



U.S. Congressman

**Nick Rahall***WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
APRIL 4, 1991CONTACT: JIM ZOIA  
(202) 226-7761**RAHALL TELLS FEDS-STATES:  
BOTTOM LINE IS HEALTH AND SAFETY OF COALFIELD RESIDENTS**

**AUSTIN, TEXAS --** The health, safety and environment of coalfield residents must be the primary mission of those entrusted with implementing the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 was the message U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) delivered in remarks before the annual meeting between the Federal Office of Surface Mining and coal-State regulatory authorities held in Austin, Texas, today.

"The health, safety and environment of coalfield residents depends on the type of job you do. That is the bottom line. It is the whole reason why we are here. Why Congress took action in 1977. Why this program was created," Rahall, invited to address the conference in his role as chairman of the House Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources, told the assembled Federal and State representatives.

Rahall recounted how it was in Logan County, West Virginia, where on February 26, 1972, a coal waste dam located on Buffalo Creek collapsed causing a flood of truly horrible proportions in loss of life, injuries and people who were left homeless. For the first time, he said, the level of public attention to the plight of coalfield citizens adversely affected by certain coal mining practices was raised from a local to a truly national scale. According to Rahall, this led to the first serious efforts to enact Federal legislation regulating the environmental consequences of surface coal mining.

"This is the legacy we live with, at least I do, when I consider matters relating to the Federal surface mining act. Your administration of the Act -- and this applies to all of us, States, Office of Surface Mining and Congress -- will determine whether we can face the survivors of the Buffalo Creek disaster, and many other similar situations that have occurred throughout the country, and say to them: Those lives were not lost in vein. The lesson was learned."

Rahall also outlined several of his legislative initiatives, including his 'remining' legislation aimed at providing incentives for industry to remine previously disturbed areas, extract the remaining coal, and subsequently reclaim the site.

In addition, he noted that West Virginia is leading the Nation by already taking advantage of Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program legislation he gained Congressional approval of last year. In the recent session of the State Legislature, Rahall said that a measure was enacted allowing the State to set-aside a portion of its annual grant from the Office of Surface Mining to address acid mine drainage situations, and to utilize amounts from the grant to replace water supplies contaminated by past coal mining practices. These activities were authorized on the Federal level by Rahall's bill.