



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Congressman

Nick Rahall

WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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RAHALL TO LEAD HOUSE MINING PANEL IN 'ACTIVIST' NEW YEAR STAGE SET FOR MAJOR INITIATIVES IN 1990

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Controversies involving remining abandoned coal mine lands, mine subsidence, mining threats to national parks and forests, and mine health and safety technologies will be at the top of the House Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources' agenda for the new year, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) said today in noting that 1989 "was a banner year for mining issues in the House of Representatives."

The panel's chairman also announced that he will also move to closely examine the effects of pending acid rain control proposals on coal production and employment and to insure that the extractive industries are included in the Bush Administration's formulation of a national energy policy.

Continued oversight on the implementation of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 in both West Virginia and nationwide is also slated for priority treatment by the Subcommittee.

Rahall said that the intensive pace he set for the Subcommittee during the past year culminated with the House of Representatives' overwhelming approval of his legislation to reauthorize the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program; often referred to as the coal industry's equivalent to the "Superfund."

The panel was also responsible for House passage of Rahall legislation to foster the development of domestic critical mineral deposits, such as recently discovered manganese ore in southern West Virginia, and to prohibit U.S. governmental assistance to foreign mining projects, among other initiatives.

"I believe in taking an activist approach to issues involving mining and natural resources," Rahall said. "Many of these items have the potential to affect the daily lives of people living in the coalfields as well as being of national significance in terms of the public interest."

According to Rahall, 1990 will be the year when the House finally passes legislation to further promote the 'remining' by industry of abandoned coal mine lands.

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"Despite the fact that some progress has been made in the remining area to date, those of us who have been examining this issue find that additional legislation is necessary if we are to fully realize the benefits remining can have to the coalfield environment. In effect, coal remining incentives not only serve to augment the environmental restoration work being done under the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program, but have the added benefit of making coal available that would otherwise be bypassed," Rahall stated.

The West Virginia Democrat said that the ongoing dispute over mine subsidence bears close scrutiny in light of the growing use of longwall mining systems in underground coal mines and the extent of surface owner protections under current law. Confusion over how to proceed on "valid existing rights" applications pending for units of the National Park and Forest systems due to the failure of the Office of Surface Mining to promulgate a definition of the term also needs to be addressed, Rahall said. The federal surface mining act prohibits mining in these areas unless a valid existing rights to mine can be proven.

With respect to mine health and safety, Rahall said that a thorough review of whether the Bureau of Mines is meeting its statutory mandate to develop technologies which industry can reasonably be expected to employ to meet more and more stringent mine health and safety standards should be subjected to intensive oversight. "The question is whether the Bureau of Mines is simply developing types of technologies which have the effect of displacing employment levels in underground coal mines, or whether this research is in fact contributing to a safer working environment," Rahall said.

As work continues on pending acid rain control legislation, Rahall noted that prior to a bill being considered on the House floor Congress must have a thorough understanding of how it would impact coal production and employment. "Acid rain is more than an environmental issue. It is very much an economic issue for those of us from West Virginia and other coal mining regions of the country. My Subcommittee's jurisdiction is with the mining, rather than the environmental, aspects of this specific issue and I intend to make sure the facts are known before a vote is taken."

Rahall also said that the extractive industries such as coal, oil and gas must be "at the table when the cards are dealt on the Administration's intention to devise a national energy policy next year." According to the congressman, a policy based on nuclear energy would be "ill-conceived and not in the public interest." He added: "I intend to conduct hearings by the Subcommittee to make sure the Bush Administration understands that coal has a major role to play in the energy future of this Nation."