U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Blog Round-up

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January 26, 2010

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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With the internet, blogs, Twitter, forums - people are talking about EPA 24/7
Here's a sampling of what was said on Jan. 25, 2010:

NOTE: To read the entire blog entry, click on underlined URL. To learn more about the blogger, click on the name/link in first line. Notes and headings are from OPA.

Lisa Jackson

Many issues w/ what Obama has or hasn't done this yr, but one thing is for sure. Appointing Lisa Jackson = SEA CHANGE in the EPA culture.
Posted by: ccordero26 3:32 pm Full post:

RT @neefusa: EPA Admin. Lisa Jackson on the road to hear citizen concerns on "Environmental Justice Tour"
Posted by: ConnectxNature 2:30 pm Full post: http://ow.ly/10dYX

New Nitrogen Dioxide Standard

API blasts new air standard: The US Environmental Protection Agency said today it has set a new air quality st...
Posted by: UpstreamOnline 7:00 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/67r0bb
(Note: American Petroleum Institute)

EPA Tightens NO2 Smog Standard: U.S. EPA today strengthened the federal public health standard for nitrogen dioxi...
Posted by: CleanLantern: 5:32 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/6lvvFh
(Note: Clean Lantern: "Beacon for Ideas That Can Save the Planet" 5,000 followers)

Scientific American: EPA Tightens NO2 Smog Standard: U.S. EPA today strengthened the federal public health standar...
Posted by: scienceRSS: 5:30 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/4vrD7m

EPA Sets Stricter Air-Quality Standards Near Roads - Wall Street Journal:
Posted by: scienapse 5:17 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/91xZFn

EPA strengthens N02 air quality standard
Posted by: Doubleclutchca 5:10 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/4NPuZL

EPA strengthens N02 air quality standard
Posted by: carspydispatch: 4:22 pm Full post: http://ow.ly/16q1Ks

EPA focus on freeway pollution could mean more air monitors for Portland: The toxic pollutant is emitted by vehicl...
Posted by: PortlandORrss: 4:10 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/5SJMNc

EPA Raises Nitrogen Dioxide Air Quality Standard; First Change to It in 35 Years: (via @edmunds)
Posted by: GreenKeyFleet 3:10 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/4TTYHM

GHG Endangerment Finding And Regulations

Seattle Times: "Muzzle Lisa Mukowski, let the EPA do its job"
Posted by: RepowerAmerica 6:10 pm Full post: http://j.mp/8zMxzg

Global Warming Deniers Ask Court To Help Their Cause: The EPA Clean Air Act endangerment finding, under attack in ...
Posted by: zaranithin: 5:10 pm Full post: http://bit.ly/5X9h1b
(Note: Bangalore, India)

ROUND-UP OF MAJOR BLOGS

CLIMATE CHANGE/GLOBAL WARMING

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States Step Up to Defend Endangerment Finding (*TreeHugger*)

by Daniel Kessler on 01.25.10

Last year, the EPA issued a long awaited set of guidelines on regulating large, stationary sources of CO2. The rules, known as the "Endangerment Finding," used the authority granted to the agency through a Supreme Court ruling that found CO2 to be a pollutant that the EPA could regulate. While environmentalists, especially those skeptical of Congress' ability to regulate CO2, rejoiced, some industry groups protested, filing a lawsuit. Today, 16 states and New York City joined the lawsuit on behalf of the government.

Coal and mining companies Massey Energy Co., National Beef Cattlemen's Association and Alpha Natural Resources Inc. are behind the lawsuit. Fighting them, citing the threat of climate change and the need for action, are Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

Most of these same states were part of the *Massachusetts vs. EPA* case that resulted in the EPA's new authority. The Court said that the Clean Air Act should extend to greenhouse gases, but Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Blanch Lincoln of Arkansas are pushing for an amendment to debt legislation that would take away EPA's rights to regulate.

Both Murkowski and Lincoln have been linked to oil and gas lobbyists who have donated generously to each Senator's political campaigns.

According to Greenwire, green groups want to intervene in the case.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation filed a motion last week to intervene. The New England-based Conservation Law Foundation filed a separate motion.

Joe Mendelson, global warming policy director for the National Wildlife Federation, called the industry groups' challenge a desperate attempt from big polluters to overthrow the science of climate change. "Given that the agency went through an exhaustive review of the science, given what we know about the peer-reviewed science, it seems to be a last-ditch effort by polluters who want to deny that we have a problem," he said.

If the EPA is stripped of its ability to regulate GHGs and Congress fails to act on limiting emissions, the US federal government will have almost no ability to regulate heavy emitters of CO2 and other greenhouse gases.

MINING

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Old Senator, New Tricks (*The New Republic*)

What's behind Robert Byrd's surprising smackdown of Big Coal?

- *Jesse Zwick*
-
- January 25, 2010 | 12:00 am

As a rule, politicians in West Virginia don't care for environmentalists. This is, after all, a state that supplies 50 percent of U.S. coal exports, a state where the mining industry is responsible for roughly 30,000 jobs—a state that essentially depends on pollution for its survival. And West Virginia's most prominent coal champion has long been Robert Byrd, who once slammed green critics of mining as "head-in-the-cloud individuals" out to destroy jobs and impoverish the region. In 2008, Byrd was the lone Senate Democrat to vote against even starting debate on a bill to curb carbon-dioxide emissions.

