MOUNTAIN VOICES

The Socio-Cultural Ramifications of Declines in Coal Mining Employment and Production in the Southwestern Virginia Coalfields

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VIRGINIA CENTER FOR COAL AND ENERGY RESEARCH

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FOREWORD

The ready availability of electricity is fundamental to our present way of life in the United States, from everyday activities to the economic vitality of the nation. Coal-fired power stations provide 56 percent of the nation's electricity. It follows that coal is a vital, indigenous source of energy. Notwithstanding pressures to reduce the use of fossil fuels, economic realities will ensure that coal remains a primary source of energy for the next several decades. Equally, it is also a reality of the extractive nature of mining that the recovery of reserves in any given area becomes uneconomic sooner or later. Coal production in Virginia has been declining throughout the '90s, assuaged slightly in 1996 and 1997* by the effects of the coal tax credit bill. This decline has been the result of a complex combination of factors including diminished reserves of the thicker seams, prices of coal that remain depressed as a result of intense competition, and international currency exchange rates.

The prevalence of coal mining throughout Appalachia has left an indelible legacy on the culture of past and current mining areas. From shortly after the Civil War to the present time, coal mining and southwest Virginia have been inextricably linked. The coal mines which were active in Montgomery County prior to World War II, all long since closed, are remembered through the families of the miners and the formation of the Coal Mining Heritage Association in 1994. The remaining coal mines of Virginia are concentrated into seven counties in the southwestern tip of the state. The decline in production through the 1990s has motivated previous publications of the Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research (VCCER) on the economic impact of such declines, and what mitigating measures might be taken. However, the VCCER has not, until now, actively sought the opinions of the people to whom it matters most, the citizens of the coal counties.

Stephen D. Mooney, of the Virginia Tech Department of English and the Appalachian Studies Program, undertook this work through 1997 and the spring of 1998. Stephen is a native of the Appalachian coalfields and has lived for most of his life in far southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky. During the 1980s he was an award-winning newspaper reporter covering central Appalachia's coalfields. He has lived through the socio-cultural ramifications of increases and decreases in coal mining employment within those areas. He has an empathy with the "coal culture" that allows him to understand it in ways that would be difficult for an outsider. These were ideal qualifications for the tasks that he was asked to undertake—first to summarize the impacts of a declining coal industry on the social and cultural life of southwest Virginia and, second, to conduct interviews with people of his own choosing within the coalfields. The author makes no claim that his selection of interviewees was other than "subjectively chosen"; he does, however, assert that the selection process was neither random nor arbitrary, neither unbalanced nor unfair. Instead, respondents were selected because of their direct knowledge of

* Virginia Coal. VCCER annual reviews 1997 and 1998

the subjects at hand, and were chosen from both the public and private sectors, from both the industry and non-industry segments of the Virginia coalfield population.

History has left traditional coal mining areas of the United States with a sometimes wary relationship between mining communities and the coal companies, and a folk lore that is both nostalgic and appealing. There are few who cannot respond to the lilting refrain of *The Coal Miner's Daughter*. Differences between popular perceptions and real life in modern coal communities can, however, be quite stark. My involvement with coal mining in Virginia leaves me in little doubt that the people in the southwest of our state want mining to continue there as long as possible—not only, or even primarily, for the maintenance of a culture but for the economic benefits that it can provide. As one who was born and raised amidst coal mines, and who has spent a long career serving mining industries, I can identify with those sentiments.

The purpose of commissioning this work was to elicit a selection of views from the people of the coal counties faced with the prospect of a decline in coal mining activities. The study includes expressions of opinion and human reaction from some of the inhabitants of our coalfield, as distinct from the more scientific and/or empirical approaches normally adopted in VCCER studies (although the author does utilize a clearly defined methodology, extensively set forth in his "Introduction" to this report).

Whether the VCCER should involve itself in such matters has been the topic of considerable debate . It was certainly not our intent to afford an opportunity to attack an industry that continues to be so vital to the region, the state and our export markets, nor would the VCCER be a party to such an attack. Indeed, it is the view of the VCCER that this report does not pursue such a counterproductive approach. Instead it strives for a balanced presentation of perspectives and viewpoints. This was a key factor in selecting excerpts from the transcribed interviews. Whichever side of the debate one prefers, this report does, indeed, reflect concerns that cannot be ignored.

Here, then, is Stephen Mooney's *Mountain Voices.*

Malcolm J. McPherson
Director
Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research

Any opinions expressed in this document are those of the author or his interviewees and do not necessarily coincide with those of the Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research.

INTRODUCTION

The following study, *Mountain Voices*, was funded by the Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research. Its purpose is to allow the people of the southwestern Virginia coalfields—miners and managers, citizens and industry representatives—to speak for themselves about socio-cultural issues related to the vitality or decline of their coal-based economy. Unfortunately, these voices—belonging to those who live daily with the consequences of booms and busts in their economy, and who, as a result, know best their socio-cultural ramifications—are often ignored by both politicians and policymakers alike. This study seeks to, at least partially, remedy that problem by providing the coalfield population a direct line of access to those people who make the decisions affecting the course of their lives.

The study is divided into two central sections. The first, "Coal Mining Industrialization and Quality of Life," provides a brief historical overview of the connections in Virginia's coalfield counties between the coal economy and quality of life issues. It also identifies the many factors that influence Virginia's coal industry, discusses the role of that industry in the state's economy as a whole, identifies significant problem areas with regard to the coal industry and coalfield population, examines the cost of a "do-nothing" approach, and finally offers tentative solutions to these problems, identifying certain long-range potentialities. The study's second part, "Mountain Voices," provides coalfield residents an opportunity to speak to these problems, solutions, or potentialities. Their comments reveal the vast network of connections in the coalfield counties between coal mining industrialization and quality of life. Their comments also reveal a depth and complexity of understanding on the part of coalfield residents about the economic and socio-cultural factors that affect their lives.

It is freely acknowledged that the study's methodology is influenced by the author's background and approach to this work. Perhaps most importantly: (1) the author's lifelong experiential knowledge—as a resident, newspaper reporter, and educator—of Appalachian coal culture life and work, with its attendant historical cycles of boom and bust; (2) the author's extensive knowledge of the very considerable body of scholarship and literature on the Appalachian coal industry and coal culture; (3) the author's firm belief that the story of the coal mining industrialization of central Appalachia and of southwestern Virginia is a complex and many-sided story, with multiple shades of gray and little in terms of a simple dichotomy between an heroic proletarian workforce and an evil capitalist empire that oppressed a good people while simultaneously and completely destroying their culture and environment; (4) the author's desire to establish a balance and a tone of fairness in the presentation of materials; (5) the author's desire to allow the people of the southwestern Virginia coalfields to speak for themselves about the issues that most affect their lives; (6) the author's firm belief that these people are an intelligent and astute group who can more than accurately speak—and with sophistication, eloquence, and real depth—to their decades' long experience with coal mining and its attendant socio-cultural consequences; (7) the author's knowledge and appreciation of an extensive body of thought and scholarship which argues for the utility and accuracy of "people's narratives" as a credible source of historical information and interpretation, and which argues that over-arching "diacritical meta-narratives" by interpretive agents are unnecessary and often obscuring in their effect and in their pursuit of "truth"; (8) the author's firm belief in "common sense"; that, for example, if one seeks to best understand the impact on school systems of historical and/or projected declines in coal production and/or employment, then who better to talk to than a school administrator with more than 30 years of experience in a Virginia coalfield county school system? Or, if one seeks to best understand the impacts of these developments on a coalfield county social services department, then who better to talk to than a social services director with 35 years of experience?; (9) the author's belief that a fair representation of viewpoints and perspectives can be attained with a small but carefully selected, highly relevant, and sensibly chosen body of interviewees; that a large "statistical sampling" is not always a necessary or even desirable methodology by which to proceed; that at some very logical level "quality" and depth of response are more important than sheer "quantity"; and finally, (10) the author's firm belief that an open airing and debate of the issues raised by this report are far more desirable than silence and/or a basic refusal to address these issues which so clearly and directly affect the realities of day-to-day life, work, and culture in the Virginia coalfields.

COAL MINING INDUSTRIALIZATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE

For over a hundred years coal mining industrialization and the economic quality of life of the people of the southwestern Virginia coalfields have been inextricably linked. Indeed, all aspects of life, work, and culture in the seven coal producing counties—Lee, Tazewell, Russell, and Scott, but especially Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise—have been dramatically affected by developments in the coal industry. As scholar Keith Dix perceptively notes in his study *What's a Coal Miner to Do?: The Mechanization of Coal Mining*, since the beginning of widespread industrialization in central Appalachia in the 1880s, "coal mining [has been] more than the extraction of a mineral from the earth; it [has been] a technical process combined with a mercantile process, with consideration for the former affected by the latter" (p. 26). In other words, in the coalfields of central Appalachia, and thus southwestern Virginia, the vitality and health of the coal mining industry always have been interconnected with that of the broader regional economy, and thus has had a direct impact on the quality of life enjoyed, or endured, by coalfield residents.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Even the briefest review of the historical record makes abundantly clear the essential validity of these observations. In central Appalachia and southwestern Virginia, in the 50-year period from about 1880 to 1930, the region underwent a nearly complete transformation. It changed from a place where most of the population derived a living from subsistence farms, and where the economic infrastructure was domestic-and-local in combination with trade-and-barter, to a place where most of the population—now living in or near hundreds of coal towns—derived a living from coal mining industrialization, and where the economic infrastructure was based on a cash-wage system tied directly to national and international patterns of industrial production and consumption (Eller, pp. xv-xxvi). This shift occurred with a compression and intensity that is nearly singular in American history, producing wide-ranging and permanent effects on the southwestern Virginia coalfields. Thousands of its residents attempted to adjust to the new conditions of life and work and to the numerous related issues they raised: rural versus town-based living, sufficiency versus dependency, and local versus external control of resources development.

The vitality and health of the mining industry always have had a direct impact on the quality of life enjoyed, or endured, by coalfield residents

The residents of the southwestern Virginia coalfields also were affected dramatically by post-Depression era developments in the American and Appalachian coal industries. For example, as these industry segments began to utilize mechanization on a widespread basis following the eventual Supreme Court confirmation of 1935's Wagner Act, which recognized the legality of unions and thus union scale wages, literally hundreds of thousands of central Appalachian miners began to be displaced by machines, starting especially in the late 1940s. In his study *Fire in the Hole: Miners and Managers in the American Coal Industry*, economist and labor historian Curtis Seltzer provides a clear idea of the extent of this displacement of human labor by machine labor: Between 1950 and 1970, mining employment in central Appalachia declined from 415,582 to 124,532 men (p. 69). In human terms, in a mere 20-year period, about three out of every four coal mine workers lost their jobs. It requires little to imagine the social and economic havoc that both accompanied and followed this period of massive worker displacement. In fact, the War on Poverty-era programs of the 1960s resulted at least partially from the impression that these conditions of severe poverty and destitution made on presidential candidate John F. Kennedy as he made early campaign visits to central Appalachia.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Significant reductions in central Appalachian mining employment—and perhaps more importantly, the impact of job loss on quality of life—did not end with the War on Poverty of the 1960s. This fact becomes clear if we briefly examine the recent history of southwestern Virginia's coal mining region. In the past decade alone, from roughly January 1987 until December 1996, mining employment in the state's seven coal producing counties declined by almost 50 percent, from nearly 14,000 workers at the beginning of 1987 to just over 7,000 at the end of 1996 (Karmis et al., p. 12; Sadler, 1997 data). In some counties this significant rate of job loss occurred with even greater rapidity. In Dickenson County, long a center of activity for what for decades was the country's largest exporter of coal, mining employment decreased by over 50 percent in a single two-year period, from 1,401 workers in 1993 to 694 by the end of 1995 (Karmis et al., p. 6).

In the past decade alone, mining employment in the state's seven coal producing counties declined by almost 50 percent

What is more significant for the regional culture and quality of life, however, is not simply coal employment but coal production. In southwestern Virginia, production also has declined substantially during the past 10 years and during the 1990s alone. In fact, Virginia's 1990 peak production total of 46.5 million tons decreased to just under 36 million tons by the end of 1995, the lowest production since 1983—and with underground production at 27 million tons, the lowest since 1978 (Karmis et al., p. 3). And according to projections by the Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research, both coal mining production and employment in Virginia will continue to decrease over the next 10-15 years, even given a best-case scenario that posits year 2005 total production at approximately 28.5 million tons and employment at somewhere between 4,000-4,500 workers.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FUTURE OF VIRGINIA'S COAL INDUSTRY

Closer inspection of these facts and figures reveals that a vast network of constantly evolving national and international mining and marketing conditions long have affected and will continue to impact the residents of the coalfield counties of southwestern Virginia. Current factors influencing the future health of Virginia's coal industry—and, in turn, its coalfield population—include:

- **Domestic Competition**. The region faces competition from a number of domestic sources: from neighboring Appalachian coal-producing states such as West Virginia and Kentucky, which have larger remaining deposits and thicker, more easily accessed seams; from mid-western producers such as Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana, which have substantial deposits that can be easily accessed through more inexpensive surface mining techniques; and from western coal-producing states such as Wyoming and Montana, which also have substantial deposits that can be easily tapped through less expensive surface mining techniques.

