



Winds of Change

Supporting Organized Voices and Empowered Communities Since 1987

Huntington, WV

OVEC

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Al Gore Talks with OVEC Volunteer Dr. Randi P

On October 11, former Vice President Al Gore said:

I'm excited to welcome Dr. Randi Pokladnik, a retired research chemist who has become a very passionate and effective environmental activist with the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition.

He said this during 24 Hours of Reality: Countdown to the Future, which took place October 10–11, hosted by The Climate Reality Project.

For 24 straight hours, Climate Reality Leader activists in 85 countries across the globe led digital presentations and discussions exploring the historic conjunction of climate change, COVID-19, and structural racism that not only threatens our lives and deepest values, but also opens the door to truly transformative change.

Vice President Gore spoke with Randi about the impacts of the fossil fuel industry on her community near Uhrichsville, OH.

In introducing Randi, he noted that her community is facing an encroachment from the expansion of the fracking industry. He said:

One of the reasons we have to accelerate this just transition to clean energy and get away from burning coal, oil, and gas, is not just that it is creating a climate crisis. It is also because, as I said, it creates other kinds of pollution.

The infrastructure associated with oil and gas—refineries, pipelines, compressors—results in the dumping of all kinds of toxic chemicals not only into the air, but also into the water.

The people who are paying the greatest price

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Black Lives Matter

There's an orange menace of putrescence who will no longer be able to occupy the White House. — Stacey Abrams

The Pivot of U.S. Politics: Racial Justice and Democracy

excerpt from an article by Calvin Cheung-Miaw; read the full article: bit.ly/3IBYJNf

The contest between multiracial democracy and white authoritarianism was at the center of the 2020 election, and it will be a defining feature of U.S. politics for at least a generation, shaping the political terrain upon which all other struggles take place and necessitating an anti-right front.

...Our historic task is to defeat the far right's attempt to create a new form of white authoritarianism and install a genuine multiracial democracy for the first time.

...They are committed to gerrymandering, purging voter rolls, reducing opportunities for early voting, shutting down polling stations in working-class communities of color, restricting access to the vote through voter ID laws, rolling back the Voting Rights Act, challenging the legitimacy of the actual votes of voters of color and other tactics of suppression that are aimed squarely at voters of color. They supplement this core strategy with appeals to patriarchy and homophobia, promises of entrepreneurial success, and fear-mongering about socialism.

...There are specific demands where the struggles for racial justice and democratic rights are intertwined, such as campaigns against voter suppression. But those campaigns are inseparable from the broader struggles against racism – against police brutality, against the murders of transwomen of color, against the criminalization of immigrants, for decent public schools, etc. – that demand a recognition of the dignity of people of color within the U.S. polity.

...A core set of social justice organizations, mostly rooted in communities of color and in unions with large numbers of members of color, have been leading the fight for multiracial democracy. This set of

social forces has proven to be the most dynamic left political force in the fight against Trump. They were instrumental in the electoral defeat of Trump and in the tremendous boost in turnout of voters of color and young people in the election.

...This article is an attempt at outlining a starting point for political strategy for the next period of struggle. Criticism and discussion is required to overcome its shortcomings, foremost among them the lack of an in-depth exploration of the relationship between the struggle for multiracial democracy and struggles against gender oppression, for queer liberation, disability rights, indigenous rights and decolonization, and for climate justice. Trumpism has intensified all these struggles as a result of its relentless assault on all those marginalized within U.S. society, and they will all play vital roles in reshaping the political terrain, so that another world is possible. 🍓

Restorative Revolution

Our ancestors fought through genocide, they fought through that trauma. And not only did they survive that trauma, they passed down knowledge that built the societies that we're built on today. So, this knowledge that has been passed down for thousands of years can be accessed and it can be applied to your daily life no matter where you are, no matter where you are from. Because industrial revolution is over. Now, if we want to survive, if we want to carry on life on Earth, we need to be a part of the restorative revolution. And whatever that looks like to you, just make sure you get your hours in.

— Samuel Genshaw III of the Yurok Tribe, founding member of Nature Rights Council, and its Ancestral Guard program, speaking in the documentary *Gather*.

We know that it does not take 'everyone on Earth' to bring justice and peace, but only a small determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale.

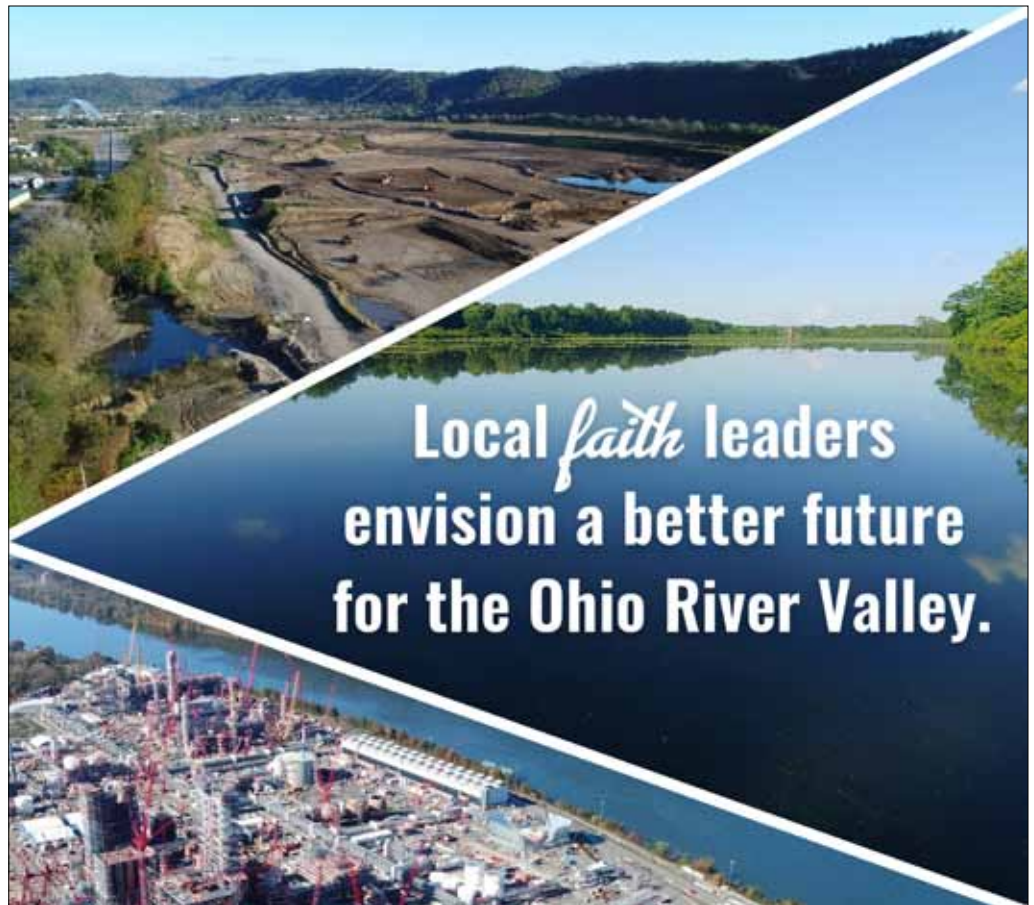
— Clarissa Pinkola Estes

Faith Leaders Call to Action

On October 14, OVEC and WV Interfaith Power and Light hosted an online meeting to encourage folks to write letters in opposition to the PTTG cracker (petrochemical) plant proposed for construction in Belmont County, OH.

