

# Roth: Make American streams dirty again?

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## Make American streams dirty again?

If you were asked whether you favored clean streams and waterways for America, you would probably agree. But if the question were framed more political, such as do you favor the repeal of job-killing regulations that have impacted coal miners, would your opinion change?

Well either way, Congress has begun, as one of its very first acts this year, to repeal, perhaps forever, a new regulation

to keep coal companies from dumping their mining waste into America's waterways. It was approved within the last months under the Obama administration and so by U.S. law it is subject to revisit by Congress under the "1996 Congressional Review Act." The Congressional Review Act allows for the repeal of recently finalized regulations if the House and the Senate, by simple majorities, and the new president agrees. And strangely enough, once repealed under the CRA a regulation, or anything similar to it, cannot ever be approved in the future. But enough about process and how it can happen, it seems to me that America should be more focused on if it should happen. Here's why.

The Stream Protection Rule was finalized by the Department of Interior on Dec. 19 after years of development and public input. According to the department, the rule is intended to protect 6,000 miles of streams and 52,000 acres of American forest by creating a buffer zone between mines and nearby waterways, to protect drinking water and to require coal companies to restore streams and return mined areas to the conditions before the mining activity. Coal's supporters have been vehemently opposed to this rule, describing it as unnecessary and a duplication of the existing Clean Water Act and they are taking no chances to get it repealed, while acting like the repeal alone could help prop up a declining coal business.

But the reality is that America's electric sector is moving beyond its former coal-dominant days, towards cleaner-burning natural gas and renewables. Across America, over 300 coal plants have been retired over the last decade alone and more will continue to come offline. And that's good news for states like Oklahoma, which are blessed with more natural gas and renewable potential than we could ever use ourselves. It's also great news for anyone with lungs, because the reduction in air pollutants has been significant as older polluting coal plants go offline.

The cost for losing the protections from the Stream Protection Rule is great and irreversible. They are so, because the rule is focused on a practice of mining that involves blowing the tops off of America's mountains and dumping the mining rock, soil and debris, or overburden, off the mountain and into nearby waterways, damming them up and changing the water quality and ecosystems forever.

Mountaintop mining is a method of coal mining used mostly in the Appalachian Mountains in the eastern United States, where explosives are used to blow up about 400 vertical feet of the top ridges of mountains to reveal coal seams underneath. Then those seams are mined and this higher-sulfur coal is shipped to be burned mostly in the states around Appalachia.

It's not just about jobs. We Americans should want all Americans to have the opportunity for decent jobs that afford healthy, dignified lives for the workers and their families. And we should want today's working generations and the coming generations to be in a growing pipeline of jobs that will sustain them throughout their working life. We should resist trying to prop up a fading, and sometimes dangerous, industry when we can help those workers transition to cleaner industries that don't pollute our rivers, streams and bodies. We can also commit ourselves to protecting the amazing landscapes and purple mountain majesties that bless much of our country's land. America has that ability if it looks forward, rather than back.

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