

Summer 2018



# Winds of Change

Supporting Organized Voices and Empowered Communities Since 1987

Huntington, WV

OVEC

[www.ohvec.org](http://www.ohvec.org)

## #BreakFreeFromPlastic Tour Visits WV



*... the biggest thing we can do to reduce ocean plastic pollution over the long term is to produce less plastic. And that starts with opposing the epidemic of new plastic plants and the cheap, fracked natural gas that fuels them.*

– Emily Jeffers in May 5 Inside Sources:

*“Want Less Ocean Plastic Pollution? Make Less Plastic”*



# March 22 is World Water Day,

and to celebrate, we teamed up with our partners in the Tri-State Water Defense group for a couple of events.

First, the Marshall University Native American Student Organization (NASO) led us in a beautiful water blessing ceremony at Harris Riverfront Park on the Ohio River. NASO and others braved the chilly day to participate in honoring the Ohio River and all our water with traditional Native American songs and ceremonies. We also took time to pick up trash along the bank of the river at the park. Although it supplies drinking water to about five million people, the Ohio is considered to be one of the most polluted rivers in the U.S. The river, and everyone who drinks its water, could be facing an enormously increased threat if the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub, a massive petrochemical complex, comes to fruition (see stories page 10 and 11).

After the ceremony, we all met back at the OVEC office for coffee, snacks, and an intimate showing of the new documentary *What Lies Upstream*. The film covers the events during and after the now-infamous 2014 West Virginia Water Crisis, when the petrochemical known as MCHM contaminated the public water supply of 300,000 residents in nine counties.

The film also takes a look at just how vulnerable our water is to different kinds of threats and the lengths to which officials go to downplay the hazards. The film not only looks at WV, but also at other places in the U.S., such as Flint, MI, where people to this day *still* do not have clean water. If you have not yet seen this documentary, contact us and maybe we can help set up a screening in your community. Those who joined us to watch the film on World Water Day found it shocking and eye-opening.

But for OVEC and our friends, celebrating our water in all its forms isn't reserved for just one day a year. Our work continues to focus on defending our clean water and air. Whether it's people in communities impacted by the toxic legacy of coal, including mountaintop removal mining, or those who are not yet aware they may end up with a massive petrochemical complex in their backyards, we firmly believe it is every human's right to have access to clean water and air. OVEC pledges to be vigilant, but we can't do our work without you, fellow water defenders!



*Middle: Members of the MU Native American Student Organization and OVEC begin to assemble along the banks of the Ohio for the blessing ceremony. Left: Four Pole Creek Watershed leader and OVEC member Mark Connelly honors the water by cleaning the river bank.*

If you live in the Huntington Tri-State area and would like to be involved with the Tri-State Water Defense group or in OVEC's work in general, contact us at [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org). We look forward to hearing from you. Water is life! 🍷

# Meet Our New Board Members

*OVEC welcomes five new board members.*

**Brian Hoey** is a knowledgeable environmentalist and anthropology professor at Marshall University. His current academic work focuses on migration, community development, and economic restructuring in the Appalachian region.

**Stephen Perry** has undergrad and graduate degrees in social work. Stephen was active with OVEC when he was studying at Marshall University. He's looking to reengage on a deeper level now, as he is actively pursuing opportunities to engage his passions for the issues of environmental and social justice.

**Abe Saad** was born and raised in Huntington, WV. Abe, the son of Lebanese immigrants, is a first-generation West Virginian. He received a law degree from Capital University in 2005. After four years as an associate attorney, Abe started



his own legal practice. He is an active member of the WV Association for Justice, currently serving on the board of governors.

**Gina Hart-Smith** and her husband Mark are longtime members of OVEC and have launched a new business, Elevate Elixers, specializing in kombucha. Their business is a representation of their values to put people and the planet first. Gina is also a yoga instructor at Studio 8 in Huntington, WV.

**Ruth Smith** has recently become a quite valuable addition to our “key volunteer” roster. She has family land in Wayne County, which she fears will be impacted by either pipelines or Rogersville Shale drilling. She is an active volunteer on our stream testing teams and has taken charge of one of the Cabell County sites.

*Thanks to all of you... We are so thrilled to have you on our board of directors!*



Activism is my rent for living on the planet.

– Alice Walker

## OVEC Board of Directors & Staff

### Board Members

Rev. Jeff Allen, Chair	Mike Sullivan, Vice Chair
Lauren Kemp, Treasurer	Diane Wellman, Secretary
Pam Nixon	Rev. Rose Edington
Lyndsay Tarus	Gina Hart-Smith
Stephen Perry	Abe Saad
	Dave Lavender
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Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
P.O. Box 6753, Huntington, WV 25773  
304-522-0246  
ohvec.org

To unsubscribe from WOC mailings or to receive WOC online only, contact [maryanne@ohvec.org](mailto:maryanne@ohvec.org) with “WOC subscription” in the subject line.

OVEC is a coalition member of the WV Environmental Council and the Alliance for Appalachia, and is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered with the IRS and the West Virginia Secretary of State.



# Clean Water versus Dirty Money

*A version of this op-ed by OVEC Executive Director Natalie Thompson ran in the May 14 Charleston Gazette*

If you once had good well water, but it is now smelly and discolored and you believe it is making you sick, you probably will investigate matters. If you suspect a nearby company is the source of the contamination, you'll probably try to remedy the situation. If the company and its supposed regulators don't help you and appear to be in cahoots, you may see the courts as the place to seek justice.

But, if you live in West Virginia, and you believe the source of your troubles is a coal company, you may well wonder if justice can be served in courts where judges receive campaign contributions from the likes of coal barons and coal corporations.

Such is the case for people living along Cedar Creek Road, who, in 2007, began to notice changes in their well water, the only source of water for the small Wyoming County community. Ten years earlier, a mountaintop removal operation owned by coal operator Jim Justice had started up nearby, on Coal Mountain.

At first, there was a bad odor that would come and go. The water got worse over time, becoming discolored, stinking of sulfur, and causing corrosion around toilet and sink fixtures.

In 2009, Justice sold the mine, Dynamic Energy Inc., and its parent company Mechel Bluestone Inc., to the Russian firm Mechel. In 2012, the Russian firm idled the mine, citing lack of demand for coal.

By then, residents had observed an inordinate amount of cancer and other illnesses occurring in their neighborhood. They suspected their deteriorated and now-contaminated water was causing the health issues, and they suspected the mountaintop removal operation and possible unpermitted coal slurry disposal had contaminated the water.

When regulators didn't help, one resident contacted us at OVEC (the Huntington-based Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition) to see if we could help get their well water independently tested. We raised funds for the testing, which took place over a couple of years. To get an accurate analysis of the water, scientists needed multiple samples taken over time, to account for weather and other seasonal conditions.



The water testing ultimately revealed dangerous levels of lead, arsenic, strontium, iron, and manganese. In 2014, residents went to court to seek relief and justice. The lawsuit played out in the courts over several years, but from the get-go, plaintiffs worried about their ability to prevail over a coal company in such a coal-dependent place.

In 2015, as the lawsuit proceeded, Justice bought the mine back from the Russian company and soon reopened it. In 2016, Justice became governor of West Virginia.

The lawsuit ended up before the West Virginia Supreme Court, after a Wyoming County jury's decision that the Justice operation did not contaminate the water wells of families living along Cedar Creek. The families believe they had a strong case that showed otherwise, and they thought that coal workers attending the trial improperly influenced the six-person jury and a person who would have been a key witness. The state Supreme Court didn't see it that way and ruled in favor of the lower court's ruling. Governor Justice prevailed, but for the Cedar Creek families, justice was not served.

Taxpaying citizens, like the families of Cedar Creek, have high hopes that the WV Supreme Court and other courts are fair and impartial. But when we know that there is big money being poured into WV campaigns, and then we see a decision where families are denied the right to clean water, we wonder to what degree the money is influencing our judges' decisions.

