U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
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ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

AIR

June 9, 2010
Bill MeadowsPresident, The Wilderness Society
Posted: June 8, 2010 04:46 PM

Keep the Greenhouse Gas Blowout Preventer - Lose the "Dirty Air Act" (Huffington Post)

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The oil that continues to gush from the seafloor of the Gulf of Mexico is a grim reminder of what our addiction to oil is costing us. Lost jobs in the fishing industry, lost protection of coastal marshes and the wildlife they harbor, and a lost way of life for thousands of Americans along the Gulf coast all result from the dogged pursuit of a fuel source that pollutes our coasts, our communities, our water, and our air.

Some in Congress feel that this fossil fuel addiction is not only acceptable, but should be promoted and accelerated. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) is scheduled to force a vote in the Senate that would strip the Environmental Protection Agency of its ability to regulate greenhouse gases, like those from the burning of oil and oil products. Some estimates show that this resolution could increase domestic oil consumption by hundreds of millions of barrels of oil. This is like offering a carton of Marlboro's to a patient suffering from lung disease.

The Environmental Protection Agency is currently the only "blowout preventer" we have for greenhouse gas pollution. Without it, there would be nothing preventing tons of carbon pollution from entering our atmosphere, and worsening the changing climate that is leaving permanent scars across our forests, beaches, and communities.

However, as we have seen in the Gulf, blowout preventers aren't the only solution. That is why it is critical that in addition to stopping Murkowski's resolution, the Senate needs to take up and vote on a comprehensive climate and energy bill. By addressing climate change now we can restore our environment, save money and create jobs in the process.

Our treasured places are already feeling the effects of a warming world. Glacier National Park has already lost a third of its iconic glaciers. The Everglades are already subject to sea-level rise from the warming ocean. Our public lands deserve better. Tragic tales like this will become more and more common as climate change gets worse.

The Senate must act immediately. First, it must vote down Sen. Murkowski's "Dirty Air Act." Second, it must pass a comprehensive climate and energy bill that decreases the amount of carbon going into the atmosphere. We can create jobs, improve the health of air and water, and lead the world in clean, green energy by passing a climate bill. We can do it by looking forward toward clean energy, not backwards toward oil.

The disaster in the Gulf has shown that our country desperately needs a better energy path - it's time to wean ourselves off dirty fuels, not increase our dependence on them.

Follow Bill Meadows on Twitter: www.twitter.com/Wilderness

BP SPILL

Poll: Voters Want Energy Reform, More Regulation In Wake Of Gulf Coast Spill (*Huffington Post*)

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BP Oil Spill, Climate Change, Energy Reform, Gulf Oil Spill, Oil Spill, Oil Spill Energy Reform, Politics News

The Gulf Coast oil disaster is intensifying the public's desire for clean energy investments and increased regulation of corporate polluters, according to a new poll commissioned by the League of Conservation Voters.

Americans voiced overwhelming support for energy legislation that goes beyond making BP pay for the damage it has caused, according to the poll released Tuesday. Findings suggest comprehensive energy reform could be a powerful election issue, with high support among key electoral groups.

"This poll makes crystal clear that the Gulf Coast disaster is the final straw for voters when it comes to allowing corporate polluters to dictate our energy policies," said LCV President Gene Karpinski in a statement. "Now, more than ever, it is clear that our dependence on oil - be it from hostile nations or friendly coasts - hurts our economy, threatens our security and harms our environment. Senators must work to deliver comprehensive energy and climate legislation this year that prevents future energy disasters, makes polluters pay their fair share and creates a thriving clean energy economy."

Sixty-six percent of the 800 voters surveyed by Obama pollster Joel Benenson agreed with this statement: "British Petroleum must pay for the damage they've done. But our addiction to oil threatens our security and we need more than a band-aid for that. Senators need to pass real reforms to hold polluters accountable and invest in clean American energy."

Only 23 percent agreed with this: "We need to ensure that British Petroleum pays every last dime of the damages they've caused, but Senators would be wrong to try to use this tragedy to pass some huge new Washington program and job-killing energy tax."

