

## **Facing South—Institute for Southern Studies**

<http://www.southernstudies.org/2009/11/senate-approves-controversial-choice-for-coal-mining-regulator.html>

By Sue Sturgis on November 10, 2009 9:11 AM

# **Senate approves controversial choice for coal mining regulator**

Environmental and public health watchdogs have vowed to increase their scrutiny of the Interior Department's Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement in the wake of the Senate's approval last week of President Obama's controversial choice to head the agency.

On Friday the Senate confirmed as OSMRE's director Joseph Pizarchik, who led the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Mining and Reclamation since 2002. In that role he came under fire from environmental advocates for promoting environmentally destructive mining practices and dangerous disposal methods for toxic coal ash waste from power plants.

After environmentalists raised concerns about Pizarchik's nomination, an unknown senator placed a hold on the nomination. But that hold was lifted, and the Senate approved Pizarchik's appointment by unanimous consent.

"Those in the Senate who allowed this nomination to go through are helping the Obama administration continue to enable the worst coal mining practices in this country," said Aimee Erickson, coordinator of the Citizens Coal Council, a national federal of grassroots groups working to reform the mining industry. "Coalfield citizens are not about to sit back and let the destructive mining practices that Joseph Pizarchik condoned when he failed to properly regulate the coal industry in Pennsylvania spread to the rest of the U.S."

Bill Price with the Sierra Club's Environmental Justice program added that citizens' groups in Appalachia and their allies nationwide also expect Interior Department Secretary Ken Salazar to increase his oversight of OSMRE, given the director's history.

"If Mr. Pizarchik tries to run the OSM in the same manner that he ran the Bureau of Mining and Reclamation in the Pennsylvania DEP, the world will know," Price said.

Environmental advocates also raised concerns that during his confirmation hearing Pizarchik dodged questions about mountaintop removal mining, 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 Tierra Curry, a scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity.