



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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RAHALL SEEKS ACCOUNTABILITY IN FEDERAL COAL PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Federally owned coal reserves in the western states should not be developed to the detriment of coal already in production from West Virginia and other Appalachian Region states, displace this coal from its historic markets and consequently, contribute to the loss of employment in the mining of this coal, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) said today in introducing the "Coal Leasing Equity Act of 1990."

"This bill is aimed at making the federal government more accountable to the general public on the way our coal resources are managed," Rahall said.

The legislation would require the Secretary of the Interior to consider the effects development of a proposed federal lease might have on eastern and midwestern coal production and the markets for that coal. If development of the federal coal lease would have an adverse effect on the production of this coal by displacing it from its historical electric utility markets, the federal lease could not be issued.

"I am concerned that due to more stringent electric utility emission requirements in pending legislation to reauthorize the Clean Air Act we will see western federal coal flooding into our traditional markets," Rahall stated. "This would not be appropriate. The fact is that federal coal is owned by all of the people of the United States and the government should not arbitrarily compete against Appalachian Region producers."

The federal government owns about one-third of the Nation's coal, the majority of which is located in the western states. Through the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management, this coal is made available under a leasing program. Rahall said that under existing law, prior to issuing a federal coal lease the Secretary of the Interior is required to take into account the effects of leasing on the western states.

However, during a hearing held by Rahall's Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources yesterday, the director of the Bureau of Land Management refused to commit to also considering the effects the development of a proposed federal lease might have on coal markets that have traditionally been met by Appalachian and Midwestern region producers.

According to Rahall: "The Interior Department is simply the agent of the people in the management of these resources, and in my mind, good stewardship should include the interests of all of the people, not just a select few. My legislation would require the Interior Secretary to make an additional consideration; the interests of the people of West Virginia and others in our region who depend on the coal industry for their livelihood."