

**Coal River Mountain Watch  
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
West Virginia Citizen Action Group  
Citizens Coal Council**

October 21, 2002

Nancy Herholdt, Commissioner  
WV Division of Culture and History  
Chair, Capitol Building Commission  
The Cultural Center  
Capitol Complex  
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East  
Charleston WV 25305-0300

Re: Bas-relief plaques on what was intended to be a memorial for miners

Dear Ms. Herholdt:

Thank you for your prompt response to the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition's Freedom of Information Act request for all minutes of Capitol Building Commission meetings at which the miners' monument was discussed. Do the documents we have so far received constitute *all* minutes from *all* meetings at which the monument was discussed? The only minutes that came in the faxed package were for April 8 and May 2, 2002. Minutes stretching back to 1999 may include reference to this monument. If that is so, please send those minutes. We also request a full list of donors to the monument.

The above listed citizen groups wish to formally register with the Capitol Building Commission our displeasure with the design of the monument, and we ask for changes to be made. We hope the Commission will enter into public record and discuss the items outlined below at its next meeting.

Environmental and citizens groups fully support a monument that honors coal miners.

In 1999, the Legislature passed a resolution (Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 24) authorizing the placement of a statue of a West Virginia coal miner on the State Capitol grounds:

Requesting the placement of a statue of a West Virginia coal miner on the grounds of the state capitol as a reminder of the impact of the coal industry on the state.....Whereas, A monument to West Virginia's coal miners would also serve as a lasting memorial to the many who have perished as a result of coal mining in the state.

No where is there mention of a plaque that will read:

In recognition of the men and women who have devoted their careers to providing the state, country and world with low-cost household and industrial energy.

Most importantly, nowhere does the monument, as it is now configured, pay tribute to those who have lost their lives.

The original intent of the legislature to honor miners who lost their lives to the quest for coal appears long forgotten. How did honoring lives lost become honoring careers dedicated to “low-cost energy?” This phrasing is especially offensive when you consider what miners, the public and the environment have endured from the coal industry for over 100 years. Our lives and our land are not cheap!

No where in the resolution is it stated that the monument will include a plaque featuring the draglines of mountaintop removal.

The practice of mountaintop removal / valley fills breaks laws:

- ◆ Piling mining waste in streams is illegal.
- ◆ A comprehensive study of how MTR affects watersheds is required by law, but no such study exists.
- ◆ Practically every MTR mine is in violation of certain federal mining laws.

How dare the coal industry make a monument that was supposed to honor miners into a monument glorifying coal companies’ illegal behavior! What other criminal behavior shall we memorialize in bronze and stone on the statehouse grounds?

The WV Coal Association has seized an opportunity with the statue to present its own goals, and to move its public relations campaign off the billboards and onto a public monument. This is highly inappropriate. The plaques in question will be in a very prominent spot in the most public place in our state, the Capitol grounds. Such placement, in bronze and stone no less, implies an “official” endorsement of legally-questionable mountaintop removal / valley fill coal mining.

Some have speculated that if we spoke up against this public insult that the Coal Association would paint us as anti-miner. Let us repeat: Environmental and citizens groups fully support a monument that honors coal miners. Our memberships include retired, disabled and disgruntled miners, brothers and sisters and spouses of miners, sons and daughters and grandchildren and great grandchildren of miners. We support our kin.

The WV Coal Association represents companies that have a history of resisting even basic worker rights, such as the 40-hour work week, paid holidays, compensation for injuries, and priority attention to worker-safety issues. Some of these same companies are responsible for many of the worst disasters Appalachia has seen, such as the Mannington Mine and Buffalo Creek disasters.

If we are to believe that the WV Coal Association wants to honor miners, as well as honor the Legislature’s resolution, then let the miner statue be all that is on this monument. If the plaques so far placed upon this monument are to remain on display in the most prominent public location in the state, then the public should have input concerning what they depict. The WV Coal Association has maintained that these plaques represent the history of mining. These plaques, however, leave out a great deal about the history of mining: miners’ lives lost to mine

wars, tragedy and lung disease; miners' jobs lost to the machines depicted on these plaques and to union-busting coal company tactics; communities, forests and streams lost to mountaintop removal; democracy lost to political corruption; etc.

If this is to be a monument to the history of coal, then let it reflect the entire history, not the sanitized version set forth by the coal industry. Public input regarding this history is essential.

We think this matter will best be solved by: installing the statue of the miner; removing the plaques depicting machines that have taken miners' jobs and allowed the coal industry to engage in legally-questionable mining; and, placing a carefully-worded plaque that actually pays honor to those who have died because of the coal industry.

Sincerely,

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CC: Gov. Bob Wise; Bill Raney and Chris Hamilton of WV Coal Association; various members of the media