

News
From _____

CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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CONTACT: JIM ZOIA
(202) 226-7761

**SWEEPING ABANDONED MINE RECLAMATION INITIATIVE
APPROVED BY RAHALL SUBCOMMITTEE
*Intensive Republican Opposition Overcome***

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- In a move that will have far-reaching consequences for coalfield communities, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) today pushed through his House Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources legislation to reauthorize the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program to the year 2007.

"This legislation seeks to extend what basically is the coal industry's "Superfund" beyond its current expiration date," Rahall stated. "Let it suffice to say that I have not approached this issue lightly, for it involves nothing less than protection of the health and safety of countless citizens residing in the mining regions of this Nation, and the quality of the environment in which they live."

The legislation approved by the Subcommittee would reauthorize the collection of the reclamation fee assessed on the coal industry, which finances the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund, for an additional 15-year period beyond the current 1992 expiration date. While \$2.3 billion has been collected from the fee to date, the federal Office of Surface Mining estimates that \$4 billion worth of high priority projects will remain after the existing fee authority expires in 1992. Another provision of the bill would clarify the funding eligibility to construct public facilities relating to water supplies adversely affected by coal mining practices.

During Subcommittee proceedings, Rahall said that while the hearings conducted by this Subcommittee have established a clear need to move forward with the reauthorizing legislation, "the hearing record does not tell the full story of the human misery which exists in many mining areas of this country. Letters cannot tell the full story. Neither can studies filled with data and charts."

According to Rahall, "To fully know the need for this legislation, one only has to travel to the impacted areas. It is the courage and the faith of people living in these regions of our country that stands as the ultimate testimony on behalf of this bill."

Rahall gained approval of his legislation despite intensive opposition from Republican Members of the Subcommittee who indicated that there was no further need for a national program, and that western states should not be made to pay for reclamation projects in the Appalachian Region.

"Companies which produced coal in West Virginia or Pennsylvania 20 years ago, and left the land unreclaimed, may be producing coal in Wyoming today," Rahall responded. "The fact that a given western state may soon no longer have any abandoned coal mine lands left has little bearing on whether the companies producing coal in that state should pay some type of fee and contribute to the program."

According to Rahall, "The bottom line is that we must have a national program, and there is need for the continuation of this national program."