According to WV Secretary of State data collected by followthemoney.org and WV Citizens for Clean Elections, since 2000, candidates running for the state Supreme Court have received \$529,654 in campaign contributions from the energy and natural resources sector and another \$2,266,895 from so-far unidentifiable sources. All of the sources of financial backing may be influencing the decision of many different types of cases, including environmental justice, distributive justice, criminal justice, and social justice.

In 2017, a report from the Brennan Center for Justice and the National Institute on Money in State Politics found that a torrent of special interest money, often from secretive sources, is pouring into Supreme

**In too many states, judicial elections are becoming political prizefights where partisans and special interests seek to install judges who will answer to them instead of the law and the Constitution.**

— *Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor*

Court races around the nation. The report noted that in 2016 five judges ran for one seat on the West Virginia Supreme Court, attracting more than \$3 million in funds for campaign advertising from outside sources.

Although the Supreme Court justices may say or even truly believe that these campaign contributions won't influence their decisions, special interest money in judicial races is kind of like the water of the families on Cedar Creek: It looks bad, it smells bad, and it's bad for our health—in this case, the health of our system of government.

*OVEC Executive Director Natalie Thompson is also co-coordinator of WV Citizens for Clean Elections, a statewide coalition working to increase transparency and accountability in West Virginia elections. To get involved in these efforts, visit [wvoter-owned.org](http://wvoter-owned.org) or contact [natalie@ohvec.org](mailto:natalie@ohvec.org).*

The people of Cedar Creek will do what generations of West Virginians have done over the years. We will pick up the pieces and cope as best we can in dealing with problems and damages not of our making.

The coal barons and corrupt parasitic politicians make the money, and the citizens of West Virginia pay the price.

We appreciate everyone at OVEC more than you can know.

- *Paulette Blankenship, resident of Cedar Creek*



## **Trump Admin Nixes MTR/Health Study**

In the spring issue of *Winds of Change*, we ran an article titled, “Private Money May Pay for MTR Mining Study Trump Stopped.”

We shared the news that the prestigious National Academy of Sciences (NAS) was pursuing private funding to complete a study of the health effects of mountaintop removal coal mining, after the Trump administration ordered a halt to the scientific work.

*Winds of Change* was already at the printer when news came that the Trump Administration had ordered researchers to entirely stop work on an independent evaluation of potential health effects from mountaintop removal coal mining. We wanted to yell “Stop the presses!,” but it was too late. We also wanted to yell at the administration over this latest slap in the face to Appalachian communities.

Some online commenting is one way to vent for now, as community members, researchers, and others determine next steps. As this update was being written, a webform for commenting to NAS was still operational: [bit.ly/2rlUH4a](https://bit.ly/2rlUH4a). Remember, NAS was out to find out the truth, seeking private means to fund the study after government funds were cut off, and was ordered by Trump's Department of the Interior to cease the study. The page to comment to the White House is [www.whitehouse.gov/contact/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/).

The Charleston Gazette-Mail reported that Paul Locke, chairman of the NAS study, has sat on at least seven other committees like the one conducting this study, and he'd never seen such a situation arise.

“I know leadership changes, but the facts and the science don't change, so we're now in a position where we don't know what we could have known,” Locke told the newspaper. “I hope you hear the frustration in my voice. I'm very frustrated and disappointed.”

We are, too! On to “leadership” change! 🍷



# Pipelines: DEP Meets with Citizens, Launches Webpage

On April 12, WV DEP hosted a meeting that involved leaders of many citizens' groups in WV and VA. The primary purpose of the meeting was to enhance communication between citizens and DEP officials regarding major pipeline projects, including the Mountaineer Xpress, the Mountain Valley, and the Atlantic Coast pipelines.

Citizens living along the routes of these pipelines—all of which have received FERC approval and necessary DEP permits to move to construction phases—are understandably very concerned. DEP officials highlighted and gave tips for accessing information on a new web-based tool they have designed. This can be found here: [bit.ly/2I1qHzl](http://bit.ly/2I1qHzl). OVEC's Robin Blakeman attended DEP's meeting. Contact her if you need help to navigate this system.

Citizen groups in both WV and VA have organized into citizen-science-based monitoring groups. OVEC has trained teams monitoring streams that are soon to be impacted by the Mountaineer Xpress Pipeline in five counties. We would like to expand this program by adding some new stream testing sites and new volunteers. If you would like to be involved in a training to take part in this program, please let us know by contacting [robin@ohvec.org](mailto:robin@ohvec.org).

You can take part, even if you have yet to take training. You can become a visual stream monitor. Just watch this webinar, [bit.ly/2wIIZcX](http://bit.ly/2wIIZcX), and follow the reporting directions. The DEP does not have enough



*Above: The start of Mountaineer Xpress Pipeline construction in Wetzel County does not bode well. On May 22, journalism students joined with OVEC and Bill Hughes to get a firsthand look at infrackstructure in Bill's home county. Much to the chagrin of the pipeline contractors, Bill is among the citizens who regularly monitor pipeline construction near their homes and report violations to DEP and FERC.*

inspectors in the field, so they need to hear from you. Shutdowns and fines have come about thanks to citizens monitoring and reporting pipeline construction problems to DEP. 🍌



# Training Is a Gas!



*Left: Some of the crew at the training.*

Appalachian Gas Working Group's (AGWG) vision is to support healthy communities, property rights, and a just transition to clean renewable energy, while leading a coordinated effort to end public harm from fracking- and gas-related extraction and infrastructure.

From April 6–8, at Jackson's Mill near Weston, WV, 64 people gathered to take part in the Appalachian Gas Working Group's (AGWG) Citizens' Organizing Summit.

An AGWG planning team worked for months to plan the event, after surveying assorted community members around the state about what kinds of training they need in order to take more effective action.

The goal of the Community Organizing Summit was to empower and strengthen grassroots activism with leadership training, coalition building, and outreach. We tailored the event especially for folks wanting to learn how to better resist the region's growing oil and gas extraction and related threats to our land, water, and health.

On Friday night, attendees heard from Carol Davey, with the Ohio Environmental Council, who spoke about the group's work through the lens of the February 15 fracked-gas well blowout near Powhatan Point, OH. No one was injured, but 30 nearby households were evacuated for several days. A preliminary report by EPA says the well leaked about 100 million cubic feet of methane per day for 19 days until the well was finally capped. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas.

We also heard from Austin Sachs, founder of Protect and Divest. Austin notes that behind every fossil fuel infrastructure project lies an intricate web of financing that we unknowingly contribute to. If we want to truly stand up to environmental degradation, we must commit our actions and habits as well as

our money to the cause. Through the divestment from fossil fuel funding banks and advocating for government funds to divest as well, we can make our money talk and help contribute even more to a sustainable future.

Saturday sessions included:

- Speaking Across Bridges
- Coalition Building
- Starting and Building a Campaign
- Gas Related Health and Medical Effects
- Permitting and Enforcement
- Environmental Monitoring

OVEC staff hosted the event, and provided a media training, as well as a session on the Appalachian Gas Storage Hub/Petrochemical Complex.

On Saturday evening, Leann Leiter, with Earthworks, showed participants how to download and start using the FracTracker Mobile App ([www.fractracker.org/apps/](http://www.fractracker.org/apps/)), an intuitive and powerful tool for community residents and researchers who want to document and share observations about oil and gas industry effects.

Many folks headed home Saturday night, but about 15 stayed for an on-the-ground tour of nearby oil- and gas-impacted areas. Diana Gooding led the tour.

Thanks to everyone who supported the event, to everyone who attended, and to all the trainers and speakers! AGWG is already planning our next big event. To join the group, e-mail [natalie@ohvec.org](mailto:natalie@ohvec.org). 🍷

AGWG members include OVEC, WV Rivers Coalition, WV Highlands Conservancy, WV and VA Sierra Club, Appalachian Voices, Appalachian Mountain Advocates, Pennsylvania League of Women Voters, Preserving Our Water Heritage and Rights (POWHR), Ohio River Citizens Alliance (ORCA), Friends of the Harmed, Mountain Lakes Preservation Alliance, Wetzel County Citizen Action Group, Headwaters Defense, Greenbrier River Watershed Association, Indian Creek Watershed Association, Eight Rivers Council, Christians for the Mountains, Preserve Monroe, Summers County Residents Against the Pipeline, Doddridge County Watershed Association, SW Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project, SouthWings, WV Citizen Action Group, WV Surface Owners Rights Organization, and Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action, and more.

