



Winds of Change

Supporting Organized Voices and Empowered Communities Since 1987

Huntington, WV

OVEC

www.ohvec.org

People? Yes! Petro Chem? No!



On April 9, about 50 people representing more than a dozen grassroots groups from West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania gathered to show our opposition to the Appalachian Storage and Trading Hub, a petrochemical mega-complex build-out proposed for the Ohio and Kanawha river valleys.

We gathered outside the Marcellus and Manufacturing Development Conference, hosted by the West Virginia Manufacturers Association.

The Dominion Post, the Morgantown newspaper, reported on its front page:

As the gas industry celebrated its progress inside the Marriott at Waterfront Place, outside by the rail-trail, close to 40 people assembled to protest the expansion of the plastics industry.

They called themselves People Over Petro, and the three-hour protest was coordinated by the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition.

OVEC Project Coordinator Dustin White

told the group, "Out-of-state and out-of-country companies come to capitalize on West Virginia's people. They minimize the health impacts, such as cancers and neurodevelopmental defects."

The Hub was the main topic, both inside the conference and outside at our press conference and protest.

"Inside the Marriott are people who are thinking only about the money and the profits and not giving one minute to what is going to happen to our air and water," said BJ McManama, with the Indigenous Environmental Network.

Ashley Funk, a community organizer for Mountain Watershed Association, said, "We are standing together to show the shale gas and petrochemical industries that, unlike the plastics from which they want to profit, our communities are not disposable."

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Above: A scene from the People Over Petro Press conference, with OVEC's Dustin White at left, speaking. In center, looking his way, is OVEC volunteer Mary Wildfire. On the front page, left to right: Ashley Funk, Erica Jackson, and Alex Cole.

All photos of this event are courtesy of various participants.

We Demand Better than Toxic State

A version of this op-ed by OVEC's Dustin White ran March 17 in the Huntington Herald Dispatch.

Like many readers of this paper, I love West Virginia. I love our forests, mountains, and streams. I love the people. I've lived my entire life here and would hate the idea of calling any other place home. But I'm finding it increasingly hard to physically live here, and not just for social or economic reasons. I mean biologically. It seems like every time I turn around, there is some kind of assault on the basic things we need for life—our air and water.

It's simple: We need clean water and air to live. Our Mountain State should have some of the cleanest air and water in the nation. But the powers-that-be allow those most vital resources to be destroyed for profit. What's worse is that the majority of our elected officials seem to promote the idea of *more* toxins in our lives.

This past legislative session, legislators shot down the WV Department of Environmental Protection's recommendation for updating human health protections for our water quality. The DEP's

recommendation was based on that of the federal Environmental Protection Agency. This update would have brought our standards up from 1980's science criteria to those of 2015. Water quality experts,

citizens, and the DEP urged the legislature to implement the updates.

Instead, most legislators listened to the wishes of the WV Manufacturers Association, which had earlier told the joint rule-making review committee that because West Virginians are heavier than people in other states, we can tolerate more pollution, and because we drink less water, we are less exposed to pollutants in the water!

This just isn't an isolated incident. The WV

Legislature has been siding with industry to weaken or eliminate water and air quality standards for years, so many communities in West Virginia are being poisoned in some way, like Prenter in Boone

"We deserve better. And it will get better only if we demand better. If you love West Virginia like I do, stand up! Demand that clean air and water take priority over industry wants. Demand jobs of which we can be proud and that don't destroy our health or rely on boom and bust industries. Let's finally put people before profit. I'm tired of living in a toxic state. Aren't you?"

- Dustin White

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ROAR Ya'll

by Alex Cole

Politicians, multi-national corporations, and foreign investors may want to turn our region into a mega-petrochemical “hub” but we are here to ROAR: “No way!”

We are here to Reimagine Our Appalachian Region. This is where we—and that includes you!—both envision and actually push for the kind of economic development in the Ohio River Valley that brings about a just and sustainable future.

Through a series of workshops this spring and summer, we are showcasing what OVEC members and supporters are already up to in terms of actively creating this better future for our Mountain State.

At our first ROAR session, I spoke with folks about my experience living off the grid, living with less, and practicing permaculture.

Though the problems we face are daunting and systemic, these hills and hollers are the perfect place to achieve healthy, sustainable, and vibrant communities.

When I envision an ideal future for our state and region, it looks a lot like our past. Small, relatively self-sufficient farms spread out evenly along streams and across ridges. Country stores within



Alex's off-grid cabin. Photo by Alex.

walking distance of each other. Interconnected, vital communities that come together and help when things get tough or just when something needs to be done.

It sounds idealistic, I know, but we here are a lot closer to that ideal than people in many other places. I've seen that, too.

I left for Ohio University when I was 18; it wasn't that far, but I was getting out of West Virginia and I wasn't looking back.

I had a different goal then. Get a degree, move to some city, get a job, buy a house in the suburbs, have 2.5 kids, and commute to work every day—all in the hopes that someday I could retire and move back home. The teachers and counselors agreed that it was the path forward if you were smart. They coached the accents out of us and sent us out the door never to come back.

But when I got to Athens, I saw something else. I met the 2.5 kids from the suburbs—disheartened and disillusioned, desperate for an identity, and enthralled by mine.

Some were the descendants of Appalachian refugees from decades past. They hung on every little hint of information they could glean from me about their mythical homeland. A place full of fictional characters, unimaginable beasts, strange music, and places they had only heard of in bedtime stories told by their parents and grandparents.

I felt stuck in between. I studied history initially. I didn't know which direction was worth heading in. But, when I took a class in environmental geography, I knew for sure.

I learned about something called “permaculture.” The professors taught it as if it were something new

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Lawsuit Over Endangered Species, Coal Mining amid Political Foul Play

In May, several groups joined together to file a formal notice of intent to sue the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the state of West Virginia for failing to protect endangered species from coal mining.



OVEC joined the Center for Biological Diversity, Appalachian Mountain Advocates, Sierra Club West Virginia Chapter, and West Virginia Highlands Conservancy in filing the notice of intent to sue.

We took this action after the Center used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain documents that show the Trump administration is circumventing the Endangered Species Act and putting species at risk of extinction.

“The Trump administration is putting coal-industry profits ahead of people and wildlife in Appalachia whose health is threatened daily by pollution,” says Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the Center. “Political appointees interfered to undermine endangered species safeguards, so we’re relying on the courts to protect endangered animals and the creeks where they live.”



The records show officials in West Virginia appealed to the Trump administration for shortcuts for protections for the Guyandotte River and Big Sandy crayfish, which the officials claimed were harming the coal industry.

