WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §5b-2A-1

§5B-2A-1. Legislative findings and declaration.

The Legislature hereby finds and declares the following:

(a) Coal mining has made and continues to make significant contributions to the economy of West Virginia. These contributions include the creation of quality jobs that pay high wages and provide good benefits; the consequent stimulation and support of mining contractors, suppliers of mining equipment and services, other mining-related industries and numerous providers of goods and services that are indirectly related to coal mining and dependent upon its existence and prosperity; the generation of significant severance and other tax revenues that support important economic development, infrastructure and education initiatives in mining communities and throughout the state; the support of civic, education and service groups in mining communities; and, in the case of surface mining operations, including mountaintop mining, the creation of much-needed flat land for economic development and recreational uses.

(b) The development and increasing prominence of surface mining operations, including mountaintop mining, has brought increasingly high levels of productivity, safety and efficiency to the state's mining industry, enabling the recovery of coal that could not otherwise be mined and marketed profitably, increasing the severance tax revenues and other economic benefits described in subsection (a) of this section and ensuring the competitiveness of the state's coal industry from a national and international perspective.

(c) Where implemented, surface mining operations, particularly mountaintop mining, tend to extract most, if not all, of the recoverable coal reserves in an accelerated fashion. For a state long dependent on the employment and revenue coal mining provides, this reality should be sobering and there is no place in which the comprehension of this reality is more crucial than the coalfields of West Virginia. Long dependent primarily on mining, this area must plan for a future without coal. The state and its subdivisions have a legitimate interest in securing that future.

(d) The coal industry and those related to the extraction of mineral resources benefit from the mining of our state's coal through mining practices which impact its citizens — some in a negative way — and through practices which will extract significant portions of coal reserves in an accelerated fashion. Those industries must therefore accept a greater responsibility to help address the long-term needs of the communities and citizens impacted by their activities.

(e) Once it becomes public knowledge that a permit is being sought, the marketability of property may change and the relative bargaining power of the parties may change with it. The potential for negative impact on those living in communities near surface mining operations may limit the options and bargaining power of the property owners.

WV Legislature

(f) Surface mining operations, including mountaintop mining, present unique challenges to the coal mining industry and the state and its citizens, especially those living and working in communities that rely heavily upon these methods of mining. This requires that these communities, in conjunction with county commissions, state, local, county and regional development authorities, landowners and civic, community and business groups and interested citizens, develop plans related to the communities' long-term economic viability.

(g) The Office of Energy, as the state agency charged with energy policy and development activities, shall engage in planning and coordinating the long-term economic development of communities in which these mining methods are prevalent and shall establish a formal process to assist property owners in the determination of the fair market value where the property owner and the coal company voluntarily enter into an agreement relating to the purchase and sale of such property.

WV Legislature