

Today, the Subcommittee will examine the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement's Abandoned Mine Lands Program. This program has been in place since 1977 and during these forty years the program has brought in and paid out billions of dollars to states to conduct reclamation efforts on abandoned coal mines.

Currently, State reclamation activities are funded by fees levied on the coal industry. These fees have resulted in the reclamation of approximately \$4 billion of abandoned mine land, or AML, liabilities. However, according to the Department of the Interior, over 6,650 AML sites remain with estimated remediation costs exceeding \$10.5 billion.

The fee will continue to be collected until 2021 and, while that seems like a long way off, we have already heard requests for reauthorization which last occurred in 2006. The program has changed since then and congress needs to know if the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act is functioning as intended. Likewise, both the coal industry and AML inventory have not remained static. The coal industry has changed over time in quantity and geographic origin, while the AML inventory has grown over time for a number of reasons.

But any conversation about fee extensions or reauthorization cannot happen without or before examining the effectiveness of the AML program.

Concern has been expressed for how funds from the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund have been spent over the 40 year span of the AML program; specifically, the portion that does not directly go toward fixing AML problems. While I fully recognize that states have some latitude within the law to utilize their funding on other activities, I would like to see some more accounting for these expenses.

State status, fee structures, site classification and prioritization, and grant distributions are just a number of the nuanced aspects of the AML

program that need to be examined to make sure the right actions are being incentivized. This Subcommittee's hearings this year have already begun to reveal some of these big questions and today we will be digging a little deeper into the AML program.

We must consider the ways the AML Program and the problems associated with cleaning up AML sites have changed. This is why Congressional oversight is so critical. For the sake of those affected by abandoned coal mines, the industry that pays the AML fee, the states that implement reclamation programs and OSM (which bears the responsibility of executive oversight), we need to begin the oversight process as early as possible. There are many complicated issues and it will take time to determine the best course of legislative action.

This is why we have invited this diverse set of witnesses to help us advance this effort. We have both certified and uncertified state programs, community watershed groups, OSM, and the mining industry represented at the hearing today.

I look forward to hearing testimony from this well rounded panel that brings some of the most important perspectives to the table.