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"EPA vs. American Mining Jobs: The Obama Administration's Regulatory Assault on the Economy"

Witnesses:

Edmund Fogels
Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Natural Resources
State of Alaska Representative, Interstate Mining Compact Commission
Sheldon Maier
President, Fortymile Mining District
Chris Hamilton
Senior Vice President, West Virginia Coal Association
Norman Van Vactor
Chief Executive Officer, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation

Committee Members Present:

Doug Lamborn (R-CO) Committee Chairman
Rush Holt (D-NJ) Ranking Member
Peter DeFazio (D-OR)
Don Young (R-AK)
John Fleming (R-LA)
Rob Bishop (R-UT)
Kevin Cramer (R-ND)
Dan Benishek (R-MI)
Chris Stewart (R-UT)
Steve Daines (R-MT)
Louie Gohmert (R-TX)

On October 10, the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing on what Chairman Doug Lamborn (R-CO) called "abusive actions" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) against U.S. mining operations, including EPA's watershed assessment of Bristol Bay, Alaska. The goal of the hearing was to offer solutions to create jobs and grow the economy by bolstering America's mining industry. Witnesses from the mining industry as well as the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation provided testimony. Due to the government shutdown, no representatives from the EPA were able to attend.

The subcommittee was divided; with Republican members placing blame on the Obama Administration for creating a "war on coal," and Democratic members, conversely, focused on the need for increased regulation. Republican members showed their discontent with the increased emission standards on pre-existing and new coal power plants. Opponents of the increased regulation argue that the technology to affordably reduce carbon emissions at coal power plants is not readily available or affordable and will drastically increase the cost of electricity.

Witness Edmund Fogels, Deputy Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, expressed that states should have more jurisdiction in mining regulation and management of natural resources. Fogels added, "The states' familiarity with the specifics of their respective local mining industries is irreplaceable, and federal agencies must recognize the states' role in representing their citizens' economic and environmental interests."

Members of the subcommittee referred to the Obama Administration's coal regulation as a "war on coal." "The Obama Administration's 'war on coal' can be felt throughout the country," Lamborn stated. "Now it has seemingly expanded to an all-out 'war on mining jobs' threatening workers from Chicken, Alaska, to Superior, Arizona." Rush Holt (D-NJ), however, emphasized that under the Obama Administration the mining industry has experienced the largest increase of mining jobs in 15 years.

Van Vactor, CEO of Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation, noted the importance of the Bristol Bay's salmon fishery and the role the EPA has played to help protect the region. Vactor told the committee that EPA's watershed assessment has been vital in sustaining the future for the Bristol Bay watershed.

The split committee heard mixed testimony from witnesses; with three of the four witnesses expressing that the EPA's coal regulations were harming industry growth. One witness representing the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation applauded the EPA's regulations in protecting the watershed and sustaining the diversity of the Bristol Bay. The mixed reviews from witnesses and split committee failed to find solutions on how to bolster the economy and increase mining jobs.

Opening statements, witness testimonies and an archived webcast of the hearing can be found on the House Committee on Natural Resources web site.

-SKF