

Office Visit for Andy Barr -- January 2018

Synopsis for the Andy Barr Office Visit January 2018

Congressman Barr repeatedly criticized the Obama Administration for its “war on coal” for its efforts to impose greater restrictions on coal emissions and coal pollution.¹⁻⁵ Barr labeled these as an effort by the EPA to ban coal mining in Eastern Kentucky and the use of coal-fired electricity throughout this country.⁶⁻⁷ He defended his actions as protecting Kentuckians from higher electricity rates and to protect coal jobs.^{1,8} He blamed the closing of a plant in his District that made underground mining equipment as a casualty of the war on coal, which he blamed for causing thousands of families with healthy incomes move to food stamps.³ He has also called EPA efforts to regulate carbon dioxide under the Clean Air Act as unlawful over reach.⁵ These actions raise the following questions for Barr.

Questions

1. Barr raised the specters of higher electricity rates, that coal fired power plants are cheaper, and efforts to regulate coal and its emissions or waste products is best described as a “war on coal”. Electricity rates increased 37% during the GW Bush years and 11% during the Obama years as renewable energy sources were encouraged.⁹ States like Texas that replaced coal with renewable energy and other sources, have seen their electric costs decline by nearly 50%, not increased.¹⁰ ***Can Barr justify his rhetoric regarding protecting Kentucky consumers from higher electric rates in view of the reality his policies have in fact encouraged higher and not lower electric costs for his constituents?***
2. The Clean Air Task Force in 2017 estimated that air and water pollution from coal cost just his constituents \$451 million in additional health care costs and 59 deaths from coal related health problems and Kentuckians overall \$3 billion in added health costs in 2012.¹⁴ If health costs were added to energy bills, energy would increase by 4.4 cents/kwh or more than 30%.¹² ***Would Barr like to explain why the hidden health care costs of coal are irrelevant with respect to the financial burden his constituents are expected to pay for electricity from coal?***
3. Last year Kentucky lost 39 coal jobs in the first nine months, and next year it will lose 526 more coal jobs in February as Armstrong Coal (Madisonville, KY) and Thoroughfare Mining (Central City, KY) close their doors and more coal fired power plants are replaced by newer, non-coal, more efficient and less polluting power plants.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ ***Can Barr explain if coal jobs are still disappearing and coal power plants are still closing in Kentucky how the war on coal was real, and not a wholly fabricated invention to encourage his constituents fear of various efforts by the prior administration to deal with serious problems related to coal use?***
4. Kentucky employs just over 6,000 people in Kentucky in coal mining.¹⁴ The renewable energy industry (wind and solar) provided 420,000 jobs in 2016, 260,000 more than exist in the entire coal industry.¹¹ ***Would Barr please explain why he has embraced a policy of “coal jobs or no jobs” mentality in place of encouraging a shift to renewable energy jobs for unemployed coal workers? What did Barr actually do to solve/address the human tragedies related to job losses and health problems linked to coal, other than just complain about those doing anything?***
5. Coal produces about twice the carbon dioxide as natural gas and more than ten times more than renewable energy sources do per kilowatt hour. In the last decade, weather extremes connected to global warming cost the US over \$350 billion.¹³ ***With a federal deficit already in excess of \$20 trillion, why isn't Barr doing more instead of less to address the increasing damage to our federal budget caused by global warming induced weather extremes?***

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6. One way to improve accountability and responsibility is by making violations and serious breaches of that responsibility publicly available to others in society. ***If Barr actually cared about coal miners, please explain his justification for co-sponsoring HR 4289¹⁷ this last November, that relieves coal owners of any accountability to investors or coal workers to publicly report major health and safety violations, fines, deaths and lawsuits associated with their mining operations?***

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