# **Groups: *ORSANCO, Maintain Your Pollution Control Standards Role!***

**Corporations:  
*ORSANCO,  
Let Us Pollute  
the Ohio River  
Even More!***

*A coal-fired power plant on the Ohio in Marshall County, WV. There's a power plant about every 38 miles along the river.*

A coalition of environmental groups from states along the Ohio River is calling for a multi-state commission to resist weakening clean water protections along the 900-mile-long river. The decision to scuttle 60-year-old protections would impact millions of people in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

A majority of commissioners appointed to the Ohio River Valley Sanitation Commission, known as ORSANCO, is proposing revisions to its core mission that would eliminate key Pollution Control Standards and withdraw ORSANCO from the responsibility of ensuring consistent water quality throughout the Ohio River. ORSANCO was created as an interstate water pollution control agency in part to ensure pollution dumped into the Ohio River in one state doesn't have a negative effect on the waters of another state.

Environmental groups submitted comments to ORSANCO opposing the proposal to eliminate ORSANCO's water quality standards during a public comment period that ended February 24.

"ORSANCO commissioners walking away from their crucial oversight role will set the stage for a 'race to the bottom' in controlling pollution in the Ohio River," said Madeline Fleisher, senior attorney at the Environmental Law & Policy Center, one of the

groups that submitted comments. "We can't afford to lose the one watchdog in charge of making sure the entire Ohio River is safe and clean for more than four million people who rely on it for their drinking water."

Other groups submitting comments included WV Rivers Coalition, Ohio Environmental Council, National Wildlife Federation, Kentucky Waterways Alliance, Ohio River Foundation, Three Rivers Waterkeeper, Sierra Club, Hoosier Environmental Council, and OVEC.

"It is a good idea for ORSANCO to ensure pollution dumped into the Ohio River doesn't have a negative impact on waters of other states, especially in light of spills like the MCHM spill in 2014," says OVEC's Robin Blakeman. "Such petrochemical product spills are likely to be more common in the future, especially if the massive Appalachian Storage Hub project becomes a reality."

A couple of months after the groups encouraged their members to submit individual comments and sent their joint comments, a news story confirmed what the groups suspected—that fossil fuel industry pressure is behind ORSANCO's deliberations on abdicating its role of setting pollution standards within the Ohio River watershed.

The article, "Industries Try to Strip Power from



Ohio River’s Water Quality Commission,” by James Bruggers, which ran May 30 on InsideClimateNews, reports:

The eight-state regional commission, known as ORSANCO, has a long history of setting water standards for hazardous chemicals and heavy metals from coal-burning and other industries, often at more stringent levels than state or federal standards...

Electric utilities and other industries are pressing a regional commission to end its role in restricting the dumping of toxic wastewater into the river, arguing there’s too much bureaucracy already. Instead, they want the commission to stick to research, and leave anything related to regulation to individual states.

At the same time, the Trump administration has put on hold the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s first Clean Water Act rules in a generation to curb toxic wastewater discharges from power plants while the agency reconsiders them...

Some 944 pages of public comments reveal the battle lines. On one side are dozens of industries—steel millers, chemical manufacturers, municipal wastewater treatment operators and electric utilities—that send effluent into the river. On the other are drinking water utilities and environmental groups.

Then there are people like Robert Mertz, a retired science teacher in Spencer, West Virginia, with his children and grandchildren on his mind, who was among more than 700 citizens who submitted objections. (Ed. note: Robert is an OVEC member.)

“It’s our duty to do the best we can to make things better, or at least keep things from getting worse, which seems to be the best we can do anymore,” Mertz said. “All these states are under tremendous pressure from the industries in their area. Somebody has to push back.”

Do take the time to read the entire article: [bit.ly/2J3RmMq](https://bit.ly/2J3RmMq). And be ready to push back! Hearings on ORSANCO’s proposal will take place this summer. It is critical for water drinkers to attend these hearings. Watch our website for details or send us an e-mail: [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org). 🍓

## Appeals Court Hears Case of OVEC v. Scott Pruitt

You may recall that we are involved in a lawsuit titled Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), et al. v. Scott Pruitt, et al.

The “et al” on our side in the case is the Sierra Club, the WV Highlands Conservancy, and the WV Rivers Coalition.

The lawsuit is over the WV DEP’s failure to submit total maximum daily load (TMDL) cleanup plans for more than 500 waterways here. The Clean Water Act (CWA) requires the state to write up the plans, but the state DEP has failed to do so for years. When the state fails to develop a satisfactory plan, the CWA requires the U.S. EPA to step in and come up with a plan.

In 2017, a district court judge ruled in our favor. The Associated Press reports the judge “...found that the state of West Virginia has abandoned its responsibility to write cleanup plans for streams harmed by pollution from mountaintop-removal coal mining.”

The EPA, headed by Scott Priutt, appealed the ruling.

On May 8, AppalMAD attorney Derek Teaney presented our arguments in the appeal before a three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, VA. He says, “We are trying to compel agency action.”

As the publication Inside EPA notes, “OVEC and its allies have argued that upholding the court order is the only way to ensure West Virginia will clean up waterways polluted by mining and other industrial activities.”

Thanks as ever and always to the attorneys at Appalachian Mountain Advocates (AppalMAD) for representing OVEC and other groups in legal challenges we file when DEP and coal companies fail to follow the Clean Water Act. We await a ruling. 🍓



# Petrochemical Mad Men

We've been seeing many op-eds and reports breathlessly promoting the Appalachian Storage Hub/Petrochemical Complex as an economic "game changer." The Hub would stretch along the Ohio River and inland, from Monaca, PA, to Cattletsburg, KY. A spur would come up the Kanawha River, from Point Pleasant, WV, to Charleston, WV.

Proponents claim the hub will increase employment and bring long-term investments to areas of high poverty. The onslaught of promotional material amounts to a massive smoke and mirrors PR campaign in favor of the hub.

To break some of the mirrors and fan away some of the smoke, let's look at some of its investors. Like most fossil-fuel-backed projects, the Appalachian Storage Hub is said to be great for America. If this is true, then why did the Trump administration sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with China to invest \$83.7 billion in the Hub over the next 20 years? That alone should make people pause, but China isn't the only foreign interest.

A company from Taiwan, PTT Global Chemical, is building one of the key components, known as the Belmont County ethane cracker plant, for the petrochem complex in Ohio. In early March, PTT announced a new partner in construction of the plant, South Korea's Daelim Chemical. We don't expect it to stop there with the foreign companies if this complex gets off the ground. It's not a stretch to conclude much of the money and products that would be produced at the expense of public health would be exported.

In the last issue of *Winds of Change*, we attempted to fan away some of the smoke by providing details on those promoting the Hub, people poised to really cash in for themselves, no matter the cost to the land, water and air and human health. For a recap:

One day after introducing legislation titled the Appalachian Ethane Storage Study Act of 2017, WV Senator Joe Manchin received a \$5,000 campaign contribution from the American Chemistry Council, whose members include major petrochemical corporations. Other members of WV's Congressional delegation followed suit, signing on to other legislation supporting the Hub.

WV Secretary of Commerce Woody Thrasher, who attended the signing of the China MOU, is actively promoting the Hub. He owns a 70 percent



stake in The Thrasher Group, as a contractor for oil and gas companies set to make a lot of money if our region becomes a major petrochemical hub. Can you say, "conflict of interest"?

WVU professor Brian Anderson, who is championing the hub, is a principal of Appalachia Development Group, which is the primary LLC that entered into the \$83.7 billion MOU with the China Energy Investment Corp. for financing the hub.

Since our last newsletter, two more proponents have come out of the woodwork: former state legislator Brooks McCabe and former WV Congressional candidate Howard Swint.

