

Coal CEO Looks For New Ways To Revive The Industry09:43

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Exhibit 27

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A train near hauls coal mined from Wyoming's Powder River Basin near Bill, Wyo., Tuesday, March 28, 2017. President Donald Trump's lifting of a federal coal leasing moratorium issued last year by President Barack Obama will allow new leasing of federal coal to resume in the basin and elsewhere. (Mead Gruver/AP)

About 81,000 people worked in the U.S. coal industry last year, compared to 123,000 a decade ago. President Trump is trying to reverse that trend by changing regulations, such as his executive order to roll back environmental restrictions on power-plant emissions and coal leases on federal land.

[Ramaco Carbon](#), a coal company which is trying to open a new mine in Wyoming, says it is looking for [other options](#) by finding new uses for coal that do not involve burning it for energy.

Here & Now's Peter O'Dowd speaks with [Randall Atkins](#), chairman and CEO of Ramaco Carbon, about the project and about Atkins's take on how the broader coal industry could change under Trump.

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Interview Highlights

On his plan for a new coal mine in Wyoming

"Our plan is to be a little bit against the grain. Unlike most of the other coal production in the Powder River Basin, which is thermal coal, and thermal coal is typically burned by utilities, we're trying to essentially take the coal and turn it into products that have a variety of different uses, some of which are known, some of which are under development.

"Indeed about 95 percent of all coal produced is thermal coal. Five percent of the coal produced is metallurgic coal. And metallurgic coal, of course, is used for steel. That's kind of what led us to explore perhaps using a different approach than most people do for thermal coal."

On how the plan changed to get where it is today

"Well, basically, as we examined our development options, the landscape changed. Part of that was perhaps regulatory, part of which was market, and part of which was, frankly, investment driven. The idea of investing what would probably be hundreds of millions of dollars in a typical thermal coal mine struck us as becoming more problematic, frankly, because of the utilities being under some pressure to move from coal, both again from a regulatory as well as from a market-driven standpoint."

On the market for coal and other energy sources

"I think a number of the mines that went bankrupt in Wyoming, frankly, were connected to large public coal companies that had over-levered. I don't think they went bankrupt because the operations in Wyoming were necessarily unprofitable. But to your point about the pressures on the coal industry in general, certainly natural gas has become a cheaper base load fuel for utilities over the last several years because of its prolific production. By the same token, the regulatory atmosphere over the last eight years or so has been very difficult. And so I think to the extent that you have a new sheriff in town, so to speak, in Washington, they can certainly, around the margins, do things to make the regulatory playing field more even. But the market will be up to what the market is."

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Randall Atkins

On the health and environmental damage that results from the coal industry

"I think when you go through a permitting process, it is designed to weed out and rectify a lot of these issues which you just raised. And as far as the regulatory climate, if you get an even playing field I think you've got a better opportunity to address a lot of these issues."

On the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan

"I think to a certain extent some of the things that the plan attempted to do would impose certain restrictions on utilities, putting the thumb on the scale somewhat. And I think as far as coal companies in general, despite rhetoric to the contrary, I would say most coal companies are not out there trying to be bad stewards toward the environment and certainly toward their neighbors."

On President Trump's promise to save jobs in the coal industry

"Candidly, you know, we don't try to get ourselves into the thermal coal debate from the standpoint of how much utility use will be swayed one way or another by a regulatory change. On a very simple basis, you know, you get more jobs if you are able to use more coal. Most people attempt to use coal for thermal purposes, for burning in utilities. We're trying to come up with, frankly, a different idea that might ultimately result in an alternative use of coal, which would not necessarily burn it. To the extent that that would create more demand would also create more coal jobs.

On how many jobs his project would create

"Frankly, several thousand jobs, because we envision actually having sort of three components to it. We've got a coal mine, and then we're gonna have an industrial park that will essentially use that coal to make products. And then the third component is we have a research center, which will in essence try to explore new uses of the carbon from coal to make product."

On the president's policies and the future of coal

"I guess, to preface it, and not trying to dodge, but I'm not really trying to get into too much of the politics of the Trump administration.

"I think the Obama administration, as I've said, tried to impose both certain market constraints on utilities, and then also certain regulatory constraints on the conduct of mining. So I think to the extent that the Trump administration perhaps levels the playing field a bit on the regulatory, I think, you know, a rising tide will perhaps carry all boats. And I think, again to the demand equation, coal companies nor Mr. Trump nor anyone else can essentially change the fundamental dynamic of whether gas is a less expensive form of base load fuel for a utility than coal. So, that side of the equation is pretty much out of the political hand, so to speak."

This segment aired on April 4, 2017.

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