During our online event, participants heard a brief update on the status of the PTTG project (see related story page 7), and they heard from residents and faith leaders from the community closest to that facility.

The faith leaders have initiated a letter-writing campaign, asking the PTTG CEO Kongkrapan Intarajang, Belmont County commissioners, and other local and state officials to address their concerns with the cracker plant.



The potential air pollution from the proposed factory is exceptionally alarming, especially in terms of projected greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The more GHG emissions in the Ohio River Valley, the greater the likelihood of major climate disruptions, such as severe storms and widespread flooding.

That's one reason the faith leaders are working on this campaign and asking you to take part in urging decision makers to prioritize human health over corporate profits and stop plans for construction of this plant.

You can see for yourself what the faith leaders have to say on OVEC's YouTube channel. Go there and search "OVEC WV" to find the faith leaders' videos. (And, if you haven't already, please do subscribe to our channel.)



Then, head over to bit.ly/2IZupi0 to read the letter and to send your own using the template provided.

Contact Robin Blakeman at robin@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246 to join in efforts around this campaign.

Thanks, and keep up the faith that we can and will bring a better future to our region! 🍌

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

Kovatch Cleanup



Meet Me at the Bank of the Beautiful River

Above: In center, back to camera, OVEC Administrative Director Matt Spurlock and right, foreground, OVEC member Dave Lavender, helping in a cleanup of the Ohio River. Photo courtesy Dave Lavender.

In November, more than 40 volunteers—including OVEC members and staff—helped remove trash from the banks of the Ohio and Guyandotte Rivers in Huntington in memory of Jeff Kovatch.

Jeff, who died in 2016, was a Marshall University professor and member of the Fourpole Creek Watershed Association.

In an interview with the WV Department of Environmental Protection, former OVEC board member and community activist Dave Lavender said, “(Jeff) always said ‘yes’ to adventure. He always said ‘yes’ to helping his community. He always said ‘yes’ to finding new friends. And, so, this is a way to live like Jeff and keep his memory alive.” 🍌

Wild, Wonderful Water

OVEC Project Coordinator Robin Blakeman takes part in the WV Water Policy Workgroup, which consists of allied groups that work on issues related to monitoring, preserving, or enhancing water quality in the state and/or on related legislative issues.

The need for such a group was made evident by the 2014 MCHM water crisis, and it continues to be necessary due to continuing water-related challenges in WV. This group shares information and serves to increase engagement by each group’s members on action items, and in relevant conferences, etc.

You can expect the workgroup to be exceptionally active during the 2021 WV Legislative Session.

Contact Robin at robin@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246 to help in efforts to defend our water. 🍌



Introducing Two New OVEC Staff Members

Dani Parent >

I'm Dani Parent, the newest member of OVEC's communications team.

A lifelong teacher and activist, I was a volunteer for the Kentucky Young Democrats in my youth and have been an outspoken advocate for children and families since. I have a background in writing, graphic design, mass communications, and marketing.

I earned two bachelor of arts degrees in 2015 from Marshall University, in literature studies and secondary education, and began pursuing a masters in leadership. During this time, I used my background in digital communications and marketing to provide support to many local businesses.

Upon graduation, I began working at Huntington East Middle School as a special education teacher and joined the executive committee of the local chapter of the West Virginia Educators Association. I helped to organize my building and my county during the 2018 teacher's strike and found an outlet for my advocacy in union organizing, becoming a founding executive committee member of the Future of 55 Political Action Committee and an active communicator for the West Virginia United Caucus.

For me, environmental activism is a vital part of social justice work—fighting for the health, betterment, and unity of all Appalachians. 🍁



< Brendan Muckian-Bates



Hi everyone! It's great to join OVEC as the Director of Organizing. For seven years prior to joining OVEC, I was an educator. I have taught classes at WVU, high schools, and a middle school in Wheeling.

During my years as a college instructor at WVU, I taught a variety of gender studies courses and supervised some of the undergraduate teaching assistants. There, I learned how to put my activism into practice, examining feminism and helping students learn how to better understand and relate to the world, while fighting to make a better campus and state become realities.

Those years helped shape my vision for what kind of teacher I wanted to be. In the classes I taught to middle and high school students, I always stressed the human relationship between content and action. What good is it to know something without knowing how to relate it to the world? I wanted my students to be scholar activists—knowing the content, but knowing why it matters and how to use it for the better.

In 2018, I showed my students what being an activist looked like. I helped organize my building for the statewide walkouts and, soon thereafter, West Virginia made history for the education workers' strikes that began after local activists compelled the state leadership of the West Virginia branches of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association to hold a strike vote. I spoke at numerous conferences after that, discussing what we learned here and how to combine labor with activism. I helped form the rank-and-file caucus, WV United, the first of its kind in the state, in the WVEA and AFT-WV. Our caucus helped educate members about the threat of charter schools, leading to the two-day walkout in 2019.

This is all to say that my organizing background is rooted in social justice activism. Fighting for the common good is what I've done best for nearly a decade. With OVEC, I hope to continue that fight. 🍁

Thank You Frontline Workers

Pollution is Scary



Above: Some of the participants in the October 31 Pollution is Scary rally. Photo courtesy Maren Cooke, OVER.

On October 31, folks from West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania met in Moundsville to protest (with COVID-19 precautions in place) the petrochemical and fracked gas industry.

The Pollution is Scary rally brought together people opposing the massive Shell cracker plant in Beaver County, PA, with those opposing the resources and investments being wasted on a proposed PTTG cracker plant in Belmont County, OH (see story opposite page).

OVEC, Concerned Ohio River Residents (CORR), and OVER (Ohio Valley Environmental Resistance) organized the rally because our vision is for the Ohio River Valley to be our safe, healthy, and prosperous home, not an industry sacrifice zone.