McCabe owns land inside the "area of interest" for the Appalachian Storage Hub. Depleted gas wells on the land, near the Kanawha State Forest, could potentially be used for storing natural gas liquids as part of the Hub. Is McCabe positioning himself to sell those depleted wells for the hub? A while back, McCabe sold the land that would become the Keystone Development #2 mountaintop removal site, also near the Kanawha State Forest. That mine was shut down due to repeated violations.

Swint is the owner of Swint Associates, a sole proprietorship that serves as a holding company for commercial real estate and is a consulting firm for entities that could feed the petrochem beast. Is he also in a position to possibly cash in on infrastructure relating to the Hub?

No doubt, more promoters of the hub will come to light. Some will just be believers of the PR campaign, and some will be salivating about their own potential personal gain, not stopping to think about the consequences to our region's health and safety.

We deserve a better future. We shouldn't have to sacrifice our air, water, land, and people to yet another round of fossil-fuel-fueled corporate greed.

Help us counteract the PR machine! Write letters to the editor when you spot Hub puff pieces, and consider taking part in our Appalachian Gas Working Group media team. E-mail [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org) or call 304-522-0246 for details. 🍷



# Where's the MOU?

More than six months have passed since the Trump administration and China Energy Investment Corp. reportedly signed an \$83.7 billion Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Beijing.

According to both the U.S. and WV Chamber of Commerce, the investment would extend over a 20-year period, covering projects for oil and gas development. This includes the proposed infrastructure of the much-touted Appalachian Storage and Trading Hub (petrochemical complex), which would consist of the underground storage of fracked gas liquid byproducts and cracker plants for the manufacturing of plastics and other environmentally hazardous petrochemicals in the Ohio River Valley.

West Virginia's secretary of commerce, Woody Thrasher, attended the signing event in China, and Governor Jim Justice has praised the MOU.

Would we be singing its praises, too? Highly doubtful, but we can't know until we see it, right? Since hours after the MOU was announced, many people, including journalists (and us), have wanted to see exactly what this document entails.

We called up our friends at Appalachian Mountain Advocates, who filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the WV Chamber of Commerce. Our allies at Friends of the Earth also submitted their own FOIA request on the federal level. Replies to both requests were chock full of legal jargon and were basically delaying tactics that raise more questions than answers.

So, with both the Trump and Justice administrations refusing to release the MOU to the public, and with journalists and citizen groups unable to get details, we have a burning question: If this MOU is as good for our region as both administrations claim, then why do they not want the people to know what it says?

It's our opinion that this MOU should be a matter of public record, because our federal and state governments entered into it.

We are continuing to explore all avenues to get this MOU released to the public. We will also be



reaching out to allies in Congress to see if we can expedite the FOIA requests. We all should have a right to know what is in this MOU, because their projects will affect our region. 🍌

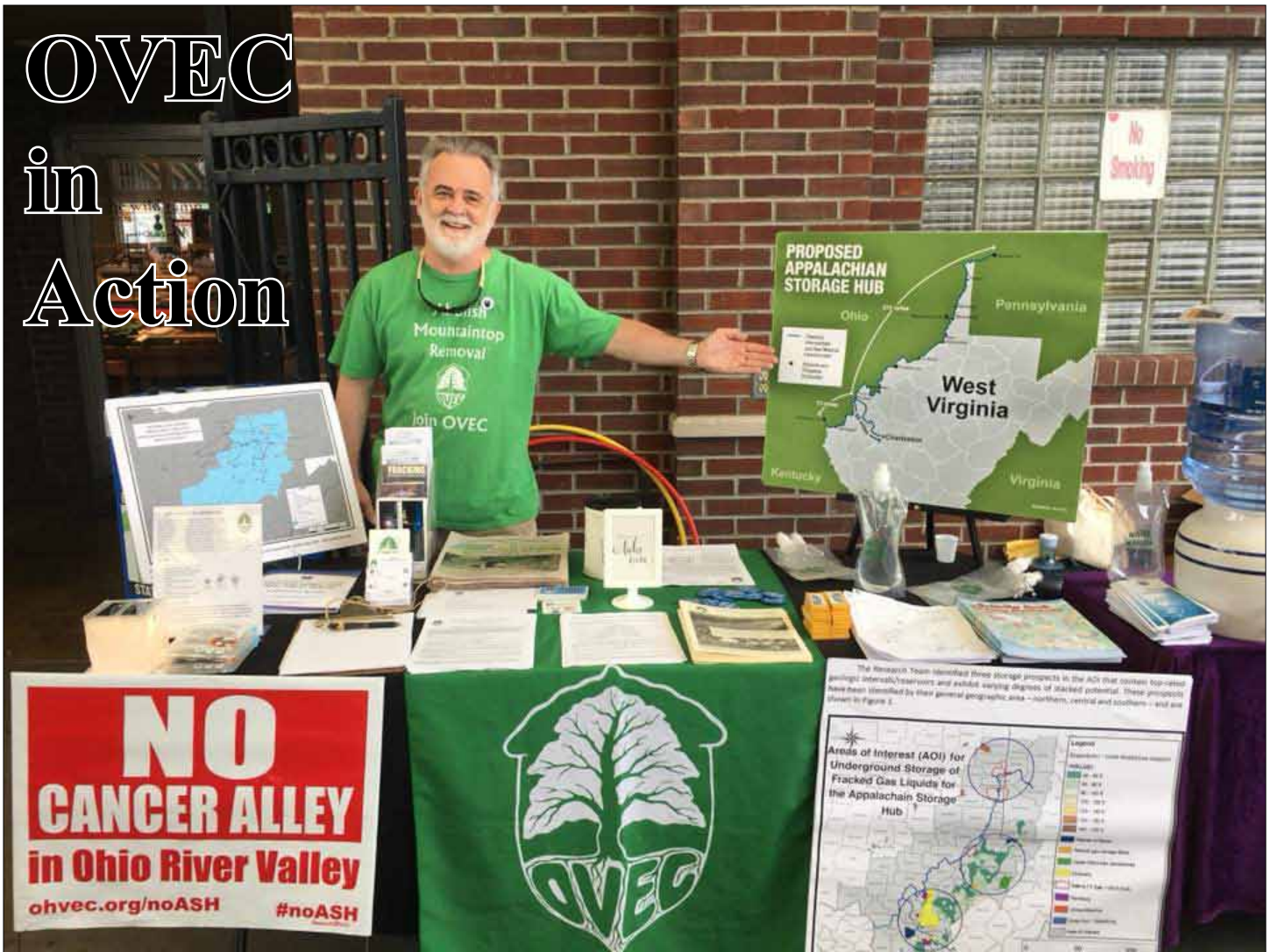
## Your Tax Dollars Not at Work For You

In January, the Appalachia Development Group LLC (ADG), one of the groups pushing the Hub, was invited to submit a Part II Application for a loan guarantee under the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Title XVII Loan Guarantee Program. This \$1.9 billion loan guarantee from the DOE would support the development of infrastructure for the proposed Hub. ADG and other hub cheerleaders claimed this was a "major milestone."

However, we see it as a potential misuse of federal tax dollars for an unnecessary project that would do more harm than good for people living nearby and downstream.

Why not set up a program to loan out up to \$1.9 billion to a whole host of local small business owners and caring, creative entrepreneurs who value clean air, clean water, healthy kids, and community over a quick buck at any cost. Haven't we learned a thing from the mess, diseases, and poverty the coal industry has left for the state? 🍌

# OVEC in Action



OVEC's out and about this spring! Above: Board member Mike Sullivan at OVEC table at the May 19 Huntington Sustainability Fair at The Wild Ramp. Photo by Natalie Thompson.

Opposite page, starting upper left, moving across to right, then down to next row:

Photo 1: Natalie Thompson, right, talks with Explorer Academy 5th-grade students about the past, present, and future of energy in West Virginia. Courtesy photo.