- **Export Market Competition**. International producers such as Colombia and Australia have immense and easily accessed deposits and, in some cases, lower labor costs, which means that they can produce and sell coal competitively in former American markets, such as Japan. This competition results in a tightening of the export market.

- **Affiliated Industries**. The future of the state's coal industry is also affected by the structure and health of affiliated enterprises, such as the electricity-generating industry, the primary consumer of coal on the domestic market, and the railroad industry, the primary transporter of coal on the domestic market (and to export shipping centers such as Hampton Roads). Similarly, the natural gas industry offers increased competition.

- **Environmental Concerns**. Increasing concern over coal's effects on both domestic and global environments continues to exert pressure on the industry.

- **Virginia Coal Geology**. Perhaps the most pressing concern is the fact that Virginia has exhausted many of its thicker, more easily accessed coal seams and now, to survive and compete, must develop and implement methodologies and technologies for mining its remaining thin but high-quality and low-sulfur seams in a cost-effective manner.

THE QUESTION OF IMPACT

At this point, there perhaps is a real temptation to simply say, "Well, since so few people are affected by the coal industry in Virginia, just some of the residents of seven counties—and really, mainly three—in the extreme southwestern corner, and since so little money is involved, why don't we just let nature take its course and allow the industry in the state to die?" The problem with such a response is that it is based on a significant misunderstanding of the coal industry's role and that of its produced revenues, both direct and indirect, on both southwestern Virginia and the state as a whole. In a 1995 study entitled *In-State Economic Impacts of the Virginia Coal Industry and Potential Coal Production Declines*, VCCER Associate Director Carl Zipper, basing his examination on data from 1993, does much to clear up any misconceptions that what happens to the coalfields happens to the coalfields alone.

Zipper's report reveals that for the period of study over 40 percent of the personal income earned in these seven counties was generated by the coal industry (pp. 2, 25). In addition, the industry in 1993 directly employed over 9,000 persons and supported a $340 million payroll, while generating more than $36 million in local and state tax revenues (pp. 2, 25). More significantly, when indirect and induced effects on that wider matrix of persons and businesses affected by the infrastructure of the coal industry—for example, independent coal truck drivers or auto parts store owners—were taken into consideration, Zipper found that in 1993 the coal industry in Virginia directly or indirectly employed nearly 40,000 persons, supported a payroll of over $1 billion, and generated nearly $150 million in local and state tax revenues (pp. 1-2, 25). What Zipper's study clearly demonstrates is that when there is a substantial decline in Virginia coal production and employment, it affects not just an inconsequential number of residents in a very few counties, not just a coal miner in Dickenson County or a preparation plant worker in Buchanan County or a small merchant in Wise County. It also affects a state mining inspector born and raised in Richmond, a railroad worker living in Roanoke, and a shipyard worker in Newport News. In sum, Zipper's study shows that if coal production and employment in Virginia continue to markedly decline—or even worse, to collapse altogether—then the fiscal impact on the entire state of Virginia will be substantial, perhaps even severe, resulting in a potential loss of $1 billion in personal payroll income—much of which is spent in Virginia towns, cities, and communities—and $150 million in local and state tax revenues.

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WHAT IS AT STAKE AND WHAT MUST BE DONE

What is at stake, then, is a significant part of Virginia's economic vitality, as well as its ability to compete effectively in an ever-shifting global economy, one still substantially dependent upon coal for the production of its energy and infrastructure. At the very least, the future of the coal mining region of Virginia and its people hangs in the balance. As current VCCER Director Malcolm J. McPherson wrote in a recent article entitled "The Tax Credit Has Given Us A Few More Years. But What Then?" from the VCCER publication *Energy Outlook*:

> *The region will [now] take one of two paths. If a sufficient portion of the wealth created by mining [is] retained within the area, to encourage the development of other industries and infrastructure, then the region will continue to grow and prosper. If, however, there [is] insufficient local investment, then the area will become truly depressed or die completely. The nation and the world contain hundreds of examples of major cities and ghost towns, both of which commenced as centers of mining.*

As McPherson goes on to state, what Virginia must do now—in conjunction with the coal industry; related industries such as the railroad, export shipping, and energy industries; state development agencies, such as the Coalfield Economic Development Authority (CEDA); and the people of the coalfields themselves—is to work cooperatively to ensure "that southwestern Virginia maintains a viable mining industry until the region reaches a level of guaranteed self-sustainability." More specifically:

- The state, the coal industry, and its related industries must jointly assist in the funding, development, and implementation of mining technology suitable for the recovery of Virginia's remaining high quality thin-seams, as well as its considerable deposits left in areas where coal was mined inefficiently at an earlier date;

- Given current environmental concerns, these "partners" must develop mining technologies that are environmentally benign in order not only to reduce or eliminate problems related to subsidence, groundwater disruption or contamination, and methane emissions, but also to ensure near-zero impact on surface areas;

- The state and its "partners," by way of methodologies and technologies such as those just mentioned, must, instead of maintaining current mining methods and then merely "closing shop" within the next 10-15 years, significantly lengthen the time period over which such economic benefits as coal production taxes, personal income, and local spending are derived from Virginia's coal industry;

- And, finally, and perhaps most importantly, the state and its "partners" must work cooperatively to maximize the coal tax funding of non-mining developments in the coalfields, in terms both of infrastructure—roads, industrial diversification, small business entrepreneurship—and human services, such as education, job retraining, and temporary assistance to the unemployed.

If We Do Nothing

If the state, coal industry, related industries and coalfield residents themselves do nothing over the next 10-15 years, the result will most certainly be a severe and even irreversible decline in the quality of life, economic and otherwise, for the people of Virginia's coal-producing counties, as well as for other Virginians. The conversations with coalfield residents documented later in this report demonstrate this conclusion with force, clarity and immediacy. According to these conversations, the decline will manifest itself in myriad forms:

- Ever-increasing unemployment will occur as coal production decreases or ceases altogether;

- The region's tax base will decrease or collapse, resulting in a lack of local funding for infrastructure or human services elements such as education, law enforcement, and road maintenance;

- Local governments will become increasingly nonfunctional as the region's tax base decreases;

- As coalfield residents, both male and female, turn to other and lower paid forms of primarily service-industry employment, the real earning power of the coalfield population will further decrease significantly;
- Other Virginia localities and regions will have to pay the cost of supporting a subsequent coalfield "welfare state";
- Outmigration of the region's population, including especially the "best and brightest" of the young, will accelerate, leading directly to the perpetuation of already long-term problems;
- A significant portion of that outmigrating population will move to other regions of Virginia, especially northern Virginia, perhaps resulting in increased job competition as well as an increased strain on the local budgets and social services of those regions
- Coalfield families will experience an increase in tension, stress, and disintegration as the already-fragile domestic and regional economy is adversely impacted
- Coalfield residents will experience an increase in incidents of clinical depression, substance abuse, and related emotional or psychological behaviors, including spouse abuse, suicide and homicide;
- Coalfield towns and communities will continue to deteriorate as local, especially small, businesses close due to a decrease in expendable regional income;
- The coalfield population will experience a real and significant decline in political power and leverage—already nonexistent in the minds of many coalfield residents—as the region's ability to produce tax revenue for the state declines; and finally
- Important aspects of coalfield culture—independence, neighborliness, hospitality toward strangers, resiliency—will diminish or disappear altogether as outmigration accelerates, communities deteriorate, and the region's sense of "shared historical experience" is, at worst, forgotten. In other words, America will move closer toward losing another of its distinctive "regional" cultures.

If We Work Together

On the other hand, conversations with coalfield residents also reveal that if the numerous interconnected parties mentioned above can indeed work together—and, residents are the first to concede, if they too will become involved—then a multitude of positive long-term potentialities seem possible for the coal-producing region of Virginia. These potentialities, they say, include:

- A diversified and more stable economy based not only on mining but on other manufacturing or information-age industries, one that takes advantage of the eager, ever-more-able and educated workforce and work ethic of the region's people;

- An economy based more heavily on the small business entrepreneurship and skills of the region's people;
- Improved transportation systems—from highways and railways to the Internet—that allow for the import and export of the region's raw materials and finished products, both physical and information-based;
- Improved transportation systems—here mostly in the form of four-lane highways—that allow for an increased emphasis on and funding of tourism as a viable economic alternative for the coalfields region, and that take advantage of the scenic aspects and historical significance of the mountainous region of far southwestern Virginia; and
- Perhaps most significantly, the possibility that community cohesiveness and leadership, political and otherwise, will improve and increase as the region's residents—empowered by a more diversified, stable and long-term economic infrastructure—continue to adapt to the changing conditions and historical processes that affect them; in short, that southwestern Virginia's many coal mining towns and counties can again become "communities of hope" that remain a distinctive and beautiful part of America's regional identity.

MOUNTAIN VOICES

As the following interview excerpts demonstrate, coalfield residents prove themselves quite thoughtful about the socio-cultural and economic prospects before them should the mining industry diminish or collapse outright. Over the summer months of 1997, and also during the spring of 1998, the author of this study conducted taped interviews (or "conversations," really) with a subjectively chosen but arguably representative segment of the Virginia coalfield population—among them active and former coal miners and their wives, coal industry management personnel, school teachers, newspaper editors, school superintendents, merchants, local elected officials, directors of social service programs, and mental health workers.

As these interviews or conversations reveal, coalfield residents are not only well aware of the problems that might arise from a collapse or severe decline in the region's coal industry; they are also concerned with the potential consequences of inactivity and are vocal about the best possible methods for responding to potential economic distress or calamity for their region. This section will address—oftentimes in the verbatim voices of the people of the coalfields—their responses to these problems, consequences, and solutions.

PROBLEMS

Effects of Severe Decline in and/or Collapse of Coal Tax Base

As interviews with several coalfield residents reveal, a miscellany of coal taxes—production (or "severance"), machinery and tools, payroll—provides much of the local revenue base for southwestern Virginia's coal producing counties. For example, Jenay Tate, editor of Wise County's Norton-based *Coalfield Progress* newspaper, calls these coal taxes, especially the coal severance tax, "that Golden Egg. Everything is funded with them. Loads." Similarly, Mike Quillen, a coal industry manager who currently works for Mid-Vol Leasing Inc., a small metallurgical coal producer near Princeton, West Virginia, but who has nearly 25 years of experience with some of Virginia's largest coal companies, calls the severance tax the "golden goose." Quillen, though, is quick to point out that in his view, in some Virginia coalfield counties, local officials "have stayed too short-sighted, [have] thought the golden goose was going to be here forever." As a result, Quillen says, "they have become tremendously reliant on taxes from the coal industry" to provide revenue for local government, perhaps too much so. In both Tate and Quillen's view, in fact, a severe decline in and/or collapse of this coal tax base can result in a crisis for local government, up to and including the literal inability of that government to function.

Collapse of the coal tax base can result in a crisis for local government

More specifically, Quillen says a loss of coal taxes would produce a situation in southwestern Virginia that is “very drastic. Particularly drastic in the immediate time . . . We would all, the citizens of the area, see a dramatic decline in the short-term. In our school systems, in our other services, law enforcement, county social services, these are all going to be impacted.” Adds Quillen: “It’s even conceivable, I don’t think this is too drastic to say, that a county could even face bankruptcy in terms of their debt.”

Such a scenario, in fact, nearly played itself out over the past two or three years in Dickenson County, which, since the 1995 closing of a number of mines, has suffered from substantial production declines and the loss of more than 50 percent of its mining jobs. As Roy Rose, Director of Social Services for Dickenson County, remarks, “There have been quite a few consequences of the developments of 1995. First of all, of course, as everybody understands, the tax base has gone down, down, and down. Last year the county was on the very edge of financial disaster. Almost bankruptcy. Through a lot of hard work on eveybody’s part that was averted. But just barely.” Dickenson County Board of Supervisors Chair Scottie Rose does not disagree with Roy Rose’s assessment: “I’ll be very blunt with you. When *[those mines]* shut down here two and a half, almost three years ago, it took almost a third, more than a third, really, of our local tax dollars away from our county. And the labor market that we lost, the people who lost their jobs, they couldn’t pay the taxes. So we had no way of coming up with that tax money that we lost when they shut down. We lost the machinery and tool tax. We lost the production tax. Those are big losses.”