So just about everyone was shocked when, last month, Byrd did an about-face and wrote an op-ed that criticized modern-day mining practices and accused the coal industry of "having its head in the sand" on climate change. Local pols were sure there must have been some mistake. The state's governor, Joe Manchin, chalked the whole thing up to a "misunderstanding." The local Chamber of Commerce president generously offered to "forgive" Byrd if he'd walk back his comments.

But it wasn't a misunderstanding, and Byrd isn't walking anything back. After 50 years in the Senate, the 92-year-old statesman seems to be revising his views on both coal and global warming. And not because he's suddenly channeling his inner tree-hugger. Rather, Byrd is finding it increasingly difficult to argue that the interests of coal companies and the interests of his state are one and the same.

Last May, a series of floods ripped through the southern coalfield counties of West Virginia, damaging some 3,000 buildings and requiring more than $60 million in government assistance. Politicians and industry reps were quick to call the disaster an act of God, but Byrd wasn't convinced. For the past few years, environmental groups had been quietly lobbying the senator's office about the destructive effects of mountaintop-removal mining—a widespread process across Appalachia, in which miners use explosives to rip off the tops of hills and mountains in order to get at the coal seams underneath. Not only does this form of mining destroy streams and pollute drinking water in the surrounding areas, but a host of studies have pointed out that the resulting degradation of forests and topsoil has left the region more vulnerable to severe flooding. When local citizens pled their case that month, Byrd surprised many by agreeing to take a look.

Although Byrd himself was still recovering from a staph infection that kept him in the hospital, he sent several members of his staff to visit the affected areas. They toured the countryside, where locals pointed out roads that had been washed out and homes literally swept away. "The vast amount of damage is not something you can see from a TV camera," observed Howard Branham, a resident of Mingo County who volunteered as a tour guide for Byrd's staff. "I think what they saw was the true extent of the damage."

By the fall of 2009, the prospect of greater federal oversight over mountaintop mining made it likely that the industry would have to start at least mitigating the damage from mountaintop mining. But when the EPA announced that it would delay 79 mining permits in the region for further inspection, coal companies decided instead to go on the attack. Don Blankenship, the CEO of the state's biggest coal producer, Massey Energy, teamed up with the state Chamber of Commerce and other trade groups to hold a Labor Day rally. The theme? How "environmental extremists and corporate America are both trying to destroy your jobs." Blankenship spent more than $1 million on the event, which took place on a flattened mountain and featured conservatives like Sean Hannity and Ted Nugent.

Blankenship's stunt created a backlash from some key quarters of the state. Massey is a notoriously anti-union firm, and the fact that the rally was being held on Labor Day didn't sit well with many in the United Mine Workers Association (UMWA), still a major political force in the state. Many of West Virginia's union members are already uncomfortable with mountaintop-removal mining, which is less labor-intensive than traditional methods and has led to a steep decline in the size of West Virginia's coal workforce—from 62,500 in 1979 to about 22,000 today. "I don't even like to compare what they're doing to what we're doing," says retired miner and UMWA member Terry Steele. Moreover, the event only underscored the fact that Blankenship has long tried to frame coal as a partisan issue. In a state where registered Democrats still outnumber Republicans by a wide margin, he's devoted more than $6 million to helping the GOP take over.

As Massey and other coal companies have become increasingly obstreperous, Byrd has begun to notice. At a public hearing on mountaintop-removal mining last October, members of the front group Friends of Coal packed the meeting and shouted down West Virginians trying to lodge their complaints. (Many of the citizens in attendance were convinced that employers had encouraged or paid their miners to show up and disrupt the proceedings. "I've been in unions, I know how the companies fight, and these guys were being stoked," says retired miner Joe Stanley, who was at the meeting.) A Byrd staff member was in attendance, and it appears that the industry's tactics grated. "I think those meetings did play a role [in Byrd's shift]," says one former mining official and close observer of state politics. "Everybody watched the debate and saw the vile nature of it." And the gap between the coal industry and Byrd only widened in November, when the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce called on the state's representatives in Congress to try to block health care reform until the EPA "backs down on its campaign against coal." In his December statement, Byrd called the demand "foolish" and "morally indefensible."

There's also the climate question. Byrd's not about to become an environmentalist; even in his op-ed, he insisted that coal was here to stay. But he seems to recognize that the realities of global warming will force the country to rethink how it uses coal sooner or later and that the state’s companies aren’t playing a constructive role. (Blankenship, for instance, has criticized coal-heavy utilities in other states, like Duke Energy, for working with Congress on climate issues.) Byrd's longtime mantra, according to political historian Robert Rupp, is that "It's better to be at the table than on the menu." And so he seems willing to spend what's likely his last term in Congress getting West Virginia to realize that, in the end, obstructionism won't serve the state very well.

Jesse Zwick is a reporter-researcher for The New Republic.

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