



WEST VIRGINIA CHAMBER

Testimony of

Steve Roberts  
President

West Virginia Chamber of Commerce

Before the

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives

On

*EPA Mining Policies: Assault on Appalachian Jobs Part II*

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Ladies and gentleman, Honorable Chairman and members of the committee:

Thank you very much for your interest and concern about the impact of actions of the US EPA on mining production, energy needs, employment and quality of life in mining communities throughout West Virginia and the nation.

I particularly want to acknowledge and express appreciation to Chairman Mica, Sub Committee Chairman Gibbs and to the Honorable Nick Rahall, who I am proud to know and by whom I and my family members living in beautiful Huntington, West Virginia have been so ably represented since 1978.

West Virginia is a beautiful state, populated by decent, hardworking, caring people. We are justifiably proud of our twenty colleges and universities, our well developed transportation network, our breathtaking peaks and valleys and our industrial base that supplies the much needed coal, gas, timber and electricity that have helped build our great nation.

West Virginia proudly boasts the nation's lowest crime rate, the highest level of home ownership, and the first publicly funded system of primary and secondary schools found in the post Civil War South. The West Virginia mountains have given our nation Pearl Buck, Homer Hickham, Chuck Yeager, George Patton, Booker T. Washington, and athletes Mary Lou Retton and Jerry West, to name a few.

Coal and energy production have been key components of our State's being since the discovery of coal in Boone County, West Virginia in 1742. Because of the importance of coal to our state, we are especially afraid of the assault referred to in this hearing's title. Outside of Wyoming, we produce the most coal in the United States. Because of the sensitive nature of our economy, the jobs coal provides are more than important: without them, tens of thousands of families, and a historic American mountaineer culture, would cease to exist here.

The best jobs in our state's neediest areas are nearly always mining jobs. Per capita income in southern West Virginia, \$15,800 in 2006, is about half of the national figure. Yet the average coal job pays more than four times that amount. These last two statistics come from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the West Virginia Coal Association, respectively. A mining income can stabilize a whole extended family in this region, providing support for the elderly, a future for children, and a livelihood for many relatives of the wage-earner. Killing off such

work will do the opposite: tens of thousands of families and many communities would be thrown into crisis.

If surface mining ended in West Virginia, coal production would be cut by more than 40%. The West Virginia Office of Miners' Health and Safety reports that of the 537 mines operating in West Virginia, 232 are surface mines. If permitted, more could exist. As the country's second largest coal mining state, limiting more than 40% of our total production would be destructive to our country broadly. Locally, 6,255 surface miners would be immediately jobless, a large portion of the 2,340 people employed by coal handling facilities would be let go, and secondary industries would experience cuts as well. For these reasons, the environmental effect of surface mining can never be considered in isolation from the real experience of the people who live in this environment.

Before I delve into statistics, let me quote one of those people. Ellen Taylor is the president of the Beckley Chamber of Commerce. The area served by her chamber is particularly rich in coal and coal mining history. She knows mines and mining communities, and works with them to make sure the local economy is able to sustain them. She says, in reference to 404 mining permits, that "cancelling permits will have a disastrous effect on the people here. Not only mining families, but local businesses will be widely affected. To use one of many examples: buying groceries could become a problem if they were to lose their jobs. Stores would close. Refusing to issue permits would have a terribly harsh trickle-down effect on the economy. Many, many families depend on that paycheck from mining companies."

This is because those companies treat their employees well. In the mining industry, wages per employee have increased 3.9 percent yearly on average through 2008. Mining companies freely maximize their employment. They do not risk pressuring employees by under-hiring. As of 2008, the coal industry employs 20,454 people: more than the coal mining industry in any other state. These workers were paid \$1.5 billion in wages, with a total employee compensation of \$2.8 billion. These statistics and those to follow come from a study by West Virginia's two largest universities, entitled *The West Virginia Coal Economy: 2008*.

I have just listed some of the direct benefits of coal. The indirect benefits are also vast. In 2008, coal companies paid \$676.2 million in taxes, amounting to a substantial portion of all state tax revenue. It is the West Virginia Chamber's assessment that this contribution would shrink to the point of state crisis if 404 mining permits are denied. The loss of property taxes alone "would be fatal to local governments," the study found.

The secondary benefits continue further. Many people are employed in the transportation of coal and the use of coal in the production of electricity. This employment would be hampered by a shrinking industry. Mining companies also take great concern to cultivate the local communities in which they work. This includes providing educational opportunities, supporting local athletics, contributing to local service departments, charities, festivals, fairs, and other community events and associations. All of this would be irrevocably damaged by limits to our industry of the sort the EPA is contemplating.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, Mr. Chairman. We believe that the denial and revocation of 404 permits has already threatened our economy and workforce. There could be much more damage still. For that reason, I thank you for our attention to our struggle, as we try to retain jobs in this most traditional of Appalachian industries.