In response, Vincent DeVito, a former high-level Trump official in the U.S. Department of the Interior, did an end run around the Fish and Wildlife Service. DeVito signed a guidance document presented to him by the WV Division of Mining limiting protections for the crayfish.

The state then issued mining permits in crayfish habitat. Those permits blindsided Service officials who were actively developing their own guidance to protect the crayfish. Today’s notice challenges the ongoing reliance on a slightly modified version of the state’s guidance.

The public records reveal extensive efforts by Trump administration appointees to prevent the Fish and Wildlife Service from following science and doing what is needed to protect the crayfish.

Landon Davis is a former coal lobbyist and Trump campaign field director now serving as a



policy advisor within the Department of the Interior’s OSM. Davis contacted Aurelia Skipwith, the Fish and Wildlife deputy assistant secretary and current nominee to lead the Service, asking her to expedite mining permits in endangered species habitat. In turn, Skipwith wrote to Greg Sheehan, then director of the Service, saying the regional office was “overstepping their bounds” by reviewing mining documents to protect the crayfish.

Our filing also challenges the ongoing reliance on a biological opinion from 1996 that was meant to protect endangered species from coal mining nationwide but had long failed to do so and was invalidated by the Obama administration. That invalidated biological opinion was reinstated in April 2017 by OSM.

Numerous scientific studies have linked coal mining in Appalachia to declines in birds, fish, salamanders, crayfish, insects, and freshwater mussels. Primarily because of coal mining, only two populations of the Guyandotte River crayfish survive.

Mining also threatens nearby communities with air and water pollution and the risk of flooding. More than 20 peer-reviewed scientific studies have now linked mining pollution in Appalachia to health problems, including increased risks of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and birth defects.



Be sure to read “How the West Virginia coal industry changed federal endangered species policy” by Juliet Eilperin, which ran in the Washington Post on May 10. (See <https://wapo.st/2E1mefl>.)

It illustrates the tragic dichotomy in the fact that, even as the United Nations warns that “human activities have pushed one-eighth of the world’s species to extinction,” the Trump administration is “reshaping the nation’s landscape in ways that could harm threatened species.”

The article notes that Davis also weighed in on the abrupt cancellation of the study on the effects of mountaintop removal on human health (see related story on opposite page), about which Davis reportedly said that science was a “Democrat thing.”

Another official called out in the article is WV DEP head Austin Caperton, also a “former” coal lobbyist.



Congressional Hearing on MTR

In March, our friends at Earthjustice and Appalachian Voices reached out to us to see who we would recommend for testifying before Congress on April 9, when the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, would hold a hearing on the public health impacts of mountaintop removal coal mining. We are happy to say that one of the OVEC members we recommended was among those who ended up testifying.

Donna Branham's powerful words were quoted in several news stories on the hearing. You can find a link to her entire testimony (in which she gives a shout-out to OVEC), as well as that of the other witnesses, at bit.ly/2KRJ8fp.

In a story carried on multiple outlets, Ohio Valley ReSource reporter Jeff Young wrote:

Late in the Obama administration, the National Academy of Sciences launched a study into the health effects for communities near mountaintop removal coal mines.

Donna Branham of Lenore, West Virginia, was among the many residents with questions and concerns about effects on air and water quality. She was hopeful the National Academy study would bring some answers. But in the summer of 2017 the Trump administration's Interior Department abruptly cancelled funding and ordered the National Academy to halt the study.

"We felt abandoned, we felt as if our lives didn't matter," Branham told lawmakers. Branham was one of four witnesses from Kentucky and West Virginia who told members of the House Natural Resources Committee that the National Academy study should continue. Until such a study is complete, they argued, regulators should place a moratorium on mountaintop removal mining.

Former coal miner Carl Shoupe of Benham, Kentucky, organizes for the citizens' action group Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. He said mining also threatens cultural and natural areas that could be part of the region's new economy.



Left to right: Donna Branham, Carl Shoupe, Michael McCawley, PhD, and a coal lobbyist.
Photo courtesy Kentuckians For The Commonwealth.

"As we speak, a coal company is seeking a permit to strip mine the ridge behind my home," Shoupe said. "They plan to go up the entire valley."

Arizona Rep. Raul Grijalva, the Arizona Democrat who chairs the committee, said in an interview with the ReSource that the Interior Department had declined to answer requests for information

and declined to send a representative to answer lawmakers' questions. Grijalva said his committee is considering using its subpoena power to get documents relevant to the department's decision to cancel the National Academy study.

WVU scientist Dr. Michael McCawley also testified. He noted that previous studies have found higher rates of disease in MTR areas and exposure assessments that indicate a causal—not just correlative—relationship between MTR air pollution and increased rates of chronic disease.

McCawley was glad that Congress was once again introducing the Appalachian Communities Health Emergency (ACHE) Act, which over the years has been championed by our friends at Coal River Mountain Watch. He told the committee, "This act will allow a better understanding of the effects of mountaintop removal activities—not only from the air exposure but also from the water and the mining waste that are affecting the people in these areas. The coal miners working in, and the citizens living near, mountaintop removal operations have suffered the consequences of these operations for too long."

Rep. John Yarmuth (D-KY) who first introduced the bill in 2013, said, "The federal government should not be approving mining permits until it can truthfully say to local residents that their health will not be jeopardized and their lives will not be put at risk." He has unsuccessfully pressed the issue in the past.

Under H.R. 2050, no permits for new or expanded mountaintop removal could be issued until the Department of Health and Human Services conducts a comprehensive health study that finds no threat to public health. 🍌

RECLAIM Act Is Back

The RECLAIM Act is back before Congress and now known as H.R. 2156. There's a slightly different version—S. 1232—before the Senate; Senator Joe Manchin is one of the co-sponsors. WV Interfaith Power and Light (OVEC is a founding member) is conducting a postcard writing campaign to support this legislation.

Here's why: As the coal industry has declined over the past few years, thousands of jobs have been lost; the RECLAIM Act could create more than 4,000 jobs and catalyze local economies. The reclamation funds that would be made available through this bill would clean up old (pre-SMCRA—Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977) abandoned strip mine sites and then turn those sites over to the local community to utilize in the creation of economic opportunities, such as tourism, renewable energy projects, etc.

Our communities have made great sacrifices to power this nation; the hardworking Appalachians in those communities should get to decide what they are



This active mountaintop removal site, photographed May 1, 2019, near Charleston WV, would not be part of any RECLAIM efforts, because it opened up post-SMCRA. If SMCRA were enforced, perhaps we wouldn't be in as big a mess as we are. Because history illustrates over and over that coal companies aren't too keen on obeying laws they didn't help write, our best bet is to once and for all ban mountaintop removal coal mining. Flyover courtesy SouthWings.org.

willing to work hard on to build a better economic future.

