



KENTUCKIANS FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

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Action for Justice

December 2, 2013

Governor Steve Beshear
700 Capitol Avenue, Suite 100
Frankfort, KY 40601

Congressman Hal Rogers
2406 Rayburn House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Governor Beshear and Congressman Rogers,

We are Kentuckians. More specifically, we are eastern Kentuckians with very different stories. One of us is a third generation coal miner from Harlan County who turned 19 while serving with the US Marines in Vietnam. The other is a young woman who grew up shuttling between Floyd County and Cincinnati as her parents moved for work, and who later chose to return to eastern Kentucky after attending college. Both of us share a vision for a bright future in these mountains we call home. We are also proud members of the grassroots organization, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth.

Like you we share a deep love for our families, communities, and Commonwealth. We hold fast to the hope that we, along with our children and grandchildren, will have opportunities to create good lives for ourselves right here at home. And like you, we hold special and deep concerns about the economic conditions now facing so many people and communities in eastern Kentucky.

It's not news to anyone that eastern Kentucky's economy is changing fast. Job losses and economic upheaval in the coal industry have hit us hard. There's not really any way to describe what the loss of those jobs means to those workers, their families, or the broader community. It's a painful time, especially for this region that has already sacrificed and struggled so much. But no one is satisfied for our story to end here. And, once we start looking, it is possible to find hopeful stories, creative people and promising ideas all around us.

For all those reasons, we applaud your recent announcement of a public forum to gather input about the economic future of eastern Kentucky. It won't be easy, but we believe we can build a bright future here in the mountains. Eastern Kentuckians are some of the most resourceful, skilled people you'll ever meet. We like to say that if you give a miner a coat hanger and some electrical tape, he can fix anything. Building a new, diverse economy in eastern Kentucky won't be easy, and it will require a lot more than pluck and tape. But we, along with lots of other good people, are already hard at work tackling the problems and opportunities in front of us. We welcome the involvement of any and all honest and courageous public leaders who will help us build a brighter future.

We have encouraged our friends and neighbors to attend the summit on December 9th in Pikeville. We look forward to participating and learning more ourselves. With more than 1,000 people registered, we'll all be doing a lot of listening. With that in mind, we'd like to take this opportunity to share our perspective about what's

needed, and what it will take, to build a thriving local economy in eastern Kentucky. These ideas have been developed over several years with input from hundreds of members of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth.

I. Principles

First, we believe it is important to aim high. We must seek to create a just transition for workers and communities in eastern Kentucky. To us that means regional development efforts should be guided by and evaluated against these principles:

- Improve the quality of life for people and communities affected by economic disruption, environmental damage, and inequality.
- Foster inclusion, participation and collaboration.
- Generate good, stable, meaningful jobs and broad access to opportunities and benefits.
- Promote innovation, self-reliance and broadly held local wealth.
- Protect and restore public health and our environment.
- Respect the past while also strengthening communities and culture.
- Consider the effects of decisions on future generations.

II. Process

Eastern Kentucky is not alone in our experience of economic transition. From Kentucky's tobacco farms to the logging towns of the Pacific Northwest, there is much we can learn from others. In particular, we urge you to take to heart the words of a former cod fisherman from Newfoundland who spoke at the Appalachia's Bright Future conference hosted by Kentuckians For The Commonwealth in Harlan County last April. He said, *"In times of economic transition, the process matters. It really matters."*

To build a bright future in eastern Kentucky, we need public leaders who encourage collaboration, reduce polarization, and create a process that allows for meaningful public participation from people from all walks of life and perspectives. It's especially important, we believe, for you to encourage the leadership of young people, women, the unemployed and underemployed in this conversation. We can't afford for their voices to go unheard when decisions are being made about the future of our region.

We welcome your leadership in hosting the SOAR summit and creating an open space for this urgent public conversation. However, the makeup of the planning committee concerns us greatly. While the announced group is heavy with the region's traditional leadership, it barely begins to tap the region's rich talent pool of women, artists, farmers, miners, teachers, non-profit and community leaders, young people, faith leaders, public health professionals, emerging entrepreneurs, and people directly affected by economic distress. We respectfully ask you to significantly expand and diversify the set of individuals who are guiding your thinking and this process as it goes beyond December 9th.

To have a lasting impact, the SOAR event must be more than a moment for the public to express our hopes and concerns. It must be the start of a meaningful and inclusive public process aimed at shaping a shared vision and identifying key strategies. On December 9th, we urge you to declare your commitment to a longer term public planning process and invite participants' ideas about the best ways to include and engage us all in this essential work.

