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Steven Allen Adams: West Virginia is ground zero in climate change battle

By: Steven Allen Adams

Op-Ed Contributor

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Franklin Roosevelt called Dec. 7, 1941, "a day which will live infamy" because of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The week that began Dec. 7, 2009, will be remembered as the week when West Virginia coal miners were attacked by their own government.

Among the first casualties were 500 miners laid off as a result of a decree issued Monday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency saying carbon dioxide threatens the "public health and welfare of the American people."

On the same day, Robert Kennedy Jr. led a protest against mountaintop removal at the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, and that evening the University of Charleston held a debate about cap and trade between the Cato Institute's Patrick Michaels and David Hawkins of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

All of this occurred in the shadow of the Copenhagen summit, where world leaders will be dictating how much smoke can come out of our smokestacks. United Nations officials are already cheering our EPA's declaration. "It's a very good signal indeed," said Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the Convention on Climate Change. "It makes it easier for the president of the United States to commit to something."

The EPA declaration opens the door for increased regulation of carbon dioxide emissions, notably at the nation's coal-fired power plants. This move by the EPA is simply a way to force Congress into passing a cap-and-trade bill. A bill would be more permanent than EPA regulations, which can be undone by the next president.

The Wall Street Journal said it best: "... The White House has chosen to impose taxes and regulation across the entire economy under clean-air laws ... that were never meant to apply to carbon. With this doomsday machine activated, Mr. Obama hopes to accomplish what persuasion and debate ... manifestly cannot."

With the coal industry already suffering from the uncertainty in the market, the EPA may have just pushed one company to the brink of collapse. Consol Energy laid off over 500 miners, citing the EPA's recent interference in a mine permit decision. The EPA has already pulled 79 surface mining permits for further

review; 23 of those permits for surface mines in West Virginia.

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Surface mining, or "mountaintop removal" as it is also called, has become the cause celeb of the leftist community -- drawing in politicians, movie stars, musicians, and out-of-state protesters. Kennedy, during his speech Monday, called mountaintop removal a "criminal" act that was destroying the mountains.

A recent Government Accountability Officer report, however, shows that mountaintop removal has far less effect on the mountains than claimed by environmental activists. The 88-page report, titled "Surface Coal Mining: Characteristics of Mining in Mountainous Areas of Kentucky and West Virginia," reveals a couple of interesting pieces of information about mountaintop removal.

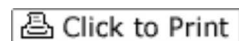
First, of West Virginia's 55 counties -- covering a total of 15 million acres -- only 1.58 percent of that acreage includes MTR sites. In the top three MTR counties -- Logan, Mingo and Boone -- only 13.42 percent of their acreage is devoted to MTR. Destroying the mountains? Hardly.

Also, most surface mining reclamation plans don't involve commercial or industrial use. From the report: "In West Virginia, of the 212 permits issued from January 2000 through July 2008, 141 permits were approved for forestland ... followed by 46 permits approved for fish and wildlife habitat/recreation and 34 permits approved for hay or pastureland."

The EPA is determined to limit the use of coal, and our nation will pay in higher taxes, higher utility prices, and higher unemployment.

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