

**TESTIMONY OF DR. BILL BISSETT, PRESIDENT & CEO
HUNTINGTON REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
FOR THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mister Chairman, members of the House Natural Resources Committee – My name is Doctor Bill Bissett and I am the President and C.E.O. of the Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce in my hometown of Huntington, West Virginia. Please know that my Chamber represents more than 550 businesses and 30 thousand employees in our region. It is also important to remember that West Virginia is the only state completely contained within Appalachia, and, as an Appalachian, we like to think that where I'm from is the gateway to this wonderful place we call Appalachia. Economically, I bring you good news from West Virginia. Since my return to my home state more than two years ago, we have gone from catastrophic job loses and declining state revenues to job growth and a state that is now stable and growing financially. Much of this previous economic downturn related

to a severe decrease in the production of fossil fuels, but we are now witnessing a rebirth in both coal and natural gas production.

With coal, we continue to be concerned with our nation's inability to build new coal-fired power plants. Until this fact changes, the domestic market for steam coal – coal used to create electricity – will continue to decrease as coal plants are retired. However, the story that is not often told is that, in the southern coalfields of West Virginia, the economy is doing well due to metallurgical coal, or coal that makes steel, which is also known as met coal. This coal, which sells at a higher price and burns much hotter, is in great demand both in the United States and around the world. As we Americans discuss not only new infrastructure but also the maintenance of roads, bridges and other large structures, large amounts of steel will be needed, and I would hope that we would use steel made in the

United States. And to make that steel, I would want us to use met coal from West Virginia.

To the north in West Virginia, we see the expansion of natural gas production and tremendous investments in our state's future. From new wells to new pipelines, the jobs, revenue and additional economic development related to the production of natural gas have spiked optimism and opportunity in our state.

While I bring good news to you economically from West Virginia, it comes with a caveat. As I talk to business leaders and job providers back home, many of them are thrilled to see this uptick, but they also find it fragile. In West Virginia, in the heart of Appalachia, we worry that, as a global issue like Climate Change is addressed, it will damage the economy of West Virginia far greater than any other state.

My Chamber is located outside of the coalfields in West Virginia, but we are all too familiar with what a downturn in coal production does to our region. At a time when our country

and the world needs steel and electricity, met and steam coal production provides high-paying jobs, not just for coal miners, but engineers, lawyers, accountants, machinery workers, and numerous other service jobs that are dependent on the mining of coal for their existence. While we have withstood the last downturn, we worry that actions here in Washington will damage West Virginia's rebounding economy, job growth, and long-term economic development.

I believe, and would suggest that many of my fellow West Virginians believe, that we can produce coal and natural gas while also creating new economic opportunities for our citizens. We simply do not have to sacrifice one industry to create new opportunities.

Some final thoughts.

-As person fascinated with how we electrify this country every day in a reliable and low-cost way, I would suggest to you that what works for one state might not work for other states. What

works for Arizona and its economy probably doesn't work well for West Virginia. We are very different places. When the wind doesn't blow and sun doesn't shine, we still need to power our homes and businesses, and fossil fuels, especially through combined cycle plants using both coal and natural gas, can provide this critical backbone of electricity production.

-In my opinion, we need all forms of energy production. To make windmills and solar panels, you're going to need a lot of materials that come from underground. And that involves the extraction of minerals and the use of land. As a senior engineer told me early in my career, every form of energy production has an economic and environmental cost to it.

-I think everyone in this room and on this panel can agree that no one wants to create poverty and hopelessness by their actions. As many of us Appalachians try to tell our story beyond our borders, we worry about the future of our region and how impediments to our ability to produce natural

resources will return us to what was a very dark time in my home state and in Appalachia. As Climate Change is a global issue, we must consider its impact in a global way, and with a global solution. Sacrificing the economic future of West Virginia and Appalachia will have little impact on global manmade carbon, but you will succeed in creating more poverty, more hopelessness, and an uncertain future for those of us lucky enough to call West Virginia home.

Thanks you again for allowing me to share my thoughts with you today. It has been an honor.