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From _____

CONGRESSMAN


Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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RAHALL SUPPORTS TRADE AND PLANT CLOSING BILLS

WASHINGTON - Stating that today is the first of a new era for West Virginia workers, U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.) voted in favor of bills that may prove helpful to many West Virginia workers. The Plant Closing Notification Act (S-2527) and H.R. 4848, the Omnibus Trade Act, both passed the House today by wide margins. The Trade Act, minus the plant notification proposal and certain restrictions of Alaskan oil exports, is identical to the trade bill approved earlier this year by the Congress and vetoed by President Reagan.

Rahall called the trade bill a measure that will strengthen laws to protect against unfair foreign trade practices and one that will compensate those affected by the unfair tactics.

Included in the trade bill is a provision authored by Rahall that urges the President to direct the U.S. Trade Representative to take into account the amount of coal that Japan purchases from the U.S. in determining the level of steel products that can be imported into the United States.

"One of the major causes of the United States-Japan trade deficit is the continued and aggressive exportation by Japan of steel products into this country. Despite the voluntary restraint agreement which has negotiated with Japan on steel, it appears they continue to circumvent both the intent and scope of the agreement with respect to certain steel products," Rahall said. "This is a matter of grave concern to me. Metallurgical coal is an essential ingredient in the production of steel. This agreement provides the United States with an element of trade reciprocity between Japanese steel imports and United States metallurgical coal exports."

One specific program that stands to benefit from passage of the trade bill is the Trade Adjustment Assistance program which has been utilized by many West Virginia coal miners who have lost their jobs as a result of foreign imports.

"H.R. 4848 extends Trade Adjustment Assistance eligibility to secondary workers or firms that supply essential goods and services to firms directly affected by imports," Rahall stated. "Current law allows only those workers directly employed by an affected company to receive TAA benefits. This provision would become effective only if an import fee is put in place for financing."

The bill requires the President to negotiate with U.S. trading partners for agreement on the imposition of a small uniform fee on all U.S. imports which would be used for a trust fund to support the program.

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The measure also authorizes \$980 million for Fiscal Year 1989 for a new worker readjustment program that would provide comprehensive services to dislocated workers who have lost their jobs due to plant closings, layoffs or other major disruptions.

In regards to plant closings, the House passed S. 2527 which requires that businesses employing 100 or more workers give 60 day advance notice of plant closings that would result in job loss for 50 or more workers. The Plant Closing Notification Act also calls for a 60-day notice of layoffs lasting six months or more, if the layoffs affect 500 or more workers, or 50 workers who constitute one-third of the workforce at a plant.

"The opposition to this bill is unfounded," Rahall said. "This notification provision, while affecting only two percent of all firms, will protect nearly half of our workforce by virtue of the fact that 49% of all employees in the private sector work for firms with 100 or more employees. It is important to note that many major union contracts already have advance notification clauses, clearly demonstrating that American industry in fact can live with such standards."

The Plant Closing notification Act now goes to the President for his signature while the Omnibus Trade Bill moves to the Senate for consideration.