

RECLAIM ACT TESTIMONY: Reclamation can lead to redevelopment BY Dan Fisher

My name is Dan Fisher. I am Treasurer for the City of Gillespie, Illinois, and although I have never worked in a mine, I come from a long line of coal miners and live in a community built upon jobs in the coal industry. While some Illinoisans may still find employment in mining, especially in other parts of the state, mine jobs have essentially vanished from my community over the past several decades.

But I am here today to assure you that redevelopment of the sort envisioned in The RECLAIM Act can take place once coal mines are reclaimed because I have seen such redevelopment occur several times, including a wide variety of local small and midsized businesses that are providing jobs and income to those communities that surround Gillespie; communities that once depended on those long closed coal mines for jobs and income.

I'm basically retired now. Most mornings I sip black coffee on my back deck as I look out at the nearby Miner Soccer Association fields. Even early in the morning the fields are busy with children kicking balls about, trying to get through a practice before the heat and humidity of an Illinois summer gets too daunting.

Although the fields are only a few years old, the site has been Gillespie's hub for decades, because before there were soccer fields on the site there was the Little Dog coal mine, an underground pillar and post mine that was the economic engine of the city until it closed in the late 1960's.

My dad worked at the mine. So did each of my grandfathers, as did my wife's father.

But as I hear the shouts and whistles from the soccer fields, I am reminded that there is still life in these old mines, and not just from kids playing soccer on reclaimed turf. There are business opportunities, too. On the east edge of Gillespie lies Aladdin Steel, the largest contiguous

industrial building in all of Macoupin County, a shade over 200,000 square feet of steel warehouse space that lies on top of what once was the Consolidated Coal Company's Gillespie Mine. That mine operated from 1897 to 1910, and was reclaimed in the late 1970's through the Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Fund (AML). Aladdin Steel opened in 1976, and sixty five people work there today sorting, cutting and selling steel pipe and tubing to every state in the union, as well as Canada.

A couple miles east of Aladdin Steel on Illinois Rt. #16 is Quality Flooring, a carpet and flooring retailer that sits on the former Consolidated Coal Company's Hornsby Mine, which operated from 1897 until 1906, and was reclaimed in the late 1970's. Quality Flooring broke ground upon the former slag pile in 1985 and opened in 1986. They were the Coal Country Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year in 1987 and to this day sell carpet and flooring throughout a seven county area that stretches from St. Louis, Missouri on the South to Springfield, Illinois, on the north.

A bit farther south is the Village of White City, home to Ideal Fabricating, where fifteen workers produce commercial trash dumpsters and other fabricated metal goods on the former site of the Number 15 mine that closed in 1951. Ideal Fabricating opened in 1965 and much of their fabricating work is actually done in one of the original buildings there, still structurally sound after all these years.

Down the road a bit is the Village of Livingston, home to the Winery at Shale Lake, which is located upon lands that once were the Livingston and Mt. Olive Coal Company's No. #1 Mine, which operated from 1905 to 1964.

These are just a few examples of the redevelopment that has occurred on the reclaimed mine sites that surround my home town of Gillespie. Now, not every former mine that has been reclaimed enjoys a second act; but most of those that have not been formerly redeveloped are still used to grow straw and hay, producing an agricultural commodity while stifling the threat of pollution. Which, I suppose, is more proof there really is no such thing as idle ground.

The RECLAIM ACT (HR XXXX) would provide an additional \$1 billion to clean up dangerous, old abandoned mines, with a goal of creating reinvestment in the former coal mining communities. The Department of Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement estimates the Act would create 4,600 direct jobs, concentrated in the areas hardest hit by those coal industry job losses. Program funds come from the existing AML Reserve and no new taxes or increased taxes are required to fully fund the program.

There are jobs and opportunities awaiting those communities who take a new look at those remaining abandoned coal mines. If Congress acts and passes the RECLAIM Act a lot more people will get to enjoy not just children's soccer games, like I do, but new job opportunities in tourism, agriculture, recreation, renewable energy, retail and, in some cases like that of Ideal Fabricating or Aladdin Steel, standard heavy industry.

The RECLAIM act will work. I hear confirmation of that every day as I sip my morning coffee. But we need to do more than drink coffee; we need to move the bill forward. Now.

Thank you.