

MR. CHERMAK: My name is Rick Chermak. And I work at Arch Coal [indiscernible] in the North Fork Valley. And I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today. I am a Delta County native. And I just want to spend a couple of minutes talking about growing up in the North Fork Valley and touch on two much talked about topics that affect those of us who mine coal in the Valley. Number 1, the environment. We also hear and read how coal is supposedly destroying the environment. And the people who move into the Valley have told me, you know, they move in from outside the area, how the coal mines are destroying the area by building roads and paths on the surface through what was once a pristine area. Unfortunately most of those people don't get to see the end result five or 10 years down the road after the reclamation is done. And I can tell you that up there their area is so thick with oak brush you can't walk through it. And after the reclamation, there are meadows with grass. There are trails where the roads once were. You see abundant wildlife in those areas, where before, you never saw any wildlife. And I often wonder what brings people into the North Fork Valley? Why, why is there such an appeal there for them? And I really think it's probably because of the pristine environment. And we have miners at West Elk that are fifth generation there. And so, I've got to think that, you know, if their great-great grandparents, great-grandparents, and grandparents, and parents did such a poor job of caring for the environment, why do people move to that area? And truly I think it's because the North Fork natives have been, and will continue to be, true stewards of the land and the environment we live in. The other thing I'd like to touch on is health. And there, again, many people believe that mining negatively impacts the health of those who live near the mines and the power plants. My own experience to the mines tells me it's a fallacy. I've been mining now for 24 years. And I work in the so-called unhealthy underground environment, teaming with coal dust, methane fumes, and numerous other hazards. And I'd like to tell you that I'll soon be 65 years old. And I'd wager to say my health is equal to or better than anyone else in this room who's close to my age. And I was going to put a challenge out there that anyone who would like to meet me in a 100 meter dash at Lincoln Park after this hearing is over, I'd like to prove that point.

But, I say that tongue-in-cheek. And so, I just want to say make no mistake, coal miners, they are a healthy and hardy group of people. And I'd like to tell you about an experience that I had a couple of years ago.

I was in town. It was not here in Grand Junction.

But, I was walking down the street. I had a shirt on that was embroidered with West Elk Mine.

I had a complete stranger walk up to me, look me in the eye, and said you should be ashamed of what you do for a living. And well, I want to tell you nothing can be further from the truth.

I'm proud to be a coalminer. And I'm proud of all the fellow coalminers in this room wearing shirts. And I want to call each and every one of them my friend. Thank you.