



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MAY 19, 1994

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BLACK LUNG REFORM BILL CLEARS HOUSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. – By a roll call vote of 252 to 166, the U.S. House of Representatives late this afternoon approved legislation to reform the Federal black lung program, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) announced. Rahall has been a leading proponent of the bill.

"This is a tremendous victory for the working men and women who have produced the coal that fuels this Nation," Rahall stated. "It is an act of social justice."

During the nearly six hours of debate on the bill, a series of weakening amendments offered by House Republicans were defeated. The bill approved by the House represents the product of the work Rahall and other coalfield Congressmen put together to address the extremely low approval rate for black lung benefit claims.

Rahall said that chances of the bill being enacted into law are the highest since he initiated the reform effort in January of 1988. A Senate companion bill has been introduced and was the subject of a hearing in that body.

The bill passed by the House would:

- ** Provide that repayment of benefits paid on an initially approved claim would not be required if the claim is ultimately denied, unless fraud or deception was used to obtain the payment.**
- ** Limit the amount of qualifying evidence a claimant could be made to produce to support benefit eligibility.**
- ** Provide benefits for survivors and dependents if the miner was receiving benefits or was total disabled by pneumoconiosis at time of death.**
- ** Stipulate that if, as result of administrative or judicial proceeding on a claim a determination is made that the claimant is entitled to benefits, the claimant would receive all reasonable costs incurred by claimant as a result of the proceedings in order to cover legal fees.**

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