

Studies Link Poor Health to Mining Practices but Little is Being Done *Is Campaign Cash Contributing to the Lack of a Response?*

Why do West Virginia's elected officials have such a lackadaisical attitude when it comes to investigating why the health of our state's people is so poor? After all, poor health costs our state in both compensated and uncompensated health care, prescription drug costs, days lost from work and school, and children who will not develop their full adult potential. Yet both the Governor and many members of the Legislature have blithely ignored recent studies focusing on the health and well-being of coalfield residents. Could part of the answer be that their campaign contributors in the coal industry discourage them from investigating?

Although the state's population tends to be older, it's not just the elderly who suffer from poor health - the health of young people and children also appears to be in jeopardy. Recent university research studies have revealed very troubling data:

- A summary of a Harvard University study released by West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, appropriately called "Early Deaths," noted that women in four West Virginia counties (Mingo, Logan, Wyoming, and McDowell) have life expectancies in the lowest one percentile nationwide¹. On average, these women are losing a decade of life.
- In the town of Sylvester, citizens complained about coal dust and air quality problems for several years before a protective dome was built over the local coal processing plant. A 2007 study, "Hospitalization Patterns Associated with Appalachian Coal Mining" by Dr. Michael Hendryx, found that rates of hospitalization for hypertension and chronic pulmonary disease increased in proportion to the amount of coal mined in the immediate area².
- Another recent study by Michael Hendryx of WVU, and his associate Melissa Ahern of Washington State University appeared in the respected journal *Public Health Reports*. It concluded that while the coal industry generates about \$8 billion in economic activity per year in Appalachia, the societal costs in terms of premature deaths across the region is - at a conservative estimate - \$42 billion dollars, or more than five times as much³.

A study of the effects of slurry injection was commissioned by the Legislature in 2007, after coalfield citizens haunted the Capitol with jars of their contaminated orange, black, and brown well water. Former Department of Environmental Protection Director Stephanie Timmermeyer said the agency had plenty of time and funding to complete the study by the end of 2007.

¹ "Early Deaths: West Virginians Have Some of the Shortest Life Expectancies in the United States," West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, November 2008, http://www.wvahc.org/downloads/early_deaths.pdf.

² "Hospitalization Patterns Associate with Appalachian Coal Mining," Michael Hendryx, Melissa A. Ahern and Timothy Nurkiewicz, *Journal of Toxicology and Environmental Health, Part A*, Volume 70, Issue 24, January 2007. (Available at http://www.sludgesafety.org/health/Hospitalization_Coal.pdf)

³ "Relations Between Health Indicators and Residential Proximity to Coal Mining in West Virginia," Michael Hendryx, Ph.D., and Melissa M. Ahern, Ph.D., *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 98, No. 4, April 2008.

When DEP finally reported to the Joint Committee on Water Resources in June 2009, Director Randy Huffman contended that because the DEP had not done its job in testing water quality around the injection sites prior to allowing the practice, they now have no idea whether the injection has affected the water quality. The DHHR's part of the study, identifying possible health implications, has barely begun.

It's no secret that the coal industry wields significant political influence in West Virginia. But did you know that between 1996 and 2008, coal interests contributed more than *\$4 million* to candidates for Governor and the Legislature? That includes more than \$1 million to Governor Joe Manchin's campaigns and inaugural celebrations. Sometimes money talks loudly enough that the lobbyists need not say anything. It is just assumed that the true human and economic costs of coal production will never come to light.

And coal's campaign spending doesn't stop with the Governor and the Legislature. West Virginia is clearly following a national trend in which coal and other special interests are trying to exert significant monetary influence in state Supreme Court races. Between 1996 and 2008, coal interests made \$868,163 in direct contributions to candidates for the West Virginia Supreme Court. This does not include the nearly \$3 million Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship spent in 2004 to unseat a Supreme Court Justice who had often sided against Massey.

Public campaign financing for candidates in West Virginia would help remove special interest money from the election process, along with real or perceived conflicts of interest, by providing candidates with an alternative source of "clean" funding. This would help ensure that the Governor and Legislators are free to represent the interests of the citizens. They could pursue policies, such as making health care affordable and enforcing pollution controls, because they would be accountable only to the voters. For Supreme Court candidates and sitting justices, public financing would mean their campaigns would no longer have to raise money from special interests and attorneys whose cases they may later decide.

