

NICK MULLINS: Hi. My name is Nick Mullins, and I came here from Clintwood, Virginia by way of Berea, Kentucky, where we have now lived for five years. We left the valley my family called home for ten generations due to extensive coal mining and the health concerns contained therein. Coal has been a part of my family for many years. I myself was the fifth generation in my family to work in the underground coal mines of Southwestern Virginia. Many people today want to try to make the argument that we need coal mining because it creates jobs and it helps the local economies. I'm here to tell you from personal experience this is untrue. And one need only look at the hundreds of coal-mining communities throughout this nation to see that truth. The cyclical boom and bust nature of coal markets have left sweeping poverty, complete with the typical indicators, including rampant substance abuse. Those who enjoy the brief economic benefits of coal employment have been left to suffer the health impacts, including black lung, cancer, joint deterioration, and back injuries. And this includes people in my family, such as my father, both my grandfathers, my great-grandfather, my second great-grandfather. In fact, multiple uncles and cousins. Many now live in daily pain. And I had a family member who eventually took his own life to end his pain. I, myself was beginning to experience some of these side effects. And the different -- the (Inaudible) diggers and fatigue took its toll on my body and my family. The truth is we don't need coal, and we certainly do not need it to mine it at the expense of people's health and at the expense of the health of our lungs. In this technological age, we should be seeking out ways to live healthier, happier lives without dependency on cheap energy sources and all its long-term detriments. Today I live a life in which I see the connections between modern convenience and its externalized costs. For instance, when I see a twenty thousand square foot pet supply store that is being heated and cooled twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I know where much of that energy is coming from. Also, people can comfortably shop for toys and food for their pets. I can really extrapolate this into the millions upon millions of square feet of retail and office space, all heated and cooled and lit for the purpose of buying and selling and trading thousands upon thousands of non-essential items, from video games and designer clothes to other things. I know these connections and I know them when I see them in my father, in my uncles, in my grandfathers, who mine coal, and how they live in this daily pain now. So, then you think about your role in this process and your review of the ERS in allowing the lands of our great nation to be exploited for the benefit of a few companies. I implore you to think about those people who ultimately suffer from your decisions. I ask you to consider whether or not the coal that is mined and burned is done so for a higher purpose than providing unnecessary materialistic benefits to a greater nation. Your decisions have real impacts upon real people, upon future generations who are going to contend with a warming planet. I ask that you put a permanent moratorium on any coal mine leasing on federal lands. Thank you.