More than 30 people from communities including Wheeling, Bridgeport, Moundsville, Shadyside, and Weirton held signs on both sides of W.Va. 2 at the Moundsville Plaza, located across the Ohio River from the proposed plant site.

“We weren’t prepared to fight the Shell cracker when it first arrived,” Maren Cooke of OVER told the crowd. “But you all here have the chance to stop this toxic plant before it [is] built, and you’ve done a great job of stopping it in advance.”

Rally participants brought forth concerns about the Mountaineer Storage Hub (see page 5 of the Fall 2020 Winds of Change) proposed in Monroe County,

OH and the toxic fracking waste barge terminals (see page 10 of our fall newsletter) proposed along the river.

Participants held signs in support of sustainable development and good-paying jobs for Ohio Valley residents—jobs not tied to the fossil fuel industry.

One of those participants, Justice Hudson, was inspired to take action after moving to Wheeling. Justice is an activist who has seen his fair share of environmental destruction in his young life. “Being from the Charleston area—it’s chemical valley there. I know we can do better as a state.”

Justice remembers what it was like to live through the 2014 Elk River chemical spill. Since then, preventing environmental degradation in his new home has become his passion.

“Something as flagrant as a plastics-producing plant grinds my gears,” Justice told the attendees. “I know the people of West Virginia deserve better, even though they’re sold the same deal every century.”

Although COVID-19 has made in-person rallies difficult for environmentalists, the Pollution is Scary rally was a success by any measure. It is the first of many rallies that coalition partners—OVEC, CORR, and OVER—are planning.

The pandemic has not stopped corporations from continuing their work, and it will not stop us. 🍌



PTTG Punts Again

In mid-November, citing changes in the U.S. political landscape, PTT Global Chemical announced it will again be postponing a final investment decision (FID) to conduct a “feasibility study” of its proposed \$10 billion Belmont County, Ohio petrochemical facility. The announcement marks the latest delay in a years-long series of reevaluations, extensions, and missed deadlines.

An executive with PTTG told the Bangkok Post that the company is reviewing how “changes including the new U.S. president” may affect trade and investment policies related to the ethane cracker plant, which would convert ethane from fracked natural gas into polyethylene, a primarily single-use plastic.

If built, the cracker plant would be a major component of ASH, the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub petrochemical complex.

Financial risks, compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, have plagued the proposed Dilles Bottom, Ohio, project and the larger petrochemical industry.

With a global plastics and oil oversupply, plastics and oil prices have plummeted nearly 50 percent since the project’s initial proposal in 2013, raising serious profitability concerns. Two partner companies, including a major financial backer, have abandoned the cracker project (Japan’s Marubeni Corp in 2015 and Korea’s Daelim in 2020).

Admst an unfavorable U.S.–China trade war, the American branch of PTTG is still seeking financial assistance, even as JobsOhio has invested more

than \$70 million in economic development funds to prepare the Dilles Bottom site. PTTG and supporting politicians have promised local residents historic levels of jobs, tax revenue, and spin-off economic benefits, none of which have materialized, and economists question the lofty promises.

Dr. Vincent DeGeorge, a materials science researcher and organizer with the citizens’ advocacy group Concerned Ohio River Residents, has doubts about the feasibility of the Dilles Bottom project.

He says, “A business that is utterly dependent on futureless fossil fuel and whose ‘valuable’ end product is single-use plastic trash the world is already drowning in is not feasible. That economy is not sustainable. The Ohio Valley deserves a robust, prosperous, and sustainable economy in which we, our families and communities can make a living without the unending pitfalls and environmental compromise of boom-and-bust industries.”

Brendan Muckian-Bates, Director of Organizing for OVEC and a resident of Moundsville, says, “PTTG has promised us that this investment would bring good-paying jobs to this area for the better part of a decade. As projects stall and environmental challenges compound, it’s becoming clear to residents that they do not have our best interests at heart.” 🍌



Democracy v Fossil Fuels

OVEC volunteer Dr. Randi Pokladnik was one of several people interviewed by Dr. David Orr for episode five of the Democracy Unchained series: democracy v. fossil fuels. Watch it here: bit.ly/37J0a83.

The episode includes a look at a petrochemical plant, and, as our friends at the new Ohio River Valley Institute put it, “examines the troubling relationship between the fossil fuel industry and policymakers in the region and what that relationship tells us about the role of corporate money in our democracy.”

Democracy Unchained is part of The State of American Democracy initiative, which focuses on repairing and strengthening democratic institutions to serve the aims of justice, fairness, prosperity, and resilience.

Their website states, “Democracy and wealth have a long and troubled relationship. Democracy requires openness, transparency, accountability, and a reasonable level of economic equality. On the other hand, wealth, unrestrained, often works in various ways to buy influence, power, and votes. The uneasy relationship between democracy and money became even more troubled with the rise of large corporations, particularly those selling coal and oil.”

We know that’s the truth! Get involved with OVEC’s work with WV Citizens for Clean Elections (see page 18) to defend democracy, fair courts, and judicial impartiality. Contact Dani at dani@ohvec.org. 🍌

FOIA: What's Up With PTTG and Officials?

For several years, using the tool of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), OVEC has been involved in attempts to find out what's going on behind the scenes in terms of government promises of loans, tax exemptions, etc. for assorted dealings and components of the Appalachian Storage Hub (ASH).

ASH is a massive petrochemical/plastics build-out that politicians and investors keep promoting for our region.

We recently closed one FOIA case, which sought information surrounding the PTTG cracker plant proposed for Belmont County, OH. Represented by the fine folks at Earthjustice, we obtained heavily redacted documents, but not without a prolonged legal battle.

Despite the redactions, it is clear that high-level officials (including former Secretary Perry) at the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Department of Commerce (Secretary Ross) were in close communication with PTTG officials. DOE in particular, really advocated for the project, even though the PTTG cracker plant is about plastic, not energy.

OVEC project coordinator Dustin White is mentioned in one of the emails, which cites a news article in which Dustin opines on how harmful PTTG would be to the region. This shows the power of our efforts, but also is an egregious contrast with how heavily redacted other names/facts are throughout the documents.

On November 24, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ran an article that reported on our FOIA-ed documents (read the full article here: bit.ly/36gdWzo).

Anya Litvak reported, "The Thai company's executives have met several times with the secretaries of energy and commerce and with Mr. Trump, who has been a vocal supporter of petrochemical development in Appalachia."



Our @Earthjustice @OVEC_WV FOIA showed just how closely the Dep't of Energy was courting a Thai petrochem project for Ohio.

The gov't should not be investing time & money in fossil fuel projects.

