



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

**Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Oversight Hearing: Department of the Interior
March 2, 2016
Opening Statement as Prepared**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for yielding. Secretary Jewell, I appreciate you taking the time to be here today. Welcome back to the Interior subcommittee.

Your Department plays a central role in the stewardship of our natural resources and the preservation of our national heritage. From operating our fisheries, to running our national parks and even processing permits for coal mining, your Department touches almost every aspect of life in my District – as well as those across the country. Not so long ago, we called on your Department to join an interagency effort to raise the water level at Lake Cumberland back up to its historic pool level, while saving the endangered Duskytail Darter. I appreciate your participating in this important effort, and I am pleased to report that my constituents are enjoying boating and fishing out on Lake Cumberland once again.

That said, other communities in my District in Kentucky cannot tell a success story quite like this one. In a few short years, I have seen 10,000 miners lose their jobs and struggle to find work in communities that are experiencing staggering unemployment. Let me be clear about one thing – working out in the coal fields was a good job for these miners. This industry provided high wages and reliable work in my part of the country for decades, and watching these miners grapple with starting over again is heartbreaking. Not to mention, for every one mining job we lose in my area, we lose 3 to 4 more in other industries, leaving us with 12 *and even 15%* unemployment in some counties. We have a real crisis in Appalachia, and some of the policies championed by your Department only exacerbate the very real challenges that they face every day.

Every Department in this Administration has bought into the “keep it in the ground” strategy with respect to our country’s most abundant resource – each one handing down their own set of anti-coal edicts, aimed at shuttering power plants and coal companies nationwide. Coal is a plentiful and inexpensive commodity, and your Department should be seizing every opportunity to unlock this resource and maintain its sizeable footprint in our energy economy. Instead, this Department is perpetuating an unaccountable regulatory scheme that leaves businesses waiting on permitting and leasing decisions for months and years at a time, and levies unworkable compliance costs on already overburdened job creators.

A particularly concerning piece of this wrong-headed regulatory agenda is this Department’s proposed Stream Protection Rule. For over 4 long years now, you have been spending millions of dollars rewriting the stream buffer zone rule finalized in 2008. Your Department has led an entirely mismanaged and insular rulemaking process from the start, seeking input from no one

other than your politically minded colleagues – bent on destroying the coal industry through regulation. This Committee has heard time and again from your so-called State partners that you have left them completely out of the rulemaking process. There is no doubt that this rule will have a tremendous impact on determining what coal can and cannot be mined and will result in the bulk of it being left in the ground. One independent analysis of the proposed rule indicates that it threatens up to 280,000 jobs, most of which are in Appalachia. That is the equivalent of dozens of small towns in my region – and a high price to pay for what will be imperceptible environmental gains.

All the same, your Department doubled down on its anti-coal stance earlier this year when it issued a moratorium on all federal coal lease sales. This decision halts proposed coal lease sales in 9 states, including my home state of Kentucky, while you engage in an unnecessary study of the federal coal leasing process. Even pending lease decisions will be shelved during this exercise. You know as well as I do that this moratorium is just another excuse to keep coal off the market so it can't compete with other resources.

This approach is not a winning strategy for energy independence or economic growth in this country. We have an unemployment crisis in Eastern Kentucky, and despite our efforts to retool and encourage economic development, these regulations are proving too much to overcome in some areas. Efforts such as the AML pilot program that this Committee began last year and the President's POWER Plus proposal for economic development on abandoned mine lands represent just a small portion of what it is going to take to get Appalachia back on its feet. The job creators in this region need relief from these onerous regulations in order to keep jobs in the coal fields online and to turn their good ideas for economic diversification into employment opportunities.

These issues mean everything to the communities that are struggling to make ends meet in rural Appalachia. We need to set the right priorities here, in Washington, so that they can resurrect their economies and put their people back to work. I look forward to hearing your testimony today and I yield back.

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