Overview & Methodology:

This report was produced by the WV People's Election Reform Coalition (PERC-WV), a joint project of the Mountain State Education and Research Foundation (MSERF), the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC) and the WV Citizen Action Group (WV-CAG).

The report attempts to provide West Virginians with a quantitative analysis of coal industry campaign contributions to state level political candidates during each elections cycle from 1996 to 2008. The raw data compiled for this report were obtained from candidates' financial reports filed with the Secretary of State's office and were provided to the PERC-WV by the National Institute on Money in State Politics (www.followthemoney.org) unless otherwise noted.

Coal Industry Contributions to WV Political Campaigns 1996-2008

	1996 ⁴	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	Total Contributions Over Past 5 Election Cycles
Governor's Race⁵	\$518,304		\$641,682		\$847,751		\$196,650 ⁶	\$2,204,387
Supreme Court Race	\$102,211 ⁷	\$25,850	\$46,950		\$354,321 ⁸		\$338,831	\$868,163
Legislative Races	\$195,350	\$295,937	\$213,398	\$332,252	\$474,423	\$577,827		\$2,089,187
Total	\$815,865	\$321,787	\$902,030	\$332,252	\$1,676,495	\$577,827	\$532,581	\$5,161,737

⁴ Reflects contributions to winning candidates only.

⁵ Includes contributions to the Governor's inaugural celebration.

⁶ Analysis of contributions to Joe Manchin's 2008 re-election and inaugural conducted by the nonprofit and nonpartisan Civil Society Institute and TheCLEAN.org.

⁷ Estimate based on J. Michael Withers, "Money Talks: A Campaign Financing Study of the 1996 WV State Elections." According to the report, over 25% of the \$408,843 raised by Justice Elliott "Spike" Maynard can be directly attributed to the coal industry.

⁸ Does not include the \$2.4 million Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship donated to And for the Sake of the Kids, or the \$517,708 in independent expenditures Blankenship made in support of Brent Benjamin.

Top Recipients of Coal Industry Contributions 1996-2008

	Campaign Contributions⁹	Elections
Governor Joe Manchin III	\$1,014,333¹⁰	2000-2008
Governor Cecil Underwood	\$895,946	1996-2000
Governor Bob Wise, Jr.	\$423,340	2000-2004
Justice Elliott "Spike" Maynard¹¹	\$286,111	1996-2008
Justice Brent Benjamin	\$248,200	2004
House Speaker Bob Kiss	\$76,425	1996-2004
Delegate Steve Kominar	\$68,725	1996-2006
Senate President Earl Ray Tomblin	\$62,425	1996-2004
Senate Minority Leader Vic Sprouse	\$60,854	1996-2004

⁹ Includes inaugural contributions for gubernatorial candidates.

¹⁰ Includes \$71,969 in coal contributions Manchin received during his 2000 campaign for Secretary of State.

¹¹ Estimate of contributions in the 1996 election cycle based J. Michael Withers "Money Talks: A Campaign Financing Study of the 1996 WV State Elections."

Coal Industry Contributions to WV Governors 1996-2008

	Coal Contributions	Total Contributions	% of Total Contributions from Coal
Cecil Underwood (1996)	\$264,454	\$2,181,802	12%
Underwood Inaugural	\$253,850	\$960,400	26%
Cecil Underwood (2000)	\$377,642	\$2,636,782	14%
Bob Wise, Jr. (2000)	\$115,600	\$2,913,858	4%
Wise Inaugural	\$120,340	\$892,534	13%
Bob Wise, Jr. (2004)	\$187,400	\$1,248,490	15%
Joe Manchin III (2004)	\$571,214	\$4,798,665	12%
Manchin Inaugural (2004)	\$174,500	\$1,347,992	13%
Joe Manchin III (2008)	\$112,250	\$2,940,952	4%
Manchin Inaugural (2008)	\$84,500	\$951,450	9%