

Written Statement of Jimmy “Bo” Copley

Former WV Coal Miner

Before the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

EPA’s Regulations and Their Impact on West Virginia

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Good afternoon. Senator Capito and esteemed guests, thank you for asking me to be here today. My name is Jimmy “Bo” Copley. I am a 39 year old child of God, husband to 1, father of 3, proud West Virginian, and a former coal miner. I was formerly employed at Coal Mac, Inc. in Holden, WV (a subsidiary of Arch Coal in St. Louis, MO) from July 26, 2004 to September 18, 2015. My duties there were that of a maintenance planner, EMT, rescue team member, and certified surface mine foreman.

Just slightly over 1 year ago, I was notified that my services were no longer required, due to a reduction in force. Although we were told that we shouldn’t have to reduce our workforce before the beginning of 2016, we should have known that we wouldn’t make it that long without one. Our company was the only one in Arch that had not experienced such a reduction. Every Monday during our weekly safety meetings, we were told how increasingly difficult it was becoming to acquire mining permits due to EPA regulations. Weekly, we were told how fortunate we were to not have our pay cut, and how fortunate we were to be working, in general.

My duties as a maintenance planner required me to work in an office. That’s where I saw the numerous state and federal mine inspectors that would come to our job as they started their inspections. With increasing regulations forcing other mines to close, we would see more and more inspectors on our job. At one point, we had 12 inspectors on our property on the same day. They told us they were all there that day because they had nowhere else to go. Many times, we would see underground inspectors who had no idea what they were looking at because they had never been on a surface mine. That would lead to more violations because of their interpretation of laws. More violations lead to higher cost per ton. Higher cost per ton leads to less profits. Less profits lead to job loss.

My job required me to build relationships with vendors that performed various tasks related to our industry. As each major coal corporation has faced bankruptcies and downsizing, every vendor down the line has had to face the ramifications of those actions. From large companies like Walker Machinery to smaller, locally owned companies like Guyan Heavy Equipment, every vendor that is related to our industry has taken their share of loss due to this administration’s EPA overreach. For every coal mining job lost there are countless more that are also affected. Heavy equipment vendors face the hard ship of trying keep people working versus making a profit. School administrators face decreased funding because their enrollments have dropped due to people moving to find work. Many commercial businesses have closed their doors due to the lack of spending in our region. Many small business owners, just like my wife, see a decline in their business because people don’t have the extra money to pay for things outside their basic needs. Our entire state feels the ramifications of a targeted industry.

While my family has been fortunate to have my wife's photography business to help sustain our family in what would otherwise be a dark time, many coal miners don't have that second income on which to depend. For many years, coal mining has produced great wages that have allowed spouses the opportunity to be stay at home parents and to be able to do the various things that are vital for our families to operate and function properly.

Finally, but definitely most importantly, our family's faith in God as our Provider (Jehovah Jireh) has allowed us to be able to carry on with our everyday life. Our God is able to bring His people through any circumstance they face, and we believe that West Virginians' unwavering faith in God is what will separate us from those who mean to do us harm. Our faith in Him will guide us to the type of people and leaders that will ultimately lead us to prominence. While coal is not a renewable energy source, I believe that He has given us this resource to provide clean, affordable energy. I also believe that He will lead us to elect the type of people that will allow us to use this energy source until a better, all-around source is available to compete with, or eventually, take its place.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to speak before this committee today. To share concerns on behalf of so many people in our great state is a tremendous honor that I don't take lightly, and I pray that I am able to represent my brothers and sisters in a way that shows the honor and dignity that they deserve. Have a good afternoon, and may God bless you.