

News
From _____

CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
APRIL 25, 1989

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RAHALL GETS BALL ROLLING ON AML EXTENSION

Program Essential in Restoring Lands & Waters in W.Va.

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- With the introduction of the "Abandoned Mine Reclamation Act of 1989" today, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall took the first step toward gaining the reauthorization of a program which has already been responsible for mitigating almost \$2 billion worth of adverse health, safety and environmental hazards associated with past coal mining practices nationwide.

"This bill represents a road map by which the course of abandoned mine reclamation work in this country will be directed through the year 2007," Rahall said.

The Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund was established by the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 in order to provide for the restoration of areas affected by past mining where there is no continuing reclamation responsibility. Monies in the Fund are dedicated to projects on a priority basis through a number of programs, including annual grants to the states, the federal emergency program administered by the Office of Surface Mining and the Rural Abandoned Mine Program implemented by the Soil Conservation Service. Authority to collect the reclamation fees, paid by the coal industry, which finance the Fund was set for a 15-year period and expires in August 1992.

Rahall said that approximately \$4.4 billion worth of high-priority abandoned mine reclamation projects would not be reclaimed unless the program is reauthorized. According to the current inventory of eligible sites, \$2 billion worth of these projects are in West Virginia. The Congressman's legislation would reauthorize the program for an additional 15 years.

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"I do not require any reports or studies to tell me there is a pressing need to reauthorize this program. One needs only to travel through West Virginia with me, through the counties of my Congressional District, to know that the health and safety of coalfield residents remains threatened by these old abandoned mines," Rahall said. "Yes, we have made progress under the current program, but much more remains to be done," he added.

Last week Rahall's Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources conducted an oversight hearing on abandoned mines at which time groups as diverse as the West Virginia Contractors Association to the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, among others, endorsed reauthorizing the program. Rahall also noted that the West Virginia Mining and Reclamation Association was the first coal industry group to support extending the collection of the reclamation fee.

On May 16th, Rahall's Subcommittee will hold a hearing on his legislation, as well as two other bills which deal with specific aspects of the program introduced by Rep. Chris Perkins of Kentucky and Rep. Frank McCloskey of Indiana. The Perkins bill would provide for reclamation monies to be used to restore water supplies affected by past mining, and the McCloskey bill would allow some of the Fund's receipts to be dedicated toward post-1977 projects under limited circumstances.