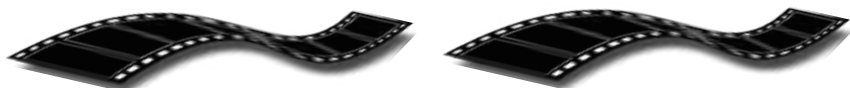
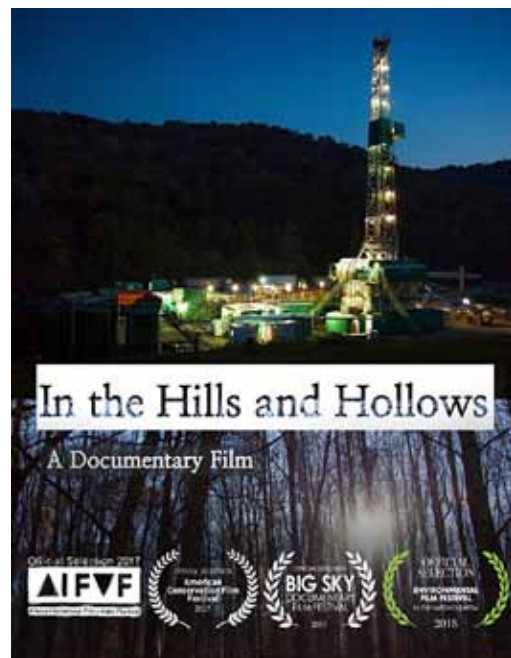
We believe Congress must pass a package of just transition measures, including the RECLAIM Act and reinstatement of the Black Lung Excise Tax with a 10-year extension. If you agree, please contact Robin at robin@ohvec.org for ideas on how to show your support for the RECLAIM Act. 🍷

In the Hills and Hollows Update

Filmmaker Keely Kernan recently reached out to let us know that her documentary *In the Hills and Hollows* has been accepted for educational distribution through New Day Films.

This is big news, and it means a much wider audience for the film! New Day Films titles have garnered an Academy Award, nine Academy Award nominations, and four Emmys. Their titles have been broadcast on PBS, HBO, and other media outlets.

Keely told us, "Thanks so much again for the endless support with this project!" The thanks are to you, Keely, for making such a powerful film that tells our stories with such clarity and compassion. See keelykernan.com/film. 🍷



New York Times Article Draws Local Ire



The Shell cracker plant under construction along the Ohio River near Beaver, PA. This huge industrial facility is one of five or more such plants that would be part of the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub. This April 2, 2019 photo courtesy of Ted Auch PhD, Great Lakes Program Coordinator, FracTracker Alliance, fractracker.org/photos. Flyover courtesy LightHawk.

On March 26, the New York Times ran an article titled “Shell Sees New Role for Former Steel Region: Plastics,” which went on about the petrochemical cracker plant under construction near Pittsburgh, PA, that would be part of the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub/mega petrochemical-plastics-pollution complex (see related story page 1).

The article did include these two short sentences: “Industry calls it a game changer,” said Dustin White, project coordinator for the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition in Huntington, W.Va. “We see it as game over.”

The article stirred up comment on assorted #NoASH e-mail listservs. For instance, Mary Wildfire sent around a note:

This piece infuriated me; it was on the level of those wvnews.com pieces, which breathlessly promote the Hub and fail to mention any downsides to the proposed petrochemical build-out of our region. There was one one-sentence quote from Dustin White toward the bottom; all the rest was industry propaganda—how deliriously happy we all are to have this brought to our benighted region. Were they (expletive deleted) PAID to run this? They should have been.

Mary turned her ire into a letter-to-the-editor and sent it off to the Times. Others on the listservs said they were sending letters, too. As far as we know, not one was published.

Here’s Mary’s:

I write in response to a March 26 article by

Keith Schneider about Shell wanting to make the Steel belt into the plastics belt. Please note that not all of us here are thrilled with this idea. To me, it is flat-out nuts to be promoting plastics. There is a growing worldwide movement to ban single-use plastics and a near-daily barrage of news about ocean gyres, dead wildlife, and Asian beaches heaped with plastic trash. There’s more science coming in on how toxic plastic is to life on Earth and how it’s also a source of greenhouse gases. Speaking of greenhouse gases, how nuts is it to be promoting something that will require more fracking and more greenhouse-gas-spewing factories? This may be a solution for the struggling gas industry, but not for the people who live here.

Yes, we need jobs, but we also need clean air, clean water, and sane economic development with a future, not more kowtowing to another destructive fossil fuel industry. We’ve had a hundred years of abuse by the coal industry; we’re not lying down for a repeat.

Hey, Mary: Winds of Change is hardly the New York Times, but at least your letter is finally published. Also, as we went to press, a different New York Times reporter had contacted us about the petrochemical complex.

So, whether they are published or not, your comments and letters are noticed by editors. When you read articles that need to be answered—answer them! Contact OVEC to join our news-tracking listserv or for tips on writing letters-to-the-editor. 🍷



At the end of the 2019 Legislative Session, Governor (In)Justice signed SB 622, a bill that allows big donors to put even more money into West Virginia elections.

WV Citizens for Clean Elections worked hard to oppose the bill. Although we didn't win that one, we fought back other measures that would have been an affront to our Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption platform.

The opposition to 622 helped raise awareness about the need for increased transparency of political spending in our elections. People are rightfully angry about SB 622 and ready to ramp up the fight for a democracy that works for everyone.

That was evident at our May 28 WVCCE coalition meeting, where people came fired up and ready to plot our campaign to carry us into 2020 and beyond. Several working groups are starting up now—there may be one of interest to you, so please reach out to OVEC (info@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246) to learn more or get involved with our WVCCE



Above: Julie Archer, at the easel, during a recent coalition meeting of WV Citizens for Clean Elections. Next time, everybody please bring your reusable water bottles!

efforts if you aren't already.

After all, the issues WVCCE addresses underlie all the issues OVEC and all the coalition partners work on. To improve social justice, environmental justice, and workers' rights, we have to have fair courts and a political system that is responsive to people, not corporations.

Thanks to Carin Schiewe from re:power (formerly Wellstone) for facilitating our meeting, along with Julie Archer and Vivian Stockman. Thanks, too, to Nick Lyell with ReThink Media for offering his insights as he attended via phone. 🍌

Knock Down the House Screening

On May 19, OVEC hosted a screening of the new documentary *Knock Down the House* at the LaBelle Theater in South Charleston.

The film follows four determined women on the campaign trail as they challenge big-money politicians in the 2018 election, so it was natural that WV Citizens for Clean Elections was among the groups that helped promote the event.

