



U.S. Congressman

Nick Rahall*WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS***EMBARGOED UNTIL****SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 1991****CONTACT: STEVE SPINA****PHONE: (202) 225-3452****RAHALL SPEAKS TO GREATER YELLOWSTONE COALITION**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) last night spoke to the Greater Yellowstone Coalition in West Yellowstone, Montana. He spoke to the audience about reforming the Mining Law of 1872 and in his remarks, he raises some fundamental questions about the relationship between industry and environment. The following are excerpts from his speech:

"Having been throughout this area in the past, especially during our consideration of the onshore oil and gas leasing reform bill, I have noticed that there are those who are trying to build walls around Yellowstone. And it is not only here, but many places throughout the country where we see this happening.

There are those who simply would avoid proper planning and management of this area as an ecosystem. They will tell you: over there is the Park boundary, and over here, let us drill, let us mine, let us clear-cut, for this area is not in the Park.

Now, I will be the first one to say that drilling and mining should take place. But it must be done in a manner that takes into account other resources values. No activity should take place in a vacuum. And I would ask, can an ecosystem be managed in such a perfunctory fashion?

Can we really unitize, compartmentalize, shelve, and file that which we call an ecosystem, and expect the wildlife to obey our commands? Can we expect developments in the Beaverhead, or Gallatin, or Custer National Forests not have to have any consequences on the water, air, wildlife and environment of this unique Yellowstone ecosystem?

I think not. I would say to you, here this evening, that in fact, it is not proper, or realistic, or appropriate to attempt to build walls around this Park. I know you all are well aware that this is an area of national significance. And I would say to you, tear down those walls.

Let's do the planning and let's manage this place in the public interest. This is the only prudent course to take. For it will also provide industry with an understanding of what will be required of it up-front, rather than after-the-fact, and I believe mitigate some of the endless delays, debates and litigation that is so often associated with mining operations today.

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THE PRESS RELEASE

The effort to reform the Mining Law of 1872 transcends the relatively simple questions of whether it is still appropriate to allow for the patenting of federal lands, or whether the hardrock mining industry should pay a royalty for producing minerals from the public domain.

We have, I believe, mounted a campaign of truly historic significance. For at stake, ladies and gentlemen, is the health, welfare and environmental integrity of the people of the western states.

In my own region of the country, in West Virginia, 14 years after the enactment of the federal strip mining act, we are still grappling with a legacy of acidified streams, highwalls, refuse piles, open mine shafts and other hazards associated with past coal mining practices.

And as those of you in this room know, these consequences of past mining are not limited to Appalachia for they are present here, as well, in the West.

I will recall that the coal industry was dragged kicking and screaming into the debate that led to the enactment of the 1977 federal strip mining act. Yet today, you will not find many in the industry who would suggest that law be repealed. And today, the coalfields of this Nation are a much better place in which to live.

This change did not come about easily. It came about because of the active participation of coalfield citizens who rose in outrage; who called upon the Congress of the United States to take such action as necessary to protect their livelihoods.

And it will take this same commitment from the public to achieve any meaningful changes in the Mining Law of 1872."