Photo 2: Stream testing volunteer Fred Tackett at a Roane County stream. Photo by Vivian Stockman. Fred spotted mussels near a spot where the Mountaineer Xpress Pipeline will cross the stream. That led to a site visit by a Division of Natural Resources wildlife biologist.

Photo 3: Board member Ruth Smith and OVEC project coordinator Robin Blakeman table at the April 14 Cabell County Preparedness Fair. Courtesy photo.

Photo 4: Natalie and Mike at the Sustainability Fair. Courtesy photo.

Photo 5: Right, Vivian Stockman on a SouthWings flyover of fracking- and pipeline-impacted areas of WV. Photo by Bill Hughes, who is (almost) visible in Vivian's phone screen.

Photo 6: OVEC volunteer Deborah Griffith at the OVEC table during WVU-Parkersburg's Earth Day event. Summer and fall will bring more opportunities for action. Join in! 🌎





Is your OVEC membership up to date? Your membership dues and donations help keep OVEC in action. You can update your membership, join for the first time, and donate online at [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org). Also, check out [ohvec.org/kroger/](http://ohvec.org/kroger/) and remember to relink your card annually. Need help? Call the office at 304-522-0246.



# #BreakFreeFromPlastic Tour Visits WV

In late May, OVEC was thrilled to host an international delegation touring the United States to support global efforts to #breakfreefromplastic.

Why would OVEC be part of this tour? The Stopping Plastic Where It Starts tour, organized by Earthworks, aimed to show the negative impacts of plastics production throughout the entire plastics supply chain.

Currently, 99 percent of plastics are made with fossil fuels. As we see in areas where fracking is taking place, extracting the raw material for plastics creates pollution. Manufacturing plastics—a big part of the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub (see story page 10)—creates pollution, and plastic pollution is endangering people’s health and choking our oceans.

The tour helped OVEC, as well as citizen groups in Texas, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania, learn about what people on the end-side of plastic use have to deal with, and it helped the international participants understand what is happening here on the fencelines of plastic manufacturing hubs and in the “frack fields.” By getting to know one another, telling our stories and connecting our struggles, we can grow the global movement to end plastic pollution.

Before coming to WV, the tour group visited folks on the front lines of the petrochemical industry in Texas and Louisiana. They met with people in Portland, TX, profoundly concerned by Exxon/SABIC’s Gulf Coast Growth Ventures petrochemical complex, which would include the largest ethane steam cracker facility in the world. They also met with TEJAS and with Hilton Kelley (both of whom OVEC is working with in regards to EPA’s Chemical Disaster Rule delay; see story page 17). These “Cancer Alley” residents know all too well what we could face here if we see a massive petrochemical build-out in the Ohio River Valley.



*Above: Left to right, tour participants Jed Alegado, Bill Hughes, and Lakshmi Narayan ponder the starting point of the Mountain Valley Pipeline in what was once Mobley, WV, before the frack invasion. Below: MVP’s starting point.*



The tour group also met with several of our PA allies, including members of Center for Coalfield Justice, the League of Women Voters of PA, and the Breathe Project. OVEC organizer Dustin White joined the PA leg of the tour.

The tour arrived in Wetzel County, WV, on May 24, to meet up with local all-things-frack documentarian Bill Hughes and OVEC’s Vice Director Vivian Stockman.

As our day together began, Myrna Dominguez, a food sovereignty activist from Manila, Philippines, told us, “I’m here visiting communities in the U.S. threatened by plastics production in order to bring voices from our coastal communities halfway around the world that are harmed by plastics, too. Plastic trash pollutes our waters and destroys fish sanctuaries, harming our fisherfolk whose livelihoods depend upon clean water and a healthy seabed.”

Reports of recent studies help us realize the implications of what Myrna told us, summed up by headlines like this: “Something Fishy: Toxic Plastic Pollution Is

Traveling Up the Food Chain; Chemicals collect in microplastics, which then get eaten by fish, birds and seals—and by humans.”

Lakshmi Narayan, from Pune, India who is a representative of waste pickers in India, told us, “Waste pickers, who make a living dealing with plastic waste every day, would support the fight against increasing production of plastics, especially single-use plastics which have little or no economic value. The environment is already suffocating from the pollution wrought by too much disposable plastic packaging, and waste pickers who are efficient in recovering materials, know that recycling alone will not solve this problem!”

Lakshmi educated us on what really goes on with





“recycling” plastic. Only about 10 percent of the massive U.S. plastic waste stream is recycled. What does end up in our recycling bins can often take a journey to poor Asia communities, where recycling it results in yet more pollution. She noted that if manufacturers had to pay the full costs associated with disposal of their products, we would have much less plastic being made in the first place.

OVEC was prepared with a couple of in-depth questions for Lakshmi. Taylor Talbott, the daughter-in-law of OVEC members Barb and Ken Lewis, had spent nine months working with Lakshmi and the waste pickers union in India. Taylor was glad to hear we would meet Lakshmi and sent along questions. One had to do with whether Lakshmi felt some type of waste picker cooperatives could work in the U.S.

Although the exact same type of waste collection wouldn’t work here, there is opportunity for all types of activities that could create jobs and foster a regenerative economy, such as the collection of compostable waste.

Lakshmi emphasized the need for labor and environmental groups to have closer working relationships. For instance, when fossil fuel corporations promise “jobs, jobs, jobs,” make them prove they are creating jobs and hiring locals by setting up local employment exchanges.

Although there is legitimate need for certain plastic products currently made from fossil fuels, much of the plastic waste stream results from single-use products that are marketed to us as being items we “need.” As another tour participant, Jed Alegado, who works for Break Free From Plastic out of its Manila office, noted, there is much corporate

*continued on page 16*



*Above: Left to right, tour participants Jed Alegado, Robby Diesu, and Myrna Dominguez observe one of the many compressor stations now shattering the rural soundscape in northcentral WV. Left: One of those compressor stations amid what once was Almost Heaven, West Virginia. Below: Myrna showed us shocking photos of mangrove forests utterly fouled by plastic waste that leaves the mangrove unable to perform vital ecosystem services, such as flood and erosion control.*



**Our part of the #breakfreefromplastic tour could not have been possible without the help of Wetzel County resident and OVEC member Bill Hughes, who has dedicated the past eight years of his life to learning all about fracking and related processes and infrastructure. He regularly shares his knowledge and amazing photo collection with students, concerned citizens and journalists. Be sure to read Bill’s blogs on OVEC’s website, [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org).**

**#breakfreefromplastic** is a global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution. Since its launch in September 2016, more than 1,100 groups from across the world, including OVEC, have joined the movement to demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and to push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis. These organizations share the common values of environmental protection and social justice, which guide their work at the community level and represent a global, unified vision.

*continued from page 15*

responsibility for the toxic crisis we face. One attempt to try to change corporate behavior is becoming a worldwide movement called Zero Waste Cities.

Bill Hughes shared his own story with the tour group, as well as some of his powerful photos that document the fracking onslaught of Wetzel County before we headed out to see some of *infrack*structure in person. Dustin had alerted us that Myrna had been singing John Denver's "Country Roads" in anticipation of her visit here. We printed up the lyrics, and while driving down one of those country roads in the tour van, right here in Almost Heaven, West Virginia, we all sang that song.

As our day together came to a close, Brittany Patterson, a WV Public Radio journalist who had joined us, asked the group their impressions now that

*Front page montage: Top photo of ocean plastic pollution courtesy #breakfreefromplastic. Group photo courtesy Breathe Project. Infrackstructure photos are OVEC's.*

they had seen the whole process.

Lakshmi replied, "It's horrifying how a single product can begin its life causing so much destruction and end its life also with the same level of destruction."

Myrna said, "It only proves that plastics are harmful from the very beginning because their origin is already harmful. How can an evil produce a good?"

We are sick and tired of regional politicians and those who stand to profit off the pollution (see related story page 10) touting the sad, same old extraction/pollution vision for our future, this time wrapped up as plastics, plastics, plastics (AKA: toxic, toxic, toxic).

