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From _____

CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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BATTLE LINES BEING DRAWN ABANDONED MINE RECLAMATION FACE-OFF ON WED. *Rahall Expects Fight Over Reclamation Bill*

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The fate of a program aimed at mitigating health, safety and environmental threats faced by many coalfield residents in West Virginia and throughout the Nation will be determined Wednesday when U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) brings his comprehensive abandoned mine reclamation initiative before the House Interior Committee for a vote.

The legislation would reauthorize the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program under which grants are made to states like West Virginia to mitigate coalfield problems presented by burning refuse piles, old mine shafts, contaminated water supplies, landslides and subsidence. The federal Office of Surface Mining estimates that \$4 billion worth of high priority projects will remain nationwide after the current program expires in 1992.

On July 27th, Rahall pushed the bill through his Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources over intensive opposition from western states and Republican Members.

"There are those who do not feel that abandoned coal mines are a national problem, that this is something of concern only to states in the Appalachian Region like West Virginia and frankly they simply do not want to pay for the reclamation of these areas," Rahall said in explaining opposition to his legislation. The program is funded by a fee assessed on every ton of coal produced and the western mining states contend they are being made to subsidize the reclamation of the eastern mining states.

"However, we must ask who has benefited from the exploitation of our coal resources? Has it been only West Virginians? The answer is no. The Nation has benefited," Rahall stated.

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"In its essence, this is a matter of accountability and social responsibility and now I am asking the country to assist us in repairing the damage done to our people and our environment," Rahall added.

According to the Congressman, battle lines are being drawn over his bill based on geographic regions of the country pitting the Appalachian Region, where most of the abandoned mine sites are located, against the West, which while being a major coal producing region does not have the history of mining and the extensive inventory of eligible projects found in the East. Besides Rahall, there is only one other Appalachian state Member on the Committee.

"The wild card is going to be those Committee Members from states like California with no mining whatsoever. My job is to convince them that this bill is in the national interest and deserves their support," Rahall said.