

Chairman Hal Rogers
RECLAIM Act Testimony
House Natural Resources Committee
April 5, 2017
10:00AM

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today in support of a bill I sponsored, known as the RECLAIM Act of 2017.

Chairman Bishop, I am particularly grateful to you and your staff, who have worked closely with me over the last year to perfect the bill and prepare it for consideration by the Committee. I would also like to thank the cosponsors of the RECLAIM Act in the House, as well as Senators McConnell and Capito for taking the lead on this important effort in the Senate. I am pleased that this bill has enjoyed bipartisan support in both the 114th and 115th Congress, and I am hopeful that we can maintain this nonpartisan spirit as the bill makes its way through the House.

In the year since the RECLAIM Act was first introduced, I have worked alongside this Committee to incorporate input from stakeholders from all over the country. We sought out the opinion of States, advocacy groups and Members of Congress from coal country who want to see this bill through to the finish line. Their feedback has been a critical part of moving this bill forward and we appreciate their support.

Mr. Chairman, I sponsored the RECLAIM Act to help revitalize coal communities all across the nation that have been devastated by the downturn of the coal industry. In my District in Eastern Kentucky, we have lost over 11,600 coal mining jobs over the last 8 years. Families that relied on good paying jobs in the mines are now going bankrupt. Our small counties that once receive sizable revenues from coal severance tax dollars are struggling to provide basic services.

These are hardworking people who are looking for opportunities, and the RECLAIM Act stands to create thousands of good paying jobs in the communities that need it most. The RECLAIM Act will do two things: 1) reclaim abandoned mine lands to clean up our environment, and 2) spur economic development on that land to reuse it for job creation and business development.

One of the greatest things about the RECLAIM Act, is that it doesn't cost taxpayers a dime. There is approximately \$2.4 billion in the unappropriated balance of the Abandoned Mine Lands Fund that remains untouched. This bill will release \$1 billion of that available money to states, like Kentucky, that have been hit the hardest by the downturn in the coal industry.

While RECLAIM will undoubtedly be an economic and environmental boon to Appalachian states, each and every coal producing state across the country actually stands to benefit from this bill. Under this program, \$200 million will be distributed to States and tribes annually for five years for the purpose of cleaning up abandoned mine land. \$195 million will be distributed to uncertified states, while certified states and tribes will be eligible to compete for \$5 million in grants each year. States and local governments should leverage these dollars to secure other sources of public and private funding for the development of these sites. A municipal entity

could secure funding from the State or a federal agency to lay a water line, create hiking trails, help a small business grow their footprint or attract new industry. The possibilities are endless.

I am so confident in the revitalizing potential of the RECLAIM Act because it follows the successful implementation of the AML Pilot Project, which was enacted in the 2016 Omnibus Appropriations bill. The \$90 million program, spearheaded in Kentucky, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, was created to pilot the concepts inherent in this bill: providing coal communities with grants to reclaim abandoned mine lands with economic development purposes in mind, create new job opportunities and stimulate the local economy. The AML Pilot program has already allowed these three States to break ground on dozens of new projects. Some of these projects include: a wildlife recreational trail and education center in Kentucky, an agriculture training program for veterans in West Virginia, and a botanic gardens project in Pennsylvania.

The RECLAIM Act will build on the momentum generated by the pilot and make countless new job-creating projects a reality. This bill represents a real investment in coal country – one that will provide much needed resources to clean up the environment, create jobs and strengthen these communities from the ground up.

I look forward to working with the committee to move this bill forward, and I thank you for your support. I yield back.