Two of the women in the film—long-time OVEC volunteer Paula Jean Swarengin and Amy Vilela from Nevada—attended the screening and answered questions about how their people-powered campaigns have made an impact, even though they didn't win their races. Director Rachel Lears also attended.

Zeynab Day with Brand New Congress moderated the Q & A session. Brand New Congress—a volunteer-led political action committee that supports candidates who want to root out corruption in politics regardless of party affiliation—supported all the women in the film. The other two women are (now Congresswoman) Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Cori Bush of Missouri.



The film shows how new leaders across the nation saying no to big money and politics as usual. It shows us that regular people have political power—and invites us to join the movement to take back our government from wealthy special interests! West Virginia has a head start on that, thanks to WV Citizens for Clean Elections and our Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption platform. E-mail info@ohvec.org for info on how you can help further strengthen our local people power.

Thanks to everyone who helped us host the event and thanks to all who came out! 🍌

Envisioning the Kind of Future We Want

by Mary Wildfire

On Saturday, May 11, about 50 people met at Wheeling Jesuit University to learn more about the downsides of fracking and the proposed Appalachian petrochemical complex—and to dream of a better future. The event was organized by FreshWater Accountability Project and Concerned Ohio River Residents. OVEC was among the participating groups.

To begin, Kathy Hipple from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis took us through the reality that the shale gas drillers are not profitable. She said they've been monitoring 30 companies, and the companies haven't had a year of positive cash flow in the

nine years they've been drilling. The few who have been cash positive are the oil majors who aren't concentrated in the shale-producing regions.

She said both the promised jobs and the tax revenue have been "hugely exaggerated" and that the jobs are temporary and often go to people from out-of-state—40 percent in the case of pipeline workers—and from 2008 to 2017 drilling jobs actually declined. Those same years saw a 15 percent increase in tax revenue, which is positive—but does it even cover the road damage, let alone the extra healthcare costs? Because most oil and gas produced in the U.S. now comes from fracked shale, this lack of profitability matters. It's a problem, but perhaps also an opportunity for a turnaround in policy.

Dustin White and Alex Cole, OVEC organizers, took the mic next to talk about what a just transition would mean, talking about the Tupelo model of community development and emphasizing that solutions come from the bottom up, not from well-meaning outsiders.

Jill Kriesky spoke for the Environmental Health Project of Southwest PA, which focuses on helping people afflicted with health problems due to fracking. They are not a research organization, but they do collect data and work with researchers. EHP handouts show the myriad health problems associated with living near a fracked gas well—and, yes, there are peer-reviewed studies on the topic. She also talked

about the mental and social stress involved and the fact that all these are costs externalized by the industry—that means, for instance, pollution in our communities.

The Fair Shake Environmental Legal Services represents mostly low-income

individuals in OH, PA, and WV.

Megan Hunter said that by the time a community group learns about a particular threat, the people behind it have been working on it for years and have their experts and their data all lined up. She talked about the possibility of using the Clean Water Act: You must be able to show a use for the water body before the harm was done, so gathering data in advance is a good idea. She also mentioned FLIR cameras, which can show methane emissions not visible to the eye. Earthworks has one and it can be useful in getting agencies (though they're all understaffed) to pay attention to complaints and in lawsuits.

Next, we heard from Grow Ohio Valley. Its director Danny Swan spoke about the loss of nutrients when produce isn't fresh and when it's grown on impoverished soil. He focused mostly on an outstanding set of projects centered on Wheeling. The objective is to achieve food sovereignty in the area, thus helping family farmers thrive and move

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Rural West Virginia photo by Alex Cole

OVEC in Action



Above: Alex Cole and Maryanne Graham at Marshall U Earth Day. Middle: The crowd at the Earth Day table. Bottom: Left, Randi Pokladnik, right, Mary Wildfire reporting on a breakout session at an event in Wheeling. See story page 9.
All photos on these pages by assorted event attendees.



Above: Top, left: Board member Steven Perry at the Solar Congress in Charleston, which was organized by Solar United Neighbors of West Virginia. OVEC was one of the event sponsors. See related story on page 19. Top, right: Board member Pam Nixon at that same event.

Next: The crowd attending the Solar Congress included staff member Robin Blakeman at far right of shot. Photo at the park: WV Women's March, Fourpole Creek Watershed Association and OVEC organized an Earth Day cleanup at Harris Riverfront Park in Huntington. Participants included at right, Mark Connelly and next to him, Bobby Lee Messer. Bottom photo: Robin Blakeman speaking on the subjects of water justice and just transition in the Ohio River Valley at the National Council of Churches' Ecumenical Advocacy Days in D.C. With the support of our allies at Creation Justice Ministries, Robin was invited to speak at this annual gathering of hundreds of faith community leaders from across the country.





Top photo: The crowd included many OVEC members at the Green New Deal town hall in Spencer; OVEC members were central to the planning of this event. See story on page 19.

Above: board members Mike Sullivan and Will Edwards at the OVEC table at Sustainability Fest at the Wild Ramp. Next: Electric vehicles were part of the display at that event. Thanks to everyone who volunteered and who turned out for the events featured on these pages. April and May were busy outreach months. We hope to see you out and about at upcoming events over the summer! Check our online calendar for updates.

Middle photo: In the foreground, in the lobby of the LaBelle Theater, Maryanne Graham at the check-in table for the special screening of *Knock Down the House*. See story on page 8.

Bottom photo: OVEC is a member organization of the ORSANCO Watershed Organizations Advisory Committee. We've been working with other member groups to assure strong turnout at recent ORSANCO pollution control standards public hearings, such as this one, where OVEC volunteer Randi Pokladnik is delivering comments. You can read her comments on our blog. There were a total of 6,000 public comments on the last pollution control standards proposal; we hope to equal or surpass that number now. Citizens' comments have been overwhelmingly in favor of keeping and enforcing the current pollution control standards throughout the Ohio River watershed. We hope the ORSANCO Commission will hear loud and clear that citizens of the Ohio River Valley region want strong, enforced standards. Stay vigilant for our water! Contact robin@ohvec.org for more info.

Bill Hughes: Miss Me, But Let Me Go

The staff and board of OVEC join so many others in extending our deepest condolences to the family of Bill Hughes.

On March 25, Bill Hughes left this world. Bill had shared the news of his failing health with his extended activist family, but the news still came as a shock.

Bill's wife Marianne let us know: "He spent the last few weeks perusing all the cards of thoughts and prayers and well wishes from all the environmental community. These were his sustenance."

