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RAHALL PREDICTS SHORTAGE OF ENGINEERS, SAYS NOT ENOUGH WEST VIRGINIA STUDENTS PREPARED TO ENTER FIELD

Huntington W.Va. - U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.) today called on more West Virginia high school students to take all the math and sciences courses available in their school to prepare for an engineering career. Rahall feels there will be a shortage of qualified engineers in the 21st century.

Speaking at an Engineering Career Day at Marshall University, the Congressman said we must prepare now for the future. "Unless more students prepare themselves for an engineering career, our children will face the 21st century's biggest challenges without the engineers needed to design solutions," Rahall said. "From cleaning up abandoned mine sites and chemical waste spills, to flying to the stars, we will need engineers. Without them, most of the discoveries of modern science would still be laboratory curiosities. Let us not leave the inventions we need in the laboratory. Let's get them out where they can help people. Now is the time to act."

The shortage, projected to occur in different fields and in many parts of the country, will become evident in the construction industry as early as the 1990's and is expected to affect other disciplines as soon as the year 2000. The lack of qualified personnel is one of the four most pressing concerns of engineering firms, according to a survey released by the American Consulting Engineers Council. U.S. college science, math and engineering programs have declined when they should have progressed. We are now graduating half as many PhDs in the physical sciences as we did in the 1970's, and half of those graduates speak English as a second language.

Rahall commended Marshall University for its efforts in promoting engineering as a career. "Marshall University is moving forward at a time when others are going backward," Rahall noted.

"The solution to the shortage lies in getting educators and parents to encourage students' interest in math and science," Rahall commented. "Yet, in many school systems, these disciplines are de-emphasized. We must teach our children to become more comfortable dealing with numbers, concepts and ideas. Our educational system should prepare them to solve problems in a highly competitive, interdependent world environment. There is no doubt that we should conduct aggressive and sustained campaigns to encourage young people to enter the engineering profession and make sure they have the skills to do so. Creative thinking and problem solving need to be more strongly emphasized than they are now."

- 30 -