



U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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RAHALL ABANDONED MINE RECLAMATION BILL NEARS FINAL APPROVAL

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Against almost overwhelming odds, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) today said that he is nearing success in his bid to enact legislation extending the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program this year.

In an 11th hour move, Rahall tacked his legislation to reauthorize the program into the House passed budget package. Rahall said that yesterday evening, House and Senate conferees meeting to reconcile the budget, accepted the majority of his measure.

"What we have done will have far reaching implications for the health and safety of coalfield citizens in West Virginia and throughout the Appalachian Region for years to come," Rahall stated.

Last October, the House of Representatives gave overwhelming approval to Rahall's bill, the "Abandoned Mine Reclamation Act" and sent it to the Senate. However, since that time the Senate took no action on the legislation. Western congressmen, in particular, oppose the measure because many western states, which do not have as long a history of coal mining as the Appalachian Region, will have reclaimed their inventory of abandoned coal mine sites by 1992. Under current law, the authority to collect the reclamation fees paid by the coal industry to finance reclamation projects expires in 1992.

In an effort to force the issue, Rahall inserted the bill into the House version of the budget package that was passed on October 16th. The agreement on the "Abandoned Mine Reclamation Act" reached by the House and Senate conference must still be approved by the full Congress as part of the overall budget package.

Rahall said that while his bill would have extended the reclamation fee collection authority through the year 2007, the agreement covers only the years subject to the 5-year budget package. This means that the program would be authorized through fiscal year 1995.

"This three-year reprieve means between \$78 million to \$88.5 million for West Virginia that we would otherwise not receive in abandoned mine reclamation funds," Rahall said.

The Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program was established by the 1977 federal surface mining act and is financed by a reclamation fee of 35 cents per ton of surfaced mined coal and 15 cents per ton of deep mined coal. Annually, the coal states receive grants under the program to pay for reclamation projects that eliminate health, safety and environmental threats faced by coalfield residents stemming from past mining practices.

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