Scottie Rose notes that, in his view, it is crucial that the coal tax base of Dickenson County be maintained in the near future even if mining jobs are lost due to improvements in technology. He says: “Even if future mechanization takes away jobs, at least we would still have the tax base here from the coal industry, even though we would lose the jobs. So we would still have the production tax and that’s the good side to it outside of the bad side of losing the jobs.” Rose continues: “But if I had to have one or the other, if I couldn’t have both, and I can’t, I’d have to say I would want to keep the coal tax base here more than the jobs. Because people here don’t realize how close Dickenson County came to just shutting down in the wake of the last big round of . . . layoffs. To just having the state come in and take over.” Quillen agrees that as unfortunate as potential automation-induced employment declines might be, it is nonetheless extremely important to keep production levels (and the tax base) up by way of technological advancement. Quillen says that even though job loss is inevitable with increases in technology, with the concurrent increases in production, then “a lot of money still flows in. Even though it may go to one individual instead of two, the area still gets the benefit.”

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Scottie Rose goes on to reveal the sheer frustration felt by members of the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors in the aftermath of the layoffs: “[We] got so desperate that we actually thought about sending a letter out to everybody who was from Dickenson County or who had ever lived here for long asking for help or ideas.

But we could never get up the nerve to do such a thing. We were just too proud, I guess. But I'll tell you, the state ought to consider the cost of having to come into the coalfields and to totally take over the county governments versus the cost of helping out just a little right now." These remarks make clear the centrality of coal tax funding—and the potential effects of its loss—to Virginia's coal producing counties.

Resultant Outmigration and its Effects

Another significant problem that results from the loss of coal mining jobs, coal taxes, and a decline in the coal economy of southwestern Virginia is the continuing outmigration of the region's workforce, especially its young people, who are forced to leave the area to find employment and economic stability. This tide of outmigration has been flowing steadily since at least the World War II era and has only accelerated with the developments of recent years. Says Roy Rose of the situation in Dickenson County: "For years we have seen the cream of the crop of our population leave the county. Both from the standpoint of those middle-aged and younger displaced miners. They had to leave and go elsewhere. So we've lost their talents and contributions to the community. And we're seeing almost entirely our young high school graduating people leave this county. Virtually none of them are staying. There's nothing here, economically speaking."

Looking at the case of his own family, which features two children just now getting ready to graduate from college, Quillen agrees "What opportunity do they have [here in the coalfields]? Who knows? That's something all of us here have to deal with emotionally, whether you're a coal operator or a clerk in a store . . . It's something we all face." Quillen adds that "we're definitely facing the outmigration of our smartest kids. That's a real detriment."

Conversations with other coalfield residents reveal the crucial side-effects of this outmigration pattern. Says Dickenson County School Superintendent Dr. Danny Greear: "We've been in the 'export business' for a long, long time, and I'm not just talking about coal. I'm talking about the fact that our best people, our people who seem to be the most energetic, who have the initiative, who seem to have the skills to do well, have been forced to leave because we only have X number of jobs for those people. We've lost all those capable people and we've lost much of our middle class as a result, and our tax base along with it."

Adds Norman Lewis, a 22-year veteran Dickenson County coal miner who was laid off in 1995 along with about 500 others: "Our youth—they have no future here. Now for people who are already retired or close to retired, yeah, this is probably an ideal place to be. Things are stable in that rural small town kind of way. But there's nothing here for the young people: they've got to go. At the very best after graduation from a local college they've got to go elsewhere. You know, eventually all of Dickenson County, all her wealth goes out in a train and then her biggest asset goes out in a car to seek work someplace else."

Lifelong Norton resident Mike Robbins, a disabled coal miner who now helps his wife and her partner run a city sporting goods store called High Country Outdoors, clearly identifies the effect of steady outmigration on coal country downtown areas and small businesses. Robbins explains that about 75 percent of the business of High Country Outdoors is connected in some way to those involved with coal mining. Robbins then notes the massive layoffs—about 700 miners—that have occurred at Wise County's Westmoreland Coal Company operations in the past one to two years.[1] According to Robbins, "These layoffs have affected our business. There's been a lot of miners to leave this area right around here. And when they go their money goes. Now they're in other states or in northern Virginia spending their money somewhere else. It's definitely affected this area, and this business."

Similarly, both Roy Rose and Ronald Mullins, a Wise County special education teacher, note the effect of outmigration and its resultant small business decline on Clintwood, Dickenson County's county seat. Says Rose: "We have seen almost a total loss of businesses in the county. Look around. We have no real businesses at all. We got three major grocery stores in the entire county. There are virtually no department stores. You can't buy in Clintwood, for example, a man's shirt or a pair of shoes. This gives you an idea of what's happened to the small business economy of our county." Adds Mullins: "Back in the years past, even during the boom of the 1970s, you could see a big difference in the quality of the life that we have in terms of dollars. During the boom of the 70s, seems like everybody and their brother drove new four wheel drives, there was more work done on the roads, more students were enrolled in school, you never saw squabbles over insurance in the school system, and not even too many big battles over salaries. And the town of Clintwood itself was thriving. But look down the streets of Clintwood now. There's not nearly as many businesses as there once was. There used to be dime stores and department stores and hardwares and different restaurants. The town was booming. That's the way it was when I was growing up. The town was always busy. But now it just seems dead."

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Roy Rose speaks forcefully to other, more long-term and equally serious consequences of the continued outmigration of Dickenson County's population. Says Rose: "Here's what we're getting left with and then some of the consequences. We're getting left with a lot of the very low income people. Dickenson County's current poverty rate is estimated at 25.9 percent, about 30 percent, of the total population, living at or below poverty level. The population is aging rapidly. And we have a tremendous number of disabled persons in this county. The effects this is having? Loss of hope. We're seeing an increase in the number of substance abuse cases, both old and young. School systems are not able to adapt. County government is not able to adapt. They can't seem to accept the idea that King Coal is not coming back. I guess the general public is not accepting this, and it's causing a lot of worry and fear."

The result, Rose speculates, is that "Dickenson County is ending up, I am afraid, with an aged, disabled, undereducated population. Which is, I don't know how to put it, depressing. It's depressing to those of us who want to try and make it better, who want to try and meet the needs of those people but there are not enough resources. And there's not going to be enough resources. And I'm fearful that we're going to basically end up virtually bankrupt. I'm

[1] These layoffs occurred because Westmoreland became insolvent and filed for bankruptcy protection.

afraid that's the direction we're headed in. The trend is not decreasing. It's increasing. And it's totally parallel to the coal economy, which has dropped out the bottom." If conditions in Dickenson County are at all representative, outmigration and its attendant consequences continue to be a serious problem for southwestern Virginia's coal-reliant counties.

Effects on Miners and Operators of Loss of Income

Conversations with social services directors and workers clearly reveal the extent of the economic setbacks suffered by both southwestern Virginia miners and operators over the past few years, especially during the decline of the past decade. As the remarks of Roy Rose demonstrate, these miners and operators have had to adjust—often only with the greatest difficulty—to oftentimes drastic shifts in personal income and socio-economic status. Says Rose: "We [the Dickenson County Social Services Department] of course have seen a large segment of that displaced coal mining population through this agency over the last 16, 17 years. You know we won't get into the horrible human tragedy stories of some of that unless you want to. But we have seen people go from $40–50,000 a year jobs and substantial bank accounts down to zero resources and zero income. We've had people in this office asking for food assistance through the food stamp program and for medical assistance through the Medicaid program that a few years ago would have called me a liar had I said 'Hey, one day you might need my services or the agency's services.' And it's just not coal miners, either. It's coal mine operators. I have seen, I have literally seen in this office, securing food stamps, local coal mine operators who in 1981 or so probably were worth millions, at least a couple of millions. But in the last 15 years they have lost everything. Everything they owned. And there's more than one I have seen in this office."

Thinking back to the 1970s regional coal boom--brought about by the oil embargo of that decade--and its temporary influx of wealth, Quillen remembers much the same rags-to-riches-to-rags story as that described just above by Rose. Says Quillen: "For just a few months there really, in 1974, [per ton] prices got extraordinarily high. A tremendous amount of cash came into the southwestern Virginia coal counties." Quillen, though, quickly remembers the aftermath: "I know an awful lot of people who made a tremendous amount of money in a few months, but who didn't keep it. In fact the number of people who kept it is certainly a lot smaller than the number who in effect became millionaires for just a very short period of time, but who then spent it or lost it all. They lost it all."

Considering a more recent time, former coal miner Lewis effectively describes the wages and lifestyle of a typical (union) coal miner before the marked decline of the mid-1990s: "When we finally shut down in '95, we were making about $148 for an 8-hour shift. But we worked 10 hours and it ran about $178 a day. It was around $17.80 per hour. The most I ever earned in a year, I guess, was about $45 or $46,000. Now for people who don't have education—some above high school and some don't even have that—the possibility to make that kind of wage, that's why it's such a draw. And we're just talking about cash moneys. Or before taxes. We're not talking fringe benefits—you can add another 40 percent or more to your salary out of that, in terms of real dollars. In terms of buying health care or putting away for retirement. So, you could make $45,000 a year and that's

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not even considering retirement and health and other fringes like that. And you get used to it. You think it's not going to change, the world's going to need coal forever. You just don't know that they might not need it at the price it costs you to mine it."

Lewis also vividly explains the effects of the sudden—or even gradual—loss of such an income and lifestyle. Thinking back about his own job loss, he says, "It was probably as painful as losing a close family member. You can never prepare. You think you've prepared by paying off a house early, which we did, or putting money in savings or things like that, but when you've been used to working every day and earning that kind of wage and it stops, at first you think, 'Well, yeah, I'll go to school and I'll have a big time,' and you enjoy it for the first couple of days, because you don't have to go to work. But then by the third or fourth day you realize, 'Hey, I'm not making any money here.' And you start to look and there are no jobs. There aren't even minimum wage jobs. If you want to mow somebody's yard or maybe do some kind of labor like that, you can find a few things to do, but there are a lot of workers and no jobs. And it's been tough. There were times . . . We, my wife and I, sat and worried about it quite a bit, wondering how we would manage when we couldn't hardly make it from payday to payday at $17 an hour. How were we going to make it at nothing an hour?" Adds Lewis in a sober and reflective tone: "We've been very fortunate in that we've been able to maintain what we have. But there are several people that I know who have not, who have lost vehicles, homes, marriages."

Quillen's assessment of contemporary wage loss patterns and of lack of earning alternatives is much the same as Lewis'. Notes Quillen: "The opportunity to make $50,000 a year . . . it's not going to be there anymore. And to make $50,000 a year, there are not a lot of other jobs in our area where you can do that. A lot of the telemarketing jobs and the other jobs we can bring in, they just don't pay those kinds of wages." Quillen, though, identifies one alternative for families in the region: "If we can't have the opportunity for somebody to make $16 an hour in the coal mines, then we sure need to have the opportunity for two $8 an hour jobs. That's what I see now as the future. Instead of the coal miner going to work and earning $50,000 and the wife staying at home we're probably going to see both of them working trying to make $50,000." Quillen, however, quickly notes that there is a negative side to this probable regional increase in two working parent families. "There will be a spiraling social effect," he says. "The kids won't have a Mom at home and if the school systems aren't adequate then some kids won't get the direction they should and that will increase our other problems."

The comments of Rose, Quillen and Lewis, demonstrate with real clarity the drastic personal economic transitions undergone--and yet to be undergone--by both Virginia coal miners and operators.

Psychological and Emotional Health Issues

Several connections immediately emerge between the health of southwestern Virginia's coal economy and the psychological and emotional health of the region's substantial mining-related population, according to Dickenson County Clinical Services Director Robert Rambo. Rephrasing a question put to him by this writer, Rambo says, "What kind of impact does the vitality of the coal industry have on the emotional health of this community? Well, that's an awfully involved question, but let me respond on several fronts. Well, first, there is depression. That's the beginning. For example, we had a mine close about two years ago. A major mine. We're talking hundreds of men suddenly out of work. And their families put on the spot. So some of them came to the Department of Social Services for assistance. And some of them came here [to the mental health clinic] because when you've been working your whole life, as most of them had been, and then that's gone, you can get depressed very easily. You can just lose your zest for life."