Story by @AnyalLitvak:



Regardless of election, Thai giant PTT's cracker project in Ohio in flux. Thai petrochem giant PTT has strong relationship with Trump administration. With its Ohio cracker project in flux, it plans to do the same with Biden's. post-gazette.com

She also quoted PTTG's America spokesman Dan Williamson as saying, "This project has built relationships with DOE under the Obama/Biden administration and the Trump/Pence administration and fully expects to continue them under the Biden/Harris administration."

The article notes: "The company has been even more active in building relationships with local and state officials than with federal ones."

If local, state, and federal officials want us to believe that project will be so great for our region, why do we have to sue them to try to find out to whom they are offering our tax dollars, our water, our air, our land, and our futures?

Join our efforts to make reluctant officials hear us: contact info@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246. 🍌

Gearing Up for the 2021 Session Legislative Session

In mid-November, more than 70 people, including several legislators, joined WV Environmental Council's virtual annual gathering to discuss the 2021 WV Legislative Session. OVEC staff member Dani Parent will be active with WVEC and WV Citizens for Clean Elections during the session. She says, "Our members know that the environmental justice and health protections we seek depend on a healthy democracy and fair courts. We'll be watching for any legislation that spends taxpayer money on the buildout of the petrochemical and other fossil fuel industries. We hope to see legislators address the impact of climate change and the need for clean air and water. We hope that our elected officials will spend their time tackling these pressing issues." 🍌

Communities of Color Face Worse Pollution

Lawsuit: Weak Emissions Standards for Petrochem Plants

In mid-October, we joined with 10 other groups nationwide in suing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) over a weak national emission rule for hundreds of chemical facilities, including petrochemical plants, whose pollution is linked to cancer.

Earthjustice represents us in the lawsuit over the Miscellaneous Organic Chemical Manufacturing, or MON, rule. The rule regulates toxic emissions for about 200 chemical plants across the country. These plants emit more than 7,400 tons a year of dangerous air pollutants, including at least 2,000 pounds of ethylene oxide, an aggressive carcinogen. EPA updated the rule earlier this year after the national air toxics assessment showed this pollution is contributing to cancer-risk hot spots in the United States.

Industrial plants covered by the MON rule handle chemicals used in the production of solvents, plastics, and pesticides. During this process, potent carcinogens, like ethylene oxide, 1,3-butadiene, benzene, formaldehyde, and other toxic fumes that people breathe, are dumped into neighboring communities. The MON rule leaves people in surrounding areas exposed to cancer risks of 200 in a million, twice the level EPA admits is unacceptable under the Clean Air Act.

MON facilities are located around the U.S. but especially concentrated in Texas and Louisiana, and disproportionately affect Black, Latino, and low-income communities. We have MON facilities in West Virginia, including—no surprise—near the predominantly black community of Institute.

EPA's MON rule allows periodic, uncontrolled releases of chemical pollution, while communities need around-the-clock protection from toxic air. This rule allows facilities to spew fugitive emissions into communities without monitoring, and permits facilities to do so repeatedly, even if pollution levels are too high.

“Our neighborhoods are not sacrifice zones for petrochemical companies. EPA's national air toxics standards must be the strongest necessary to prevent cancers that EPA itself says the pollution from these chemical plants can cause. Those of us in



Louisiana have seen first-hand the type of harm this kind of pollution can do to communities,” says Sharon Lavigne, founder of RISE St. James.

As communities push for monitoring and stronger rules for chemical plants, the petrochemical industry is expanding in places like Cancer Alley in Louisiana,

which is already facing elevated cancer levels due to industrial fumes. And, of course, we've seen that officials in our region want to build the Appalachian Storage Hub, a massive petrochemical complex, with cracker plants, underground storage facilities, pipelines, and other infrastructure in counties along the Ohio River from Pittsburgh into Kentucky.

EPA has known of the pollution and extreme health harms associated with MON plants for years; still, it chose inaction. According to federal law, EPA was supposed to review and update the national MON standards by 2014, but years later, the agency had still failed to meet the deadline. Through litigation, Earthjustice represented communities and groups, including OVEC, in forcing EPA to finish the rule and in 2017 a court ordered EPA to review and update it.

“The EPA knows how many plastic/petrochemical and other factories are spewing pollution onto communities predominantly populated by people of color. The EPA knows that people living near these plants are going to have a dramatically increased risk of cancer because of the pollution. But the Trump EPA doesn't care. It really is a travesty that we have to sue our Environmental Protection Agency for environmental protections that the agency itself knows should be in place,” said OVEC Executive Director Vivian Stockman. 🍌

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!

HALLOWGREEN

SPOOKTACULAR CELEBRATION AND MONSTER MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Since our inception, OVEC volunteers and staff have tried to have some fun even as we engage in the crucial and serious work of defending our air, water, land, and communities.

And if ever there were a year in which pretty much everyone everywhere really needed at least some occasional fun, that would be 2020.

That's part of the reason why, in October, we held our Monster Membership Drive, which featured several events culminating in our HallowGreen party on October 30.

Because we build power when we increase membership numbers, we hoped for at least 25 new members (spoiler alert, we reached 42 by the end of October!). Adding active, committed members helps us win campaigns that protect people and the environment. We hope our new and long-standing members are excited to be part of a group that loves to have a little fun while making the world a better place.

Throughout October—acting within the precautionary measures we all have to take due to the pandemic—we reached out to potential new members through personal phone calls, texts and emails, social media memes, and a series of live and recorded Zoom and Facebook events.

Through the events, we hoped to celebrate what can happen when we work together as we

confront some real-life monsters, such as those of the Appalachian Storage Hub petrochemical mega-complex (ASH). Plus, we wanted to have some silly, spooky fun, see some chilling costumes, and make certain to hit our annual regional quota of Mothman sightings.

Our kickoff event featured OVEC Development Director Tonya Adkins's telling an eerie yet touching story, "Ed Holler Ghost," written by Tonya herself and produced by Communications Specialist Sarah Carballo. The story beautifully illustrated how we Appalachians cohabitate with our history and with our hills and shared how her idyllic (if slightly haunted) home was ruined by extractive industries.



OVEC Project Coordinator Dustin White leading the Spooky Short Stories event

Following that, OVEC Project Coordinator Dustin White hosted Scary Short Story Time, featuring an episode of the popular podcast *Lore* that centered around the supremely spooky Moundsville Prison in West Virginia. Dustin related the Moundsville Prison hauntings to information about the Appalachian Storage Hub and the sites proposed in and around Moundsville that would become similarly haunting to folks if these proposals become reality.

Next up was OVEC Project Coordinator Robin Blakeman's costumed kids' hour, which she hosted



A sampling of the in-costume participants at the online HallowGreen Celebration



Project Coordinator Robin Blakeman as the Wicked Witch of West Virginia during children's story hour

dressed as the Wicked Witch of West Virginia. She read aloud a spooky West Virginia-themed children's story titled, "A Halloween Scare in West Virginia."