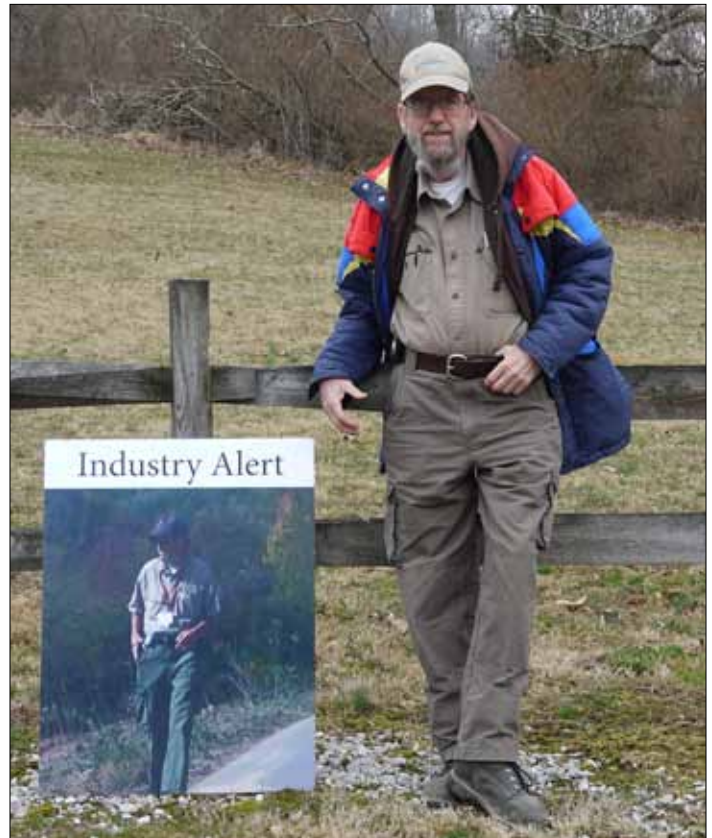
Bill dedicated his retirement years to learning all about fracking-related activities and then sharing his knowledge with his neighbors, regulators, scientists, students, filmmakers, journalists, and activists.

"I will sorely miss Bill and his sense of humor," says Vivian Stockman, OVEC's executive director. "His humor helped diffuse tense situations. Several times, for instance, as we were standing on a public road, taking photos of a fracking well pad or the installation of large-diameter pipelines or some gas-processing facility, almost invariably, a worker from the site would come up and say, 'Can I help you?' Bill would reply something along the lines of, 'Yes. My lawn needs mowed.'"

For about a decade, Bill documented the activities of shale gas operators near his home in Wetzel County, West Virginia. An influx of huge vehicles, driven by fellows who apparently had little knowledge of local winding country roads, first alerted him to the fracking invasion and moved him to action. Both Bill and his wife Marianne had grave concerns for the safety of their grandchildren and all children on those roads, once the fracking trucks started taking over. Bill called the traffic jams created by fracking-related vehicles "cluster trucks."

Bill's documentation of the fracking invasion included deep research and benefited from his longtime role on the local solid waste authority. He was perhaps the first person to raise the alarm over the huge volumes of fracking-related radioactive waste coming into local landfills not designed for this type of waste.

Bill presented his photos and PowerPoint essays at dozens of events. He hosted scores of ground tours to show firsthand, to anyone interested, assorted



You know your watchdog work is getting noticed when you walk into a room at the WV State Capitol, soon after a committee meeting on issues facing the oil and gas industry (you know, pesky things like pollution regulation), and find that industry lobbyists left behind an "Industry Alert" poster with your photo on it! That's what happened to Bill. He helped the industry clean up one of its messes by removing the abandoned poster from its easel.

fracking-related activities and their impacts on local communities and the environment. He was also keen to show them the solar panels that powered his home.

Bill and Marianne had recently purchased an electric vehicle (EV), and he charged it with those solar panels. He shared his passion for EVs with OVEC Administrative Director Maryanne Graham, who also owns an EV. In their last email exchange, displaying that sense of humor, Bill wrote, "BTW we now have about 2,000 miles on the Chevy Bolt and we still drive right by those gasoline stores. I have been told that they still make people pay for that stuff. How historic is that?"

Bill has left copies of his thousands of photos to both OVEC and the FracTracker. Many of Bill's photos and PowerPoints are already housed on OVEC's website, ohvec.org.

In 2016, the WV Department of Environmental Protection awarded Bill the agency's Spirit of Environmental Protection Award.

DEP said, "Mr. Hughes exemplifies what it means to be an engaged citizen, and his commitment to

The below is a wide angle composite photo of a
Halliburton Hydraulic Fracturing Project
 in process. Given the shallow angle viewpoint,
 not all equipment is clearly visible nor is all of it numbered..



ITEM	NAME	ITEM	NAME	ITEM	NAME	ITEM	NAME
1	Sand Kings	2	Frack Pumps	3	Frack Tanks	4	Hydrochloric Acid
5	Sand Cans	6	Chemical totes	7	Diesel Fuel	8	Chem. tanker
9	Portable Crane	10	Man lift	11	Storage trailer	12	Wire-line control
13	Command Center	14	Blender-mixer	15	Sand Castle	16	Well heads
17	Portable office	18	Pipe manifold	19	Berm	20	Mobile equip

At left and below, slides from Bill's numerous and well-researched PowerPoints that document the frack attack on Wetzel and surrounding counties. Bill knew what was going on at every stage of fracking-related activity, and he sought to educate as many people as he could.

the location in one of the photos was very near to where he once crashed his plane into the Ohio River.

Keely Kernan:

In the making of (the documentary) In the Hills and Hollows, I had the privilege to spend countless hours with Bill at his home, driving around the

environmental protection is an inspiration to many. He dedicates countless hours at great personal expense each year to public education and community involvement."

In 2018, OVEC awarded Bill its Laura Forman Passion for Justice Award, our highest honor.

"I know Bill has ignited his own passion for justice in many a person he touched," Vivian says. "I think many will strive to honor his memory and show our gratitude for his work by keeping that passion alive in our own hearts."

We posted a remembrance of Bill on our blog. Please take a moment to post your own thoughts. Here are some snippets of a few of the comments already posted:

Chuck Wyrostok: *I first met Bill (with his yellow car and yellow shirt) many years ago at Cedar Lakes. Within seconds, he made me laugh out loud. He generously taught at Sierra Club's Marcellus Academy and always downplayed his part in the fight for justice and decency. He was one of the most decent people I've ever had the privilege of meeting.*

Leatra Harper: *Bill is one of the early responders to recognize the true dangers of fracking and its waste. We here in Ohio will never forget him. Somehow, during his own personal suffering, he was able to rise above that to tell the truth to protect communities.*

Jody Mohr: *I'll never forget being at Bill and Marianne's to prepare for a presentation. While looking at pictures to include, Bill casually mentioned*

rural countryside, and walking through the forest as he educated me on the impacts of natural gas in his community. Bill and his wife Marianne Hughes became like second parents while I was working on the film; their support and work towards advocating for their community I will always deeply admire and appreciate.

