

MS. PETERSEN: Thank you for the opportunity to speak, especially here in Grand Junction. I am Bonnie Petersen, Executive Director of the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado. Our seven counties and municipalities are energy-producing communities and strongly support coal mining on Federal land. So, as a matter of fact, six of our seven counties had elected official here earlier today speaking on behalf of energy production on these Federal lands. We believe the Federal Coal Leasing Program has worked well and continues to serve the needs of the American public, both the taxpayers and the companies that lease the coal mine -- or that lease and mine the coal. Our communities in Northwest Colorado depend on these jobs in the coal mines and the power plants they supply, as well as the economic benefits provided by the suppliers of goods and services to mines and power plants. Opponents of coal mining allege there are serious flaws in the Federal Coal Leasing Program. This is unsubstantiated. Reports from 2013 by the Government Accountability Office in the Department of Interior and Inspector General contain minor recommendations for improvements to the Federal Coal Program. Neither report recommended wholesale revisions to the program, nor do they address in any way royalty rates. BLM has already acted on the reports' recommendations to improve the management of the Federal Coal Program. To date, the agency has published an updated Coal Evaluation Manual and Handbook, as well as seven instruction memorandum to its field offices in response to the suggestions by the IG and the GAO. We believe large-scale changes in the program are unnecessary and may serve to harm the industry and result in less revenue to the American taxpayer. Critics of coal call for BLM to keep it in the ground. That would result in no return at all to the taxpayer. The Federal Coal Program provides substantial revenues to Federal and State governments, totally \$13.8 billion since 2003. Because coal bonus bids, rents, and royalties are shared with the States, the Colorado citizens receive \$22 million from Federal coal in 2015 alone. That represents 49 percent of the monies paid to the Federal Government. Our communities depend on these payments to provide for schools and infrastructures to benefit our citizens. [Indiscernible] concerns rates regarding lack of competitors for Federal lease bids. That's a function of pricing on private land leases. Those leases are less

expensive than Federal land leases. That impacts the number of companies willing to bid on Federal leases. You know this, this industry, the coal industry, supports our communities through direct contributions far above the taxes that they pay; not to mention the volunteer opportunities. Reclamation on these coal mines. People come to Colorado and love our land. Oftentimes don't realize that they kill their first [indiscernible] or get their first fish off of reclaimed coal mines. Reclamation is one of the major improvements to habitats that we get in, in Colorado, particularly Western Colorado. Because a lot of our Federal programs have failed. And they do not provide -- they, they created a fire hazard and unhealthy landscapes. So, we request that this review of the coal program consider these issues in its deliberation. And look for a way to balance the coal program and support our communities. Thank you.