

ADAM HUGHES: Good morning. My name is Adam Hughes, and I'm a member of Statewide Organizing for Community Empowerment, formerly Save Our Cumberland Mountains. For forty-four years, our members have organized their communities to preserve their lives, health, and property from the disastrous effects of surface mining, and to work for a just economic transition that respects the priceless assets and the personal strength of mountain communities. On behalf of our members, I'm delighted to welcome the Bureau of Land Management to my home of Knoxville, Tennessee. In Tennessee, we are fortunate that none of our public lands are threatened by federal coal leasing. Our public lands provide camping, hiking and biking, hunting and fishing, some of the most breath-taking views you will ever see. We are fiercely proud of these lands. And I'm saddened that my friends across the country must fight to preserve the land held by all of us in the public trust. However, this does not mean that the Federal Coal Leasing Program is not important to Tennesseans. A recent report by the non-profit environmental entrepreneurs praises Tennessee as among the best nationwide for growth in clean energy jobs, with nearly half the gains coming in the crucial manufacturing sector. This growth could be even more profound were it not for the defective federal subsidy for the coal industry. When considering the true cost of the Federal Leasing Program, please consider the economic impact it has on our green economy. Tennessee does burn federally leased coal. At the TVA Kingston Fossil Plant, approximately half the coal comes from federally leased land. In 2008, one billion gallons of coal ash contaminated with heavy metals spilled on the communities of Roane County. The cleanup was long and costly, finishing only last year and doing damage that cannot be truly quantified. The ash from the spill was shipped by train to the cash poor predominantly African-American community of Uniontown, Alabama, where it sits in a land fill directly across from houses. Residents report health problems and crop failures, and they have filed a civil rights complaint and testified in Washington, D.C. We must understand that the Federal Coal Leasing Program is directly connected to the injustices in Kingston and Uniontown. We must call for a federal coal leasing policy predicated on keeping our community safe and under the understanding that black lives matter. The Federal Coal Leasing Program must be modified to prioritize the goal of developing a renewable energy future and must take into account the cost that federally leased coal ash, which must be stored and monitored perpetually, demands on the health and safety of communities throughout the country. Thank you.