

Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

EPA's Regulatory Threat to Affordable,
Reliable Energy: The perspective of Coal
Communities

The Honorable Albey Brock

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My name is Albey Brock I'm the Bell County Judge Executive and I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony regarding the devastating impact that EPA regulations are having on families and our economy in Eastern Kentucky, the place I proudly call home.

My position has placed me on the front lines and in the trenches of a battle between the rapidly growing needs in my county as unemployment explodes and shrinking budgets as revenues decrease. The duties of the County Judge Executive are similar to that of a county Mayor. I have fiscal responsibilities of operating all things related to county government. I'm responsible for the budgets of the jail, sheriff's office, animal control, the road department, and ambulatory services to name a few.

Today I'm here testifying, not as a bystander, but as an expert witness and a colleague reporting conditions from where I live and serve as County Judge.

For the purpose of perspective, I want you to understand that the Eastern Kentucky economy is more dependent upon coal than Detroit is upon the auto industry.

In Eastern Kentucky we have lost seven-thousand coal-mining jobs in less than two years.

Economists estimate that one coal-mining job supports three-and-a-half other jobs in our economy.

That means that beyond the seven-thousand coal-mining jobs already lost, an additional twenty-four-thousand-five-hundred jobs in our region will be affected.

The average family size is three. That means ninety-four-thousand-five-hundred people — nearly twenty percent of our entire population in Eastern Kentucky — have been directly impacted by coal industry job losses.

The average wage of the seven-thousand coal jobs lost is just over seventy-eight thousand dollars per year. When you multiply that wage by the seven-thousand jobs lost, and then multiply the other twenty-four-thousand-five-hundred jobs lost by a conservative annual salary estimate of twenty-thousand dollars per year, it means one billion dollars of earned wages will be removed from our region's economy — every year. That's worth repeating: one billion dollars a year.

Many Eastern Kentuckians are leaving their homes, their communities, and their families to work in other parts of the country. What does the future of our region hold for those that remain?

Already we are seeing dramatic increases in childhood homelessness as families lose their homes. In some schools this fall, nearly 50% of the children had at least one unemployed parent as a result of the coal lay-offs.

These are not young people fresh out of high school debating about their career path. Everyday I am approached by mature men and women with young families. Workers that feel the effects of time and toil on their bodies and have retirement just within their sights also approach me almost daily. They both have made choices about their careers; worked hard, and made sacrifices and now because of recent decisions made by the EPA they face hardship and uncertainty.

I have witnessed them selling their life's accumulated possessions in yard sales. Their credit is being damaged beyond repair as they are forced to dependency on free lunch, food stamps, and other government programs in an attempt to get through another week.

These are men and women that have believed that basic American promise. They believed that if they worked hard that they could do well enough to raise a family, own a home, and send their kids to college, and put a little away for retirement.

Keeping that promise alive is what President Obama named as the defining issue of our time. I agree. Don't we all? Can't we find a way to undo what is being done?

What is the future of Eastern Kentucky?

Knott County is representative of our region. In 1960 — just before the War On Poverty was declared — seventy-six-point five percent of Knott County citizens lived in poverty. By 2011, only twenty-four-point five were living in poverty. Now, the coal workforce in Knott County has suddenly been reduced to half of what it was in 2011 and poverty is on the rise again.

I cannot imagine that the EPA calculated the human impact of their decisions that have so negatively impacted the coal industry in Eastern Kentucky, put thousands of families at risk, and threatened decades of progress. But if they did, they callously disregarded that calculation and violated the most basic moral imperative of our government, which is to protect its people.

Today, energy produced in America by coal is as clean as it ever has been and the technology is in place to make it even cleaner.

I am from Eastern Kentucky, my family is in Eastern Kentucky, my friends, and my constituents are in Eastern Kentucky.

I am asking you to please help stem the tide of unemployment and poverty by curtailing the EPA regulations that so drastically impact the production of Appalachian Coal. As my friend and fellow Bell Countian, Jimmy Rose, has reminded us all recently on the hit show America's Got Talent: "Coal Keeps Our Lights On."

Thank You