But we were energized and enlightened with Myrna, Lakshmi, Jed, and Robby's visit here. OVEC is grateful to everyone involved with the Stop Plastics Where It Starts tour! We look forward to working together to help grow the worldwide movement to #breakfreefromplastic. 🍌

## Preach: Solar Reach

OVEC would like to recognize the innovative thinking that the members of Spencer Presbyterian Church (a few of the congregants are members!) are demonstrating with their solar project. This small but faithful and forward-thinking congregation has obtained a special low-interest loan and a grant from their denomination to finance this project. Solar Holler is doing the designing and installing.

The church is the home of a vital daycare/pre-K facility. For the sake of the kids and the impact on the environment, this small community is taking a huge leap forward.

Spencer Presbyterian Church is also engaging in the process of becoming a Presbyterian Church (USA) certified Earthcare Congregation. They may soon be the third congregation in the WV Presbytery to obtain this certification, but they will be the *first*



*Solar panels going on the church in May. Photo courtesy SPC.*

with a solar powered church building!

For more information on the process of Earthcare or other "green" certifications for faith communities and about solar-panel installations for faith community facilities, contact robin@ohvec.org. 🍌



# Report: Another Year of Preventable Chemical Disasters

In early April, we joined with other citizen groups, workers, and scientists to release a report highlighting how Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt's prolonged delay of the Chemical Disaster Rule continues to hurt families.

The one-year review spotlights some of the serious chemical incidents that have occurred while the rule has been on hold over the last year. The rule would have begun to prevent and reduce chemical disasters in communities near 12,500 facilities nationwide if the Trump Administration had not abruptly suspended it one year ago, in March 2017.

As you may recall from the Spring issue of Winds of Change, we are involved in a lawsuit over the delay of this rule with several other groups. We are represented by Earthjustice.

The report outlines dozens of examples of chemical disasters that have occurred since the rule was first delayed, including the Arkema explosion that took place in Texas in August 2017 and the ExxonMobil Refinery fire in Louisiana in November 2017.

The report also details the personal accounts of those who found themselves in harm's way, but because local communities often do not receive complete or timely information regarding the flames they see and odors they smell coming from oil refineries and other chemical facilities, these incidents provide only part of the picture. No comprehensive list is available of all of the incidents or resulting



Photo courtesy Earthjustice and Eric Kayne.

harm that have occurred at covered facilities during the delay, in part because EPA has not released such a list.

The EPA reports that about 177 million Americans live in the worst-case-scenario zones for chemical disasters. At least one in three schoolchildren attends a school within the vulnerability zone of a hazardous facility, as well.

The percentage of black people living in fenceline zones around 3,433 of the most dangerous facilities is 75 percent greater than for the U.S. as a whole, and the percentage of Latinx in these zones is 60 percent greater.

The Chemical Disaster Rule includes much-needed improvements to the EPA's Clean Air Act Risk Management Program (RMP) and would prevent and reduce chemical disasters, hazardous releases, and resulting chemical exposures, while strengthening emergency preparedness and coordination with local first responders. When developing the rule, the EPA determined that prior protections failed to prevent over 2,200 chemical accidents around the country during a 10-year period, including about 150 incidents per year that caused reportable harm.

Read the report: [bit.ly/2uHVbE9](https://bit.ly/2uHVbE9). Joining together to release it are: BlueGreen Alliance, Coalition For A Safe Environment, Community In-Power & Development Association, Coming Clean, Earthjustice, Environmental Justice Health Alliance, OVEC, Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, Union of Concerned Scientists, and California Communities Against Toxics. 🍌



## Congrats to Kim Baker!

Congratulations to longtime member and one-time staff member Kim Baker. Kim owns and operates River and Rail Bakery at Heritage Station in Huntington.

The WV Small Business Administration has awarded Kim and her bakery its Woman-Owned Small Business of the Year. 🍌

## OVEC WORKS!

*Thanks to everyone near and far for taking action to end environmental injustice, with an extra special thanks to all the folks fighting extreme fossil fuel extraction. We know it takes courage to speak up! We hope you know how much we appreciate you. OVEC works because of you!*

## THANKS!

# We Have No Inhibitions About Coalitions

*Reflections on the birth of the Appalachian Gas Working Group*

by Janet Keating

If I never learned another thing after many years of being on OVEC's staff, one thing I know for sure: The key to winning on any issue is building people power. And one way to accomplish that is by building strong, diverse coalitions with those who are committed to justice and who share the same primary goals.

Clearly, every small organization has its strengths, and, fortunately, OVEC, after more than 30 years in the trenches, has quite a few.

But rarely can a group as "small" as OVEC accomplish its goals and win big issues without joining with others. The fact that OVEC staff has successfully built and maintained winning coalitions since the early '90s has allowed OVEC and its allies to win victories where others generally viewed wins as impossible.

Our stand-out win on the proposed Apple Grove pulp and paper mill, along with numerous legal and other victories on mountaintop removal mining, came about in large part because of a willingness of groups to come together, share the work load along with resources, and lead with their individual strengths, with OVEC often taking leadership. Friends of the Mountains and even The Alliance for Appalachia are just two examples of successful coalitions that OVEC helped form and maintain. Although coal companies are *still* getting away with mountaintop

removal, some places have been spared and many people know about this outrage due to the efforts of groups in the coalition.

I had already set my retirement date for fall of 2016, when, in early fall 2015, with the increasing rise of fracking and related activities in our state, I saw a need. As far back as 2010, OVEC had been working on issues dealing with oil and gas, especially legislative ones. More recently, OVEC staff had begun to develop relationships

with people in north-central West Virginia who were being directly impacted by new oil and gas development, especially "fracking" of the deep Marcellus Shale.

OVEC staff and volunteers had long-term

relationships with the leaders of groups like WV Citizen Action Group, WV Surface Owners' Rights Organization, WV Highlands Conservancy, WV Council of Churches, and WV Rivers Coalition, to name several. Although we had all worked together on other issues when a need arose (like the 2014 West Virginia water crisis), we, and smaller community-based groups, had not had a face-to-face meeting—everyone in the same room.

Because none of our organizations had (have) huge budgets, it made sense that we come together for information sharing to find out what each group was working on and see what other groups they might be working with



A scene from a December 2015 gathering of what was to become the AGWG.



outside of our state. And, importantly, if most of the groups in the room agreed, we would at least continue to meet and share information and then, perhaps begin to eat the “elephant” “one bite at a time.”

That first meeting at Jackson’s Mill (December 15, 2015), appropriately called “It’s A Gas,” (thank you Natalie Thompson for this cheeky title!) was remarkable. But that’s exactly what one would expect out of a room full of creative, committed leaders. Groups shared what they were doing and where—details, tactics, and resources. We shared victories, both large and small. Then we discussed strategic opportunities to work together and assessed how much interest was in the room for taking on shared efforts.

Before the day’s end, folks were drilling down (no pun intended) on specifics and decided that at the very least, a list-serve was needed to help keep groups apprised of other actions and agreed that another meeting in

the spring would be good, especially one that would include many of our out-of-state allies (fracking and its infrastructure affects our neighboring states of Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Virginia, and Ohio.)

To put the oil and gas industry on alert that we were collectively watching them, OVEC issued a press release after the meeting. The first paragraph reads, “On December 15, more than 40 people representing 30 citizen groups from across West Virginia gathered to meet one another and to discuss each group’s work surrounding deep shale oil and gas issues.”

At the next meeting, in the spring of 2016, allies from around our region joined with us, forming the Appalachian Gas Working Group (AGWG). This coalition continues to meet regularly, strengthen relationships, share strategy, and provide trainings and other resources for groups and individuals working to stave off the destruction of our region’s air, land, and water by the oil and gas industry. 🌰

The screenshot shows the Climate Home News website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the site name and a 'Support CHN' button. Below the navigation bar, the main article is titled 'Reclaiming coal'. The article features a large image of a man in a suit, identified as Coal tycoon governor Jim Justice, and a sub-headline: 'Coal tycoon governor Jim Justice uses loophole to leave mines and workers idle'. To the left of the main article, there are several smaller article thumbnails with titles such as 'US agency calls for ban on controversial coal mine 'self-bonds'', 'What happens to the land after coal mines close?', 'Crackdown on coal mine 'self-bonds' stalls under Trump', 'Obama official: Trump cuts will leave coal clean-up agency unable to function', and 'Why and how we investigated the coal industry's clean-up funds'. To the right of the main article, there are more thumbnails with titles like 'Reclaiming coal: US mines' clean-up cash - all our data', 'US coal hasn't set aside enough money to clean up its mines', and 'Schemes that favour coal companies in Appalachia have left a national shortfall experts said was 'one of the biggest public failures that has gone under the radar''. At the bottom of the page, there is a copyright notice: '© 2018 Climate Home. All rights reserved.'