Finally, we cut loose with our HallowGreen celebration! Improbable as it might be, we had a good time on Zoom, sharing stories, songs, drinks, decor, and a costume contest—all to celebrate a whopping 42 new OVEC members!

The adult costume contest during the event was wildly successful, hosted by our own Dr. Frackenstein (Dustin) and joined by an incredible Flatwoods Monster, a unicorn, a disco queen, a Cheshire cat, Mother Earth, and more.

Times are certainly tough all around. We have work to do and monsters to fight, but it was a joy to share the spooky season with all our members, our staff, and our board. We need hope to fight these monsters that are bigger than we are, better-funded and more powerful—hope we can get only from each other.

If you didn't join in October, or if you have let your membership lapse, please join now! We do have a membership-dues waiver for those financially impacted by the pandemic, so join us today at ohvec.org/donate and help stop monsters like ASH in their tracks. 🍷



Children's costume contest winner Ava S. as Ruth Baby Ginsburg

Join or Renew at No Cost to You

OVEC knows that many people are experiencing financial stress due to COVID-19-related layoffs. That's why we are offering to waive your annual membership dues. Although OVEC depends on membership dues to help support the work we do, we don't want to have dues standing in the way of your membership. If you need to, please take advantage of the membership-dues waiver. Your membership is extremely valuable to us: We know there is power in numbers! Join or renew online at

ohvec.org/donate

HALLOWGREEN
SPOOKTACULAR CELEBRATION AND MONSTER MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

MONSTER MEMBERSHIP CELEBRATION

Have a smartphone? Scan the QR code to join OVEC.

Bonds, Coal, and DEP Update: **Legal Victory Means Our Case Can Proceed**

The front page of our Summer 2020 issue of Winds of Change reported that we intended to sue the WV Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) over its mismanagement of the Special Reclamation Fund (SRF) and its related failure to comply with federal reporting requirements.



In July, Attorneys from Appalachian Mountain Advocates and Public Justice filed the lawsuit, on behalf of OVEC, WV Highlands Conservancy, and the Sierra Club, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia. DEP soon asked U.S. District Judge Robert “Chuck” Chambers to dismiss the case.

In mid-November, Judge Chambers denied the DEP’s request, noting, “This argument [by the DEP] misunderstands, or worse yet misconstrues, [our] Complaint and the law.”

On November 16, the Charleston Gazette-Mail’s new environment reporter, Mike Tony, wrote that our case “raises questions about the financial health of West Virginia’s surface coal mining reclamation program.” Read the article online: bit.ly/3kNcYOU.

The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 mandates that, in order to obtain a coal mining permit, coal companies must post a reclamation bond. The bond is to ensure that the regulatory authority in charge of the permits will have sufficient funds to reclaim the site if a company fails to complete reclamation of its coal mine.

In reporting on the judge’s November ruling, WV Public Broadcasting reporter Brittany Patterson wrote (read the full article: bit.ly/3kG3dC9):

According to documents filed by the DEP earlier this year, the state’s Special Reclamation Fund would be “overwhelmed” if ERP’s permits were forfeited. The agency said the company has an estimated \$115 million in bonds, but it would cost at least \$230 million to remediate all of the company’s operations. The difference would fall to the reclamation fund...

According to a Jan. 9, 2020 report to the West Virginia Legislature, as of Sept. 30, 2019, the Special Reclamation Fund had just over \$58 million in cash and investments. It is funded by a 12.9 cent tax per ton of coal mined in West Virginia.

We are so relieved our lawsuit can continue. It means that we can shine further light on the problems of ongoing long-term water pollution from abandoned coal mines, the state’s coal mine reclamation program, and the WV DEP’s failure to address these problems. We may be able to find some recourse to these problems in the courts.

The 2021 Legislative Session may offer another chance to examine these issues. You can help out; contact info@ohvec.org. 🍌

Climate: Al and Randi

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for this pollution, again, predominantly live in low-income communities. A lot of them are people who are suffering from other discrimination. A lot of people are really fighting heroically against these attacks on the environment.

According to the Climate Reality Project, **Randi was one of only four “incredible activists from around the globe who are making real differences in their communities” who were selected to share their stories directly with the former vice president during this event.**

The others were Chibeze Ezekiel of Ghana, Uili Lousi of Tonga, and Dr. Erika Pires Ramos of Brazil. You can see this part of the 24-hour program online here: bit.ly/33nn2sn. Randi’s segment starts at about 51 minutes into the video.

On October 10, the day before she spoke with Vice President Gore, Randi gave one of the many presentations of the 24 Hours of Reality event. Randi’s “Climate 101” presentation beamed out live worldwide from OVEC’s Facebook page. (Thanks so much to OVEC staff member Sarah Carballo for taking care of the technical aspects.) If you missed Randi’s Climate 101 you can find it on our YouTube channel (OVEC WV) under the title “24 Hours of Reality.”

In prepping for her talk with Vice President Gore, Randi wrote out the answers to two questions. Read those on OVEC’s blog at ohvec.org.

Thank you Randi for representing us so well, and thank you climate activists everywhere! 🍌

New Alliance Releases Guide to Climate Change

By Sarah Carballo

A newly formed group of civic-minded and environmental organizations have teamed up to author a climate change resource for West Virginians.

The 16-page document, released this fall by the West Virginia Climate Alliance, is called “A Citizen’s Guide To Climate Change.”

The goal, according to alliance member Perry Bryant, is not to endorse a certain climate change policy proposal but rather to lay out the basic science of what is causing climate change, as well as some solutions to it, especially those that center around a just transition for workers in fossil fuel industries and communities that have been subject to environmental racism.

“This publication was designed to begin a dialogue with the citizens of West Virginia,” Perry says. “In order to have that dialogue, we thought it was really important for people to have a very clear understanding of the basic science of what’s causing climate change.”

