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RAHALL PROPOSES EARLY RETIREMENT BILL FOR MINE INSPECTORS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today announced his reintroduction of a bill which will offer to mine safety and health inspectors the same provisions enjoyed by law enforcement officers--the chance for early retirement.

"My bill would allow Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) inspectors the opportunity to retire voluntarily at age 50 with 20 years of service," said Rahall.

Rahall cited the intense job-related stress that mine inspectors face as reason enough to recommend early retirement and compared the danger of their jobs to the high risk professions of law enforcement.

"The difference is that we do not arm our inspectors with guns," said Rahall. "There is no weapon they can fire, either as a first or last resort, to save themselves.

"Each day, the men and women who work in the more than 20,000 U.S. mining operations face a variety of unique dangers on the job. 848 injuries to MSHA inspectors have been reported between 1986 and 1989. Explosive methane gas, unstable ground and roof, poisonous atmospheres, radiation, and harmful dusts are only a few of the hazards they encounter as part of their job," said Rahall.

Rahall added that the extreme physical stress that these MSHA inspectors face contributes to their need for early retirement.

"MSHA inspectors, in order to be certified and recertified as mine inspectors, must have the ability to crawl for up to four hours and to kneel continuously for up to three hours each day, while inhaling silica, asbestos, smoke or gas, carrying backpacks of equipment weighing up to 80 pounds, while working around dangerous moving objects such as loading vehicles and machinery," said Rahall. "A representative of the MSHA inspectors sent me a copy of the physical they must pass in order to qualify. His comment to me was this: This is our physical. To pass it is hard at age 18; at age 55 it is impossible."

There are approximately 2,743 total employees who participate in a nationwide coal and non-coal mining inspection program, conducting mine accident investigations, and providing technical assistance and training to employees.