The poll comes in the wake of greater organizing around the climate bill and outrage over an amendment introduced by Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) that would block the Environmental Protection Agency from addressing climate change through rule-making. But sixty-three percent of people surveyed said they want more regulation, supporting an energy bill that would "limit pollution, invest in domestic energy sources and encourage companies to use and develop clean energy. It would do this in part by charging energy companies for carbon pollution in electricity or fuels like gas."

Among Democrats, 81 percent would support such an energy bill, only 14 percent would oppose it. Among Independents, those numbers are 63 percent and 27 percent, respectively. Republicans are against such legislation, but not by much -- 45 percent support it and 47 percent oppose it.

TOXICS

Dirty Illinois Coal Revived by Mining Deaths, Obama Crackdown (*Huffington Post*)

By Mario Parker
June 9 (Bloomberg) -- Coal has been cruel to Carlinville, Illinois, robbing it of hundreds of jobs in the past two decades. Tragedy and tougher regulation in Appalachia promise to reverse those fortunes in a state where the unemployment rate hovers near a 26-year high.

Illinois coal, once considered too dirty to be burned by utilities, is on the rise after the worst U.S. coal disaster in 40 years. The April 5 blast at Massey Energy Co.’s Upper Big Branch mine in Montcoal, West Virginia, killed 29 workers.

“The coal mine has always paid a good salary for doing very dangerous work,” Carlinville Mayor Robert Schwab said on a recent humid afternoon. “I just hope everything goes well.”

Schwab’s town of 6,000 in southern Illinois stands to benefit as Central Appalachia’s deposits get more perilous and costly to mine. Carlinville’s fate has been tied to coal since the early 20th century, when Standard Oil Co. needed it to power a refinery and ordered 156 catalog homes from Sears Roebuck & Co. in Chicago to house miners.

The Massey disaster revived safety concerns less than two weeks after President Barack Obama’s administration for the first time moved to revoke an approved permit due to environmental issues. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is trying to prevent St. Louis-

based Arch Coal Inc. from filling streams and valleys with debris from a West Virginia mountaintop mine one county away from Upper Big Branch.

Rosier Than Appalachia

“The Illinois basin is poised for growth and we fully expect to see an environment over the next several years with companies vying for that market,” said John Hanou, vice president of coal research at Edinburgh-based Wood Mackenzie Consultants Ltd., an energy advisory firm. “It looks rosier than Central Appalachia.”

Cline Resource & Development Co., a closely held coal producer based in Palm Beach, Florida, last year reopened a former Exxon Mobil Corp. operation on Carlinville’s outskirts. Macoupin Energy LLC, a subsidiary of Cline, began producing coal there in the fourth quarter, when it added 43 workers to the five it had early in the year, according to the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Employment in Illinois’s coal industry has plummeted to 3,500 workers from 10,000 in 1990, said Phillip Gonet, president of the Illinois Coal Association. Mining jobs pay $60,000 to $70,000 a year, requiring only a high school diploma, he said.

Circumventing Regulations

St. Louis-based Peabody Energy Corp., the nation’s largest coal producer, holds the most reserves in Illinois. Arch and Alpha Natural Resources Inc., the second- and third-biggest coal companies, respectively, have expressed interest in Illinois deposits to circumvent the safety and regulatory challenges in the eastern U.S.

That’s what concerns environmental groups such as the Sierra Club.

“This country needs to move beyond coal,” said David Graham-Caso, a spokesman for the San Francisco-based group. “As that transition happens, there needs to be very careful regulation of any coal mining, whether it be in Appalachia or the Illinois basin.”

The U.S., which holds the world’s largest reserves of the fuel, relies on it for about half the nation’s power generation, according to the U.S. Energy Department, and producers are targeting the Asia-Pacific region for increased exports.

Challenging Peabody

While Arch Coal said it doesn’t plan to bring its Illinois properties into production for several years because they still aren’t as profitable as its reserves in Wyoming, rivals expect to challenge Peabody sooner.