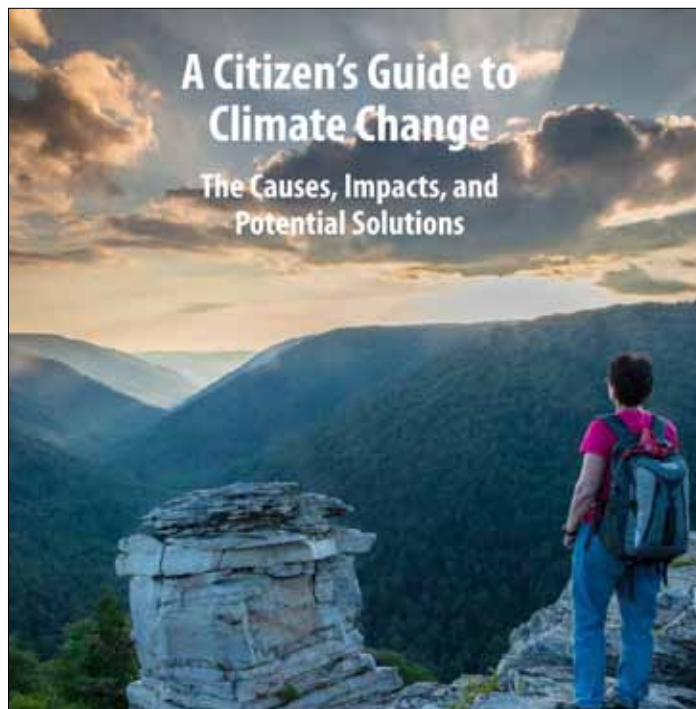
The guide pulls from scientific studies and the work of U.S. and international agencies including the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, but it is written by West Virginians, for West Virginians.

According to the guide, West Virginia can expect to see more frequent and severe rainfall events, which

can lead to flooding. The Mountain State is also expected to see temperatures increase by nearly 8 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century if action isn’t taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change will especially impact the state’s

most vulnerable residents, including children, the elderly, communities of color, low-income communities and those with pre-existing conditions, says Pam Nixon, a representative of the NAACP in Charleston and former environmental advocate for the WV Department of Environmental Protection. These groups may lack the resources to retrofit their homes to withstand more severe weather and will pay a disproportionate amount of their income in



higher electricity costs.

Currently, the WV Climate Alliance is comprised of community groups including the Citizens Climate Lobby West Virginia, League of Women Voters of WV, Christians for the Mountains, Moms Clean Air Force-West Virginia, OVEC, Sierra Club of WV, WV Interfaith Power and Light, and the WV Rivers Coalition, among others.

The alliance is welcoming new members and affiliates. For more information about how to get involved, contact us at info@ohvec.org. To read the guide online, go to bit.ly/2FM2bGn. 🍷

Justice requires not only the ceasing and desisting of injustice but also requires either punishment or reparation for injuries and damages inflicted for prior wrongdoing. The essence of justice is the redistribution of gains earned through the perpetration of injustice. If restitution is not made and reparations not instituted to compensate for prior injustices, those injustices are in effect rewarded. And the benefits such rewards conferred on the perpetrators of injustice will continue to “draw interest,” to be reinvested, and to be passed on to their children, who will use their inherited advantages to continue to exploit the children of the victims of the injustices of their ancestors. Consequently, injustice and inequality will be maintained across the generations as will their deleterious social, economic, and political outcomes.

— Amos Wilson

Marshall Students, Faculty Demand Single-Use Product Ban

In October, the Marshall University Sustainability Club and faculty gathered recyclables from residence halls at Marshall University to collect data about plastic waste for the Break Free from Plastic (BFFP) brand audit.

The club's president, Baleigh Epperly, is an OVEC board member, as is MU's sustainability department manager, Amy Parsons-White. Both are on OVEC's Youth Outreach Committee, along with several OVEC staff members including Sarah Carballo, Alex Cole and Dani Parent. Alex first networked the club with BFFP.

BFFP's brand audit is a global initiative to learn more about what companies are responsible for the production of plastic waste and to pressure them to reduce that waste. The audit has a local purpose: to reduce consumption of single-use plastic products and increase recycling on campus.

"I am fortunate enough to be able to choose zero waste items and avoid plastic packaging as much as I can," Baleigh says. "But I am dedicating my life and my career to sustainability so that I can help ensure that West Virginians and people around the world have the same access to these choices."

With the help of Amy and Baleigh, 13 Marshall students gathered trash from the Commons and Twin Towers Residence Halls. The students spent five hours sorting and auditing more than a thousand plastic products, ultimately recycling 195 plastic items.

According to Amy, most of the single-use plastic waste comes from the student center restaurants that use styrofoam. To work towards a more sustainable campus, Marshall students are requesting that Marshall University and their food catering service, Sodexo, observe the demand of a plastic and styrofoam-free campus and have provided a petition with nearly 1,000 signatures.

"A sustainable lifestyle is not just about hugging trees," Amy says. "It is about prudent financial decisions, reducing consumption of resources, and caring about the well-being of others."



◀ Follow the QR code; sign the petition.



Above: Baleigh Epperly with a piece of her art, which is currently hanging in MU's Drinko Library. Baleigh created this work with plastic trash she collected on campus grounds and in her own home. She hopes viewers will reflect on corporate production and pollution and personal consumption. The colorful flowers and embellishments represent Earth's resiliency and hope for humankind's ability to transform wasteful, destructive, environmentally racist systems into sustainable and compassionate ones.

Viewers are encouraged to use the QR code below to sign a petition encouraging students, faculty, and administration to assure that MU is a pioneer in reducing on-campus plastic waste.

MU's Sustainability Club is also working in partnership with OVEC on other environmental issues. They recently hosted a virtual meeting in which Alex and his fellow OVEC staff member Dustin White gave a presentation on the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub petrochemical complex (ASH). 16 students attended and were mortified by the scale of ASH. By the end of the meeting the students were already brainstorming creative ways to illustrate the threat to their fellow students.

To get involved with OVEC's Youth Outreach Committee, contact us at info@ohvec.org. 🍌

Trump Rule Guts OSM Oversight, Limits Residents' Ability to Report Violations



Mountaintop removal (MTR) operations, like the one above, cause all kind of troubles for nearby residents. MTR should already have been outlawed. Until that day, we should have more tools for residents to fight back, not fewer.

On October 27, the Trump administration announced a “clarification” to a rule regarding the oversight of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE).

Originally, under the 1977 Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, community members could petition the federal agency of OSMRE with evidence of environmental problems at coal mines if they felt the state regulatory agencies weren’t doing enough to solve the issue.

OSMRE would then issue a “10-day notice” to the state agency, after which the state had 10 days to act to cause the violation to be corrected or to show good cause for not correcting it. If the state did not act, then OSMRE could issue a notice of violation.

The rule purposefully allowed community members to circumvent the state agency and go to the federal agency. That certainly makes sense here in West Virginia, where more often than not, the heads of the state agency—the WV Department of Environmental Protection—have direct ties to coal companies.

Residents of West Virginia have often used the 10-day notice to try to get help when coal companies ignore the health and well-being of nearby communities. One high-profile success in the use of the original rule was in the case of the now-defunct Marsh Fork Elementary School and the coal

processing plant, impoundment, and mountaintop removal operation that grew around it, threatening the health and safety of the school children.

