



10-8-12

Honorable Shelly C. Chapman

I am a retired mine worker.
Wife and I are on lots of meds.
we both have Pace-makers, and a
Defibrillator, heart trouble and diabetes.

It would make a very
much hard-ship on us if we
lost our benefits.

Yours Truly
William C Fulkerson
and
Wife Edwin

In coal country, show of solidarity begins

BY WICKI SMITH
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MORGANTOWN, W.Va.

Coal country is hurting, and the people who live here want the whole nation to know it.

Thousands of miners have been laid off this year across Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia, many with the hope of getting their jobs back as power plants and the coal mines that trained them shut down. Now the families, friends and business operators who depend on those mines are planning a multi-state show of solidarity they hope will be heard in Washington, D.C., and beyond.

"No one really hears our voices down here and knows what's going on," says 75-year-old coal miner Tracy Miller of Okaloosa, Va. She's working to change

If all goes as planned, she says, she'll be wearing a red, white and blue striped and fluorescent mine safety vest for Coal-T-shirts lined up Oct. 13 along Highway 23 from Big Stone Gap, Va., through Martinsville and toward Lincoln, Ohio. They will march north on U.S. 119

from Pikeville toward Williams, W.Va.

Some call it "Hands Across Coal Country."

In Virginia, it's a "Prayer Chain."

But everyone knows what it's for: It's to show the rest of America

the people behind the headlines from a far-away place.

"Hopefully it's an inspiring event for the people who were laid off," says 32-year-old Shana Lucius, wife of a coal miner in Wise, Va. "It's just a way as a community to say, 'We can't stop anything. We can't do anything to prevent this from happening to you, but we can stand up for you. We can form a line, three states long to show you we care.'"

The industry was already enduring a seasonal downturn after a warm winter that kept demand for coal low. It faces growing competition from cheap, abundant natural gas. And it was struggling with the Environmental Protection Agency's crackdown on permitting for mountaintop

removal mines and tougher clean-water standards.

Then old, inefficient power plants started shutting down, too, cutting off a traditional market for Appalachian steam coal.

Operators had to adjust and that translated to layoffs — 800 alone last month when Alpha Natural Resources shut down eight Appa-

lachian mines. That means fewer working miners, spending less in stores, giving less to relatives in need and struggling to find new jobs.

"I'm not a very political person," says Miller, who's planning to take her 5- and 10-year-old children to the demonstration. "I don't want this prayer

chain to turn into politics. But the EPA has absolutely destroyed our way of life."

She and other organizers are expecting a huge turnout from people who feel the same.

Jesse Bowling, tourism director for the city of Pikeville, says his town of 6,900 is hosting a free concert for the miners and preparing for a crowd of as many as 50,000.

"It's to help them and show them we're proud of them and we support them," he says. "And we'll continue to do so."

Unlike many coal demonstrations, this one isn't orchestrated by companies or trade associations. United for Coal is a grassroots initiative, promoted largely on Facebook by people who are directly affected.

"In Washington, that gets

On The Web
United for Coal: <http://www.unitedforcoal.com/>

lost in translation some times. These layoffs affect families — wives, mothers, grandmothers, kids, grandkids," says Jesse Silver, the 52-year-old president of a Pikeville energy company that leases land and mineral rights to coal operators. "It's just a real miserable time here in the coalfields."

The idea started with Allen Gibson, a 60-year-old disabled surface miner

from Elk Horn City.

An elderly woman who lives on \$205 a month in Social Security income told him she'd always gotten by, thanks to support from five sons who were coal miners. "Who were coal miners? Now four are unemployed."

"She wasn't complaining that she couldn't get the medicines she needed," Gibson says. "She was worried about her sons."

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