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**Subject:** Coal jobs

# Charleston Gazette-Mail

## Coal jobs rise, media blames Trump

By: Luke Popovich – June 21, 2017

Here's one irony emerging from the tumultuous early months of the Trump administration.

The president's support for the coal industry, and his rollback of costly federal regulations, is gradually helping put coal communities back on their feet.

But the president isn't getting any credit for it. In fact, instead of recognizing coal's revival, the media more often describes it as "impossible."

It's as if the coal industry has become a surrogate for a presidency that is deeply unpopular with many who think that whatever the president likes must be bad and whatever he aids must fail. It's the same "government-can't-bring-them-back" narrative familiar to anyone who recalls the General Motors bailout.

But facts are stubborn things.

Coal has added about 2,000 direct jobs in the last year, with 1,700 just since December 2016. Mines are expanding and new ones are opening in Alabama, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Virginia and here in West Virginia.

Year-to-date production is up about 50 million tons, rail loadings are climbing despite a relatively mild winter, and power sector coal consumption climbed almost 23 percent in March, year to date. Both prices and exports are now expected to tick upward this year.

The Trump administration deserves some credit for this revival.

The Environmental Protection Agency has voided or put on hold costly regulations that would have achieved little or no environmental benefit.

The Department of the Interior has lifted a moratorium arbitrarily placed on federal coal production. And the Energy Department has launched a study to see how regulatory interference — including the retirement of coal plants — has damaged the reliability of the nation's power grid.

None of this impresses the naysayers, however. They're simply pushing back the goal posts — and denying the administration any credit — by arguing that coal will never return to its dominant position.

But most miners already know the difference between campaign rhetoric and reality. And few in the industry actually expect "King Coal" to regain the market share it held before the shale gas revolution flooded the energy market with cheap natural gas.

All that coal miners could reasonably expect from the new administration was to get the government off their back and out of the business of picking winners and losers.

Instead of Washington regulators making the decisions on which energy sources the nation could use, let consumers decide what fuel they'll use for electricity, manufacturing and transportation.

That's essentially what this administration is doing — removing the regulatory burden from coal and letting it compete against other energy sources in the open market. That's why lifting the regulations has helped coal mining and the jobs it supports.

Yet even this modest recovery is ignored because it's President Donald Trump helping coal.

Examples abound. The Washington Post recently belittled the revival of the industry by contrasting the slow growth of coal jobs with the rising number of fast-food workers. That's an unhelpful comparison though, since coal jobs pay an annual average of \$84,000, plus good benefits. Fast-food jobs offer little more than minimum wage.

The article also noted that coal employment has declined since the mid-1980s, a point intended to diminish the impact of Obama-era regulations and lessen credit Trump deserves for removing them.

But coal employment actually climbed by 32 percent from 2000 until 2011, reaching 143,000 before a massive Obama administration rule — and not natural gas production — began forcing almost 20 percent of America's coal plants out of business.

Some reporters even minimize recent coal job creation by only citing federal data that excludes the contract workers who also work in the mines

Adding these contract workers to the recent jobs tally from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that coal has actually grown by about 2,000 high-wage jobs in the past year — an encouraging uptick for an industry that was hit hard by costly regulations for much of the past decade.

Coal's critics shouldn't bury the industry just because Trump promised to revive it.

The question now is whether coal will continue to bear the brunt of media ire against the president, or whether it will be recognized as a sustainable source of good jobs and reliable electricity.