Rambo continues: "And then there's an increase in alcoholism, and also substance abuse of all kinds, and even more unfortunately, in familial problems like spouse abuse. But I think you have to look at the norm for the miner in this area. Most of them do not have an advanced education. It's just a pattern, you know, their fathers and their grandfathers were coal miners, so that's the pattern that's set. The problem is, when that declines, they're not trained for anything else. So along with the depression we see them turn to alcohol and other substances. And we see more of what I will call acting-out behaviors in regard to their spouses. We have more battered wives."

you don't . . . beg for help. When you're down and out, you deal with it

Rambo notes, though, that "You have to look at the whole context. Most of the coal miners here, especially the union ones, make really good money. You don't find too many jobs in this county besides coal that can earn a man $35,000-$40,000 a year in straight time salary. And when you lose that, you just can't walk down the street and get another one. You're talking about moving away or going into the service industry and making $8,000-10,000 at best. So a lot of the miners get into a lot of debt and then they're laid off and the financial burden, the stress, the tension, all just become overwhelming. From buying fishing boats and four wheel drive trucks and high-powered rifles and hunting dogs and then not being able to pay for any of them. And that plays into a lot of things: the depression, the alcoholism and substance abuse, the tension with the spouse, and even worse, occasionally things boil over and somebody gets beat up or hurt pretty badly."

Rambo then speaks to the strong work ethic of the miners, to the effect loss of employment has on their pride, and to the crisis point many of them reach before even considering a visit to his agency. He remarks: "Generally speaking, coal miners hate being on the draw, as they call it. So having to ask for help just kills them. A lot of them just can't bring themselves to do it. I don't know too many miners who I've dealt with, who have actually walked into here or into social services, that likes trading $1,000 a week for food stamps. It's kind of like beating them over the head. You know, they've lost their job, they're struggling, and they have to ask for help, which they've never done before. It comes back to the personality of the culture in this area, the Appalachian mentality—you're a man, you don't ask for or you don't beg for help. When you're down and out, you deal with it. So when we do get a miner in here to talk to us, things have usually already reached a crisis point."

Clinical Services employee Crystal Hill also notes this loss of pride and self-esteem on the part of unemployed coal mine workers, but extends her analysis to include the effects of declines in mining employment on the entire family. She explains: "When a big job layoff happens, as far as the men go, there's a real loss of self-esteem, and there's a lot of feeling insecure. As far as the women go, I think, there's all this anxiety about making ends meet. And the kids are

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affected too. If there is a conflict or problem in the family, the kids know it. They sense it, whether it's financial or has to do with whether Mom and Dad are going to get a divorce. These things go straight to the kids. It can't be helped. They're affected just like their parents. It's hard for them to go to school and say 'My daddy's out of work and my mommy's at her wit's end.' "

Both Hill and Rambo note one final type of psychological or emotional problem that has begun to recently affect Dickenson County coal mine workers and their spouses. Says Rambo: "Another thing is that the union mines are closing and the non-union mines are opening which means longer hours, less money, and generally, more unsafe working conditions,[2] which causes a lot of anxiety and worry and fear." Hill puts it this way: "If a man is used to working in a good, safe mine and then they have to go into one of these little small mines, almost all of them non-union, where there's dangerous conditions—I've heard a lot of the men talk about that—they're scared every day when they go in and they wonder, 'Am I going to come out alive?' This is an awful condition to be put into and it really leads to a lot of anxiety and puts a lot of strain on them, and on their wives and kids."

It should be noted here that Quillen essentially disagrees with Rambo and Hill's assessment of conditions in contemporary union versus non-union mines. Unlike Rambo and Hill, Quillen does not see substantial differences between the two workplaces, although they may have existed at one time in the region's history. Says Quillen: "I do want to say from direct knowledge that I don't think there is any significant discrepancy in southwest Virginia between the wages, benefits, and working conditions of a union miner and a union-free miner. I certainly recognize what the union did, for example, in enhancing safety in the mines, which has improved immensely . . . They do get the majority of the credit for that, and credit for raising the standard for wages and benefits that other people have had to match." And in the contemporary era, Quillen says, operators certainly have had to continue to meet that standard. He explains: "Nowadays, a responsible operator, coal company, whether union or non-union, is going to have to pay competitive wages and benefits because you are looking for a select group of talented people . . . And coal miners are a talented group of people. They work hard and they can find a way to solve a problem. It fascinates me how many times they find a way to solve a very difficult problem. So those are the kinds of people you want to keep around." Summarizing his argument, Quillen says: "Your incentive for paying good wages and benefits and for maintaining a safe workplace is not whether you're made or not made to do it, but to get the best workforce you can. What you want is your best workers. The best workers you can get and the happiest workers you can get. Because there is competition. If you don't believe that go out and try and hire a mine electrician right now."

[2] Statistics indicate that mine safety is dependent on the capitalization of the company and the professionalism of the management rather than the question of unionization.

While Quillen may disagree with Rambo and Hill about conditions in some contemporary union versus non-union mines, he does not disagree with their assessment of the psychological and emotional effects of lay offs and income loss. Interestingly, Quillen is able to discuss the effect on management, on operators, of these harsh realities, and of even worse ones. Says Quillen: “Getting somebody hurt or killed is without question the hardest thing you ever face in the coal industry, but the second hardest thing is having to look a good man or good woman in the face and say ‘I don’t have work for you.’ You’re impacted by that, I don’t care who you are . . . Some may deal with it better than others emotionally, but nobody could not be impacted by it. ’Cause these people work too hard! They work too hard and they earn everything they get, to not have the opportunity.”

Quillen goes on to explain that ironically, because operators generally are determined to provide as much work as possible for as long as possible, they often make economic decisions that are helpful in the short-term but hurtful in the long. Quillen explains: “The tendency is to try and run the mine longer than you should . . . But you end up having a negative economic situation, when if you had faced the facts earlier and not dealt with it from such a social perspective, then you might have shut down earlier and you might have a little more money to assist your employees. But you’re always trying to make it go a little bit longer, to keep people employed, to not have that lay off, and then you end up without the resources to do some of the things you’d like to . . . But how do you change that emotional reaction? I don’t know? There is tremendous respect for your employees and you don’t want to let them go”

As these comments of Rambo, Hill, and Quillen clearly demonstrate, there are extensive connections between the vitality of southwestern Virginia’s coal economy and the psychological and emotional well being of the region’s mining-related population, both management and labor.

Education and the Coal Economy

Comments by Quillen and by Dickenson County School Superintendent Dr. Danny Greear reveal the intimate connections—positive and negative—between southwestern Virginia’s coal economy and one of its most important—perhaps its most important—social institutions, the public school system. Quillen, who has lived in Scott County for most of his life, but also in Wise County, and who has had children in both school systems, is able to speak directly to educational conditions in both counties, and to the influence of coal dollars. He says: “Being very close to the educational system in both Wise County and Scott County, [I can say that] Wise County has had a significant advantage in their school system over having the coal severance tax versus Scott County which has only minimal coal production. For example, we would look at the expenditure per student in Scott County and Wise County, and look at their tax rates for real estate and whatever other local support they had, because they both got the same amount of money from the state. But we found that Wise County was able to spend about a $1,000 more per student than could Scott County. And they had computers. They had advanced programs. They had additional classes. They had things that Scott County couldn’t afford because of the severance tax.”

Right now we’re in a serious financial crunch because the coal industry has declined so drastically in the past few years

Looking back at his brief tenure as superintendent (he is now in his second year in the position), Greear sees the same kind of direct connection between coal dollars and educational quality in southwestern Virginia. In fact, Greear has had to deal with substantial coal-related education budget cuts from the beginning of his service. He explains: "Right now we're in a serious financial crunch because the coal industry has declined so drastically in the past few years and as a result the amount of revenue the board of supervisors has had to make available to us has diminished dramatically. Take, for instance, last year. Prior to me getting here, they cut half a million dollars out of the school budget and then they came along last summer and because of a lack of coal tax revenue, they cut two and a half million more dollars out of the budget. Then after I got here—I came in during the school year last year—they came along and cut several thousand dollars in textbook money. So over a period of just over 12 months, we lost over $3 million dollars out of our school budget. And next year's budget is not as large as the budget was in '95 or '96."

if there's not as much coal produced, then the coal can't be taxed and then . . . things in the community begin to suffer, like education

Succinctly summarizing the connection between the region's coal economy and his school system, Greear says: "As you can see, in our case here in Dickenson County, since we are a one-resource-based economy, the financing of schools is related, is correlated, almost one to one, to what's happening with the coal industry." Imagining a complete collapse in the county or region's coal economy, Greear says: "Well, you'd see a closing of schools. And you'd be losing the very people you want to keep. The smart ones. The capable ones. They'd be the first to leave because they're employable anywhere. Then you'd lose whatever tax base was left after coal, and it's a vicious cycle all over again—you'd see a tremendous decline in school populations, closed schools, you'd see a dwindling population. We'd almost be going out of the education business, so to speak, in the public schools in the coalfields."

Scottie Rose concurs with Greear's assessment. Remarks Rose: "Well, that's basically where the majority of our tax money here in Dickenson County goes. Into the educational system. And if *(the mines)* shut down and took their tax base from here we wouldn't have the money to keep our educational system going. So we would lose even more families and young people from Dickenson County because we couldn't literally raise taxes enough to keep the schools going. Look at it this way. If the coal industry shuts down, our budget, our well simply dries up. And that includes money for schools, too."

Conversations with Wise County special education teacher Mullins add considerable clarity—and a level of personal insight and experience—to the commentary of Quillen, Rose, and Greear. Says Mullins: "Well there's a direct link between education and the coal economy. You have to have a minimum tax base just to operate the school systems. And of course, the recent decline of the coal industry has for certain begun to put a limit on the funds that our school systems receive. Because, you know, school systems are funded predominantly at the local level, by local communities, their tax revenues. If you have loss of jobs and in our case here, loss of coal production taxes, then everything is hurt. Workers leave the community, small businesses shut down, and you have less revenue to pull from. In other words, if there's not as much coal produced, then the coal can't be taxed and then so things in the community begin to suffer, like education."

Mullins goes on to note recent declines in Wise County school enrollment and explains the range of funding effects this decline has caused. He says: "One of the very basic reasons for decreases in our funds recently is that we're allocated moneys from the state and federal governments based on pupil enrollment—X number of dollars for X number of students attending X number of days. Well, in the last 8 years I can say assuredly that the enrollment has dropped consistently every year. And as enrollment drops the question arises, 'Is it feasible to operate as many buildings and run as many buses for fewer numbers of students?' And now as the coal industry is declining and the workers are leaving, of course they take their children with them and numbers are dropping every year, so the money we get from the state and federal levels is declining, which makes local money even more important. But as I said, that local money is not coming because the coal industry is declining, so it's a pretty vicious cycle, a catch-22." Adds Mullins: "Around here it all comes down to this: the state and federal governments do not provide enough funds to operate a school system. They provide a fraction of the funds. Most of your moneys come from your local taxes, your local community, and once there's no longer a coal industry, once there's no longer a workforce to tax—to tax their property, to tax their income, to tax their businesses, to tax their coal—then of course education is going to suffer, and badly."

Mullins then explains that his very job is ultimately dependent upon the vitality of the region's coal economy. He says: "My job is absolutely dependent upon the coal economy. In the worst case, if enough people were to outmigrate, if enough people were to leave the area, enrollment declines. Every year maybe three or four teachers are laid off. And if in 15-20 years there's absolutely no coal industry, then we really couldn't foresee any small businesses thriving in this area without a supporting economic base, and not only would the coal miners begin to outmigrate with their families, but small business people would move out as well. You know you couldn't expect them to stay in a place where they couldn't make a living, so there goes their children, too. And if you see this sort of snowball effect, you could get to the point where students are bused and combined into a few very large schools, while lots of smaller schools are simply closed down, and teachers laid off. So in 15 years, if enrollment declined enough, then of course I might lose my job before I could retire, in the worst case."

Although Mullins says the Wise County school system is in good shape right now, he adds that funding is growing tighter and tighter. He explains: "Wise County has been one of the pilot school systems in southwest Virginia—they're sort of the lighthouse, they're sort of at the forefront down here. We've been really really fortunate to have some very very good leadership, people who consistently seek other funds, grants. As a matter of fact, eight years ago I was hired with grant money. But in speaking to some of those people this year, they say those grants are becoming fewer and harder to get. And what I hear is that the state and federal governments don't care as much anymore and we're really on our own and without some sort of economic development and diversification[3], if we can't find something to replace the revenue from the coal industry, then in 10-15 years we will be in very very bad shape. Lots of things that people equate with quality will simply disappear. And we'll have to give up a lot of things that aren't really frills.

[3] The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority exists for the purpose of encouraging the diversification of economic activity within the coalfield region.

