

OPENING STATEMENT

- **Today we will consider a bill that addresses an important public health and safety issue: the cleanup of abandoned mines.**
- **My colleague, Mr. Teague, introduced H.R. 4817 with Mr. Lujan and Mr. Heinrich;**
- **I'll let Mr. Teague explain the bill, including its importance to his fine state of New Mexico.**
- **However, I do want to make a few remarks, drawing on my experience chairing this Subcommittee's examination of abandoned mine problems at hearings here in Washington and in Sacramento.**
- **In 2008, the Government Accountability Office estimated that there are at least 161,000 abandoned hardrock mines in the West.**
- **California alone has 40,000 sites that threaten public health and safety.**
- **There are very few sources of funding for the cleanup of those dangerous hardrock mines.**
- **That's why the funds provided to States and Indian tribes by the Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement have been so important.**
- **The Office of Surface Mining, under amendments to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, can provide grants to clean up sites used for hardrock sites as well as coal mining sites.**
- **Historically, the Office of Surface Mining has provided more than \$3 billion to eliminate safety and environmental hazards on more than 300,000 acres.**

- **11 states and several tribes have used roughly \$200 million of those funds to clean up hardrock sites.**
- **However, in recent years, Department of Interior policies have restricted use of some Abandoned Mine Land monies, asserting they must be used only for coal site reclamation.**
- **H.R. 4817 would ensure that uncertified states can use ALL the AML grants and payments they receive for EITHER coal site reclamation OR to clean up hazardous non-coal sites.**
- **This bill does not change or increase the amount of funding distributed to the States.**
- **This Subcommittee has consistently heard testimony that one of the most important things we can do to protect the public from abandoned mines is to be smart about prioritizing sites for cleanup, and to direct limited resources to those places of greatest need—regardless of what mineral was mined at the site.**
- **I think that’s what this bill is trying to do. That seems like common sense.**
- **I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the details of this bill.**