

Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Legislative Hearing:
Health and Environmental Impacts of Mountaintop Removal Mining
April 9, 2019

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on the health and environmental impacts of Mountaintop Removal Mining, and on H.R. 2050, Mr. Yarmuth's Appalachian Communities Health Emergency, or ACHE, Act.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member or their designees.

I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5:00 pm today. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent for Congressman Beyer to sit on the dais and participate in this morning's hearing. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

I would first like to welcome the witnesses and thank them for being here this afternoon.

Some impacts of Mountaintop Removal Mining are highly visible – the massive scars it leaves on the landscape can be clearly seen in photos taken from space.

Other impacts – such as the suffering of the people of Central Appalachia – have been largely invisible to those who do not live there.

Mountaintop Removal Mining destroys homes and communities, makes air and water toxic, and causes higher rates of heart, lung, and kidney disease, birth defects, and cancer.

Yet Congressional Republicans and the Trump Administration keep accepting the coal industry's excuses for Mountaintop Removal Mining.

The coal industry says regulations are an unnecessary burden – that mountaintop removal practices are safe and environmentally-friendly.

The fact is Mountaintop Removal Mining has already poisoned four thousand miles of streams¹ and spoiled an area the size of Delaware.

The coal industry says – protecting this mining practice protects jobs!

The fact is Mountaintop Removal Mining replaces most jobs with explosives and heavy machinery. Cheap Natural Gas and basic economics replace the rest.

The coal industry says – just give us one more mountain to flatten, let us dig a few more tons of coal – if you do that, we promise Appalachians will have prosperity.

The fact is they've been saying that for a hundred years. They've devoured five hundred mountains, dug up billions of tons of coal – and still the region suffers.

It's almost as if the coal industry has been using the people of Appalachia to build its own wealth and power – extracting the hard work from mining communities the same way it extracts coal – and leaving nothing behind but poverty and health problems.

Let me be clear: the people of Appalachia played an important role in the history of our country - Appalachian coal miners were instrumental in winning World War II.

But the science is undeniable: Mountaintop Removal Mining is harmful to the health of people who live nearby.

In 2016, at the urging of Appalachian communities, the Department of Interior funded the National Academy of Sciences to study the issue.

¹ Based on EPA projections from 2011. This is a conservative number.

But halfway through that study, the Trump Administration cancelled it.

We invited one of the people behind the cancellation, Associate Deputy Secretary Jim Cason, to testify today, but he refused, with the reason being, “the issue has been covered.”

In addition to Mr. Cason not getting to decide what issues Congress has covered to his satisfaction, he’s also flat out wrong.

The Department has repeatedly refused to provide any information to Congress on why it cancelled the study.

An Inspector General report found that the Department’s public explanations about the cancellation were false, and concluded that the study money was, quote, “wasted.” That’s the I-G’s word, not mine.

We found a clue to the real reason in a quote from an I-G interview with Trump appointee Landon “Tucker” Davis, who said, quote, “Science was a democrat thing.”

So, it appears this administration is treating science the same way coal miners deal with mountains: blow it up and throw it away.

Of course, science is not a Democratic thing or a Republican thing. It’s about figuring out the truth.

The bill we are discussing today, H.R. 2050, the ACHE Act, would let science find that truth when it comes to the health impacts of mountaintop removal mining.

I only wish the Interior Department would show up sometime to explain why they’re so opposed to science and the truth, and so callous about the health of the people of Appalachia.

With that, I look forward to the testimony from our witnesses, and I now recognize Ranking Member Gosar for his opening statement.