Teachers' aides in the classroom, fewer teachers, higher teacher-student ratios, and some of the technology that we desperately need here—it's going to be hard to compete without knowing how to use the Internet, to access information. These sorts of things—access to Internet, some of the technological advances, things we really need to work on right now—those things at the very time they're crucial will no longer be a part of the school system, if we can't expand our economic base." For Mullins, then, "The bottom line is this: if economic development is not implemented, if it's not sought after, if someone doesn't find a solution, if I don't find a solution, and there is no economic diversification here, then the school systems and this community will suffer dramatically in the next 15 years, because there will just be no way to produce enough funds to operate a school system effectively."

Quillen, along with Mullins, notes the high quality of the current educational system in Wise County, but also like Mullins is concerned about future developments there. He says: "You take Wise County. There's not another county in Virginia that has a better educational system or opportunities, and that's because of the coal severance tax money. But it's going away. So the question is: 'How can we keep that standard? How can we get the other [coalfield] counties up to that standard?' " Quillen adds: "We've got to figure out a way to replace the money that's going into the economy of southwest Virginia [from coal] as coal goes down. That's the issue we need to dwell on . . . The issue is it's going to happen and it's a fact we've got to deal with. We've got to figure out what we're going to do about our tax base and how we are going to keep up our standard of education."

> we'll have to give up a lot of things that aren't really frills. Teachers' aides in the classroom, fewer teachers, higher teacher-student ratios, and some of the technology that we desperately need

Both Mullins and *Coalfield Progress* editor Tate, though, note one perhaps unforeseen positive side effect on coalfield education of recent declines in coal production and employment. Says Mullins: "One thing I've been thinking about, and this is sort of ironic, is how the decline of the coal industry has boosted local interest in higher education. When I was in high school, everyone, almost everyone, all the young men were going to run to the coal mines, and they were going to make $16, $18, $20 an hour, with no thought of further education. But, without the mine there, without those jobs available, these young people now begin to think earlier on, well they don't even give it consideration now—they're not going into the mines. So they either begin to think they'll need some further technical education, some trade, some skill, or maybe college even. So I guess that even though the decline of the coal industry hurts the basic infrastructure of the school system, at the same time for some kids it has been good, because they are now forced to look around them and realize that they have to pursue that higher education."

Tate similarly speaks to this possibility: "For people who believe that coal will always be here, there's a disincentive for people to continue their education if they think they can get out of high school and just get a job. But I think that there is an incentive to advance your education when you know that a job is not going to be there, and you may not be afforded the luxury should you choose to stay home and work. That you may have to go out into a much larger world, and you know, you better be taking with you a whole lot of tools because you're going to need them."

Quillen also believes that young people in the coalfields gradually have begun to think more and more in terms of higher education and of alternative careers because they have realized that coal mining is not always going to be an option, or is going to be one that demands a much higher level of educational ability. Quillen explains that because coal mining historically was a very labor intensive, very physical, occupation, some young people did not take advantage of their educational opportunities. But that is less and less the case today, he says, because young people realize that "the days when they could get out of high school, and after a 90-day training period, be making more than any school teacher in Wise or Dickenson counties—those days are behind us now." Quillen adds: "We all like to think about how things used to be, but we're never going back to having tens of thousands of coal miners in southwest Virginia. That's not going to happen again." But, Quillen says, there will be work in the industry for several more years for the most educated and skilled of laborers. He says: "It's going to be a highly technical, highly mechanized industry run by just a few very skilled individuals who are going to be well compensated. That's the way it's going to be. The numbers of employees are going to continue to decline. But they're going to get paid better. They're going to be more skilled. They're going to be running complicated machinery and doing a lot of things with electronics and computers." And, Quillen says, young people today in the Virginia coalfields understand this; they know that "to be a coal miner now you got to not just use all muscle, you have to use a lot of brainpower too." So those of them that are seeking careers in the industry, Quillen says, are increasingly pursuing advanced college degrees in engineering or computer science. Quillen sums up his views about gradual improvements in the region's educational standards and levels by saying simply: "I have seen big changes."

CONSIDERATIONS

Worst-Case Scenarios

Although the range and variety of socio-cultural problems already discussed that are associated with the lack of vitality of southwestern Virginia's coal economy may seem overwhelming, conversations with a number of the region's residents reveal that they feel the worst may not yet be over, or have even occurred. In fact, Roy Rose says: "Things can get a whole lot worse than they are now. The population continues to decline. The best of the young continue to outmigrate. The tax base continues to decline. So agencies like mine, with even poorer economic times coming, are going to need more funding. But we're not going to get it. So we're going to have to serve more with less, which is what we have been doing for literally years now. [Quillen does not disagree with this assessment. He says of social service programs in the Virginia coalfields: "Regrettably, those are not substantial dollar programs . . . Of the tax dollars that coal companies pay, I can't say that there's any significant amount that goes directly to social programs."] You're going to see more and more people with no services to receive, because we're not going to be able to provide them. State and federal moneys are already drying up drastically. Let me give you a good example. I operate, for the local ministerial association, one of the larger food banks in the state of Virginia. Primarily, over the years we have operated the food

> It's going to be a highly technical, highly mechanized *(coal)* industry run by just a few very skilled individuals who are going to be well compensated

we need to keep the industry going for another two decades or so, so that we can diversify enough that we can offer substantial jobs to the people

bank with federal moneys. But every year we get a little less. Now we serve about 1,500 people a month, and I'm not trying to be melodramatic here, but some of them are literally starving to death. But this year we got less than last year. And next year we'll get less than this year. What are we going to do? The county can't contribute. It's not going to be able to fill in for the federal dollars. So the point is fast coming where I'm going to have to give people less or no food. I'm going to have to tighten eligibility requirements. To what? You have to be crawling on your knees from hunger and weakness to receive help? People are going to get more hungry. And with the so-called welfare reform, things are going to get even worse. All I know to do is to encourage people to leave, to pick up and find jobs and lives elsewhere. But that's a horrible thing to have to do. Terrible. To tell somebody who has been born and raised here and loves it here that their only choice is to leave? So, yeah, things can get a lot worse. To be very blunt, I'm not sure that we've seen anything yet. And that's scary. Real scary."

Tate agrees. She says: "If we sit on our hands and pretend that coal is going to be here forever, we're going to be in for the rudest awakening of our time. If we make good use of the next 10 or 20 years to prepare for what I think is the obvious—and that is that coal is not going to be here forever—that's going to make the difference in what happens, whether it's a best-case or worst-case scenario that plays out. But if we sit on our hands and do nothing? What happens? To call it total collapse, probably would not be extreme, if in fact we sit around and do nothing. We're going to be non-functioning in 20 years."

Quillen is similarly concerned about the consequences of a "do-nothing" approach. "At some point we're not going to have the coal severance tax," he says. "We've got to start preparing for that now. We've got to try and diversify away from a one-resource economy and think in terms of what the loss of coal money is going to do to the social cost of living in the coalfields." Quillen adds: "Somehow we've got to get the voter and the taxpayer to understand the consequences and then accept the responsibility for what can be changed, for what other sources of revenue that can be secured, and try to make the transition as smooth as possible. Because it's coming. It's not a matter of if; it's a matter of when the economic impact from the coal industry is going to decline." In the end, Quillen sees a responsibility for change and improvement that must be shared by all coalfield residents. "We have to work with what we've got," he says. "But the more we can do to educate the populace . . . well, anybody who considers themselves to want to be in some kind of responsible position in their community has got to accept the fact that everybody needs to recognize what we've got in front of us and then figure out how to do it . . . We have to take responsibility ourselves. We have to be realistic about what we're faced with. There's not any big boom coming back in the coal industry. That's just not going to happen. We're looking at a declining industry."

Scottie Rose concurs with Roy Rose, Tate, and Quillen. He speculates: "If coal production collapsed today the quality of life in Dickenson County would suffer greatly. Almost beyond belief. That is why we need to keep the industry going for another two decades or so, so that we can diversify enough that we can offer substantial jobs to the people. That way, when the mines do shut down forever, well the quality of life will dip, but there wouldn't be another total bust, and by that point we could survive. But if it all shut down tomorrow, Dickenson County would be a ghost town. It would be a ghost town."

Norton businessman Robbins foresees a similar future for the Virginia coalfields region if a total collapse of the coal industry is allowed to occur. Says Robbins: "If the coal business essentially shut down there would be nothing left in Wise County because there are not enough jobs in Wise County to support Wise County. Wise County, Norton. They would be ghost towns. I mean if we had some factories in Wise County to let these guys fall back into to find some employment, then good, maybe there's a chance. But if not, they're gonna leave. They've got to find jobs elsewhere. It's already happened a lot. They've left town. They've left the state. They don't have a choice but to move out. They've got families to raise. They got to go somewhere to support their families. So we've already seen a lot of what happens when the coal industry declines. But if it collapses totally, why, this business here would shut right down. Along with a lot of others. It's the small businesses like us that are really hurt. We're hurtin'. I mean there's just no way we can stay alive and compete and stay in business. We've seen too much of it in the past few years, where the small businesses have had to close out. The bigger businesses come in. The K-Marts. The Wal-Marts. And it strains off all our business. And they don't have ties to here, really. Just what people they employ. And we don't have to talk about how that works. I mean part-time jobs. No benefits."

The Consequences: A Real Welfare State

Tate discusses the popular notion that the southwestern Virginia coalfields already represent a "welfare state" that drags down the remainder of Virginia's population and exhausts its resources. While she argues that this popular notion is unfounded, she fears that if the region's coal economy is allowed to collapse or significantly decline, the misconception may become more of a tangible reality. She argues: "Now we shouldn't have to tell the politicians the cost of government feeding our children, educating our children, paying people to sit at home and do nothing. If we have a brain in our heads, we know what happens when you create a welfare state. People already think we're a welfare state down here, but they just don't understand, they don't know the history of the place. Still, the people from the more affluent areas of the state look down at the coalfields and go, 'Look at those lazy people sitting on their butts. They don't have jobs. They're feeding their kids off the state. They're all on welfare.' But we're not. Yet. But if a worst-case scenario plays itself out, it's going to be bad around here. There aren't going to be other places to turn for the revenue that coal produces. And if people don't have jobs, they're not going to be spending. So we're going to have a decline in retail sales. We know what's going to happen to the tax base. We're not going to have the coal industry paying for their machinery and tools. The resources just aren't there. But people will still be living here, and then a good many of them will have to go on welfare. But you know welfare reform, people within the government who talk about that, they talk about job requirements. But how can you impose job requirements in a place where there are no jobs? So people say, 'Just move. Go somewhere else and find a living.' "

how can you impose job requirements in a place where there are no jobs?

Tate continues: "Okay, let's see, then, everyone out-migrates in search of jobs. Now where are they going to go? Well, they've already filled up Sandusky, Ohio, so they're going to be going somewhere else, like Northern Virginia. Well, folks in Northern

Virginia better just figure out how to talk the way we talk down here because we're going to be coming up there looking for their jobs. So, finally, then, there will be no more people here. This land will be desolate. Or those that do stay will be part of a real welfare state. And I have tried to talk about what that means. Now I know my reader can't vote for a delegate in Northern Virginia or Southside or Tidewater or Eastern Shore or wherever, so that delegate puts our constituency way low on his priority list. And I certainly can understand how politicians who are not from this area are going, 'I just can't deal with their problems today. I've got so many of my own, and so many other people to take care of.' So I can understand why folks from somewhere else want to put their people first on their priority list. Somewhere in that list of priorities, though, they very much need to carve out some good time to be thinking about what it is going to cost their constituency to take care of those people down there in the hills."

Is There A Welfare State in the Virginia Coalfields Right Now?

While politicians, sociologists, and economists often and quite casually refer to the existence of a contemporary welfare state in the Virginia coalfields, conversations with the region's residents quickly demonstrate the falsity of this popular blame-the-victim ideology. Dickenson County Social Services Director Rose speaks directly to this issue in the following remarks. Says Rose: "No. With all our shortcomings there is not that type of society here. The people here are not welfare addicts. For example, approximately 33 percent of this county's residents receive some kind of service or another from this agency. But let's break that down. About 18 percent of the county gets food stamps. Another 23 percent are eligible for Medicaid but not all of those receive that help. And only about 7 percent receive full-time ADC benefits. The rest of it is services. Child protective services. Family planning. Day care. That whole realm of services. So we don't have 33 percent of the county on welfare. Don't get that idea. Don't misconstrue that figure. Really only about 18 percent are on welfare. So about 82 percent of the county's people are not on welfare. They don't receive foodstamps. And you know what? Based on my best estimates, something like 45 percent of the county's people are eligible for foodstamps. So there's a full quarter of the county's population, or 23 percent or something like that, who could get on foodstamps, who could go on welfare, but they don't. And they're aware of the foodstamp program. Of welfare. But they're out there doing the best they can. Flea marketing. Odd jobbing. And they say 'the hell with foodstamps.' They won't ride the system. They just won't do it. Now that is the way it pretty much is in this county. Most of the people in this county would go right to work if they could. People in this county are not afraid of hard work. We may have a lot of problems and faults but there is no lack of a work ethic."