## ICYMI: OVEC in the News

In case you missed it, we wanted to draw your attention to an excellent in-depth series on the failure of coal bonding schemes by Climate Home News journalist Mark Olalde. Mark contacted us before he came here to work on his reporting, and while here he traveled with OVEC’s Dustin White. Find the series at [bit.ly/2Jndfd0](https://bit.ly/2Jndfd0).

OVEC speaks and takes part in ground tours with journalists on a regular basis. Stay up to date on news that features OVEC members, staff, and/or our work. Go to [ohvec.org/news/](https://ohvec.org/news/) and click on the acorn icon. 🌰

# Now We Can Say Something

Because OVEC is a 501-c-3 nonprofit group we cannot, by law, endorse candidates for public office. So, as an organization, we could not help out, nor brag about, longtime member and volunteer Paula Jean Swarengin, who ran in the Democratic primary against incumbent Senator Joe Manchin.

Paula put up a great fight! She received 48,302 votes or a total of 30.2 percent of all votes cast (159,372) for U.S. Senator in the May 9 WV Democratic primary.

She began deciding to run for office after confronting Manchin at a March 2017 town hall meeting. “Who’s going to clean up the mess when coal is gone, Senator?” she asked him. “...and fracking is not acceptable, either. We are tired of being collateral damage.” (See the YouTube clip at [bit.ly/2Gb2btX](http://bit.ly/2Gb2btX).)

A June 20, 2017 article in The Hill notes:

After channeling her frustration with the coal industry into local activism, Swarengin—a supporter of Sen. Bernie Sanders’s (I-Vt.) Democratic presidential bid—decided to mount a long-shot bid for Senate against Manchin.

Swarengin is backed by a number of new progressive groups, including Brand New Congress... As a Brand New Congress candidate, Swarengin has agreed to a platform that includes single-payer healthcare, trillions of dollars of investment in infrastructure and industry, and a plan for an economy based on renewable energy.

Her platform also includes Medicare for all, increased minimum wage, tuition-free state college, and legalized marijuana.

Another town hall (also captured on YouTube: [bit.ly/2jT5gFS](http://bit.ly/2jT5gFS)) became pivotal in Paula’s decision to run. An April 30, 2018 Rolling Stone article reports:

It was just more than a year ago that Swarengin, seated on a stage in a high school auditorium in McDowell County, described her state’s essential dilemma to Vermont’s Sen. Bernie Sanders. “When the coal industry’s gone, we’re not going to have anything left,” she acknowledged, before listing the devastation the industry had caused her personally: “I’ve watched my neighbor’s children get cancer. I buried my daddy when he was 54 years old. I watched my granddaddy suffocate to death (from black lung).” At that point, Swarengin, weeping, reached over to hug Sanders, who



Paula Jean Swarengin. Courtesy photo.

consoled her in an embrace. “We need help,” she said. It was a central moment, she now says, in her decision to launch a political campaign. “I see the senator as a public servant,” she says. “And I think they’ve lost touch. They’ve become immune to people’s suffering.”

The Rolling Stone article also quotes Paula as saying, “They’ve fed us this propaganda that coal miners should be enemies with environmental organizers. I am a proud coal miner’s daughter, but I’m not going to worship that black rock.”

The same article also quotes Paula’s friend, former deep miner and longtime OVEC member Chuck Nelson, who has served on OVEC’s board: “Coal kills at each step of the cycle—the mining, the cleaning, the transportation. That is what’s so criminal about it. Politicians know that and they allow it to happen.”

Indeed, like most WV politicians, Manchin does fall over himself in his attempt to be as pro-coal as possible. He was a coal broker, but he never was a coal baron. But, this year, one man running for Manchin’s seat was a coal baron, one that had overseen mines where Chuck worked.

Six Republicans vied for the GOP’s WV Senate nomination, but the national news was focused on one candidate: former Massey CEO Don Blankenship, who in the end lost to WV Attorney General Patrick Morrisey. Morrisey received 47,002 votes and Blankenship 26,729 out of 134,226 total votes in the Republican primary.

(Okay, so it is not a fair comparison, because there were more candidates in the Republican race than in the Democrat race, but note that Paula received more votes than did Morrisey or Blankenship!)





*In the center of the photo, Paula at left and OVEC's Dustin White at right, along with tens of thousands of their friends at the 2015 People's Climate March in New York City. OVEC had this photo up on our website's homepage when Paula announced she was running for the U.S. Senate. Due to 501-c-3 campaign laws, we took down the photo.*

Blankenship, living in Las Vegas, entered the race while still on parole after serving one year in prison on charges related to the April 2010 Upper Big Branch Mine explosion that killed 29 men.

E&E News reported, "Pugilistic ex-coal boss Don Blankenship wants to burn more coal to save the Earth from cooling, thinks some climate scientists should get straitjackets and insists that environmentalists are hurting the environment."

Late-night comedy shows had a field day with the racist and bizarre ads Blankenship ran for himself.

Outside super PACs also spent loads of money on ads both for and against Blankenship—the PACs favoring Democrats were *for* Blankenship and those favoring Republicans were *against* him. Obviously, leaders of both parties figured Blankenship could not beat Manchin this November.

Some of the ads were sickeningly ironic. An April 15 Politico article reports:

The Republican establishment has launched an emergency intervention in the West Virginia Senate primary aimed at stopping recently imprisoned coal baron Don Blankenship from winning the party's nomination.

Late last week, a newly formed super PAC generically dubbed the "Mountain Families PAC" began airing TV ads targeting Blankenship, who spent one year behind bars following a deadly 2010 explosion at his Upper Big Branch Mine. The national party isn't promoting its role in the group, but its fingerprints are all over it.

The 30-second commercials, which the

group is spending nearly \$700,000 to air, accuse Blankenship's company of contaminating drinking water by pumping "toxic coal slurry," even as the multimillionaire installed a piping system that pumped clean water to his mansion.

"Isn't there enough toxic sludge in Washington?" the narrator intones.

For groups like ours, with the help of volunteers like Paula and Chuck and so many others, that have spent years trying to get politicians to pay attention so that we could get some relief for people poisoned by toxic coal sludge, this sudden self-serving interest in the issue is maddening.

Now, Manchin and Morrissey face off for Manchin's Senate seat in the general election. During the upcoming attack ads and debates, we doubt that we will hear any mention again of toxic coal slurry harming human health, let alone plans to address the coal industry's threats to human health and the planet.

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Thank you, Paula Jean Swearengin, for an amazing effort that truly is an inspiration to people across the nation who are fed up with politics as usual. 🍷

***For Swearengin to confront him [Manchin], one West Virginia operative recently told Vice, is "like David versus Goliath, if David didn't have a sling or a rock."***

**– Rolling Stone**

# The Shale Gas Revolution—the Upside and the Downside

by Mary Wildfire

Our area is in the heart of the “shale gas revolution,” in which major new quantities of gas are being recovered from deep formations—here, the Marcellus and Utica shales—thus transforming our economy. Already these two shale plays are providing something like a third of the natural gas in the U.S., and are expected to produce an increasing share in the coming decades.

Besides the natural gas (methane), a component referred to as “natural gas liquids” or NGL, (ethane, propane, butane and more), can also be sent to cracker plants that break it into smaller components, which then can go to factories to produce plastic, fertilizer, and other chemicals. Hence the plans to build a giant new complex of pipelines, storage caverns, cracker plants, and chemical and plastics plants, all along the Ohio River from Southwest Pennsylvania to Huntington. Industry’s latest name for this complex is the Appalachian Storage and Trading Hub.

