

# Coal rally

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Teresa Lunbery hands out signs at the Affordable Energy Rally on Thursday at the Cam-plex Plaza. About 300 people turned out to support local, state and federal officials and industry representatives who oppose the EPA's proposed restrictions on coal-fired power plant emissions.

- News Record Photo/Tim Goessman



Shane Durgin of Alpha Coal West speaks during the Affordable Energy Rally.

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Singing praises of a coal industry suffering from EPA oppression, a choir of about 300 rallied in Gillette this past week seeking to break negative stereotypes of coal-generated power and urge residents to oppose the agency's latest plan to reduce CO2 emissions from U.S. power plants.

Much like a revival, participants gathered under a large, white tent to send their message from the self-declared Energy Capital of the Nation — Campbell County, where almost 40 percent of the nation's coal and 10 percent of nation's energy is produced.

At one point, the crowd was asked who works at the mines?

Nearly all hands were raised as either working at the mines or having a family member or knowing someone who does. Those are blue-collar people like Campbell County native Don Cale, who has two sons-in-law working for Peabody Energy. Cale said he believes that contrary to what many believe, coal is a clean industry.

“That stuff that you see coming out of the stacks ... it’s like that T-shirt said, ‘It’s not smoke, it’s steam,’” Cale said.

Collectively, those columns of steam carry the nation’s biggest source of greenhouse gases, but if the EPA’s goal of reducing the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power plants by 30 percent goes through, the result would be higher energy costs and lost jobs, he said.

“If they screw around with it, they will make it more expensive, make it more expensive for people to heat their homes or light the streets, everything,” Cale said.

The regulation

That EPA draft regulation was announced earlier this year under the 1970 Clean Air Act, which gives the agency authority to regulate sources of air pollution, including carbon dioxide. Thursday’s Affordable Energy Rally was one effort to drum up vocal opposition to the proposal.

If finalized, the rule will ask each state to come up with a plan to get the country to a 30 percent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from 2005 levels.

It offers four broad ways to meet the goal — improved efficiency at coal plants, deploying natural gas generators, increasing renewable generation and improved efficiency on the consumer side.

The proposal also lays out what the agency thinks each state is capable of doing based on existing energy mixes. It acknowledges that states like Kentucky, West Virginia and

Wyoming may choose to continue to “feature significant reliance on coal-based generation.”

The country would still produce about 30 percent of its electricity from coal by 2040, down from about 39 percent now, according to estimates from the Energy Information Administration.

Before including the effects of the proposed rule, estimates were closer to 34 percent of the generation mix by 2040.

Preaching to the choir

U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi told the crowd that Wyoming would see some of the worst impacts from the rule.

“We need to start the ball rolling because we are the people that will be most affected, as people in Wyoming,” Enzi said. “Revenue for the state relies 75 percent on energy revenue. It’s a big part of jobs in the state of Wyoming, and every one of you has a job that’s affected by energy.”

Campbell County is at the center of energy’s importance to the state economy, said Bill Schilling, president of the Wyoming Business alliance.

“Coal and Campbell County push and pull Wyoming’s economy,” Schilling said.

Taking away coal would disrupt the state and nation, he said.

Gov. Matt Mead said opposing the EPA rule is important for Wyoming and other coal-producing regions, but it also will affect every aspect of daily life by making energy less affordable. The EPA estimates the rule will, on average, increase energy costs by between 6 and 7 percent by 2020, but also reduce demand for energy through efficiency measures.

Diverse crowd, common goal

Some of the 300 who came to show their support for energy industries wore yellow “Affordable Energy Rally” shirts while others sported black “Friends of Coal” bracelets.

Lloyd and Paula Burt live in Salem, Ohio, and were in Gillette to visit their daughter, a mine engineer at Eagle Butte, when they first heard about the rally. They attended to support their daughter and energy industries.

“A lot of the same things that are happening in Campbell County are happening where we live with the petroleum industry,” Lloyd Burt said.

Gatherings such as the Affordable Energy Rally bring people together and make them aware of the issues and how they can fight the EPA regulations, he said.

“If you get people motivated ... to send the cards, make their voices heard because the environmentalists do this (rallies). It’s their job,” he said. “I forget which speaker said it, but we work. We go to work, that’s our job. ... We don’t ‘have time to play in that venue and we need to start making that time’.”

With a husband who works at Buckskin coal mine, Tracy Peterson could be affected more if the EPA regulations shut down production. Peterson works at one of the newly built schools in Campbell County, which the coal industry helped pay for, she said.

“That’s huge, because we have educational opportunities in Wyoming that the rest of country does not have because of the amount of money we get from the energy industries,” Peterson said.

The industry is commonly blamed for haze and damaging the ozone, but Peterson said she thinks it does a good job of keeping a healthy environment.

Frank Carleson works in the oil field, but that didn't stop him from showing his support with his wife, Charla, at the rally.

"We're kind of one happy family," he said. "I was pleasantly surprised with all these talks."

Frank Carleson wants people to imagine what would happen if the regulations passes.

"Wouldn't it be nice to just stop trucking the coal out of here for two weeks?" he said. "I think it would just shut down the town, and people would realize (the impact coal industry has on the community)."

High costs, little benefit

While the EPA rule would achieve cuts in carbon dioxide emissions, they're not significant enough to impact the global climate the way the EPA wants, said Scott Durgin, a mine manager for Peabody Energy.

"EPA's proposal is symbolic at best," Durgin said, adding that 48 million Americans live in poverty and 115 million people qualify for energy assistance. "Just think about that. If we double, triple their power bills, how many more people will have to do that and who is going to pay for it?"

He also pointed out that the industry itself has made great strides on its own in the United States since 1970, the year the Clean Air Act was passed. Since then, coal generation has increased by 170 percent and key pollutants have been cut by 90 percent.

"That's an environmental success story," Durgin said, adding that Peabody supports continued improvement to efficiencies at coal plants.

The rally focused on what local residents can do to fight the EPA's proposed emissions rules. The best thing for Gillette and Campbell County residents to do is to write letters, talk to people and start conversations, Enzi said.

"We need to start it with our friends and our neighbors and our relatives and get it to grow through the whole nation so people will understand what's about to happen to them if the war on energy continues," he said.

Making the EPA take the time to respond to letters opposing the rule is absolutely necessary to stop it, he said.

"We know how important your letters are on this EPA regulation," Enzi said.