Tate expands on Rose's comments. She says, "I think one of the things about people in the coalfields is that they do feel very independent. And capable. I think in part they derive some of their spirit from being able to overcome adversity. That kind of gets you revved: you've got a problem, you've got to figure out how to solve it; you might lose your job but you figure out a way to feed your family anyway; the company tries to screw you over but you pull together and you win a battle with the company. But there is a line. If people find that no matter how hard they work, they're just not able to succeed—and I mean, you see that out there already in a huge way, and it's not just in the coalfields of southwest Virginia, it's in rural America everywhere—you find people who have become very disenchanted. And it is hard, I think, after you have struggled for years and find yourself still not getting anywhere, it's hard to inspire yourself, it's hard to inspire those around you, and you can't inspire your children. And so you're telling your children, 'Please don't do what it is I just did. You get your education, you move on.' And so we're just left here to languish. But I don't buy that as an option, and neither do most of the people in this region. Because we are independent and hardworking people. Talk to about anybody, and they'd just as soon be working. In that way we're no different than most anybody else. I really do believe that."

Mullins agrees with both Tate and Rose. He says, "One of the positive things we do have here is a workforce, and I think, contrary to all popular perceptions, that people in this area are actually more adept than most and they are more used to working, laboring, and they generally take pride in their work. Great pride. People do continue to get up early here and even if they don't have a job, they continue to pursue something, so we do have a good workforce in this area that's willing to work."

All claims aside, the example of Lewis and his wife should set to rest any remaining notions about an apathetic coalfield "culture of poverty." While working as a miner, Lewis began to see the writing on the wall when management of his company held a late 1993 meeting with workers. He learned that if certain conditions relating to the export coal market did not change within a year, then his mine would probably shut down. Lewis' actions after that meeting are indicative of the ambition and motivation of many of the residents of southwestern Virginia's coalfields. Lewis explains: "In 1993, after we had a meeting with management and they told us that if we could not turn the tide in a year, we would probably be closing. Why, I decided right then that there was a real possibility that I was facing unemployment, and not having my home paid for and a young family, what could I do? So I started going to night classes at the local community college while I was still mining. I worked 50 and sometimes 60 hours a week and I carried an 18-hour course load at the community college. I worked around the clock. I worked all of fall of '95 and spring of '96 and crammed in enough hours to get an associates in liberal arts degree and an associates in general studies, general education studies, so that I could go to Clinch Valley [College, in Wise, Virginia]. Crammed those two degrees into one year and since August of '96 I've been at Clinch Valley. And now, I'm looking at graduation in December of this year, with a degree in Psychology, a BS in Psychology, and a minor in Sociology. I've gone to school round the clock since 1994. And my wife has, too. We decided that rather than sit around with idle hands, we both decided to go to school. She went to nursing school, and she's finished—got her LPN, and now she's back in the labor force. I've probably got a few months until I can be back. She works at St. Mary's [clinic in Norton] and then she works for a pediatrician. She has two part-time jobs. She doesn't have anything full-time yet but she has two part-time jobs and she's close to 40 hours a week. It's not coal miners' wages but it's better than I'm making, at least for right now." The example of the Lewises clearly defies the arguments of those who would casually theorize about the Virginia coalfields and their "culture of poverty."

Why Should Other Virginians Care About What Happens to the Coalfields Region?

Conversations with coalfield residents reveal a remarkable similarity in their responses to questions such as those posed just above:

I started going to night classes at the local community college while I was still mining. I worked 50 and sometimes 60 hours a week and I carried an 18-hour course load at the community college

they don't feel the state of Virginia or its people "owe" them anything; instead they feel they simply deserve due consideration for their past, present, and future services. Take the example of Dickenson County Social Services Director Rose. He says, "The state should care just as I care about my child and you care about yours. Dickenson is a political subdivision of the state; therefore the state should care. But I don't believe in sympathy. I don't think that anybody owes Dickenson County anything. The last thing Dickenson County needs is for somebody up there in Richmond to go 'Poor little Dickenson County.' Still, if there is some way the state can help us with our tax base, with creating real industrial and economic diversity, that would be good. That would be great. Because we have done a lot for the state. I can take you all over this county and show you the physical aftermath of what we have done for the state."

The response of Tate is startlingly similar to that of Rose. She says: " 'Does the state or other people "owe" the people of the coalfields anything?' I think my gut reaction is an immediate 'no.' But in part, I think that's because I don't feel—I think of owing someone something, that kind of has a negative feel to it. Do I think that people here, as all people of Virginia, do deserve due consideration of their dilemmas? If that is owing—well, number one, it's not owing—so, no, we're not owing. We just deserve due consideration. But the production of coal does affect a lot of people. If we were to sit down and draw a map of who is touched by the coal industry, we would find those little lines going everywhere. If you live in Virginia and you use electricity, you are touched by the coalfields. I mean, it's as simple as that. And I don't think everybody fully understands that, the way we're all very, very interconnected."

Lewis echoes Tate's sentiments. He says: "Why shouldn't the state care? We pay taxes just like the people in the northern part of the state. Our children have to eat just like kids in other parts of the state. And has anybody flipped on the light switch lately? Has anybody sat down in an automobile with steel in it? Has anybody taken an aspirin lately? Has anybody worn shoes that were made out of plastics? There are so many petrochemicals that come strictly from coal and coal derivatives. The products that we live in and wear every day—our glasses frames or the homes we live in—have connections to coal." Lewis continues: "But I don't think the state strictly owes us anything, no. I don't believe the state owes me anything I can't work for and earn myself. We should all operate on an equal basis. We can work for it and benefit others—and I say benefit others, not only in our county but if industry and jobs are here, the taxes they pay go back to the state, the payroll taxes that we generate, that sales tax that goes to Richmond everyday. And if you back up just a few years, just 10, you see that we once paid a great deal in revenue to the state. But I'm not saying that well, because we paid it then, then you owe it to us now—no, you don't owe us any more than you owe northern Virginia now. But we need to receive the same thing that northern Virginia does. If they receive $1 for education, we should receive it, too. You know, we may not have made a lot of the end-products that made America great, but we sure supplied a lot of the raw material."

If you live in Virginia and you use electricity, you are touched by the coalfields. I mean, it's as simple as that.

Board of Supervisors Chair Rose also feels strongly about the connections between the coalfields region of Virginia and the rest of the state. He says: "Well I feel like the state ought to feel like me. There's five districts in Dickenson County and I'm from the Willis District. But I care as much about the we may not have made a lot of the end-products that made America great, but we sure supplied a lot of the raw material

people in other districts as I do the ones in my own. And I've learned over several years in politics that you have to work together to accomplish or to succeed at anything. I think the state ought to care about us because we're important. I'm a human being and just as important—I pay my taxes and everything—as anybody in Fairfax County or any other place and I should be afforded the same opportunities as everybody else across the state. They way I look at it is if they help us with some good roads here and with some money for diversification then we won't have to leave here and go up there to Washington or Fairfax or Richmond to get jobs. They complain about road congestion up there. And about not being able to get anywhere without it taking forever. They say they need the tax dollars up there to clear up the congestion. Well if they will just help us out with the roads back here to where we can attract some industry, and if we can get some education dollars, well they won't have to worry about the congestion up there. We'll stay home. We'll be glad to."

Adds Rose: "And we have made a very substantial contribution to the tax revenues of Virginia through our coal. Coal at one time was the biggest export product the state of Virginia had. And I mean not long ago. So this area has been a very vital cog in the development of the state of Virginia. And we've got people here who've fought for this country in every war. And who've died in pretty significant numbers in every one of them. I spent time in the military myself. I just feel like I'm as much a part of the state of Virginia as anybody from Richmond or anywhere else. But sometimes with the way politics and economics and things go in this state it's hard to feel that way. It's real hard."

Mullins provides a final, and perhaps most eloquent, response to these issues. He asks: "Well, why shouldn't they? That's the question. We're people down here, we're part of the state, we're part of the nation. I can't understand why they wouldn't care. There are families here, families really steeped in tradition, there's a culture here that's almost all of its own. If people would listen to us speak, and listen to the things we talk about, they'd probably know that, and they'd probably care. But they don't know us, they don't listen, and they don't care. For the people in Richmond or Northern Virginia, we might as well be on the other side of the world. But I think to our credit, a lot of us in this area would rather just sort of suffer in silence than have to raise our voices again and again and again. I think we take a kind of a pride in that ability to endure."

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Conversations with coalfield residents quickly reveal the extent of their forward thinking and of their hope and optimism for their region's future. What follows is a brief exploration of some of their ideas and plans. Many of their remarks relate to what they would do with additional coal tax or other moneys made available to them or to their economic development authority, CEDA.

Human Services

For Tate, investment in human services is predominantly important. She says: "We need to put our money into human beings. We are making pretty darned good progress as it comes to water, sewer. I don't think infrastructure, a phenomenal investment in infrastructure, is what we need. That's not to say I wouldn't take loads of millions of dollars right now and if I could do it myself build four-lane roads and lay waterline to the people who need water. But bottom line: I'll have someone driving over a gravel road before I'll have them hauling their water. But I think investment in people is the most important thing. Because there are all kinds of folks in these coalfields, who, put together in the right ways, create their own companies. I think employing ourselves is a far better answer than asking someone else to employ us. And I like the notion of letting someone be able to make a choice to stay here if they want to."

Technological Education

For Lewis, investment in technological education is the key to the future of the coalfields. He says: "Start dumping money into our high schools and elementary schools. Get to the technology level that the elementary and high schools have in Northern Virginia or around Virginia Tech. In our elementary schools, you might have one computer for every 20 students, rather than 2 computers for every student. Go maybe to more of the advanced technology studies for high school seniors, for all high school students, so that they can get some more of the advanced training that going to the larger more well funded schools. I think that money turned into education is a good idea. It may create a new tax base here, if some of the kids stay. I say start with education. You're not going to lose by it."

The Possibilities Inherent in Information-Age Industries

Several coalfield residents share Lewis' beliefs about the need for the development of an improved technological infrastructure—and for improved technological education—in the southwestern Virginia region. Remarks Board of Supervisors Chair Rose: "I've thought about it a lot and I think the one thing we're really suited for is telecommunications and information-age industry. The computer age. You know information doesn't have to go out of here on an interstate highway or a rail line. It goes through the air. Well, it goes through the phone lines. So we've got to get our educational level up to where we can provide that kind of service." Social Services Director Rose shares a similar belief. He explains: "Okay. All over this state and all over the country there are hundreds of physicians and attorneys who need word processing and computer services. Now given the current state of technology—and we've got kids in doublewides all over these hollers who are plugged right into the Internet—it would be perfectly feasible for a doctor in Richmond who needed someone to transcribe his records to transmit them to somebody in Dickenson County who could do them for him, and do them very well."

Small Business Entrepreneurship

Like Tate, Supervisors Chair Rose sees a lot of small business potential in the coalfields and in its population. He says: "There's a lot of small business opportunity here. Look at my niece and her husband. He travels all over the country finding curly maple logs. And they saw it and dry it out and sell it to a place in Nashville and one in Memphis to make guitars with. It started on a shoestring budget but it's got to a place where next year they probably will do $200,000 in business. So you see we've got a lot of brainpower here in the mountains still yet. But think about all that we have lost. Can you imagine what we could do here in Dickenson County if we could get that brainpower back? Or keep it to start with?" Rose continues: "And if we had something set up where a group of small business experts could help these young folks around here with these good ideas determine if there is a market for whatever they're trying to do. That would be a great thing. Because you know when a small business makes good there's usually three or four families right there that prosper or do good between the owners and the workers. Because around here they know each other and live close to each other. They are going to help each other. And if we can get a whole system of small businesses going in this county then we would be all right. A lot better than now where it's coal or pretty much nothing else. A hundred small businesses are a lot better than one big industry. Because when that big industry goes down then so does hundreds of people. And that's tough. So I think small business development is probably one key to the future of this county and this area. I honestly do. It's gonna have to be a way of life. Like back when people survived on little farms. They were dependent on themselves. Not on anybody else. That's what we got to go back to here."

