

news

*Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs
Morris K. Udall, Chairman*

*House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515*

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HOUSE ACTION TO HALT FEDERAL MINERAL LAND GIVE-AWAYS *Mining Panel Schedules Hearing On Mining Law Reform*

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The age of giving away valuable parcels of mineralized federal lands for a mere \$2.50 an acre may be drawing to an end, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources, said today.

On Tuesday, during its consideration of the fiscal year 1991 Appropriation bill for the Department of the Interior, a panel of the House Appropriations Committee included language that would prohibit the further issuance of mining claim patents by the Bureau of Land Management. Under the Mining Law of 1872, once a claim is staked on public domain land, the claim holder may seek fee title (known as a patent) to the land and minerals, such as gold and silver, for a payment of only \$2.50 or \$5.00 an acre depending on the type of mining claim.

Rahall, a renowned critic of this practice, has introduced legislation to reform the Mining Law of 1872. A central element of this measure is the elimination of what he termed "the most egregious practice of transferring title of extremely valuable public domain lands out of federal ownership for a mere pittance."

According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, acreage the size of the State of Connecticut has been transferred out of federal ownership to private interests under the patenting provision of the Mining Law of 1872. Meanwhile, even if a claimant does not seek a patent, the federal government receives no rental or royalty payments for the extraction of publicly owned minerals. Many claims are held for speculation, Rahall said. This is made possible due to the lack of diligent development requirements in the law.

Earlier this year, Rahall introduced the first legislation in over a decade before the U.S. House of Representatives to revise the Mining Law of 1872. On September 6th, Rahall's Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources will conduct a hearing on the bill, H.R. 3866, in Washington, D.C.