

MR. GRAVES: Good morning. My name is Ben Graves [phonetic]. And I teach high school in Delta County. I'm also a Board Member of the Western Slope Conservation Center. And I live in a coalmining community. And I personally have experienced the suffering that follows in the decline of the coal industry. After a major round of layoffs in 2014, my tiny high school in Paonia lost dozens of families. Students wore this stress on their face as they came into my classroom -- red-eyed, blurry -- red-faced and blurry-eyed after sleepless nights, listening to their families deal with the blow of lost jobs. The blow not only rocked the community, and resulted in the closure of many of our cherished small businesses, but also forced our school to eliminate three teaching positions in a staff of less than 20. And my job was one of the ones eliminated. And I was forced, like many of our coal families [indiscernible]. As a science teacher, I must reflect on the history, like seasons, as the pattern tends to repeat itself. To my friends and colleagues and neighbors here, I stand -- who stand here in opposition to coal reform, I urge you to look at the recent history in the Pacific Northwest as an example. After just returning from Oregon and driving through some of the former timber towns that dot the State -- many of whom have reinvented themselves into technology, manufacturing, and tourism hubs. And yes, some are still mired in post-industrial poverty. So, friends, neighbors, it's up to us, with the support of the Federal Government, to define our own destiny. We need to start now by melding our current small-scale technologically advanced and environmentally sound coal extraction with emerging technologies, like coal bed methane capture, residential solar, and small-scale hydro. We need support right now to help us transition -- not away from coal, but with coal, into the 21st century. The North Fork in Delta County was founded around mining. And I'm not standing here advocating for that to end. However, we need to reform the process by which we value the products of mining and support the communities that live alongside these mines. For example, Delta County School District bears the brunt of mine closures -- both financially and socially. Our District relies heavily on severance taxes. However, many of the mines currently operating reside in Gunnison County. But, the miners and their families lives in Delta. Sure, the whole region may hurt financially when mines close. But, Delta County hurts in myriad other ways. It's our community that gets ripped apart when families relocate. It's our small businesses and schools that suffer the boom and bust. Leasing reforms need to balance

the needs of rural communities. And Federal lease coal revenues need to return to the communities where these miners live. Mountain Coal Company, the West Elk Mine, has been a model corporate citizen in Delta County. Our schools receive thousands of dollars each year directly from Arch Coal, too, for innovative teaching practices. Engineers from these mines routinely visit my classroom and bring valuable perspectives and excitement to my students. Mountain Coal Company has been an outstanding steward of the land in Delta County. And the Western Slope Conservation Center is partnered with them on access hunting, fishing, and recreation issues. However, we in North Fork rely on the good will and the community-centered relationships that we've built with these companies over the years of careful negotiation. And I'd like to encourage that to become the standard for mines -- not just the exception. Thank you.