As a businessman himself, Robbins also would like to see some investment in small business potentiality. He says: "Low interest loans to small business would help a lot. Tax breaks. But especially the loans. When you're first trying to get off your feet, you got to borrow money. It's crucial. But you can't get it most of the time. You know, you got to have money to get money. So money needs to be made available to people who have good ideas. They may not be great credit risks to a regular bank, but they've got good ideas and it's obvious. So there ought to be a way to help these kinds of people."

Basic Education, Job Retraining, Industrial Diversification and Expansion, Healthcare

In addition to moneys for information-age industry and for small business, Board of Supervisors Chair Rose also favors investment in a wide variety of other socio-cultural areas. He says: "I would like to see some more money put into the community college system. I would like to see the county school system made into a fourteen year program where two years of community college work are built right in. That way, the school bus system and all, the transportation system, would already be in place. And kids could just get two years of college right here in the county without having to go to Wise County or Richlands or wherever. And I'll tell you what, if it wasn't for the foodstamp program here in Dickenson County, a lot of the grocery stores still here would have closed down. So I think the foodstamp program is deserving of as much support as it can get. Because people need it. But I guess in the end I'd like to see most of any available moneys put into industrial diversification and job retraining so that people could find employment and help themselves and the county and the state. But human services have got to have money. Social Services. The Health Department. They have to be funded adequately. Especially the Health Department. So that the young kids can be helped out. Free shots. And checkups. And programs for young mothers. To see they're fed right and that they receive good prenatal care. And that their babies are born healthy. And receive good care after they're born. I think that's a real good place to put your money. Into good health care for the county. Especially for the young people who have got to have somebody to depend on. And the elderly, too."

Mullins shares many of Rose's beliefs. Mullins explains: "I think any money made available to this part of the state should be spent on transition—helping the small businesses, helping the coal industry to invest more of its moneys here to try and promote other forms of economy, other revenue producers that can gradually replace the coal industry, so that instead of just going bankrupt down here all of a sudden, we can change over, we can make a transition into other economic bases. I think that would be money well spent, money that would be returned in full in 20 or 30 years, instead of money wasted on short-term fixes. You know, I have a child three years old. Twenty years is not a lot of time for her. I'm sure she'd want to, and I'd like to see her be able, to stay in this area if she desires to. So I'm thinking that any money would be better spent on investigating and developing other forms of business and industry, other feasible means of developing some sort of cohesive economic base. Because let's face it, coal is finite, it's limited. Regardless of how much coal reserves we've got, how many billions of tons, it will eventually one day be gone. So maybe what we should do now is invest in something that would last twice as long as coal, three times as long, maybe something that would be self-regenerating, something that is not so finite. You know, coal has been king here for a hundred years. But a hundred years is not so long. My little girl might live to be a hundred."

Lewis also believes in long-range planning versus short-term fixes, but he is willing to acknowledge a compromise between the two. He says: "In terms of industry, I think to start we'll have to take what we can get, but once we establish a good work ethic, which we do have, once we show that our people can produce and they can produce the way that companies need to to manage and market their products, then other people, other industries might start to look at Dickenson County and say, 'Hey, southwestern Virginia, Dickenson County, Wise County, that's where I'm going to put my business.' I believe you got to crawl before you can walk, and you got to walk before you can run. I believe that the job pool is here, the workers are here, the people to run things are here. But it's just going to take awhile. There's no short-term fix, I don't believe, but if you don't look at what you can do to start for the long-term, if it's never looked into, it'll never happen."

Quillen shares Lewis' views about a necessary compromise between short-term and long-range solutions. He says: "We've got to work within the parameters we have. We have our topography and we have our infrastructure. We've got a declining industry and we've got a declining tax base. We've got to diversify. But we're not going to be successful in bringing in $15-$16 an hour jobs. At least not initially. So we're going to have to start out with lower pay and try and build up the base to where heavy manufacturing might come into the area. But it's going to be tough because of our road system."

Roads and Tourism

As Quillen's remark suggests, there is virtually unanimous agreement that improvement in the highway infrastructure of the coalfields region is necessary if those counties are to prosper in the future, or if they are to develop alternative industries such as tourism. Supervisors Chair Rose explains this basic necessity with perhaps the greatest clarity. He says: "Now look, Dickenson County is a fishbowl. We're surrounded by mountains. It's hard to get in to us and it's hard for us to get out. Now I've talked to a substantial amount of industrial people who come in and look at our county—at our industrial park, at our shell buildings—and the first thing they say is 'How are we gonna get our raw materials in? How are we gonna get our finished products out?' Because of the poor roads and the distance from four lanes and interstates, you know. It's such an added expense for them that they just

let's face it, coal is finite, it's limited. Regardless of how much coal reserves we've got, how many billions of tons, it will eventually one day be gone

can't figure it out. So they go elsewhere. So I think road improvements obviously are one key to survival in Dickenson County. We need good roads to get people in, because, you know, there are a lot of possibilities for tourism here. This is a beautiful place. Some of it is as beautiful as anywhere on this Earth. But we don't have roads. And we can't get people to invest in hotels and restaurants because we don't have roads. It's gonna take roads before we can do anything with tourism."

The *(proposed)* Coalfields Expressway is the key to the survival of Dickenson and Buchanan counties

Virginia Employment Commission analyst Larry Mullins is even more emphatic in his support for improved highway systems, especially for Dickenson and Buchanan counties, where much recent discussion has centered around the possible construction of a four-lane highway called "The Coalfields Expressway." Says Mullins: "The Coalfields Expressway is the key to the survival of Dickenson and Buchanan counties. I think those counties are going to absolutely die without some help. Without some better roads. Manufacturers have got to be able to get in and out. But you know, Dickenson County doesn't have a four-lane highway anywhere. That's why the Coalfields Expressway ought to be backed over there with all the political force possible. Because I'll tell you, Dickenson County can't win for losing. After all the mine layoffs of the past two or three years, now the Donkenny Plant in Haysi (a sewing factory) just closed. That's almost 90 more jobs right there. And Buchanan County has a lot of coal, but things might be moving in the same direction over there. In December of last year (1996), for example, they lost about 275 jobs at one of the mines. That's a lot of people."

Wise County teacher Mullins also believes that no real industrial or economic diversification is possible without highway improvements. He explains very matter of factly: "One of the major hindrances to any sort of manufacturing base in this area is the roads. You know, coal can be exported by rail, but things from lots of other factories, any sort of manufactured good, is probably going to go out by way of highway. The roads in this area really just don't promote an interest in any large-scale manufacturing, and that's understandable. If I were going to create a huge factory, with a thousand-plus workforce, and try to export manufactured goods out of here, I wouldn't want to do it on these roads we have now. I couldn't, really. So, yes, roads are a major issue around here."

Finally, Greear is in consensus. He says: "Well, first we have to look at improving our roads. No question. For example, the Coalfields Expressway that could potentially run through Buchanan and Dickenson Counties could be a real boon in terms of heavy industry, in terms of export of product. But we also need to look at light industry or computer-oriented production. With computers we're moving away from standardized production to more specialized production because the technology allows for it, the technology allows us to cut the suit and shirt just like we want. And I think that's where we can be of real help in the school system. With providing computer literacy and skills. But as I said, roads have got to be improved before almost anything."

What the Coal Industry Has Done; What the Coal Industry Can Do

Any extended conversation with Quillen quickly makes it evident that the coal industry deserves considerable credit for its many contributions to the socio-cultural quality of life in southwestern Virginia. Quillen, though, in summarizing these contributions, makes it clear that he does not view the Virginia coalfields--or the region's population, problems or potentialities--in terms of an "us against them" or "insider versus outsider" or "labor versus management" dichotomy. He explains: "[In most people's minds] I know I will be stereotyped as a coal operator but my intent is to speak as a citizen and parent and taxpayer of southwestern Virginia. So I'd like to talk about these issues not as a coal operator but as somebody who knows the inner workings of the coal companies and has been directly involved in a lot of these things."

To begin, though, Quillen readily acknowledges that the coal industry has not always conducted itself in a uniformly satisfactory manner in either southwestern Virginia or central Appalachia as a whole. He says: "There's no question that I don't attempt to defend, don't even want to support defending, the coal industry in a lot of the negatives our industry has had over the years with regard to health, safety, and the environment. Pre-1970s, pre-safety law, pre-reclamation law, it's almost all negative then. It's almost not defensible from our modern point of view." Still, Quillen says, "We've come a tremendously long way since the 1970s." He then appraises the conduct of the industry since that time, including its many contributions to the socio-cultural quality of life in the Virginia coalfields.

A key contribution, Quillen says, has been the money that has been sent back to the coalfields in the form of the coal severance tax. [Currently one quarter of that money goes to fund CEDA; the remainder is split between county road funds and general funds. Most of the general fund money goes to county school systems.] As Quillen explains, that money has benefited southwestern Virginia in several ways, chief among them the improvement of the region's educational systems. He says: "The severance tax certainly is something that has been very positive for the seven coal producing counties . . . One of the biggest benefits that will ever be found for the coal industry in Virginia is the amount of money that came out of the severance tax that went to education in the coalfield counties."

the coal industry deserves considerable credit for its many contributions to the socio-cultural quality of life in southwestern Virginia

Quillen says that coal severance tax money also has been used to fund economic development and diversification programs and agencies in the Virginia coalfields. In fact, he says that CEDA came into existence at least partially only because of the insistence of the state's coal operators. When the legislation first passed to create the coal severance tax, Quillen says, "the coal industry along with legislators began to push for taking some of the money and putting it toward economic development. And specifically we had in that law that none of it [coal severance tax money] could be used for enhancement of coal mining activity or economics." Over a period of time, Quillen says, "By being able to use this money for economic development, CEDA was formed."

CEDA has been a very positive development. It has had a positive effect in bringing about economic development and recruitment

Quillen was the first chairman of CEDA and notes that there has been some controversy over the formation and funding-spending methods of the Economic Development Authority. He says that local political structures have sometimes resented the agency because it was given the authority to spend a considerable portion of the coal severance tax moneys exclusive of control by county governments. Quillen also explains that because of the way that CEDA's spending requirements were established, "the counties which generated the most [severance tax money] have been able to do the least." More specifically, Quillen explains that money generated from the coal severance tax has to be returned by CEDA to the county that produced it, and no other, except in the case of loans from one county to another. Such a system seems sound and equitable at a theoretical level, he says, but in practice can be a double-edged sword. He explains that the counties--Buchanan and Dickenson--with the most substantial coal deposits have in fact generated the most coal production and thus the most severance tax money, and thus have had at one level the best chance to use it to "move forward in basic ways," such as industrial recruitment or development. However, because of the rugged topography and terrain of these counties--both are a part of the extremely mountainous Allegheny-Cumberland Plateaus--and because of a resultant lack of basic infrastructure development in the form of roads, particularly four-lanes, these two counties in reality "have had the hardest time actually spending the money effectively, in actually recruiting and developing a diversity of industries." Quillen succinctly explains the situation like this: "They generated the most money but they had the least opportunity to spend the money, because of a lack of infrastructure, of roads, really." So Quillen says, "this has generated some resentment." Still, he says, "Overall CEDA has been a very positive development. It has had a positive effect in bringing about economic development and recruitment" into the Virginia coalfields.

In fact, Quillen says, the road systems in the Virginia coalfield region as a whole have been much improved because of coal severance tax money. "A tremendous amount of money over the years has gone into enhancing the roads in the coalfields," he says. So much so, Quillen explains, that now the coalfield counties often have better secondary, better two-lane systems, than counties in other rural parts of Virginia. "Look at the amount of paved two-lane roads we've got," he says. "It's substantially better than anywhere else in the state. And it's paid for by coal severance tax money. But we miss that, we don't acknowledge that. But that's been a substantial benefit" of coal industry taxation. Still, Quillen notes that "regrettably it [coal severance tax money] has not always enhanced our fourlanes or access to say an interstate, which would have provided quite a bit more opportunity for economic development." Overall, though, Quillen says, "As far as day to day life and travel goes, and particularly the safety of school buses and things like that, we've got some of the best secondary roads in the entire state. There's a lot more paved roads out there than there ever would have been if it had not been for the coal severance tax money." Quillen notes that the industry is in a bit of a no-win situation in terms of one complaint often voiced against it: that the heavy coal trucks that move up and down the road systems of southwestern Virginia directly lead to the deterioration of those systems. Quillen says: "The coal trucks do tear up a lot of the roads, but through tax money they also improve a lot of the roads."

