



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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RAHALL'S COAL HERITAGE BILL SUBJECT OF HOUSE HEARING

WASHINGTON, D.C. — West Virginia Division of Culture and History Commissioner Bill Drennen and the Director of Bluefield's Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Dr. Stuart McGehee, are scheduled to testify before a Tuesday hearing on the "West Virginia National Coal Heritage Area Act of 1994," U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) announced today.

The hearing will be conducted by the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands which is considering Rahall's bill to establish a National Coal Heritage Area in southern West Virginia. Rahall is a Subcommittee member.

"The coal mining history of southern West Virginia is a story of struggle, of human sacrifice and of occurrences which have left their mark on the history of the Nation as a whole," Rahall noted. "This legislation is aimed at salvaging remnants of this past and as such, preserving this unique heritage. In my view, this must be done not only for educational purposes, but for the potential regional economic benefits this type of historic preservation may hold."

According to Dr. McGehee: "It is long overdue that Appalachian coal heritage be recognized and commemorated for its crucial role in the creation of modern America." He added: "We must act quickly now while the last generation of men who loaded coal by hand, drove mine mules, and stoked locomotive boilers are still alive. Their memories and culture are threatened by the passage of time and the inevitability of change."

The Rahall legislation proposes to carry out the recommendations of a recently completed study by the National Park Service entitled *A Coal Mining Heritage Study: Southern West Virginia*.

Under the bill, the Secretary of the Interior would be authorized to enter into an agreement with the Governor of the State of West Virginia, acting through the Division of Culture and History and the Division of Tourism and Parks, through which Federal assistance would be provided for a number of heritage preservation initiatives.

Aside from the establishment of the heritage area, Rahall's bill would also provide for a study on the feasibility of establishing a Miners' March National Historic Trail along the route traveled by the participants in what became known as the Battle of Blair Mountain.

Blair Mountain is the site of a major episode in labor and American history. In 1921, 10,000 miners confronted federal troops, state troopers, county deputies, coal operators and Baldwin Felts detective agents there in the aftermath of the slaying of Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse. Hatfield and Chambers were to be tried for their role in the Matewan Massacre the previous year.

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