



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

**Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Oversight Hearing:
Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement
March 3, 2016
Opening Statement as Prepared**

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

Yesterday, Secretary Jewell testified before this subcommittee and we had an extensive conversation about the impact of OSMRE's policies on coal communities around this country. In short, the impacts are profound.

At the outset, I must acknowledge the work of you and your staff on the RECLAIM Act. As this bill begins to make its way through the Committee process, I look forward to hearing comments and suggestions from my colleagues as to how this legislation can best benefit suffering coal communities in their home States. Let me also state my appreciation for your partnership in implementing the new AML pilot program that Congress established in the Fiscal Year 2016 Omnibus. As you know, this program will pilot the core concept of the RECLAIM Act, which is to accelerate the reclamation of abandoned mine lands with an eye toward economic development. While the RECLAIM Act will accelerate payments from the AML fund for reclamation in order to attract investment in planned economic development projects, the AML pilot will utilize general funds to explore how we might reclaim AML land and initiate such projects at the same time. It is my hope that we can get this pilot up and running in short order, so that we can bring real jobs and real hope back to these communities.

Do not get me wrong, Mr. Director, these are important efforts. But here is the unfortunate reality as my constituents see it: Our communities would not be aching for support through this pilot, or for legislation like the RECLAIM Act, if the Administration actually supported the coal industry and our coal miners. My District in Kentucky, and coal communities all across the country, are experiencing an unemployment crisis. Some counties in Eastern Kentucky have 11, 12, and 15% unemployment rates and rising. It is not uncommon to hear about layoffs in the order of 100 and 200 jobs at a time. 10,000 coal miners have lost their jobs in the last 8 years since President Obama took office, and they are struggling to find work in this economic climate. Unfortunately, Mr. Director, regulations such as those coming out of your Department are to blame. While economic development programs and innovative approaches to diversifying and growing these economies are a part of the solution, we will not be able to turn this situation around without regulatory relief.

Coal companies, farmers, and marina owners alike are struggling under the weight of costly regulations issued by this Administration. When they apply for permits, they know they will sink considerable costs without seeing a decision on their application for months or even years. When making decisions about growing their businesses, they know that hiring new employees is a risky decision - because having to shoulder even more expensive compliance costs is almost a certainty.

My most serious concerns are with your agency's proposed Stream Protection Rule. You have spent millions of dollars rewriting the stream buffer zone rule, and have nothing to show for it but a mismanaged process that has all but broken down entirely. The States that you are required to consult with during the rulemaking process have been completely shut out. The bottom line is that this rule stands to eliminate almost 200,000 jobs in my region, and that is a price we cannot afford to pay. The Secretary confirmed that the Department intends to adhere to requirements in the FY16 Omnibus related to the rule, and you can rest assured that this Committee will be following up to ensure OSM works with its State partners.

I cannot understate the importance of this fact – we need regulatory relief if we are serious about revitalizing Appalachia. I would like to think that helping these communities is a priority we share, and I hope you can shed some light on how you intend to address these issues today. I look forward to hearing your testimony and I yield back.

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