According to Quillen, southwestern Virginia's coal companies also have made substantial contributions to healthcare in the region. He notes that from the 1950s until at least the early 1980s, the coal industry often funded 100 percent health coverage for its workers. Since the '80s, though, Quillen says, the cost of healthcare has risen so dramatically in America that the industry has had to ask its labor force to pick up part of the cost. As a result, Quillen notes, the industry has taken a lot of criticism. But he says much of this criticism is unfounded, or perhaps more accurately, has been based on misinformation. For example, Quillen says that one bitter strike in the Virginia coalfields that occurred in 1989-1990 was and has been much misunderstood. The media often claimed the strike happened because the coal corporation involved decided to drop health coverage for its workers, Quillen says. But in reality, he notes, the company merely asked its workers to pay 20 percent of the cost of their health coverage. "It still amazes me that the real issue never even got discussed," Quillen says.

Finally, Quillen says the coal industry in southwestern Virginia often has contributed positively to the quality of life in the region in small ways that are not generally acknowledged. For example, he says that coal companies generally have encouraged their workers to pursue higher education as a buffer or safety-valve against negative developments in the industry, and has sometimes helped pay for that education. "We have always encouraged [our workers to continue their education]," Quillen says. "We've always encouraged them to go ahead and look at other opportunities." And Quillen reports that he knows of many success stories, of former coal miners who are now accountants or who work in the healthcare field. Quillen also says that the coal industry has been a major supporter of the arts in southwestern Virginia. "If you were to go back and look at the contribution list to the arts in southwest Virginia, and eliminated anybody that either wasn't involved in coal mining or was not in some business that supports the coal industry, you would have a lot less contribution to the arts," he says. And Quillen notes that the industry "has never looked for publicity" as a return on its arts contributions. He also says that "another thing that doesn't get a lot of publicity is that coal companies are active members of their communities in terms of assisting with equipment if there's a flood or heavy snow. And there are a lot of contributions in terms of services and facilities, such as around our schools. Most of the ballfields in southwest Virginia were improved with coal company equipment and personnel."

But Quillen says the thing he takes the most pride in as a coal industry manager is the fact that through the substantial wages they have earned as coal miners, many of the residents of southwestern Virginia have been able to markedly increase their standard of living. Says Quillen: "But really the thing I take most to heart from all this is that the people who worked for the coal companies were able to have a standard of living much like [people] anywhere else. They live in brick homes. They send their kids to college. They have computers in their houses." Quillen adds: "We're not much like the typical stereotypes of coal miners that people outside of Appalachia want to label us with. And that has always given me a lot of pride. To know that the wages that we have paid . . . There's debate you know about who makes the most money, but whether you're a union or non-union miner if you have a job in the coal industry then you're in the upper class in terms of income, in our region anyway. And those people have not wasted away their money. They've put their money into their homes and they have been able to upgrade their lifestyles."

Quillen says this increase in the standard of living brought about by coal industry wages extends to the larger social fabric of southwestern Virginia and has resulted in change for the better for the region as a whole. He remarks: "By virtue of the coal industry having some good years, particularly from the 70s up until the 90s, people began to understand a different lifestyle, and their children certainly were exposed to a lot better things. I think it has changed all of southwest Virginia for the better. The coal companies were active in a lot of things . . . so I think there was a social change. Even though there was a decline in employment, there was a social change for the good for those who still remained in the industry. And outside it really. It changed a lot of people's thinking. People all over the coalfields began to expect certain things: they wanted a cleaner area. They began to expect that. They didn't want coal dust all over everything . . . They began to expect they could send their kids to college, and that they would have computers in their classrooms. They just began to expect these type things. So I saw a big cultural change from the time I grew up in the 50s to the time that kids went to school down here in the 70s. And I think that the money that came into the region in terms of coal wages, I think it made a big difference, it made for a definite economic and social change for the better."

Still, Quillen concedes that not everybody in southwestern Virginia has been able to share in the bounty made possible by the coal industry's tenure there. He notes the considerable unemployment that has occurred throughout the region since the era of widespread mine mechanization, and he notes that any increased use of technology in the future will only result in increased worker displacement. He also acknowledges the gap in wages and working conditions that once existed between union and non-union workers or, more specifically, the larger versus the smaller mines (though again he says this gap no longer really applies). Essentially, though, Quillen argues that the southwestern Virginia coalfields are simply a microcosm of the rest of America, where in his view the gap between the "haves and have nots" continues to grow wider and wider. But this gap is especially apparent in the Appalachian and Virginia coalfields, he says, where many struggling people (probably thousands) must live alongside a few millionaires (perhaps a half-dozen) and a few thousand additional coal miners--or other professionals--who are paid $40,000-$50,000 (or more) a year. In such a social context, he says, the disparity between economic classes became startling. As a result, Quillen says, "It [this disparity] does get vocalized a lot."

Moreover, conversations with other coalfield residents quickly reveal that they believe the coal industry still has a substantial way to go before it can make too strong a claim of corporate good citizenry. In fact, some of these residents argue that the coal industry has a responsibility to southwestern Virginia that goes beyond the extraction of mineral deposits for profit, beyond the support of local governments by way of coal production and other taxes, and beyond the support of local workers by way of employment.

Argues Greear, for example: "If any state moneys are made available to the industry, then we must ask, 'What are you, the industry, going to give back? Are you willing to help fund retraining programs? Are you going to help fund activities that will enable us to diversify?' We must ask these questions of the industry because the industry has got to do more in this area to help diversify so people will have a choice about their post-coal futures. Because we're coming down to forced choices, is what is happening."

Greear continues: "Here in the coalfields we're dealing with human beings who are losing their jobs and their livelihoods and I don't think the industry is doing an adequate job of helping these people make the transition from being coal miners to being able to do something else. They [the industry] could do a lot of things. They could finance some retraining activities, they could help finance remediation programs, adult literacy. They could help fund night classes in computer technology, either computer repair or computer skills. They could do a lot of things, and if they the solutions are going to have to come from within the area, both from the people and from the coal operators who have been here for so long now, and who have shaped life so indelibly

worked with our school systems and used our facilities, so much is possible. You know, we're all in it together and what I'm saying is because of absentee ownership, the coal industry has been able to make some harsh decisions because they've had a real distance from the people directly affected by them[4]. But they have pulled out a tremendous amount of wealth from this area. That cannot be replaced in any of our imaginable lifetimes. So they have to be giving something back. They have to do more than just pay the severance tax, more than just be an employer for a few thousand people."

Bringing his argument to a close, Greear maintains: "Even in our technological, information age, corporations and businesses are still human-generated and human-driven, and they can't leave their values behind. Corporations can't say 'I'm going to leave all my moral and ethical values, which I hold highly, at the door.' Because business people look not only for skilled people, thinking people, but they look for people who have values. Now if you're going to ask people to have values, if you want your employees to be honest and hardworking, then you can't be hypocritical and say 'We want you to have values but we want you to let this corporation act without them.' No. It doesn't work that way. So here is where some of the corporations around here have to improve, where they have got to start acting as role models. If they want people to behave in a certain way and do certain things, which come out of a tradition of moral values, then they themselves must do them too."

It should be pointed out, though, that Quillen approaches these issues from a different perspective than Greear about a number of the latter's arguments. To begin, Quillen disputes some of the widely held notions about the status of the Appalachian—and Virginia—coalfields as an absentee-owner controlled economic "colony" wherein all resources and profits are sucked out of the region and distributed to other places and peoples. Says Quillen: "There's a lot of criticism that the coal companies are out of state corporations and they take all these funds out of here. But I know the inner workings of the coal companies. I see the financial statements all the time. I know what the revenue is and I know how it is distributed. And the amount of money that leaves the area is inconsequential because the majority of it, say a third of it, is going into wages and benefits for the workers of the area. And another third of it goes basically to equipment and supplies, and almost the other third goes to taxes and fees such as royalties. And then hopefully there's a little bit left to take to the owners and stockholders who took the risk to make the investment in the first place."

Quillen continues: "If [the coal companies] are not profitable, they're not going to stay in business. It's just too highly intensive a capital business today to expect anybody to stay in business and not make a profit. If I were anybody looking at the coal industry, I would want them to make a profit because the odds of them being there, paying the wages, paying the taxes, contributing philanthropically to the schools or the arts, the odds of that happening are much greater if

[4] While this comment refers to ownership, it is noted that the majority of large coal operations in Virginia are managed by personnel who were raised in the Appalachian coalfields.

they make a profit. If they don't make a profit then eventually they are going to shut down and leave the area and the people are going to be unemployed."

Quillen also argues that given their actual profit margins, coal companies do in fact return a considerable degree of their investments to the southwestern Virginia area. "Yes there have been successes and there are certain individuals who still do very well," Quillen says. "But overall, in the coal industry, if they [financiers] can get a five-ten percent return on their investment, they probably are in the upper third of the coal companies operating. But they pay a substantial amount in taxes. Between what they pay in taxes and wages, that's a much greater percentage than what they can return to their stockholders."

And Quillen says we have to remember that "profit is not a dirty word. The thing we miss a lot in America and particularly from a social situation is that any company is owned by stockholders, and their intent is to make a profit." Corporations of any kind thus have to keep a close eye on the bottom line, he says. "Hopefully they will be conscious [sic] corporate citizens and contribute where they can," he argues. "But they also pay a lot in taxes and wages and they should not be chastised because they don't give everything back. Because the amount they are keeping certainly is not exorbitant. However, people's comments on what the coal industry should do are reflective of how prevalent the one source economy theory is. I don't know of any other area where only one industry is mentioned when citizens push for corporate responsibility. How much should Walmart or gas or timber companies or banks do for an area beyond paying taxes and good wages and benefits? They extract value from the region and employ less people but don't suffer the criticism. It all goes back to a hundred years of history during which all coalfield residents were dependent on the coal companies and expected them to carry the burdens. Changing this philosophy will not come quickly and the modern coal company is much different from the old giants, but the change will come."

Looking back at his 25 years of experience in the coal industry and summing up his views, Quillen says: "The coal industry certainly has to have, and I think they do have, a much greater corporate conscience than they may have had before, but they won't ever be the force in these communities they once were."

A Personal Vision for the Future: Cooperation and Commitment

Regardless of debates about the conduct of the coal industry in the past--or that of the people of the coalfields themselves--Wise County school teacher Ronald Mullins argues that any vision for the future of southwestern Virginia's coalfields must include room for a partnership between the coal industry and the region's people. Mullins, in fact, argues for increased activism, for an increased voice, for increased participation on the part of the people themselves, and for true reciprocity on the part of the industry. He says: "I think the people themselves here ought to get involved with the coal industry and try and come up with solutions. I really don't believe that an outsider can come into this area and look around and say, 'We're going to do this and this, and this should remedy your situation.' I think the solutions are going to have to come from within the area, both from the people and from the coal operators who have been here for so long now, and who have shaped life so indelibly."

And finally, although he is not sure of the precise methodology by which his vision can be attained, Mullins hopes for a future in the coalfields that somehow keeps the best of the old while looking for improvements through the new—a sort of compromise culture, if you will. Says Mullins: "I don't know what the answer is as to what our new economic base is going to be, but it's going to have to be some cohesive economic base rather than little bits and pieces here and there, trying to survive, trying to compete. You know, it's like the coal industry was the big cohesive factor here in southwestern Virginia—the whole economy was based on coal, everything revolved around coal, businesses had coal names, you know 'Black Diamond' and so on—and not only was it just an industry for revenue, but it had a sort of unifying effect. People were proud to be coal miners, people were proud to be from this area, and in not so many years gone by, they could show their pride with the money they earned, and the things they bought. But now look around these hills here at some of these huge homes that are empty. Mansions, really, by square footage. But they're empty. And it's sad. So I hope whatever new economic base we can come up with, it's one that everybody can share in and have that sort of unifying effect that coal had, but without the extravagances."

Mullins concludes by attempting to clarify his remarks. Says Mullins: "It's hard to say exactly what I mean, but let me try. Upon graduating from college, I went to Washington, D.C., to seek employment and spent less than a week there and knew immediately that no matter how much money I made there, I wouldn't be satisfied. People were crazy up there. Going here and there at a thousand miles an hour. And they had every convenience imaginable. But you couldn't see the fog coming up the hollers early in the mornings. You couldn't hear the whippoorwills at night in the summer. You couldn't hear the frogs to let you know spring time was coming. So I missed these hills. I missed the spirit of the mountains or whatever you want to call it that means being a part of them and being able to feel them around you. At times they're almost like a blanket around you. And just knowing that you can stay here and provide for your family—and I just mean basic things, groceries, transportation, medical insurance—that's enough. I don't really feel there's a need to be extravagant in what we have, and I don't think the spirit of the mountains has anything to do with extravagance. And I think there's an awful lot of people here who feel just like me, who want to be a part of these hills but who don't see any need to extract some kind of extravagant living from them. And we'll stay here, always. We'll use what skills we have learned—subsistence farming, carpentry, woodworking, welding, whatever—and we'll just try to make our way."

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