

MICHELLE JENKINS: Good morning, everyone. I am pleased to be here this morning on behalf of Congressman Griffith. He is in D.C. voting today, so he was not able to be here in person. But he did send some words for me to share. I, first of all, want to thank all of you for being here and taking your time to be here this morning, and also thanks to the BLM for offering this opportunity for our constituents to provide comments. A statement from Congressman Griffith that I would like to share with you. He says: "I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the administration's proposal to suspend new coal mining leases on federal land as it conducts a programmatic environmental impact statement." "Coming from Southwest Virginia, this appears to be nothing more than the latest front in President Obama's ongoing war on coal and coal-dependent jobs. The impacts of this action are not only felt in the coal fields, but also in industries such as rail, manufacturing, and others that rely on coal mines for dependable energy. After all, life above ground is impacted when work stops underground as the result of a regular onslaught on coal regions, the low cost of competitive fuel, and a sluggish world economy." "Some of the key power providers in Virginia have made it clear that coal will be a part of their strategy for a long time to come. At a recent conference, Dominion Power indicated that by 2030, they expect 30 percent of their energy production will still be from coal. American Electric Power indicated that they anticipate about 50 percent of theirs will still be from coal." "These power companies are not alone. Families, businesses, and manufacturers across America will continue to rely on coal-powered electricity for decades to come. Yet the moratorium proposed by the administration would significantly restrict access in many parts of our country to an abundant and inexpensive fuel source." "While this news more acutely affects areas other than Southwest Virginia, that is of little solace to those in the Ninth District's mining industry, which, distressingly, has been in the President's crosshairs for sometime." "While I am personally unable to attend the public meeting in Knoxville, I'm encouraged by the community members that made the trip from Southwest Virginia to make their voices heard. I sincerely hope that the Department of Interior, and specifically the Bureau of Land Management, will heed our call and reconsider the suspension as new coal mining leases on federal lands. Thank you for your time."