

Comments on the Federal Coal Leasing Program

June 23, 2016

You have heard and will hear from many more commenters today that the BLM proposal to evaluate royalty rates on coal is not really about making sure that American citizens receive a fair return on coal resources on federal lands. When bonus bids, severance taxes and other fees are factored in with the existing 12.5% royalty rate, coal removed from federal lands is already taxed at a staggering effective rate of 39%. Tell me that's not paying our fair share.

The real, very thinly disguised, BLM/DOI agenda is to place another nail in the coffin of the U.S. coal industry for reasons that make absolutely no sense from either an economic or environmental standpoint. Raising royalty rates to the point that the economic playing field is tilted against coal will not increase revenues available to assist Colorado communities or our school children. Quite to the contrary, the revenue stream will dry up as coal operations cease and Colorado coal field communities are forced to suffer the associated devastation.

This is not pie in the sky rhetoric. Take a look at the losses the coal field communities in Delta, Moffat and Rio Blanco counties have already suffered. How do you think the families of laid off miners in these communities are coping? They are upside down with mortgage payments; their dreams of sending their children to college have evaporated; they are wondering how they will put food on the table with no pay check coming in. I don't even want to hear any more federal government promises about throwing token guilt money at retraining programs for displaced coal miners. We've seen how well that is working in Appalachia.

Coal miners in Colorado are part of the fabric of the communities we live in. Most of us in the coal industry have lived in our communities for decades. We are community leaders and we volunteer our time and resources with organizations within our communities and beyond. Just within the small circle of individuals that I work with every day we have a local hospital board chair, a member of a BLM Resource Advisory Council, a member of the Colorado Mined Land Reclamation Board, the chair of the local Special Olympics, an addiction recovery counselor, a scout leader, and members of various community planning and service organizations. The list goes on.

I am very concerned that this fabric will be rent apart as EPA, DOI, USACE and other federal agencies, along with their NGO allies, continue their assault on the coal industry. I hope you will ask yourselves if the myopic energy policy vision of the current administration is worth all the pain to coal communities, minorities, senior citizens on fixed incomes and in fact to the American economy when compared against the very small to nonexistent environmental return that may or may not accrue in the decades to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

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