

Letter to the Editor by 9<sup>th</sup> grader, Isaac Galton  
Yancey Common Times Journal  
April 20, 2011

Dear Editor,

This is a reply to Bucky Cochrane's letter to Kay Hagen in April 6th's Common Times that I'm doing for my Language Arts class. I may not be a representative of the Senator, but I would like to disagree on a few points. Some people might call me young, naive, or ignorant, but I think that many of Mr. Cochrane's opinions and "facts" are misleading and untrue.

I wonder how things such as electricity-generating wind turbines and solar-voltaic panels can be described as "17th century solutions". And why does the idea of "getting used to electricity when it is available" seem so ridiculous? Living in America, we are way too used to using as much electricity as we want, whenever we want. Americans desire to always have the house at 74 degrees; to watch movies on their gigantic flat-screen TVs; to take hour-long showers. You may not have to pay very much money for things like these on your energy bill, but they have a greater cost. Electricity is way too cheap. I may have never paid an electricity bill, but I have experienced the real cost of electricity, the kind that doesn't come out of your checkbook.

Last March, I went on a field trip with my school (the Arthur Morgan School) up to the coalfields of Kentucky and West Virginia. That area is remarkably similar to this area. The main difference is something buried deep in the ground: coal. We drove up to what used to be the top of a West Virginian mountain. Here, on what used to be the side Kayford Mountain, we looked down upon a sad sight. The coal company had literally blown off the top of the mountain with dynamite and pushed the sediment into the valleys and streams below. Not only are the people of this area losing their Mountains, there are other serious problems. Some people's tap water actually runs brown with all the dirt that has gotten washed into the creeks and seeped into the ground water due to operations such as the one on Kayford Mountain. If you don't believe me, there are plenty of pictures and videos on the Internet. Also, you might remember the tragic mining disaster at Upper Big Branch mine last year that killed 29 coal miners because Massey coal company was too irresponsible to use proper safety measures. How would you like it if the mountains around here were being ripped off, your drinking water was contaminated, your loved ones were constantly in danger of losing their lives at their jobs, and there was next to nothing you could do about it? Would you still like cheap electricity? That area of the country is being sacrificed so the rest of us can live comfortable lives in bliss and ignorance. There was a really good article in the New York Times last Wednesday about a WV mining town (you can look at it on the Internet at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/13/us/13lindytown.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all#](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/13/us/13lindytown.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all#))

The ill effects of coal mining are only the beginning of the very high energy costs that others are paying for. After it's mined, the coal has to be burned. It releases carbon dioxide into the air, which, in fact has been strongly linked to climate change. Though the winter may have been cold here, 2010 was tied (with 2005) for the warmest year ever on record (since 1880) globally. The past winter in northern Canada was 5.7 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than it usually is. Even though we may not be feeling the full-on effects of Global Warming here yet, they are certainly happening elsewhere. On average, for every one degree the temperature increases at the equator, it increases about 12 degrees at the poles.

Humans certainly aren't the only beings that are affected by our dependences on fossil fuel. Remember the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that happened last year? Think of all the helpless birds and marine

life in addition to the 11 workers that were killed as a result of the explosion on the oilrig. And Mr. Cochrane accuses Obama of putting a ban on offshore drilling in the eastern Gulf when there are obvious problems with the way things are done in that industry. The region needs to recover before it takes on the risk of something like that happening again. I won't even bother going into all the untested chemicals that were dumped into the ocean as dispersants.

I could continue writing about issues like these for a long, long time, but unfortunately I don't have that kind of time. Anyway, thanks for taking the time to read this. I only wish the world were a better place, and I hope us humans will soon realize that our ways of mindless, excessive consumption are dooming the planet. If there isn't a turnaround in the immediate future, life on earth will continue to pay for our mistakes way on down the road. I hope that things will change for the better in my lifetime.

Sincerely,

Isaac Galton, a concerned 9th grader