III. Policies

A just transition for workers and communities in eastern Kentucky will take leadership, long-term investment, and the efforts of many determined, creative people working together to make change for the better. Government won't solve every problem; all of us have important roles to play. But public policies and investments are a powerful tool, and effective public leadership from the two of you and other elected officials will be an essential part of our success as a region. Below are a set of public policies and positions that we urge you to support as part of building a bright future in eastern Kentucky, and across our commonwealth as a whole.

- 1) Create a new eastern Kentucky planning and development body that is inclusive and diverse** to gather public input, shape regional development strategies, and make investment decisions.
- 2) Establish a long-term fund to invest in regional economic development strategies by setting aside a portion of annual severance tax revenues.** Empower the regional planning body to invest these funds in key strategies and projects.
- 3) Evaluate development ideas and proposals based on key criteria, and turn away ideas that worsen inequality, environmental conditions, or perceptions of cronyism.** For example: does it create broad public benefit and opportunities, does it reduce leakage from our local economy and build on local assets, does it build local capacity and wealth, does it improve local economic and environmental conditions, does it create jobs for local residents rather than those outside the region, does it reduce inequality, does it promote innovation?
- 4) Increase investment in training and support for laid-off coal miners and their families and support the growth of worker co-ops and worker-owned small businesses.**
- 5) Invest money from the Abandoned Mine Lands Fund in a large-scale effort to create hundreds of good jobs by restoring eastern Kentucky's degraded land and streams.**
- 6) Accelerate the growth of promising sectors (including local food systems, energy-efficient affordable housing, land and stream restoration, arts and culture, tourism, and renewable energy)** by adopting public policies needed to grow those efforts to scale. A great place to start would be to establish a revolving loan fund to expand access to energy-efficient upgrades that can pay for themselves and create good jobs across the region.
- 7) Support state and federal energy efficiency and renewable energy standards** that have a proven record of driving private investment, creating new jobs, saving customers money and energy, and creating positive economic ripple effects in 30 states, including Ohio and North Carolina.
- 8) Develop and support local leadership (including programs for youth, entrepreneurs, education and nonprofit leaders)** by providing high-quality training programs, fellowships and other leadership experiences, access to capital, marketing and networking assistance, and more.
- 9) Support and enforce policies to protect the quality of our air, land and water and improve public health.** It's time to recognize the economic and health benefits of clean air and water and support passage of environmental rules aimed at protecting our most precious asset – our health.

10) Restore civic trust by eliminating corruption, cronyism and the tendency by those in power to use their public positions to benefit themselves and other well-connected individuals.

11) Support progressive tax reform at the state and national levels to increase investment in education, infrastructure, worker training, health care and other programs that make our communities good places to live and work.

12) Reweave our social safety net by increasing support for programs that sustain people and families in times of need (including food stamps, health care and housing support) and programs that make it possible for people to improve their quality of life (including increased minimum wage, Pell Grants, child care assistance, early childhood programs, and access to affordable health care).

13) Commit to ongoing, rigorous improvements to K-12 education in Kentucky, including increased funding, renewed efforts to address inequality in funding, funding for quality preschool, wrap-around services for students in need, curriculum reform, and upgrades to teacher training and professional development.

14) Support and invest in efforts to improve public health and address the many, serious health conditions facing Kentuckians. This includes supporting implementation of the Affordable Care Act, expanding access to high quality substance abuse and mental health treatment, investing in wellness programs and health education, and fully enforcing laws aimed at improving workplace safety and reducing toxic pollution.

IV. Conclusion

As we hope this letter makes clear, we believe that the future of eastern Kentucky is closely connected to the future of Kentucky and the nation as a whole. Many of the strategies and policies needed to support a thriving local economy here in the mountains will produce benefits for all Kentuckians. For example, we all stand to benefit from stronger investments in public education, healthcare and clean energy. And as we make progress here in eastern Kentucky, our whole Commonwealth moves forward.

It won't be easy, but together we can build a bright future right here with more good jobs, safe and affordable energy, healthy communities and opportunities for our kids and grandchildren. It will take hard work, creativity, and leaders who are willing to invest in new ideas and encourage new voices. On behalf of the nearly 8,000 members of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth, we stand ready to work with you and other people from all walks of life who care about the future of this region and want to make good things happen.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Sanders
Whitesburg, Kentucky, Letcher County Representative to KFTC's Steering Committee

Carl Shoupe
Benham, Kentucky, At-large member of KFTC's Executive Committee

On behalf of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth's New Energy and Transition Committee