

Opening Statement of the Honorable Tim Murphy
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “EPA’s Regulatory Threat to Affordable, Reliable Energy:
The Perspective of Coal Communities”
October 29, 2013

(As Prepared for Delivery)

A century ago when my grandfather came to America, he worked in a coal mine. Things were different then. Mines were extremely dangerous. Roofs would collapse. Mine injuries and deaths were all too common. Back then, factories, homes, and power plants burnt coal without concern for the environment so the skies were dark with soot. Streetlights turned on at noon, and businessmen would take a second white dress shirt to work to change into at mid-day.

Major changes in environmental practices have cleared the skies and reduced emissions by more than fifty percent even as coal usage tripled. We can always do better. I support a real commitment to investing in clean coal, but that’s made exceedingly difficult under the president’s budget, which cut \$230 million from clean-coal research at the National Energy Technology Laboratory. The administration giving up on clean coal reminds me of the editors of *New York Times*, who opined in 1903 after a failed attempt at flight by the Wright Brothers, that it would be one million to ten million years before man could fly.

Instead, the administration wants to direct billions in subsidies at unproven renewable energy projects.

But you can’t make windmills without steel and you can’t make steel without coal.

Coal is quite literally the bedrock of thousands of communities across the country. Powering forty percent of our homes, and factories, coal touches nearly every aspect of life. Coal fires the steel mills that have built the Empire State Building and the Golden Gate Bridge, and provides good jobs and paychecks to thousands of Americans.

Today, we are going to hear from workers, local officials, and others whose lives and communities depend on coal.

In parts of Ohio, Kentucky, Colorado, and the 22 other coal producing states, families are going on the government dole, schools and municipal services are being cut, and communities are being driven into poverty partly because new regulations from the Environmental Protection Agency are destroying the prosperity of these coal towns.

In June 2011, then-Administrator Lisa Jackson told this committee that the EPA does not look at the impact on jobs when they come up with new regulations. Today we will look in the eyes of those whom the EPA says are not important: the workers and families of coal.

These workers bear the immediate cost of EPA’s actions. This hearing is not about why or how the EPA draws up new regulations or permitting requirements. As part of our oversight responsibilities, we regularly take testimony about the agency’s decisions, and will continue to do so in the months ahead.

Too often, the practice in Washington is to listen as beltway experts and the EPA explain agency actions. But this practice doesn’t capture the daily impact of Washington on the distant communities where good jobs, with good wages, support a proud way of life.

In my district, the agency didn’t consider the nearly 400 people, who were put out of work last week at the Hatfield and Mitchell coal-fired power plants in Greene and Washington Counties. This was after the plant’s owner spent nearly half-a-billion dollars making Hatfield one of the cleanest super-critical facilities in the country — only to throw in the towel when the EPA announced new unworkable mandates for 2016.

The EPA didn't consider the ten people who lost their jobs at Joy Mining in Houston, Pennsylvania last Friday, or the 130 individuals at PBS Coals in Somerset County who were laid off in May, the third round of layoffs at the company in less than a year.

These Pennsylvanians joined the nearly 6,000 miners who lost their jobs in 2012 working directly in the coal mining industry — and thousands of factory workers, boilermakers, laborers, electricians, operating engineers, steamfitters, plumbers, and machinists, all out of work or under threat of losing their jobs.

Our witnesses today can speak to what the coal industry means to coal-reliant regions like Eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Western Colorado. They can speak to what the industry has meant in terms of providing a good standard of living and the support for local governments, the schools, and services critical to daily life.

This is not an academic debate. For some of these communities, what happens here in Washington is the difference between a decent living and poverty. And when a person grows up in poverty, they are at higher risk of drug abuse, chronic depression, and other medical problems. A recent study by Georgetown University says these families have other risks for obesity, cancer, hypertension, stroke and cardiovascular disease because of the stresses of poverty and unemployment.

We will hear from some who say coal plants are closing because natural gas is cheaper. Not true. They are closing because the EPA refuses to work out solutions help coal move forward to be even cleaner than it already is. These plants are closing because the EPA makes it impossible to comply with agency standards.

Today's hearing, I hope, will help Congress make the right decisions going forward so that more people can benefit from the good and honorable living the coal industry provides.

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