Given the ubiquitous, breathless, and one-sided coverage in many area newspapers, you really don’t



*100 million cubic feet of methane spewed into the atmosphere for 19 days after a February 15 explosion at an XTO Energy fracking well pad in Belmont County, Ohio. Photo from a screen grab of Ohio State Highway Patrol video. Although explosive leaks are disastrous, steady methane leaks along the fracked-gas supply chain mean fracked gas is not a climate-friendly energy source.*

need me to detail the upside, but I’ll summarize the hype: The supply is plentiful, each component of this will provide jobs, most of which pay well, and it will also mean money in the coffers of local governments. The reality, on the other hand, is detailed below:

The supply is not as abundant as is often claimed, according to geologist David Hughes in his latest report *Shale Gas Reality Check*, in which he painstakingly goes through the data, including data from each individual well, in each shale gas “play” and finds that the projections of the EIA (Energy Information Administration of the U.S. Energy Department) vary from moderately optimistic to extremely optimistic (both Marcellus and Utica are rated extremely optimistic).

Although many jobs seem to be available in drilling and fracking and building pipelines, locals report that they see virtually exclusively out-of-state license plates on vehicles parked by these job sites. And the jobs are dangerous, both to life and limb and to health. Some, like pipeline construction, are short-term. Furthermore, we’d see many more jobs if we invested in renewable energy or energy efficiency (which may be one reason we don’t see that investment—the suits like to talk about employment when they’re addressing the public, trying to get us to accept destructive industries...but get them behind closed doors and those jobs are “labor costs”).

As for the money in local coffers, I’m sure the coal industry put money in county and state coffers,

**Have you thought about your legacy?**

Are you looking for a long-term way to make a meaningful difference in the movement to build a cleaner energy future?

Please consider making a planned gift to OVEC today. Planned giving options include:

- Gifts of stocks and bonds.
- Including OVEC as a beneficiary in your life insurance policy.
- Including OVEC in your will.

Tax benefits apply to each of these options. Please contact your attorney or a financial advisor for more info, or go to [lalwv.org](http://lalwv.org).





*Above: A flare at a well pad in northcentral West Virginia. Flyover thanks to SouthWings.org. People living near infrackstructure know all too well the downsides of the shale gas "revolution."*

but they also got away with lobbying endlessly to have taxes and fees reduced, as well as with simply not paying property taxes.

The downsides of the shale gas revolution are obvious to those living near fracking sites, gas power plants, pipelines, compressor stations, crackers, and chemical plants. They include contaminated water; sick family members and livestock; air, noise, and light pollution; heavy traffic; road damage; plunging property values; forest destruction; creek pollution; loss of land from eminent domain; and fear of living right next to a well pad or a monster pipeline (these things do sometimes catch fire or explode, or leak), along with the sheer ugliness of industrial zone development in what used to be quiet and peaceful rural settings.

Landowners suspect that the “public need” that justifies the eminent domain taking of their land is really the companies’ need to make better profits by exporting the gas—and exports are way up.

On top of all the local problems is the issue of climate change. Although, indeed, burning gas produces less carbon dioxide than burning coal, the leaks of methane all along the supply route from the wells to the plant can actually make gas worse in the climate-impacts category than coal, because methane is a much more potent greenhouse gas.

Natural gas is *not* a bridge to clean energy; it’s a detour away from it—a delay we really can’t afford. It causes all kinds of local harm, in return for some jobs that are apparently going mostly to people from far away. Although having those guests here for a while does mean income for owners of restaurants and motels and campgrounds, it has also brought a spike in crime rates and spending for infrastructure likely to

be abandoned when the boom is over.

Instead of sticking stubbornly to the destructive fossil fuel economy, we could be investing in a clean energy future, like so many other places are doing. A better economic vision would include investing in the production and installation of solar and windmills, in geothermal power and microhydro, in storage technologies, in energy efficiency (of buildings and water heating and appliances and vehicles), in farming techniques that are healthier for the workers and the consumers and that sequester carbon, in alternatives to the plastic that’s creating such a threat to sea life.

Investing in a transition would put many more people to work, in safer jobs that don’t poison their neighbors. And we need to do it yesterday. Unfortunately, the handful of wealthy sociopaths determined to extract the last possible profits from their fossil fuel holdings have been able to use the power of their wealth to block any such transition. They know how to grease Congress, legislatures, and the media. A still relatively small group is fully aware of this critical struggle. If you haven’t joined us yet—now’s the time!

See [ohvec.org/the-shale-gas-revolution/](http://ohvec.org/the-shale-gas-revolution/) for the full version of this article. 🍌

**Congratulations to our excellent allies at SouthWings.** The group received the Conservation Organization of the Year award at the 54th Annual Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards Banquet hosted by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation and the National Wildlife Federation.

Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
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Huntington WV 25773-6753

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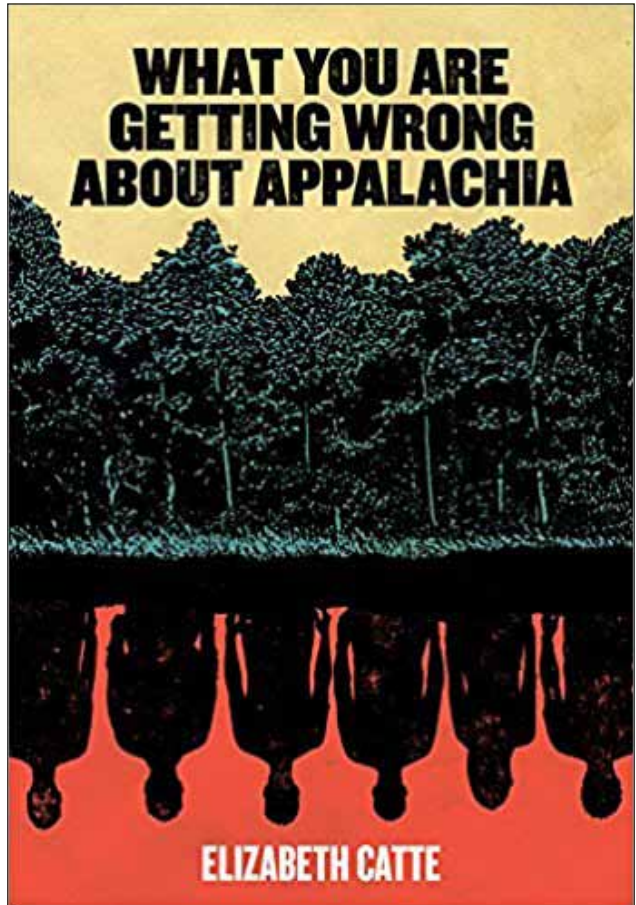
# Save the Date: September 15 is OVEC's Annual Meeting and Treehuggers' Ball

Please mark your calendars now and save September 15 for OVEC's annual meeting and Treehuggers' Ball all-in-one-combo super spectacular event!

Our keynote speaker will be Dr. Elizabeth Catte, author of What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia.

The tentative time for the entire event, which will take place upstairs at the Bahnhof restaurant on the corner of 7th Avenue and 8th St in Huntington, WV, is from 3:00 to 10:00 p.m.

We'll have several musicians and bands, plenty of dancing, good food, great friends, and an all-around most excellent day.



Check the September 15 entry at [ohvec.org/calendar](http://ohvec.org/calendar) for updates. Want to help with the event? Contact OVEC at [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org).

**Wiley Cash** @WileyCash  
I spoke at the Southern Labor Studies Assoc. conference today in Athens GA & said @elizabethcatte's WHAT YOU ARE GETTING WRONG ABOUT APPALACHIA is the best book I've read this year & you would've thought the Holy Ghost had swept thru the room with all the Amens & hand waving.  
4:40 PM - 18 May 2018  
12 Retweets 85 Likes