

**Remarks by U.S. Representative Nick J. Rahall  
Eastern Coal Regional Roundtable Training Event  
June 1, 2009**

I appreciate the kind invitation from Dvon Duncan, Executive Director of the Eastern Coal Regional Roundtable, to be with you today.

All of you who have taken the time away from other commitments in your lives to participate in this event and to take advantage of the information and training made available through the Roundtable deserve recognition.

When Dvon asked me to come here today, she thought it would be helpful to you to gain some insight and ideas on how you can work with your legislative representatives to achieve the very worthy goals of preserving and restoring our mine lands.

I realize the inner-workings of Washington may seem mysterious, but for the most part, that working relationship between citizens and their elected officials boils down, plain and simple, to communication.

I hear daily from citizens I represent – through phone calls, letters, and lots of e-mails. In this age of the Internet, blackberries, and Twitter, it is easier than ever for the public to reach their government officials and the volume of communications has increased considerably as a result.

Most of the calls and e-mails I receive come from people like you who simply want to voice their opinions about issues confronting our communities, and many of those, lately, deal with issues of coal mining, and mine lands. By and large, those communications focus on what my constituents feel that I, as a public servant, can or should do. Unfortunately, some of those messages are not stated in the most pleasant of terms either.

But what often gets forgotten in those calls and letters, even the nice ones, is that public service is not, and cannot be, solely the domain of men and women who put their names on the ballot or who possess some official title.

Your presence here today demonstrates your appreciation of public service as a choice that is open to all comers.

And I have to observe that my ability to be truly effective in my job – in face the success of our government as a whole – would be impossible without citizens like you, who give something of themselves for the greater good. So in that regard, you should that you already understand a lot about how to work with your elected representatives and how to play an important role in your government.

By your presence here, you demonstrate, as well, an understanding that the challenges in our coalfields communities are great. But because of events like this, I do not believe they are insurmountable.

Like you, I value the lands that we call home and I want to ensure that they remain livable for our children and our grandchildren.

That means that, in addition to providing for long-term economic opportunity so that our young people can earn a living and provide for their own families, we have to preserve and restore the health and safety of our land and waters. That is the mission you have chosen.

Your work rests on a foundation of government regulation and oversight that places certain requirements on industry and on the states and communities where mining occurs. I urge you to learn all that you can about those regulations and how the programs that benefit you really work, then be an advocate for programs and policies that you support.

Government funding is also critical to your goals. It is federal funding, for example, that makes this session and others like it possible. And thanks to the training here, you are better armed to plan restoration projects, organize other volunteers, and then carry out those projects.

But government funding is limited and there is extensive competition for what budgetary resources there are.

In that respect, I should note that the language regarding the Watershed Cooperative Agreement Program (WCAP), which serves as a chief source of financial support for much of the work you do, was not contained in the appropriations bill for the current fiscal year of 2009.

That language is essential to allowing the monies from that watershed program to be matched with other monies you are able to access to underwrite your projects. And most of these projects require monies from multiple sources, so that missing language is truly a handicap.

Knowing the value of the Watershed Cooperative program, which is much greater than the sum of the dollars it provides each year, I have contacted the Appropriations Committee in support of this watershed program to see what happened to that missing language and what can be done to restore it for Fiscal Year 2010.

I was told that the omission of that language was due to a regrettable oversight when the bulk of the Appropriations bills - bills that have to be passed every year to avoid shutting down the government - had to be combined with and passed as one massive Bill. But be assured I am working to have that language restored so that you have access to those much needed monies.

For your part, you can continue your work to prove the worth of those federal dollars. Also, you can let your elected officials know how important that money and your work on watershed matters are to you.

As I said at the start, communication truly is the foundation of your interaction with your elected officials. And it is the heart of America's representative form of government. Our Founding Fathers really knew what they were doing when they chose "government of the people, for the people, and by the people" because they put the power of government in the hands of people like you, who are dedicated to making it work.

For that, I congratulate you, and I thank you. And I wish you continued success in your efforts to restore and improve the watersheds in your communities.