In Wyoming, a citizen complaint found that the state failed to secure funding for a bankrupt company’s cleanup costs. In Oklahoma, federal oversight found the state had failed to require a company to carry out reclamation after the mining was completed.

But now, the Trump administration’s “clarification” eliminates the public’s ability to take violations to OSMRE. We instead have to report to the state, in a process that is “prohibitively difficult,” according to our friends at the Center for Biological Diversity.

Adding insult to injury, instead of a mandatory requirement to respond in 10 days, the “clarified” rule eliminates the mandate for states to respond at all, and gives them an unlimited time to respond! Read: See something? Say something. And we can and likely will ignore you, but we’ll string you along for quite some time.

“This rule change is all about trying to thwart people who seek help when their communities are harmed by coal companies’ actions. The Trump administration will side with the coal barons, communities be damned,” says OVEC Executive Director Vivian Stockman.

An egregious rule change coming this late in the Trump term may well be remedied in a Biden administration. Stay tuned. 🍷

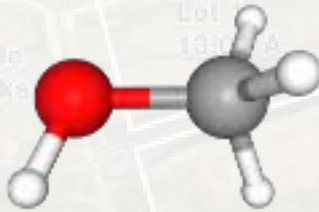
Have you thought about your legacy? Are you looking for a long-term way to make a meaningful difference in the movement to build a cleaner energy future?

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 lalvw.org.



METHANOL MADNESS

by Dustin White and Alex Cole

As many of you know, OVEC has been working with communities along the Ohio River to halt the construction of the proposed Appalachian Storage and Trading Hub (ASH). So far, the fight has been centered around stopping the development of infrastructure to refine and store ethane to manufacture plastic and other petrochemicals. The main battlegrounds have been around massive ethane crackers such as what Shell is currently building in Monaca, PA, or the proposed PTTG ethane cracker in Belmont County, OH, across the Ohio River from Moundsville, WV.

Similar to ethane, methane is a product of fracking. It is a “dry gas” that you can burn in your home, but methane’s secondary use is for producing methanol—a chemical frequently used for industrial purposes that’s also prevalent in our everyday lives.

Methanol is a light, colorless, flammable liquid with a distinctive alcoholic odor. It is extremely volatile and flammable. Any accumulation of vapors in confined spaces, such as buildings, sewers, tanks, trucks, or train cars may explode if ignited. Within the past five years, methanol has been responsible for several explosions at chemical plants worldwide, many with fatalities.

Methanol is also highly toxic. According to the website MSDSONline, direct ingestion of more than 10mL, or about two teaspoons, can cause permanent blindness by destruction of the optic nerve, poisoning of the central nervous system, coma, and possibly

death. These hazards also apply if methanol vapors are inhaled. It can cause metabolic acidosis, which can cause nausea, vomiting, fast breathing, lethargy, and kidney failure.



Methanol is considered a versatile product according to the manufacturing industry. It is used in a wide variety of products such as synthetic fibers, plastics, gasoline, solvents, pharmaceuticals and agrichemicals, plywood, and more. Currently, formaldehyde manufacturing accounts for about 34 percent of the methanol market. That’s right, embalming fluid.

The development of large-scale ethane crackers has largely eclipsed the building of smaller methanol facilities, but methane crackers should be just as much of a concern, and not only because they produce toxic methanol. By-products of methanol production include

sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds, including tons of fine particulates that are released directly into the air and eventually into the soil around methane cracker plants.

One methanol facility is almost finished in Institute, WV, on the Kanawha River just outside of Charleston. This methanol plant, Liberty 1, is scheduled to go online in the second quarter of 2021. The site is within walking distance of the historically black college West Virginia State University. Residents of the primarily black community of Institute already face blatant decades-

old environmental racism. Petrochemical companies have plopped their dirty business in the area, polluting the air and water and endangering the health of the community. The WVSU campus itself and nearby Shawnee Park face soil contamination from decades of Union Carbide pollution.

The company building this new plant, US Methanol LLC, is a pop-up headquartered in Charleston. It didn't exist prior to 2016. The plant itself is old, a "recycled" methanol cracker from Brazil. It was disassembled there, put on barges, and reassembled in Institute. US Methanol literally planned to sandblast the rust off, give the plant a shiny new coat of paint, and turn on this highly explosive chemistry set at the end of last year. The plans were delayed, however, when they unpacked one of the boilers and it was cracked.

The key component could not be fixed on site and a new boiler had to be manufactured off site and barged in, which set back the ribbon cutting an entire year.

US Methanol has a second plant planned called Liberty 2. Like Liberty 1, Liberty 2 was set to be an old "recycled" facility brought in pieces—only this time from Slovenia. We have not heard any movement on that plant or where it will go for sure, although we had heard the company plans to put the second highly explosive plant right next to the first, right next to WVSU, and right next to all the other highly toxic chemical plants still in operation at the formerly Union Carbide now DOW/Bayer Crop Sciences site.

But now there is a whole new threat on the horizon, a new pop-up company, similarly named WV Methanol, this time headquartered in Cincinnati.

According to an October 19 press release, Governor Jim Justice announced that WV Methanol plans to build a \$350 million methanol cracker in Pleasants County, WV, designed to produce 900 metric tons of high-purity methanol from natural gas each day (MTPD). WV Methanol will be using a "modular design" facility from MeOH-To-Go™, a Danish company. So, we can have our highly explosive and toxic chemical plants made "to-go" now.

The press release states that the plant would

create approximately 30 jobs. It is unclear how long these jobs will last. With a "modular design" such as this, the need for large construction employment is drastically cut and the plant is sure to be mostly automated upon completion. WV Methanol plans to barge the plant in from Denmark and place it at the Pleasants County Development Authority's Cabot Site, former location of the Carbon Black Manufacturing Facility where the Cabot company made tires.

The site is close to the Willow Island coal-burning power plant, site of the 1978 construction disaster where 51 workers were killed trying to meet a construction deadline. (See <https://bit.ly/36v9ZWx>)

It is also right across the street from the Pleasants Energy gas-fired power plant. So, this methanol

cracker will also be adding to a long legacy of pollution and economic exploitation in the area, just like the one in Institute.

As this is being written, the company has not applied for permits at the WV Department of Environmental Protection. According to the governor's press release, construction could begin as soon as 2021. People in the know, including environmentalists and some in the construction trades, speculate that the announcement may just be political posturing from Jim Justice who was up for reelection at that time. (He won.) However, we do not want to underestimate this threat to the water of the Ohio River and the air around Waverly, WV, just a few miles

up river from both Marietta and Parkersburg.

Although the current methanol crackers under construction or proposed in our region are small in comparison with the Shell or PTTG ethane crackers, they are no less a concern. The industry likes to claim methanol is safe and environmentally friendly. That is a lie. All one has to do is pull the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) or any other safety manual to see that it is hazardous.

