



Roger Lilly: Production Equals Paychecks

Commentary by Roger Lilly

Posted Thursday, March 5, 2009

One hundred and sixty million is the approximate number all West Virginians should monitor more than the Dow, NASDAQ, or S&P 500: 160 million is the number of tons of coal currently produced annually in West Virginia.

A few percentage points up or down, and West Virginians should be able to avoid the dark economics haunting the rest of America. However, significant and dramatic cuts in this number means all bets are off. Weekly and cumulative coal production readily can be found at www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/coal/weekly/weekly_html/wcppage.html. Observing the change in this number should allow you to sleep at night. It may be the closest thing to an economic crystal ball for West Virginians.

West Virginia has narrowly escaped a portion of the economic devastation that is presently tearing across this country.

This benefit is largely due to the state's energy dividend provided by coal and the oil and gas industry. The energy dividend has given the state a large surplus with which we pay our bills, keep the government sector employed and provide a safety net for those less fortunate.

Compare this to California with its billions and billions of debt – proof positive that living beyond your means and embracing public policy that disregards present-day reality for the fantasy of the future doesn't work. More than 77 percent of Californians say they are on the wrong track. Wow, 23 percent satisfied! They truly are on a different planet. Unfortunately, before we can save the planet, we must save ourselves first. Or didn't they get that part? As a proud West Virginian, I wouldn't give Morgantown or Matewan for all of Malibu.

On the other hand, in a recent statewide survey conducted by Mark Blankenship Enterprises, 67 percent of citizens feel West Virginia is on the right track, 21 percent the wrong track, 11 percent don't know. West Virginians know it's not the "tooth fairy" that takes care of family, rather it's JOBS.

As long as people require electricity and continue to "keep the lights on," we can avoid the brunt of disaster via a strong coal industry. West Virginians have come to understand the importance of energy and technology as evidenced by recent survey answers:

- 78 percent agree the coal industry is the biggest contributor to the state's economy.
- 86 percent agree that "clean-coal technology is the best way to grow West Virginia's economy and create jobs in the future."
- 88 percent agree that "through technology coal can produce electricity in a more environmentally responsible way."
- 78 percent agree that converting coal to liquid fuel is among the best ways we can reduce the cost of gasoline and become less dependent on foreign oil.

- 72 percent agree that “capture and storage of carbon emissions is the best way for coal to become a clean and acceptable fuel of the future.”

Yes, West Virginians, as Sen. Robert C. Byrd explained, understand our future lay in developing “clean, carbon neutral coal.” Additionally, 70 percent agreed “the governor and Legislature should promote the coal industry more than others because it offered the best long-term benefits to the state.”

When West Virginians were polled without aids or prompts about their greatest concerns, responses that referenced jobs and the economy were nearly 50 percent. A small 1.5 percent referenced mountaintop mining.

Production equals paychecks. West Virginians get it! They choose paychecks.

West Virginians are very concerned about water resources and scenic beauty and place trust and confidence in the coal industry to protect such. In fact:

- 86 percent agreed that “the coal industry is doing a better job of protecting the environment than it did 20 years ago.”
- 74 percent expressed trust and confidence in the coal industry to mine coal in a more environmentally responsible manner during the next 10 years.
- 77 percent agreed “further environmental regulations will increase the cost consumers pay for energy and fuel.”
- 68 percent agreed that “environmental groups contribute to high energy costs by restricting supply through legal maneuvering.”

Sadly, there are groups and individuals that seek to take away our coal production and by that our paychecks. Those who chain themselves to bulldozers and urge banks to quit lending money are insulting all West Virginians and portray us to the world as ignorant criminals and environmental morons. West Virginians know better. The facts simply don’t support their allegations. They are not saving a mountain; they are destroying jobs and the good character and reputation of West Virginia citizens.

West Virginia coal miners protect our mountains. These folk, for whatever reason, are putting at risk an estimated minimum 50 percent of our coal production, 100 percent of many families’ paychecks and varying paycheck reductions among remaining West Virginians ... and for what? These activities can only place proud Mountaineers vagabonding across the country, looking for work or at the foot of the government pleading for handouts. What a tragedy and loss of dignity.

It will be these anti-coal forces, pulling in outsiders, using a biased media and petitioning the political opportunists in the federal government to take away our production and therefore our paychecks. Watch for them. You will see it in the courtrooms and circus-like protests, stopping and stalling mine permits and slashing paychecks.

One hundred and sixty million. Monitor that number.

West Virginia coal must remain strong so that we may offer a hand up to the nation as we have in so many past wars and crises. We must remain proud Mountaineers, coal miners, always free, always self-reliant.

It’s gratifying that West Virginians understand there is nothing immoral about hard work for your family’s paycheck. It’s gratifying they value the West Virginia coal miner.

Roger Lilly is marketing manager for Walker Machinery in Belle.

Copyright 2009 West Virginia Media