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Letter to the Editor  
The State Journal  
13 Kanawha Blvd. W.  
Charleston, WV 25302

Dear Editor,

Vernon Haltom, co-director of the Coal River Mountain Watch, recently threw out some statistics to the State Journal to buttress his argument that ending mountaintop mining in West Virginia “won’t ruin the economy and won’t put everyone out of work ...” Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, Mr. Haltom’s comments are both wrong and misleading.

Haltom said that the coal industry employs only five percent of the workforce (actually seven percent of the workforce is employed in direct mining jobs) in West Virginia. What Haltom failed to mention is the *inordinate economic impact of this workforce on the state’s economy relative to its size*.

West Virginia coal operators employ more than 6,000 surface mine workers. The average annual wages of these miners are approximately \$50,000 to \$60,000. That’s a payroll of at least \$300 million annually. Moreover, each of these jobs supports five additional jobs comprised of contractors, transportation providers, repair and supply vendors, and other support services. That’s a total of 30,000 jobs tied directly to surface mining in West Virginia. The potential loss of these good jobs and the income taxes they generate for West Virginia is a nightmare we should not even contemplate.

But let’s not forget that West Virginia’s 244 surface mines produced 68 million tons of coal in 2007 with an estimated production value of \$2.8 billion. That calculates to \$175.6 million in severance taxes for the state. No alternative economic activity can replace these lost severance taxes for the counties that depend on them for their economic survival.

But why stop at just surface mining? Mr. Haltom and his friends at anti-coal organizations, such as the Sierra Club, the Kentucky Waterways Alliance, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, are effectively exploiting the judicial and regulatory process in their quest for the total elimination of mining in Appalachia.

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Mr. Haltom's comments deceptively mislead the public to believe that mountaintop mining jobs are the only ones at risk as a result of the anti-mining extremist litigation against regulatory approval of valley fills. In fact, every underground mine in West Virginia also requires creation of a valley fill for disposal of waste rock from coal processing plants. Additionally, most deep mines also require a valley fill for construction of the portal site. While Mr. Haltom and his cohorts prefer to herald elimination of mountaintop surface mining as their primary target, you should have no doubt that their real goal is total elimination of all types of coal mining. Their organizations are challenging new underground mining permits with the same vitriol applied to surface mining.

Approximately 48,000 people are employed in the West Virginia coal industry, including underground, surface, coal handling and contracting. The economic impact of these jobs for the state is well over \$2 billion, not including the value of the coal production, which was estimated at \$6.7 billion in 2007. Severance taxes from both underground and surface mining are estimated at \$418 million for 2007. With the rising coal market, this amount could easily double annually next year and beyond - if coal production is not thwarted by the extremists' blocking maneuvers.

If you eliminate these jobs and the resulting coal production, the impact on the state's economy would be disastrous. Our state's citizens should question the assertions of anti-mining extremists because they are often disingenuous at best. The coal industry need not engage in deceptions like Mr. Haltom's because the truth is compelling and favors our continued harvesting of our abundant coal resources.

Very truly yours,

Roger L. Nicholson