

Dirty Dirty Coal Dude Approved by Apparently Clueless Senate

By ShellyT, on November 8th, 2009
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What do we really know about this man, Joe Pizarchik, who was just OK'd as **director of the office of surface coal mining?** (That includes strip mining and mountain top removal, two things that should not need a director because they need to completely end as soon as possible).

Kendra Barkoff, press secretary for Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, said the following after a hold was put on his nomination.

Secretary Salazar believes Joe Pizarchik is the right man at the right time to be the Director of the Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation. Joe's experience and expertise proves that he will help move the department forward with coal production in an environmentally responsible way. Secretary Salazar is willing to address the concerns that any Senator might have regarding Joe's qualifications for the office.

Hmmm. Coal Tattoo has [a lot of information](#) on him.. Two committee members — Democrat Robert Menendez of New Jersey and Independent Bernard Sanders of Vermont — [voted against Pizarchik](#). I respect Bernie Sanders a lot, so if he feels Pizarchik is the wrong person for the job, there must be a very good reason. That makes you wonder what the rest of the Senate sees in him, and Ken Salazar too, for that matter. What is their agenda? If it's this nonsense that our "future energy is coal" then we are all hosed. Break out the gas masks and oxygen tanks. We need *much* smarter people making these decisions.

WASHINGTON — The Senate today (Nov. 6th) confirmed controversial nominee Joseph Pizarchik to be director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, the federal agency charged with protecting communities and natural systems from the impacts of coal mining. The Center for Biological Diversity and numerous organizations and communities affected by coal mining had opposed the nomination.

“Today, the Senate put the fox in charge of guarding the henhouse when it comes to destructive mining,” said Tierra Curry, a biologist at the Center. “As director of the Bureau of Mining and Reclamation in Pennsylvania, Mr. Pizarchik consistently made decisions that benefited industry at the expense of the environment and communities living in mining areas. And now, thanks to the Obama administration and the Senate, he can bring those same disastrous policies to mining practices across the country.”

Mr. Pizarchik’s environmental record includes advocating for unsafe disposal of toxic coal ash, disregarding the scientific evidence concerning coal-ash pollution, weakening stream buffer-zone rules, promoting valley fills, and downplaying the devastation caused by long-wall mining.

[That is a very bad start to any introduction of this man.

Maybe he is recovering from amnesia and can't remember who he is? Sounds like our best hope.]

Moreover, his agency has failed to meet legal requirements to prevent water pollution and has attempted to block citizens from obtaining information under public record laws.

[More "uh-ohs"]

In 2001, Mr. Pizarchik supervised the drafting of regulations that weakened stream buffer-zone rules to allow the filling of stream valleys in Pennsylvania. In spite of science demonstrating the hazards of improper coal-ash disposal, Mr. Pizarchik’s agency has allowed waste to be buried in unlined pits and old mines without regulatory safeguards. His coal-ash mine-fill program was found deficient by the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

And during confirmation hearings, Mr. Pizarchik dodged questions about mountaintop removal, claiming he needed to “learn more about the facts and details...what has transpired in the past.”

“At a time when we need to be rapidly and boldly moving away from our reliance on coal and fossil fuels to curb global warming, it is extremely alarming that the Senate would confirm such a controversial nominee with a record of consistently downplaying the devastating effects of coal mining and coal ash on the environment,” said Curry.

OK — WHAT IS THE SENATE THINKING?

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At the Center for Biological Diversity, we believe that the welfare of human beings is deeply linked to nature – to the existence in our world of a vast diversity of wild animals and plants. Because diversity has intrinsic value, and because its loss impoverishes society, we work to secure a future for all species, great and small, hovering on the brink of extinction. We do so through science, law, and creative media, with a focus on protecting the lands, waters, and climate that species need to survive.