

July 21, 2025

Dear Senators,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we write to express our opposition to Lanny Erdos' nomination for Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE). A former coal executive and industry-friendly former Trump administration official should not be in charge of determining whether to approve new coal mines, ensuring adequate measures are in place to reclaim existing mines, and overseeing the cleanup of abandoned mines. At a time when the Trump administration is recklessly greenlighting coal mining projects and gutting OSMRE and other agencies that regulate the industry, we urge you to oppose Mr. Erdos' nomination.

Contrary to what some assume, coal is still wreaking havoc on the climate, natural ecosystems, and communities. Coal accounts for more than half of all CO₂ emissions from the U.S. electric power sector,¹ hundreds of thousands of acres of public land are currently leased to coal companies for mines,² and pollution from coal fired power plants continues to poison communities through smokestack emissions³ and toxins from coal ash waste leaking into groundwater.⁴ Because of these impacts, it is critical that OSMRE faithfully fulfill its statutory mission to "protect society and the environment from the adverse effects of surface coal mining operations."⁵

Unfortunately, Mr. Erdos' record suggests that he will be little more than a rubber stamp for President Trump's "Beautiful Clean Coal" agenda at the expense of the climate, environment, and impacted communities. Mr. Erdos worked at OSMRE under the first Trump administration, first as Acting Director for nearly a year, then as Principal Deputy Director exercising the authority of the Director (after watchdog groups alleged that he had violated the Federal Vacancies Reform Act while serving as Acting Director),⁶ and finally for a six-week stint as Director. In addition to his FVRA scandal, Mr. Erdos' tenure was marked by efforts to weaken regulations that hold the coal industry accountable and protect communities. For example, Mr. Erdos oversaw OSMRE's effort to weaken the Ten-Day Notice rule, which made it harder for communities to compel coal mines to fix violations.⁷ The Biden administration later reversed course and re-strengthened the rule in 2024.⁸ Furthermore, since leaving OSMRE, Mr. Erdos has worked as a Vice President at Eagle Summit Resources, a coal company that operates several mines in Wyoming and West Virginia.

¹ U.S. Energy Information Administration. April 17, 2024. "Coal explained: Coal and the environment."

<https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/coal/coal-and-the-environment.php>

² Bureau of Land Management. April 30, 2025. "First 100 days: BLM drives energy expansion and national strength."

<https://www.blm.gov/blog/2025-04-30/first-100-days-blm-drives-energy-expansion-and-national-strength>

³ Earthjustice. April 25, 2024. "The Mercury & Air Toxics Standards." <https://earthjustice.org/feature/what-you-should-know-about-the-mercury-and-air-toxics-standards>

⁴ Environmental Integrity Project & Earthjustice. November 3, 2022. "Poisonous Coverup: The Widespread Failure of the Power Industry to Clean Up Coal Ash Dumps."

https://earthjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/coal-ash-report-poisonous-coverup_earthjustice.pdf

⁵ Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. PL 95-87. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-1574/pdf/COMPS-1574.pdf>

⁶ James Marshall. E&E News. August 6, 2020. "Top mine regulator dogged by legal questions."

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/1063692471>

⁷ James Marshall. E&E News. July 17, 2020. "Interior eases off mining oversight, again."

<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/1063580847>

⁸ Sierra Club. April 4, 2024. "Coal Community Advocates Applaud New "10-Day Notice" Rule for Strengthening Response to Health, Safety and Pollution Threats."

<https://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2024/04/coal-community-advocates-applaud-new-10-day-notice-rule-strengthening>

Mr. Erdos' nomination must be considered within the context of an administration that is actively taking unprecedented and reckless action to prop up the coal industry. On April 8, the President signed several executive orders to promote "Beautiful Clean Coal," a rebranding attempt for the industry that would be laughable if it were not being used to justify immense harm. Following those orders, OSMRE has rubber-stamped approvals for at least two coal mines under the guise of Trump's national energy emergency declaration (Bull Mountains⁹ and Hurricane Creek¹⁰), announced plans to revert back to the 2020 Trump Ten-Day Notice rule,¹¹ and shed more than 20% of its staff through DOGE-led staff reduction efforts.¹²

Furthermore, the just-passed budget reconciliation bill includes the largest-ever federal giveaways to the coal industry. H.R. 1 requires rushed agency reviews for pending coal leases, slashes the royalty rate for coal mined on public lands to 7%, mandates at least four million acres of public land be opened to coal mining, authorizes the expansion of the notorious Bull Mountains coal mine in Montana and any other federal coal leases that are adjacent to private coal reserves, and creates a brand-new production tax credit for metallurgical coal. With these policies in place, it is more important than ever that OSMRE follow the law, protect communities and sensitive ecosystems, and support the transition away from coal.

But during his confirmation hearing, Mr. Erdos repeatedly praised the coal giveaways in H.R. 1 and the reckless pro-coal policies that have already been advanced under this administration. For example, he expressed support for limiting the scope of coal mine reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act and excitement that reduced royalty rates will "incentivize the industry to mine more coal." The climate, the environment, and coal-impacted communities cannot afford an OSMRE Director who will champion more harmful mining projects and less regulation of the industry. There are already over a million acres of unreclaimed mine land in the country, much of which is no longer productive. OSMRE's focus should be to ensure the expedient reclamation of these sites, protecting communities from polluting runoff and dangerous mine features, not putting them further in harm's way.

For these reasons, we urge you to **vote no on Lanny Erdos' nomination** as Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Citizens' Law Center
Black Warrior Riverkeeper
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Coalfield Justice
Citizens Against Longwall Mining (CALM)
Citizens Coal Council
Climate Justice Alliance
Coal River Mountain Watch
Earthjustice Action
Endangered Species Coalition

⁹ Hiroko Tabuchi. New York Times. June 6, 2025. "Trump Approves Expansion of Scandal-Hit Coal Mine." <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/06/climate/bull-mountain-coal-mine-trump.html>

¹⁰ Nichola Groom. Reuters. July 9, 2025. "US issues expedited permit for proposed Tennessee coal mine." <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-issues-expedited-permit-proposed-tennessee-coal-mine-2025-07-08>

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Interior. June 12, 2025. "Interior Proposes to Rescind Overreaching 2024 Rule on Coal Mining Oversight." <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-proposes-rescind-overreaching-2024-rule-coal-mining-oversight>

¹² Jennifer Yachnin. E&E News. June 17, 2025. "7,500 Interior workers took Trump buyouts or early retirement." <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/06/17/7-500-interior-workers-took-trump-buyouts-or-early-retirement-00410683>

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