

Chairman's Bio

U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall II, a West Virginia native who represents his state's third Congressional district, has served on the House Natural Resources Committee for over 30 years - his entire tenure in Congress. After serving as the Committee's ranking member for six years, Rahall was selected to serve as the Committee's Chairman at the start of the 110th Congress.

First elected in 1976, Chairman Rahall is currently serving his 16th term in the House of Representatives, and is recognized as the youngest elected longest serving member in the history of the House. He has received national recognition for his strong dedication to protecting and preserving our nation's environment.

As Chairman, Rep. Rahall led efforts in the House in 2007 to secure passage of legislation to reform the antiquated Hardrock Mining Law of 1872 - a quest Rahall has pursued for 20 years. The legislation provides a new framework to guide in the mining of valuable hardrock minerals, such as gold, silver and copper, on federal lands. For the past 135 years, the law has allowed these minerals to be extracted with no royalty paid to the American people - unlike oil and gas and coal developers.

Rahall is also a longtime champion of protecting landmark environmental and public participation laws, such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which gives the American people the right to know about and participate in proposed federal actions. In 2006, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report requested by Rep. Rahall and several of his House and Senate colleagues confirmed the success of the ESA, which has an almost 100 percent effectiveness rate of preventing the demise of plants and animals that are so vital to human society.

In 2007, Rahall led the Committee in a series of visibility-raising oversight hearings on the endangered species program, which revealed political tampering within Interior's ranks. At Rahall's repeated urging, the agency reversed its course and conceded that a number of critical endangered species decisions made under Julie MacDonald, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, were "inappropriately influenced" and warrant revision.

Long a leader in the effort to end royalty holidays and giveaways to big oil companies who have reaped record profits while American taxpayers continue to experience skyrocketing gas prices, Chairman Rahall has led Committee efforts to conduct extensive oversight of mismanagement allegations within the Minerals Management Service's royalty collection program. A series of Inspector General (IG) and GAO reports revealed rampant fraud and failure in the collection of oil and gas royalties - costing American taxpayers millions, perhaps billions, of dollars in lost royalties owed to the Federal Treasury.

As Chairman, Rahall is committed to conducting oversight of these issues, and ensuring accountability and integrity at the Department of the Interior. Additionally, Rahall has actively promoted legislation that would correct loopholes in oil and gas leases issued by the Interior Department between 1998 and 1999.

Among his other accomplishments, Rahall has been a Congressional leader on mining-related issues. In 1985, he assumed the chairmanship of the House Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources, a position he held until 1993. As Subcommittee Chairman, Rep. Rahall transformed what had been a moribund panel into one engaged in the aggressive oversight and reform of many of the nation's antiquated federal mining laws to bring them in line with public interest. During this period, Rahall also led the enactment of legislation overhauling the federal onshore oil and gas and geothermal stream leasing systems. In 2006, Rahall worked to ensure passage of legislation that extended authorization of the Abandoned Mine Lands program, one of his long-running priorities.

Rahall has also long been a leading voice in the successful effort to defeat the Administration's proposed overhaul of the National Park Service's (NPS) *Management Policies of 2001*, which would have dramatically altered the long-standing interpretation of laws governing the National Parks. The manual covers all park planning and management issues, including land acquisition, fire management, wilderness, law enforcement, concessions, and a range of other issues.

He is additionally the author of 1978 legislation establishing the New River Gorge National River as a unit of the National Park System in southern West Virginia. Ten years later, he gained enactment of legislation to designate the Gauley River National Recreation Area and the Bluestone National Scenic River, in the process creating the largest network of federally protected rivers in the eastern United States.

Numerous national organizations have recognized Rahall for his work. He is the recipient of the International Fund for Animal Welfare's 2007 "U.S. Animal Action Award," as well as the Sierra Club's 1988 "Seneca Award" for Outstanding Environmental Stewardship, American River's 1988 "River Conservation Award," the Ansel Adams Award from the Wilderness Society in 2004, and the Mountaineer Conservation Leadership Award from the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition on Earth Day 2005.

A 33rd degree Mason, Rep. Rahall is a life member of the National Rifle Association, Elks, Moose, and the NAACP, and was made an honorary member of the United Mine Workers of America in 2003. Before his election to Congress, Rahall served as staff assistant to U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, and also made a career as a businessman. Chairman Rahall has three children: Rebecca, Nick Joe, III, and Suzanne Nicole, married to S.Sgt. U.S. Navy Chris Brown. He has one granddaughter, Madison Kaylee, and is married to the former Melinda Ross of Ashland, Kentucky.