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WCHS RADIO 58

War On Coal?

The West Virginia Coal Industry makes the case they are under assault by the Obama Administration. But some believe the coal industry woes are overblown and are not connected to the EPA at all.

Ted Boettner with the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy says numbers they've checked show there's actually been an increase in employment within the coal industry since President Obama took office.

"Coal is a business and just like every other business they want to produce as much as they can with as few workers as possible--there's nothing wrong with that," Boettner said. "The fact that employment is going up says nothing about whether Obama has been good or bad or whether there's a war on coal."

Boettner says a check of the Energy Information Administration Data projections shows coal projections in the next decade for West Virginia are expected to decline by 35-percent statewide and 50-percent in southern West Virginia, but he says the EPA regulations rank far down the list on impacts affecting the slower production.

"The biggest factor is cheap natural gas," said Boettner.

He adds the lower productivity from less experienced miners now being hired and trains is also impacting production along with better production of western coal reserves.

"EPA is way down the list," said Boettner.

Chris Hamilton vice-President of the West Virginia Coal Association sees it differently.

He says it takes more manpower to mine a ton of coal today than it did prior to the Obama Administration and blames that on the necessity to have more people involved in the permitting process.

"Part of the reason the employment is up is it's costing quite a bit more to mine a ton of coal and it's taking several more people than it did just a couple of years ago," said Hamilton. "We've also hired a lot of new people and slowly prepared for the next generation of miners. These guys aren't quite as productive as a man who was there for 30-years at the journeyman level."

Hamilton says what's happening with the most recent layoffs is just the beginning. He fears there could be a mass exodus of jobs from the coalfields without a change in leadership at the federal level.

"We have real crises in waiting at the current time," said Hamilton. "We might be able to sustain this current employment and output for a certain amount of time, but I don't think those employment numbers we're seeing are going to hold up for the next six months, let alone the next several years."