Why our local and federal officials would want to promote such toxic things for our communities is beyond us. We must end this petrochemical madness. Our communities deserve better. Help us oppose these facilities: donate, join OVEC, volunteer. Get plugged in by emailing us at info@ohvec.org. 🍌

Similar to ethane, methane is a product of fracking. Methanol is highly toxic and extremely volatile. By-products of its production include VOCs and carbon monoxide.

Top Ten Reasons to Support

WV CITIZENS *for* CLEAN ELECTIONS

Back in 1997, we co-founded what has become the West Virginia Citizens for Clean Elections (WVCCE). We continue to co-lead this coalition because we recognize that a healthy democracy is an essential underpinning for the success of our campaigns.

WVCCE works to increase transparency and accountability in WV elections, protect and strengthen our democracy, and ensure fairness and impartiality in our courts.

Despite how critical the courts are to our democracy, they often get overlooked. However, with the passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and with Amy Coney Barrett filling her seat, and given the legal challenges to the results of the 2020 presidential election, many people have opened their eyes to how crucial unbiased judicial systems are to our society.

Here in West Virginia, dark money and special-interest groups have successfully influenced judicial elections and appointments to the courts, and that undermines people's faith in the courts. That's why WVCCE continually pushes back and fights for a court system that works for everyone. That's why we constantly work to advance pro-democracy, anti-corruption legislation and other reforms.

Some of what we've been up to this year:

1. During the 2020 WV Legislative Session, we educated the public and several legislators on four bills that would have eroded the independence of the judicial branch of government. We called on folks like you to make hundreds of calls, send thousands of emails, and attend meetings and a public hearing about these bills to make certain they did not advance.

2. We didn't just play defense. Nine bills that would enact parts of our Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption platform were introduced. To help raise

awareness about the platform, we participated in and held a lobby day in February in conjunction with the Centennial Celebration of the WV Ratification of the 19th Amendment at the State Capitol.

3. When it appeared that our primary election would be held as the first wave of the coronavirus was peaking in West Virginia, we initiated conversations with the secretary of state's office to ensure they had plans in place to administer the election safely and protect the health of voters and poll workers. After it was announced that the election would be delayed and that absentee voting would be available to all West Virginia voters due to the pandemic, we worked with partners and allies to educate voters about their voting options and how to vote safely in the age of COVID-19.

4. To help educate and engage voters in advance of the Supreme Court elections held in conjunction with the primary, we partnered with the WV Consumer Protection Alliance (which is affiliated with WVCCE member WV Association for Justice) to survey Supreme Court candidates regarding their positions on recusal, as well as other relevant issues. Responses to the survey were posted on a voter-education website, along with other pertinent information about the role of the court and why these elections are important.

5. Ahead of the Supreme Court elections, we had two op-eds published in the Charleston Gazette-Mail. One, written by OVEC's ED Vivian Stockman and WVCCE coordinator Julie Archer, highlighted the important role state Supreme Courts play in protecting our democracy and our right to vote. The other, written by Julie, focused on the need to adopt strong, objective recusal rules and other reforms to bring greater trust, accountability, and transparency to the judiciary.

6. In May, we hosted a training on how to write letters to the editor (LTE) and helped people write and place LTEs on the Supreme Court election and voting in newspapers around the state.

7. In July, due to the ongoing pandemic, we coordinated an effort that pressured Governor Jim Justice and state and local election officials to make certain absentee ballots would be readily available for voters in the November General Election. In a press release about our efforts, Julie criticized Governor Justice's attacks on absentee voting: "We know that absentee voting increases participation and ensures that more Americans—including members of our military—have their voices heard. We also know that states with long established vote-by-mail programs run them smoothly and expand voter engagement in their states. We cannot allow the right to safely vote become a polarizing issue. We can protect West Virginia voters and protect the vote during this pandemic. And we must."

8. In the lead-up to the general election, we relentlessly shared information with West Virginians on voter registration information, obtaining absentee ballots, how and where to vote in person, and how to report problems or intimidation at the polls.

9. In the aftermath of the 2020 election, we are preparing for the next steps, including targeting specific bills and reforms during the 2021 West Virginia Legislative Session.

10. We are building a coalition of individuals, community organizations, faith groups, and elected officials to pressure our Secretary of State toward transparency and voting rights for all to ensure truly democratic elections.

We need your support to help thwart measures that could impede our progress towards a government that's more transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of all West Virginians.

That's right. We're counting on you to be active and engaged this upcoming legislative session—whether in the form of citizen lobbying (perhaps via video conference rather than in person?), or your calls, emails, and letters to your legislators—so please make sure you are on our contact list; go to **wvoter-owned.org** and click on the "Subscribe to Action Alert" button. 🍌

\$10,000 Challenge Grant

One more thing: we could really use your financial support, too. Thanks to the generous support of the Piper Fund, a Proteus Fund Initiative, **if we raise \$10,000 in donations by the end of January 2021, we'll receive an additional \$10,000 for our work.**

Will you donate whatever you can to help us meet this challenge in these challenging times? Go to **wvoter-owned.org** and click on the "Donate" button, or send a check to:

Citizens for Clean Elections
P.O. Box 6753
Huntington, WV 25773-6753

Be sure to indicate that your donation is for our challenge grant. Thank you, and here's to true democracy!

A Block We'll Have to Move

In a recent article, "The Last Embers of Coal: Appalachia's Green Path Forward" (see **bit.ly/3qlyZZi**), Thomas O'Neill notes that in early April, "for the first time in history, wind and solar energy production outperformed coal during a three-day period. Since 2008, US generation of renewable energy has doubled, with most growth occurring in the wind and solar sectors."

He continues:

However, politics and Big Coal currently stand in the way of ... (a) transformation of the economic landscape. At the federal level, about one in four members of Congress have investments in fossil fuels. West Virginia's own (Democrat) Senator Joe Manchin has the most in the Senate, with between one to five million dollars in Enersystems, his family coal business. Clearly, the roots of Big Coal power run deep and broad within Appalachia and US power structures. It will take incredible political and economic clout and might to push forward an energy sourcing and jobs metamorphosis. Build that clout! Join OVEC's efforts. 🍌

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So Long 2020. *Here's to the New Year!*

These word clouds reflect some of OVEC staff's feelings about 2020 and some of our hopes and concerns for the New Year. We know most of you will share many of these reflections, a bewildering mix of despair and possibility.



As we move into 2021, we allow ourselves the space to mourn, and even despair at times, because of the scope of the work that our society needs. Still, we have more space in our hearts for renewed hope, determination, and vigor to improve those things within our control. We can and will make a difference. Together we grow.

Much love!

