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CLASHES BETWEEN MINING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION SUBJECT OF HEARING BY HOUSE PANEL

1921 Battle Between Union and Coal Operators Brings Issue to Forefront

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Controversies surrounding the impacts of proposed mining activities on historic properties will be aired next Thursday during a hearing scheduled by the Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources, chaired by U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV).

The federal Office of Surface Mining and state regulatory agencies by law are required to examine whether any historical sites would be adversely affected during their review of surface coal mining permit applications. In the event historical properties would be disrupted, the agencies are authorized to prescribe mitigation measures. The Bureau of Land Management is charged with the same responsibilities for non-coal "hardrock" mining on public domain lands. According to Rahall, concerns are being raised that compliance with the law is often undertaken in a cursory fashion.

Rahall's interest in the issue was sparked by a lawsuit historic preservationists have filed against the Office of Surface Mining charging the agency with failing to comply with the law, and, concerns raised over the affect a proposed A.T. Massey subsidiary surface coal mining operation would have on the Blair Mountain area of Logan County, West Virginia. In 1921, Blair Mountain was the site of an armed conflict between 10,000 miners and Baldwin Felts agents hired by the coal operators, deputized sheriffs and federal troops sent in by President Harding.

"We have laws on the books that require compliance with the edicts of historic preservation and the question needs to be asked, is the law being shortchanged and if so, how is this affecting society as a whole. Our history and culture are such a central element of daily life, and if we let these values drop by the wayside I fear that our society will be doomed," Rahall said.

Scheduled to present testimony before the Subcommittee are:

- ** Harry Snyder, Director, Office of Surface Mining, and Dan Sokoloski, Deputy Assistant Director of Energy and Mineral Resources, Bureau of Land Management.**
- ** William Ferrar, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, West Virginia Division of Culture and History, on behalf of the National Council of State Historic Preservation Officers.**
- ** A representative of the West Virginia Division of Energy.**
- ** Cecil Roberts, Vice President, United Mine Workers of America, and Howard Green, International Executive Board Member, UMWA District 17.**
- ** E. Morgan Massey, Chairman and CEO, A.T. Massey Company.**
- ** Jerry W. Danni, Homestake Mining Co., on behalf of American Mining Congress**
- ** Elizabeth Merritt, Assistant General Counsel, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and a representative of the Society for American Archaeology.**