By: Max Bridges, Staff Member

Before leaving for a two-month recess this September, House Republicans passed the dirty coal package, H.R. 3409, by a vote of 233-175. [1] Also titled the “Stop the War on Coal Act of 2012,”
The bill would undermine landmark environmental laws and adversely affect public health, the economy, and the environment. The bill is not expected to be taken up in the Senate and is also facing a presidential veto, but it raises enormous concerns about the interests of our Representatives. Congressmen are elected to protect the interests of the American people, but House Republicans are more concerned with protecting King Coal.

The "Stop the War on Coal Act of 2012" is comprised of five bills each designed to assault America’s cornerstone environmental protections. The bill is so detrimental to public health that some have called it the "single worst anti-environmental bill to be considered in the House." Title I of H.R. 3409 blocks the Department of Interior (DOI) from issuing any new standard for coal mining or mine reclamation until 2014 and would eliminate DOI’s ability to designate an area unsuitable for mining.

Title II repeals EPA’s scientific finding that greenhouse gases endanger public health and the environment, thereby codifying the House’s denial of climate science.

Title III would overturn 40 years of clean air policy by requiring the EPA to consider industry costs when determining what level of air pollution is "safe." It would also block landmark Clean Air Act public health regulations, such as the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard, which the EPA estimates "will prevent as many as 11,000 avoidable premature deaths and 4,700 heart attacks annually. The annual value of the health benefits from these rules alone is estimated to be as much as $90 billion."

Title IV would eliminate EPA’s authority to set minimum federal standards to ensure the safe disposal of coal ash by allowing the States to create their own programs without having to meet any standard for protecting public health. Perhaps Congress needs to be reminded of the Martin County Coal Spill. In October 2000, a coal slurry impoundment broke through an underground mine shaft and spilled more than 300 million gallons of black, toxic sludge into the waters of Kentucky. The spill was 30 times the size of the Exxon Valdez disaster. But we shouldn’t need to remind Congress; they represent us, right?

Finally, Title V would roll back key provisions underpinning the Clean Water Act including EPA’s authority to veto a “valley fill” permit based on environmental concerns. House Republicans believe this bill would prevent EPA over-regulation, but others disagree. As Rep. Jared Polis (D-Colo.) said, "Let’s not fool ourselves, the bill before us today isn’t just about the role of federal government, the bill isn’t just a push for state sovereignty; rather, this bill would satisfy two very niche special interests at the cost of the American public. This bill is designed to benefit mountaintop coal mining companies and large factory farms."

By passing H.R. 3409, House Republicans showed their willingness to undercut key environmental protections that protect our safety and public welfare. These Congressmen clearly do not represent the interests of the American people. Instead, they represent Big Coal. This absurdity is further evidenced by recent political contributions. In 2012 alone, Republicans received 89 percent of the coal industry’s campaign contributions (amounting to $5,765,078). The chair of the Energy and Commerce committee has received $60,000 from major utilities and the coal industry. Bill co-sponsor Rep. David McKinley (R-WV) is the top recipient of coal cash for 2012, receiving more than $200,000.

We elect Congress to protect the will of the people, but they are more concerned with protecting the coal industry. Let’s hope our representatives begin to follow the words of John Adams, “Government is instituted for the common good: for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people; and not for the profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men.”
Anonymous--In addition, I would add that 13 House Republicans crossed party lines to oppose the bill and stand up for Appalachia. I commend their actions. But by no means am I distorting the truth or "hiding" these 19 Democratic votes. Here is the link to the votes: http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2012/roll603.xml. There were 214 Republican Ayes with only 19 Democratic Ayes. Of the noes, 13 were Republican while 162 were Democratic. In addition, the bill's sponsor and 19 co-sponsors were all Republican! This legislation is overwhelmingly a product of the House Republicans, and that's a factual statement.

How many house Democrats voted for HR 3409? I'll save you the 3 seconds and Google it for you. The answer is 19. Next time you should provide factual statements like 214 house republicans and 19 house democrats "showed their willingness to undercut key environmental protections that protect our safety and public welfare" rather than delivering a wholesale indictment of only the republican representatives. Or mention that Ben Chandler the democrat congressman from kentucky who must have forgotten the Martin county incident.


[3] Id.


[5] Id.

[6] Id.

[7] Id.