Bill Sohonage: *Bill was a hilarious and powerful life force fighting for environmental protection and justice for our planet and its people. His abstract sense of humor made his advocacy even more powerful.*

The family has requested donations in Bill's memory be sent to OVEC, PO Box 6753, Huntington, WV 25773, or ohvec.org.



~ Miss me a little, but not too long,
 and not with your head bowed low. ~

People Over Petro

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The end products of the Hub would be plastics, and its feedstock would come from an increase in regional fracking, which is already wreaking havoc in some north-central West Virginia counties.

The infrastructure related to the Hub would stretch along more than 400 miles of the Ohio and Kanawha rivers and reach into 50 counties in West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky.

It would include underground storage caverns for volatile natural gas liquids, six major pipelines (new pipelines in the region have already exploded, resulting in destroyed buildings—including a home—property damage, livestock deaths, and evacuations), thousands of miles of feeder pipelines, and huge polluting factories, including fractionators and cracker plants, like the one being built in Beaver County, PA.

“It is of utmost importance that people see these current and proposed petrochemical projects in Appalachia for what they are: a scheme that the oil and gas companies are using to bail themselves out of debt. Appalachia has been exploited enough. Every stage of the life cycle of plastic is toxic and harmful to human health and the environment—from the extraction of the natural gas liquids to the manufacture and use of the products to the disposal of them. The tide needs to shift to alternatives to plastic, rather than creating more,” said Bev Reed from Bridgeport, OH. She lives near the site of one component of the Hub, the planned PTTG ethane cracker plant.

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 as a beneficiary 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**.

Meanwhile, On the Inside

What went on inside the conference? This DeSmog blog headline sums it up: **‘Virtually No Risk of Drilling Restrictions,’ West Virginia Official Tells Fracking-Reliant Petrochemical Industry**. Read the article at bit.ly/2XwoWkN; there, embedded in the article, you’ll find a link to video of Dustin White’s speech outside the conference, which has been viewed more than 2,700 times.

Participants in the protest worried about the human health aspects of the Hub. They spoke about the warnings they are receiving from their allies who live in the petrochemical regions of Louisiana and Texas known as “Cancer Alley” and cited the recent petrochemical fires near Houston as reason enough to question the proposed Hub. They talked about Bayou Corne sinkhole, an ongoing incident in Assumption Parish, LA, where residents who had been living near a collapsing storage cavern operated by Texas Brine Company and owned by Occidental Petroleum have been evacuated.

Due to the direct human health impacts and the potential for deadly and costly disasters, participants in today’s protest questioned the wisdom of government loans and tax breaks aimed at facilitating the construction of components of the Hub. Given the likelihood of a dramatic increase in regional greenhouse gas emissions from Hub-related infrastructure, participants also questioned the sanity of the Hub.

“It’s nuts for our state to bow down to another round of abuse from fossil fuel corporations,” Dustin also told the crowd. “The ASH scheme is an unimaginative regression to 1950s era economic development. Why can’t we have real innovation? Development focused on tourism and cottage industries could allow our area to be part of real progress, toward a world we’d want our grandchildren to live in.”

Groups involved in the planning of the event included OVEC, Concerned Ohio River Residents, Indigenous Environmental Network, Sierra Club WV, Sierra Club OH, Center for Coalfield Justice, Breathe Project, Mountain Watershed Association, and Climate Reality Project: Pittsburgh. 🍌

WVMA: West Virginians Can Handle More Cancer-Causing Pollution

Folks gathered for the People Over Petro event weren't solely there to demand a better future than a petrochemical plastic Potemkin village. They wanted to also call out the WV Manufacturer's Association for its repugnant remarks to WV legislators in regards to long-overdue updates to health protections in the state's water quality standards.

As the Beckley Register Herald reported (bit.ly/2ZqKqS8): "The federal EPA allows states to consider state-specific information when developing the standards. The Manufacturers Association, which has commissioned an analysis of state-specific information to present to the DEP, argues that West Virginians drink less water, which is one of the ways people are exposed to the pollutants. It also argues that West Virginians are heavier than people in other states. The EPA considers heavier bodies able to handle more pollution."

In a must-read March 19 Charleston Gazette Mail op-ed titled "Your mama's so fat she can drink WV water (bit.ly/2viCLao), story-teller Bil Lepp opined:

The gross generalization that all West Virginians are heavy enough to consume more



Above, Delegate Danielle Walker (D - Monongalia), spoke at the press conference. She said:

I don't get big money. I don't count my pennies; I count my priorities and that's clean air and clean water, so our children can stay in this state. We have a great foundation here, but we keep selling ourselves short to big companies. No more. We matter. Our water matters.

It doesn't matter if I'm a few extra pounds over.

I matter and I drink water. I stand before you as an advocate, an activist, and a mother. What mother would not protect her children and her community? You say our children are our future—respect them. We have students here in West Virginia; we have children here; we have pets here. They matter. So I tell you, take these (petrochemical) plants elsewhere because we will not be hushed, we will not be silent, and we will not be moved.

Morgantown City Council member Berry Wendell also spoke, noting that the council had voted to stick with the Paris Climate Accord and is actively taking steps to honor it. He reminded participants of the importance of voting and assured the crowd that the city council supported us.

chemicals is absurd. We do have an obesity problem in West Virginia, but when the W.Va. Manufacturers Association makes this claim, they obviously mean adults are heavy enough to consume more cancer-causing chemicals.

...Probably, they innocently forgot that there are babies and small children in West Virginia.

...Another brilliant argument reportedly made by the West Virginia Manufacturers Association is that the amount of cancer-causing chemicals in West Virginia waterways can be increased because West Virginians don't drink as much water as folks in other states.

Let us take a sober moment to use our heavy brains to ponder why West Virginians don't drink the water. Could it be that we don't drink water because the West Virginia Manufacturers Association has previously persuaded the state government to allow companies to dump cancer-causing chemicals in our waterways?

...Our streams are toxic because manufacturers dump chemicals into our drinking water and then use the excuse that folks don't drink the poisoned water to justify putting more chemicals in the water.

Do not for one second think the West Virginia Manufacturers Association cares about anything but making more money. This blatant tactic to

continued on next page

WVMA's Toxic Rhetoric

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use our ill-health to justify increasing our risk of cancer is malicious. Any state representative who is swayed by the argument that our heft will protect us from cancer is in no way protecting our state, its children, or your mama.

