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FEBRUARY 26, 1988

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RAHALL TO HOLD W.VA. SURFACE MINING HEARING  
ILLEGAL MINING, THREAT TO PARKS AND AML FUNDS AT ISSUE

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-W.Va.) announced today that he will bring his Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources to Logan, West Virginia, to hold an oversight hearing on the West Virginia surface coal mining program. Rahall made the announcement and outlined his concerns during a congressional oversight hearing on the federal Office of Surface Mining.

Among Rahall's concerns are:

- \* Reports of illegal "wildcat" mining operations in West Virginia. Illegal mining operations in Kentucky and Virginia have been the subject of increased scrutiny and enforcement activities. Rahall is concerned that wildcatting is beginning to occur in West Virginia.
- \* The possibility of further mining within a national park unit. Coal prospecting permits have been issued for land within the boundaries of the New River Gorge National River and other acreage has not been adequately reclaimed.
- \* A growing amount of abandoned mine reclamation funds which remain unobligated by the State. Rahall said West Virginia is falling behind other major coal states in obligating abandoned mine land reclamation grants received from the federal government.

"Illegal mining not only harms the environment and the health and safety of our citizens, but it is done to the detriment of the law abiding coal producers of West Virginia. Naturally, the more illegal mining occurs the more people forget that the vast majority of West Virginia coal is produced by operators who are paying the full cost of complying with the law," Rahall stated.

He added: "It almost seems that increased regulatory efforts in the neighboring states of Kentucky and Virginia have driven former two-acre exemption abusers and illegal miners out of those states and into West Virginia."

Rahall, in his remarks, made reference to the recent federal crack-down in Kentucky brought about by a civil action suit filed by environmental organizations alleging gross mismanagement in the Kentucky regulatory program. A stetlement agreement, based on intensive federal intervention, was reached to remedy the situation.

"I do not intend to stand idly by and watch West Virginia fall into the quagmire of litigation which led to the settlement agreement that is now, in effect, governing the Kentucky regulatory program," Rahall stated.

Rahall is also concerned with the issuance of coal prospecting permits within the New River Gorge National River. Mining within units of the national park system threatens the very purpose for which they were established, according to the Congressman. Evidence has also been acquired by Rahall showing that previously mined acreage within the park has not been adequately reclaimed despite the fact that bonds were released.

Citing recent figures, Rahall said that West Virginia has obligated only 11% of its fiscal year 1986 abandoned mine reclamation construction grant. Virginia had an obligation rate of 76% and Kentucky had obligated 76% while the national average was about 41%.

"The Abandoned Mine Land program not only means correcting the environmental threats posed by orphaned mine lands, but it creates a great deal of employment. This is certainly something we cannot be lax about in West Virginia," Rahall said.

Rahall, who is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources, said he will conduct a hearing to examine the situation in the State. He has tentatively scheduled the hearing to be held in Logan on April 25.