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Energy decisions will affect millions

By Roger Nicholson

RECENTLY, Dave Cooper, a Sierra Club activist, drew alarming parallels between the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and the anti-mining group's fight against surface mining in Appalachia.

Cooper publicly stated, "One day we will look back with horror . . . , just as we look upon the photographs of civil rights leaders being blasted with fire hoses."

Cooper's reasoning is as flawed as his comparison is reprehensible. If through legislation or litigation, surface mining is prohibited, the burden of resulting higher energy costs would fall directly on those who can least afford them.

That's something the Sierra Club and other anti-mining groups would rather avoid discussing, since they offer no realistic alternative sources of affordable and accessible energy to replace coal.

And that's not taking into account the economic impact from lost mining jobs and the resulting impact on service-related jobs and local community tax bases.

But don't take my word for it. Let's see how one organization committed to racial causes feels about environmental pressure groups, like the Sierra Club, that seek to dictate U.S. energy policy.

In comments posted on the Congress of Racial Equality's Web site, chairman Roy Innis states that energy is the "master resource" on which everything else depends.

"Cripple our energy sector with taxes, over-regulation and ill-advised laws that make heating, driving and manufacturing more costly - and the poor suffer most," he writes.

"Destroy jobs, or make poor families pay an ever larger portion of their meager incomes for energy, food and clothing - and the hard won victories in our struggle for civil rights will quickly be reversed.

Lock up oil, gas and coal prospects, and there will be fewer job opportunities even in companies committed to diversity."

Innis, who is hardly a coal-industry spokesperson, calls pressure groups who seek to put our country's natural resources off-limits "energy deniers who want to shackle the fossil fuel system we have and replace it with a utopian system that isn't even on the drawing board."

He correctly observes that when affordable energy becomes unaffordable, those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder suffer most.

Our country is blessed with an abundant, reliable, low-cost resource in the form of coal. It would be a terrible thing to cripple the coal sector, drive thousands of hard-working miners out of their jobs, and force poor families to shell out an ever-larger portion of their incomes for essential heating, cooling and fuel.

Cooper and his anti-mining friends might want to compare themselves to civil rights activists, but real civil rights activists have recognized that the environmental extremists actually threaten the gains brought by civil rights champions.

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