The mind-bending audacity of the WVMA's comments irked many folks. OVEC member and chemist Randi Pokladnik sent a letter-to-the-editor that ran in the Wheeling News-Register. Read a version of Randi's letter below. 🍌

Obesogens in WV Waters

by Randi Pokladnik

During a late-November meeting with members of the House of Delegates and State Senate rule making committee members, Rebecca McPhail, president of the West Virginia Manufacturers Association, questioned the necessity of lowering the amounts of harmful pollutants in the state's waters, saying that they (the WVMA) wanted the DEP to consider that West Virginians drink less water, eat less fish, and are heavier than the national average.

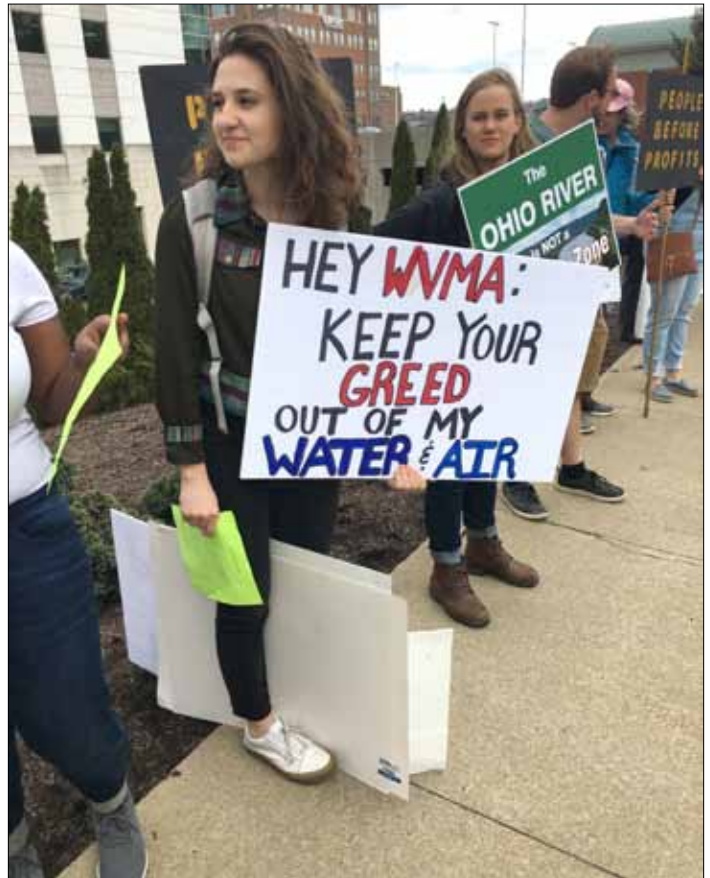
Ironically, several peer reviewed studies have found that exposure to toxic chemicals (such as C-8) in water has been shown to affect obesity. These compounds, known as obesogens, can accumulate in body fat, where they compromise fertility, affect the endocrine system, and promote reactive weight gain and obesity.

West Virginians are caught in a positive feedback loop. Exposure to more and more toxins from contaminated water increases weight and increases the toxins levels in their bodies. Fetal exposure can result in epigenetic toxicity, resulting in reproductive issues as well as higher obesity rates as adults.

Peer-reviewed scientific studies should be used when defining water quality criteria to protect West Virginia citizens, not unsubstantiated biased opinions spoken by industry representatives. 🍌

***Stay up to date on
the latest events.***

***Check our online calendar
at ohvec.org.***



Participants at the People Over Petro event let the WVMA have it.

ROAR Ya'll

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and dynamic, but it was familiar to me. It looked a lot like the small farms I knew and loved in WV and sounded like the history I'd learned as a boy, talking to my grandparents and elderly neighbors.

It never was a way to get rich, but if you want independence and freedom, look no further.

So, it all comes down to this: It is easy to get overwhelmed looking at the big picture, but we can all take small measures to make conditions in our state better. It starts with you, in your home. We can argue on the internet all day and cite study after study, but if we don't lead by example we won't convince anyone.

I know plenty of folks are out there leading by example already. I look forward to meeting with as many of you as I can and hearing your visions and plans for a better West Virginia.

Contact me at alex@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246 if you would like to share your vision and experience for a better Appalachian region by leading one of our ROAR workshops. Check our calendar at ohvec.org for details on the next workshop. 🍌

We Demand Better than Toxic State

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County and Rawl in Mingo County, where people were poisoned by toxic coal slurry that got into their drinking water.

Some residents in Minden, in Fayette County, have been dealing with PCBs slowly killing their friends and families. The 2019 Legislature basically ignored this community's attempts to get a cancer registry bill passed. People in

Parkersburg are still dealing with the aftermath of C8 poison. It's been just over five years since 300,000 of us in nine counties were exposed to toxic MCHM in the Freedom Industries leak into the Elk River, near the intake source for West Virginia American Water.

Add in the communities dealing with polluted water from coal ash lagoons at power plants, runoff from mountaintop removal mines, and the fracking-related activity, and we have an existential crisis on our hands. It's hard to find someone in this state that hasn't been touched by some sort of toxic pollution, and it is killing people we care about.

Why do government officials bow to the desires of the corporate polluters, while ignoring the rest of us common everyday water drinkers?

The number one excuse they give us is "jobs, jobs, jobs." Although stale, that rhetoric is still effective. They use our economic hardships to manipulate us. We begin to believe that it is somehow our patriotic duty to be poisoned for "the good of the nation." We begin to believe that we can either have jobs or a clean environment, but not both. For some reason, it seems we can't be proud of where we come from and the jobs we do unless they have the potential to kill us.

The powers-that-be want us to question which is more important: a job or clean air and water. But we aren't asking the real questions. Why do we get stuck



Above: A collage of WV water photos compiled by Dustin. Some photos are OVEC's and others are courtesy of Paul Corbit Brown, Coal River Mountain Watch, and Sludge Safety.

with all the toxic jobs? Why aren't our politicians promoting jobs that don't poison our workers and communities? Why are all these wealthy outside companies coming here to make us sick? Isn't enough ever enough?

Now the latest jobs, jobs, jobs promise (your air, water, future be damned!) is a 400-plus-mile petrochemical mega-complex, the Appalachian Storage and Trading Hub, which we "need" because this area "needs" to manufacture toxic plastics, and of course, more fracking, to supply the raw materials needed for plastic. The majority of the corporations pushing this hub aren't based in the U.S.

Face it; West Virginia has become a toxic stew pot from decades of pollution built on a façade of economic benefit. The real benefit, however, is to the companies' profit margins, not to us, the people. No, we are left with the messes. And we cannot expect this new petrochemical complex to be any different.

