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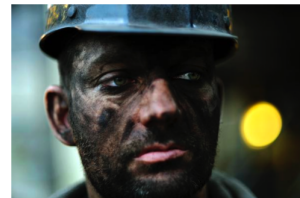
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Mining for Gold: President Obama Seeks to Aid Appalachian Coal Workers (/full-blog/mayfield)

By: Logan Mayfield, Staff Member

The state of Kentucky is the third largest coal producer in the United States behind only Wyoming and West Virginia.^[i] Naturally, the recent decline in the coal industry has significantly impacted the Commonwealth's economy, especially the eastern counties. From August 2013 to September 2014 alone, approximately 18,000 Eastern Kentucky coal employees were laid off of work.^[ii] While the "war on coal," as many refer to it, has received much attention in Kentucky's political arena, there is one thing most people would agree with regardless of party affiliation—individuals struggling with the transition away from coal are in need of some assistance.



(http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_14208902)

In early February of this year, President Obama released a proposed budget for the 2016 fiscal period.^[iii] The proposal includes a plan called POWER Plus, which is specifically designed to aid the Appalachian region and alleviate some of the economic problems caused by the coal downturn.^[iv] While specific distribution details have not been released, many individuals and communities in Eastern Kentucky will be eligible for financial assistance if POWER Plus is enacted.^[v]

Under the President's proposal, \$20 million will be used to provide job training and new occupations for coal workers who are out of employment.^[vi] Additionally, \$25 million will be added to the Appalachian Regional Commission's budget for economic development in the mining towns and cities struggling the most.^[vii] POWER Plus also includes funding designated for environmental repair. As part of the plan, \$200 million dollars would be dispersed over a five-year period from the Abandoned Mine Land Fund to clean deserted mines and restore land that has deteriorated as a result of mining throughout the years.^[viii] For example, one proposed project is to plant new trees in desolate areas that were once mining zones.^[ix] Such activity is not only expected to improve the environment, but to also create jobs for those in need.^[x]

Notwithstanding politics and personal opinions about the feasibility of the President's proposal, it is encouraging that Kentucky citizens are receiving the national attention they deserve. While it is uncertain how this specific proposal will turn out, I am hopeful that the individuals and families impacted by the downfall of coal will soon be back on their feet.

[i] *U.S. Coal Production by State & By Rank*, National Mining Association (Jan. 2015), http://www.nma.org/pdf/c_production_state_rank.pdf.

[ii] Bill Estep, *Kentucky coal jobs drop again in 2014, reaching new low*, Lexington Herald-Leader (Feb. 4, 2015), <http://www.kentucky.com/2015/02/04/3677495/kentucky-coal-jobs-drop-again.html>.

[iii] Heather Moyet, *President Obama's Budget Includes Money to Help Appalachian Communities Transition Away from Coal*, Sierra Club (Feb. 2, 2015), <http://www.sierraclub.org/compass/2015/02/president-obamas-budget-includes-money-help-appalachian-communities-transition-away>.

[iv] Katie Valentine, *Obama's Budget Provides Millions For Out-Of-Work Coal Miners*, Think Progress (Feb. 2, 2015, 3:26 PM), <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2015/02/02/3618103/power-plus-plan-for-coal-miners/>.

[v] Bill Estep, *Obama proposes \$1 billion lifeline for parts of Appalachia where coal jobs vanished*, Lexington Herald-Leader (Feb. 2, 2015), <http://www.kentucky.com/2015/02/02/3673874/obama-proposes-1-billion-lifeline.html>.

[vi] Ken Wärd, Jr., *Obama's budget includes coalfields aid*, Charleston Gazette (Feb. 2, 2015), <http://www.wvgazette.com/article/20150202/GZ01/150209859/1419>.

[vii] *Id.*

[viii] Estep, *supra* note 5.

[ix] *Id.*

[x] *Id.*

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