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Contacts:

Bo Webb, ACHE Campaign, 617-407-2721, webb.bo@gmail.com

Robyn Kincaid, Coal River Mountain Watch, 304-860-0011, bobkincaid@gmail.com

**Appalachian Communities Health Emergency Act introduced
Bill would halt new mountaintop removal pending definitive health study**

WASHINGTON—U.S. House representatives today introduced the Appalachian Communities Health Emergency (ACHE) Act, H.R. 2073. The bill would halt new or expanded mountaintop removal coal mine permits until and unless the Department of Health and Human Services, upon receiving a comprehensive health study, concludes that the process poses no threat to public health.

Rep. John Yarmuth, (Ky-3), the lead sponsor of the bill, said, “For far too long, reckless mountaintop removal mining practices have wreaked havoc on the air, water, and land throughout coal communities. We also see some of the worst health outcomes in areas surrounding these mining operations, yet to this day there still has not been a single federal health study completed on the risks associated with the practice. Our government should be ensuring the health and safety of its citizens before it considers a single new permit to allow this destruction to continue. We owe it to coal country, to those families, and to our nation’s future.”

Before she died of cancer, Vickie Terry, who lived next to a mountaintop removal site in Claiborne County, Tn., said, “Coal companies are blowing up the mountains where I live. We've seen alarming increases in cancer and other illnesses since mountaintop removal began here, and we deserve answers. Our health is not considered in the permit decisions, even though there are more than two dozen peer-reviewed studies linking deadly health impacts to mountaintop removal. To protect the health of my family and community, we need the ACHE Act.”

One study found over 1,200 “excess deaths” annually in mountaintop removal areas, after accounting for other factors such as smoking and obesity. Another study, conducted in the lab by scientists with the Mary Babb Randolph Cancer Center, was titled “Appalachian Mountaintop Mining Particulate Matter Induces Neoplastic Transformation of Human Bronchial Epithelial Cells and Promotes Tumor Formation.”

“The worth of human health and life in the communities is incalculable,” said Kathy Selvage of Wise County, Va., a long-term Appalachian activist who lives near several mountaintop removal sites. “Coal companies must protect the health of their neighboring communities. All the science to date informs us that mountaintop removal is a deadly public health threat. The ACHE Act will provide us with answers and save the lives of those in communities who have no choice but to breathe the dust from these sites.”

In 2017, the Trump administration abruptly canceled a review by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine intended to better understand the health impacts of mountaintop removal and identify areas needing more study.

“West Virginia has once again, for the tenth straight year finished last in the Gallup Well Being States Index,” said Bo Webb, ACHE campaign coordinator. “The suffering of those who reside in mountaintop removal (MTR) communities of Appalachia is not a mystery. The elevated rates of cancer, birth defects and other negative health consequences in these communities is due to silica dust and other toxins generated from blasting mountains into ashes to extract small seams of coal. This may be an inconvenient truth to the profiteers of MTR, but it is a plain sad truth to the human suffering that comes with blowing up a mountain directly above the homes of the vulnerable. To quote Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia, ‘I have come around on utilizing mountaintop removal methods, and I think the method has exceeded its useful life.’ I agree with Joe, it is time to end MTR. It is time to finally begin caring for the health of the people in these communities.” A short video of a mountaintop removal blasting dust cloud filling a Coal River Mountain neighborhood is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTb9Bm2otxE>.

Holly Clark, of Fayetteville, W.Va., home to the nation's newest national park, said, “As someone living close to multiple mountaintop removal sites, I know all too well the toll it takes on human lives. I watch as my friends die and feel my home shake from the blasts. I’m baffled by our state’s lack of protection of our mountains and its people, two of its most precious resources. Placing a moratorium on the issuance of mountaintop removal coal mining permits until further health studies can be conducted is something that is long overdue.”

Mickey McCoy of Inez, Ky, said, “MTR and global warming is a one-two punch in the ring of life in Appalachia. What used to be a "hundred year flood" is hitting the central Appalachians every two or three years. Passing the ACHE Act would be a beginning to halt the devastation that threatens lives and property in our homeland.”

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The ACHE Campaign’s mission is to educate the United States Congress about the public health crisis affecting citizens living in areas with mountaintop removal. To this end, ACHE will seek solutions and government intervention from those agencies with the responsibility to protect the health of Americans. www.ACHEact.org

Coal River Mountain Watch’s mission is to stop the destruction of our communities and environment by mountaintop removal mining, to improve the quality of life in our area and to help rebuild sustainable communities. www.crmw.net