“It certainly does make us more receptive to more serious evaluations of other basins, and the Illinois basin is clearly a basin where we have some interest in some further investigation,”

Kevin Crutchfield, chief executive officer of Abingdon, Virginia-based Alpha Natural Resources, said in an interview.

Illinois also is getting a boost from an EPA rule established in 2005 that requires utilities to add scrubbers, a mechanism that reduces the amount of sulfur released from coal, Hanou said. The scrubbers, which cost $100 million to $400 million, erase the competitive advantage that Appalachia had over Illinois coal, he said.

High-Sulfur Coal

While Illinois coal has the third-highest energy content of any U.S. basin, it releases more than four times as much sulfur dioxide as Central Appalachia deposits. That scared utilities away as the U.S. cracked down on pollution when President Jimmy Carter was in office and later in the 1990s when Congress amended pollution laws.

“The Clean Air Act put a huge disadvantage on the Illinois coal industry, and it saw a significant decline in production as a result of that over time,” said Warren Ribley, director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Coal is a combustible rock of carbon and hydrocarbon, formed from dead plants, heat and pressure from as long as 300 million years ago. In the mountainous Appalachia region, which has been mined continuously for almost two centuries, the rocky geology makes the coal more difficult to extract and increases the possibility of stumbling into pockets of trapped methane gas, suspected of playing a role in the Massey disaster.

‘Easy Stuff’ Gone

“We’ve been mining Central Appalachia for 150 years, every year,” said William Burns, an analyst at Johnson Rice & Co. in New Orleans. “Geology says that we’ve mined the easy stuff. It’s not going to get easier, especially when you look at what happened with Upper Big Branch.”

More than 600 miles away, the grain crop-blanketed land above Illinois’s coal deposits is mostly flat. This makes it easier to mine and less likely to contain hard-to- spot methane pockets, said Pearce Hammond, a coal analyst at Simmons & Co. International in Houston.

Mine workers in Carlinville, 250 miles (400 kilometers) southwest of Chicago, suffered two blows in the past two decades. Employment at the local mine dropped to 358 people in 1990 from 586 in 1983, according to the mine safety administration, as Clean Air Act regulations took effect. Employment sank to 58 in 2008 after Exxon announced in November 2007 that it would shutter the operation.

Reversal of Fortune

Macoupin’s work at the former Exxon mine is starting to reverse that trend. The company plans to increase payroll to 100 employees from the 66 it has now, Schwab said. Macoupin wouldn’t

give the exact number of jobs to be added, though it confirmed a boost in hiring during the next 12 to 18 months.

Any new jobs help a state where the unemployment rate was 11.2 percent in April, more than the national average of 9.9 percent.

“The sales tax would be beneficial to the county, and anything that benefits the county benefits the municipalities and the people of the county,” said Schwab, 58. “So yeah, it’s a good thing.”

Illinois accounts for 21 percent, or 104 billion tons, of the U.S. coal reserve base. That’s enough to power the country for 52 years, second to Montana, according to Energy Department data.

Three New Mines

The turnaround in Illinois, led by Macoupin, helped boost production 2.7 percent in 2009 to 33.8 million tons, the most since 2001, according to data from the Energy Department. Three new mines under development in southern Illinois will add 20 million tons, Gonet said.

Coal mined from the eastern interior, which includes the so-called Illinois Basin, will jump 43 percent to 138.1 million tons by 2035, according to the Energy Department. By comparison, the agency expects coal taken from Central Appalachia, which includes parts of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia and eastern Tennessee, to dive 54 percent to about 100 tons a year, from an estimated 215.5 million in 2009.

“The Illinois basin will steal some share in the coming years from Central Appalachia,” Simmons’s Hammond said.

That’s welcomed by the citizens of Carlinville, which was built on coal. The town still has the largest collection of Sears-catalog homes in the world with 152, said Laurie Flori, author of “Additionally Speaking: A Chronological History of the Sears, Roebuck & Company Homes in Carlinville, Illinois” (Brown Paper Package Publications, 192 pages).

“This community wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for coal,” she said.

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