

Opinion: Rep. Tim Murphy: Pennsylvania is coal country

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By Rep. Tim Murphy (PA)

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This fall, 380 workers at the Hatfield's Ferry and Mitchell Power Stations in southwestern Pennsylvania will lose their jobs when the two coal-fueled plants are permanently shut down. FirstEnergy, after just having invested hundreds of millions of dollars in environmental upgrades to the facilities, announced the decision was based in part on "the cost of compliance with current and future environmental regulations."

Since most of these new regulations weren't adopted by Congress, how did we get here?

The author of these regulations, the Environmental Protection Agency, is mired in the outdated view that virtually any use of fossil energy in power generation poses an imminent threat to public health. Not true. What has been lost in today's energy debate is the incredible technological advancements that have led to cleaner air and water.

Those opposed to fossil energy still present the false narrative of "dirty coal," which is an insult to the thousands of southwestern Pennsylvanians who work in the mines and throughout the coal industry supply chain.

These workers live in our communities, send their kids to local schools and reside in the towns where these plants are located. None of them wants to return to the old days of contaminated rivers and open smokestacks. Yet from the Aug. 6 editorial in the Post-Gazette titled "[Coal Barons: GOP Lawmakers Try to Turn Back the Hands of Time](#)," one would think Downtown Pittsburgh workers are still changing their dress shirts at mid-day because of soot in the air, when, in fact, over the last 50 years Pittsburgh rebuilt and redefined itself largely by environmental reform and progress.

Take, for example, U.S. Steel. The company, which relies on affordable Pennsylvania coal, just spent \$500 million making the Clairton Coke Works one the most environmentally safe facilities in the world. The plant even recycles gases to generate power needed for its Mon Valley mills. Innovative conservation projects of this kind have cut energy waste by close to 30 percent nationwide since 2000.

Pittsburgh-based Calgon Carbon has developed powdered activated carbon to help to cut in half the amount of mercury in the air. Today, most trace mercury found in the air in Western Pennsylvania isn't even from domestic sources; it's from countries without any regulation, such as China.

Three-quarters of the country's coal plants are now equipped with technologies developed by the National Technology Energy Laboratory, a federal research facility located in South Park. NETL perfected scrubbers, such as those installed by local boilermakers at Hatfield's Ferry just three years ago, to remove from the air sulfur dioxide gases that can cause acid rain. NETL's ground-breaking achievements helped to reduce emissions by 75 percent even as coal usage tripled over the last 30 years.

Instead of shutting down coal to make even greater environmental gains, the right way forward is to harness the creativity and innovation of local businesses, researchers and universities. But that's made exceedingly difficult under President Barack Obama's budget, which cut \$230 million out of NETL and clean-coal research and instead directs billions in taxpayer subsidies for unproven renewable energy projects similar to Solyndra.

As our region's workers, engineers and scientists have demonstrated, we don't have to choose between a healthy economy and clean air. We can have both, but not if we allow the debate to be hijacked by propaganda and overzealous government regulators.

Local workers are enduring not just the scorn of disinformation campaigns that ignore the true story of Pittsburgh's environmental renaissance, but they also are having to fight regulators in Washington who are destroying their way of life. Current EPA regulations eventually would eliminate coal as a fuel source without public input or even a vote in Congress.

That's why I authored legislation, adopted on a bipartisan vote in the House of Representatives, to halt the EPA's newest "social cost of carbon" regulation so Congress has an opportunity to review it. A regulation of this magnitude -- with such sweeping impact on the economy and the American workforce -- cannot be left to regulators alone, because as blue-collar moms and dads in southwestern Pennsylvania know well, the true impact of overregulation is concentrated unemployment and poverty.

If we give up on coal, we will lose more than the manufacturing and energy jobs that are the lifeblood of our region's economy. We'll also lose the chance to invest in building our future because we'll remain reliant on buying foreign energy.

The U.S. trade deficit with OPEC nations exceeded \$1 trillion in the last decade. Some of those dollars are funneled to terrorist groups fighting against us in the War on Terror, which has cost us more than \$1 trillion to wage. Since 1976, we've also spent more than \$8 trillion protecting the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. That's money unavailable for investing in infrastructure, education or job creation. An even higher cost has been the tragic number of soldiers lost in defense of our country.

The fact remains that we will need coal, oil and natural gas for transportation, electricity generation and chemical production well into the future. The question is whether we will use domestically available resources or allow our destiny to be determined by other nations and OPEC members.

I choose American energy.

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