We deserve better. It will get better only if we demand better. If you love West Virginia like I do, stand up! Demand that clean air and water take priority over industry wants. Demand jobs of which we can be proud and that don't destroy our health or rely on boom and bust industries. Let's finally put people before profit. I'm tired of living in a toxic state. Aren't you? 🌰



Future Vision

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toward regenerative practices, while also delivering fresh, healthy local food to city people, especially those living in food deserts, and keeping local food dollars in the community. They have a CSA, a couple of mini-farms on reclaimed urban land, and a new orchard, as well as a mobile farmers market that visits 20 locations like housing projects and old folks' communities. One interesting project, in partnership with Health Right, is the Pharmacy, in which patients with diabetes are given produce and cooking instructions for 15 weeks. The costs of the program are apparently more than made up for in medical savings.

The keynote speaker was Patricia DeMarco, who just published a book titled *Pathways to Our Sustainable Future*. She lives near Pittsburgh, and she spoke on how her local town hall was converted to solar and net zero energy, without raising taxes. She was passionate as she spoke about the 87 environmental protections rescinded in the last two years and the fact that a PA senator has introduced a bill every year since 2007 to close the Halliburton loophole exempting the gas industry from major environmental laws—but it never gets out of committee. She compared the \$1.3 billion in subsidies for renewables to the \$20 billion for fossil fuels and said that a just transition won't just happen—but we can make it happen.

It was then time to break into small groups, each with a map of the region, to brainstorm our visions for a better Ohio Valley. After an hour, which of course was not long enough, a spokesperson for each group presented its ideas to the general group. Some of what we envision includes ecotourism, better education, more initiatives like Grow Ohio Valley, getting more people elected who aren't tools of the fossil fuel industry, renewable energy, etc. What would you add?

We've much work to do to move these visions for the valley from ideas to actualities. Join in! Contact us at info@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246 to get involved in ROAR: Re-imagine Our Appalachian Region. 🌱



OVEC's collage of print photos from the early years of the stop mountaintop removal campaign includes a snapshot of the late journalist Peter Slavin, with camera, and the late Larry Gibson.

Remembering Peter Slavin

Peter Slavin, 77, was cycling in the northern Virginia countryside, when he was struck from behind by a vehicle on Sunday, March 24 and fatally injured. He died March 29.

OVEC extends deepest condolences to Peter's family and loved ones. Janet Keating has posted a moving remembrance of Peter on the ohvec.org blog. Search for his name there to read her memories. 🌱

Hats Off for Bobby Nelson

OVEC lost one of its great supporters and mentors when Bobby Nelson died in March at the age of 84. As a young man, Bobby studied at Marshall University, where he was a student of Dr. Ken Hechler (who was also a longtime OVEC member). After he graduated, Bobby worked for Hechler in his successful run for U.S. Congress. Bobby later ran for political office. He served in the WV House of Delegates from 1965–70 and then in the WV Senate from 1971–85. In 1985, he became mayor of Huntington.

Bobby next was a professor of political science and history at MU. He hosted a popular talk radio and often interviewed OVEC staff on the show.

We join his family members, including former board member Chuck Nelson, in celebrating Bobby's remarkable life. 🌱

Is your OVEC membership up to date? Your membership dues and donations help keep OVEC at work for our future. You can update your membership, join for the first time, and donate online at ohvec.org. Also, check out ohvec.org/kroger/ and remember to relink your card annually. Need help? Call us at 304-522-0246.

Climate Action at the Local Level

by Brenda Wilson

I woke up early one May morning to the sound of steady rain on the roof. Was this going to be a flood-style rain? I got up and checked the radar and was relieved because I figured we wouldn't have a flood event that day. But, in time, another flood will come.

Like many of us, I'm concerned about the climate crisis. Here in WV, weather events usually take the form of floods, not wildfires, droughts, or hurricanes like in other parts of the world. Because of my concern, I helped to organize the May 7 town hall in Spencer: The Green New Deal: What it is, what it isn't and what it could be.

The Green New Deal is non-binding legislation that hasn't even passed one body of the legislature yet, so it is far from a "done deal." The Green New Deal will require a lot of legislation over many years to get our society to zero (or near zero) carbon emissions in time to stop the worst effects of the climate crisis. Since the federal government is pretty much in a stalemate over climate, it seems to me that local citizens and local government will probably emerge as the drivers of change to help us through this crisis.

How could this happen? The city of Spencer could install solar panels on the roof of the municipal building. We could weatherize all buildings in town—saving money and cutting carbon pollution. We don't have much public transportation, but the Little Kanawha Bus Company could install solar panels on



Above: Folks who already have solar power at home raise their hands during a May 7 town-hall meeting about climate and government in Spencer, WV. In the center of the top photo is OVEC member Robin Wilson. Below: Robin ran for state Senate in 2014 and commissioned this cartoon as part of his campaign materials. A safe climate is the gift we are required to give to future generations.

its buildings and purchase an electric van for short trips, powered by the sun. When the question "Who already has solar?" was posed at the Green New Deal meeting, so many people raised their hands it looked like we were the solar capital of WV.

Reducing the distance that food travels to get to our plates helps reduce emissions, too. We have farmer's markets in Roane and Calhoun counties, so we can eat local food spring, summer, and fall. We have enough garden space to feed everybody. This has been proven, because we did it in the 1800s and early 1900s, when Spencer was a boomtown. All our abled-bodied citizens who have a sunny yard could raise a garden.

Making a safe climate future won't be easy, but solving hard problems helps people feel good and brings people together. In Spencer, many folks will be pushing for and taking an assortment of next steps for a climate-safe future. I am confident people worldwide are, can, and must do the same. 🍎



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We So Love Solar

In May, GreenTech Media reported that solar power should be cheaper than natural-gas-fired power almost everywhere in the world by 2023. (And, of course, if we figure in “externalized costs” i.e. pollution and the destruction of communities and climate, it already is.) Reuters reported that the U.S. now has over two million solar installations, generating enough electricity to power the equivalent of twelve million homes.

And solar is going gangbusters in WV! Thanks to Solar United Neighbors of West Virginia for recently launching the Charleston-Huntington Solar Co-op! It is open to residents of Cabell, Kanawha, Mason, Putnam, and Roane Counties, as well as nearby locations in northern Boone, Lincoln, and Wayne Counties and southern Jackson County.



Save the date for the National Solar Tour October 5–6. If your home, place of worship, non-profit, or business is already solar-powered and you would like to host a tour at your home, let us know; we can help you organize the tour. If you want to join a tour near you, be sure to check the calendar at ohvec.org for updates.

OVEC is excited to be one of the co-op partners; contact us at 304-522-0246 if you want more information, or head over to bit.ly/2w6EbW8.

Solar was part of the topic at our first ROAR workshop, held in May. Be sure to check our online calendar for info on upcoming ROAR workshops. See related story on page 3.
Find our calendar online at ohvec.org; contact us at info@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246.