

**EPA Decision Needs to Be Answered by the People**

by Avram Friedman, Executive Director of the Canary Coalition

With the decision by the U.S.Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to loosen emission control requirements under the New Source Review (NSR) provision of the Clean Air Act, a line has been drawn in the sand that challenges the political viability of the clean air movement and potentially opens the door to an unstoppable series of policies that could be disastrous to public health and the environment. If this unpopular move by the EPA cannot be successfully overcome, the rest of the Administration's proposed Energy Policy will almost certainly follow virtually uncontested by Congress. The stakes are high for the people who live in the Appalachian Region.

NSR was added to the Clean Air Act as a safeguard to public health. The Clean Air Act mandated that all new coal-burning power plants meet strict emission control requirements; but already existing plants were exempted from the clean-up. However, NSR compelled the owners of these older plants to upgrade emission control systems if the plants were expanded in generating capacity. The EPA's ruling earlier this week allows further expansion of generating capacity without emission control improvements. Areas that are already suffering from acute health and environmental problems from ground-level ozone, particulate sulfur dioxide, acid rain, nitrogen deposition and mercury contamination will now get worse, if this decision is not reversed.

Last January, when the EPA first announced that this decision was being seriously considered, there was an unprecedented volume of mail, phone calls and email to the White House opposing the policy. As a result, the decision was quietly put aside and, many hoped, put to sleep permanently. But, with renewed confidence, assertiveness and power gained from the mid-term elections, the policy makers are now boldly and blatantly pandering to industrial interests and ignoring public health concerns.

In the past two years strong clean air legislation materialized in North Carolina, Illinois, New York and California. A major court decision in New Jersey mandated power plant cleanup in that state. Public awareness of the health effects of power plant pollution is growing; and the political pressure that accompanies that awareness is having a dramatic effect on lawmakers and regulators nation-wide. Progress has been made. Suddenly this has come to a stop. The EPA has decided to take us in the opposite direction.

Over the last two years, in North Carolina, health organizations, environmental groups, members of the business community, editorial staffs and community leaders formed an overwhelming political groundswell that resulted in the near-unanimous passage of the NC Clean Smokestacks Act. But, in the western part of North Carolina, an area that includes the nation's most polluted Great Smoky Mountains National Park, an improvement in air quality depends on the actions of other states and the

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federal government. The EPA has dampened hope that the people of western North Carolina will have relief from polluted air any time soon, unless this decision is reversed.

The American Lung Association released a study this summer indicating that Cherokee children develop asthma at a rate two-and-a-half times the national average due largely to power plant pollution. The study was done in Cherokee, but doctors, school officials and members of the business community throughout western North Carolina will vouch for the fact that respiratory diseases in children and the elderly have dramatically increased in recent years resulting in a greater number of absences from schools, more family leave time from work used by parents, higher medical costs and stressing of hospital bed capacity.

Republicans, Democrats, independents, conservatives, liberals, people of all color, economic status, religious background and beliefs: all have children, grandchildren and elderly. All have to breathe. Whenever, in our country's history, there were great injustices flagrantly perpetrated against a significant portion of the population a movement has resulted to correct that injustice. Beginning with the issue of taxation without representation that led to the founding of our nation, to the issues of slavery, women's suffrage, child labor, civil rights: the injustice was met and overcome by a massive, determined movement of the people.

We have the right to breathe clean air. Nobody has the right to do this to our children. This misguided but resolute EPA policy has to be overcome. Once again, the sea of indignation must rise as we exercise our rights and peacefully mobilize the overwhelming power of the people within our beloved democratic form of government to correct a glaring injustice. To contact the Canary Coalition call toll free 1-866-4CANARY, [www.canarycoalition.org](http://www.canarycoalition.org)

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