

Witness: Jeffrey Greenley, Superintendent of the Switzerland of Ohio Local School District.

Hearing: Legislative Hearing before the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee on H.R. 3846, April 18, 2018.

My name is Jeffrey Greenley and I am the Superintendent of the Switzerland of Ohio Local School District. We are the largest geographic school district in the state of Ohio and serve 2000 students spread out over 546 sq. miles in the heart of the Appalachian region; one of the most beautiful areas in our nation. Our bus fleet travels 4800 miles a day to get our students to and from school. Of that territory, nearly 25,000 acres are part of Wayne National Forest.

Our district has struggled in the past few decades. The manufacturers and coal mines that used to provide our students with jobs and stability have closed their doors leaving the school district as the largest employer in the county. The lack of jobs has led to a sense of apathy and deprived our students of any hope that the hard work they are being asked to put into their classwork will actually pay off in the form of a good job close to home. Our enrollment has dropped from nearly 3,000 in 1998 to only around 2,000 in 2018. Our academic outcomes have plunged and our classroom disruptions have erupted without the revenue to strategically invest in improving outcomes.

There is real hope that a wave of innovation and transformation is coming to our area as oil and gas wells are drilled and newspaper articles boast about the various employers that are looking to the Marcellus and Utica Shale region. But some of the hardened people of Monroe

County cynically don't believe that any real economic traction will come. Instead, they are afraid that outsiders will descend on our county for just a few years to destroy our roads, increase our crime and then leave after robbing our land and piping off our natural resources to be sold or refined by other people's children.

We are stuck in a Catch-22. We don't currently have the workforce to easily convince manufacturers to come to our area. But we don't currently have the funding to invest in our career development programs to give our students the tools that would attract those industries. What we need are the resources to invest in our schools to align ourselves with county and regional workforce development goals to create the workforce to attract businesses to locate to our area. And we need them now. Otherwise we will miss the wave of opportunity and sit helpless as another chance to secure a solid job for our students slips through our fingers.

Senior students studying in our vocational programs understand what is at a stake, and the need for immediate investment, as they look to enter the workforce. Grant Copley, a senior in our welding program, stated that "as an impoverished region, we need to keep our revenue here so we don't continue to lose the opportunity to educate and improve every individual." Kevin Highman, a student in our construction trades program, noted that "Monroe County has always been the place for the hard-working man...[i]f this area receives funding from oil and gas it could tremendously help upgrade our career center and its trades. We could upgrade our programs and upgrade some of our outdated tools and technology."

The Providing Opportunities with Energy Revenues Act would finally break us through the morass of economic stagnation and allow our school district to complete the vision created by its stakeholders to “empower our students to connect our communities to the future.” Our Creator placed those resources in our community for the betterment and enrichment of our progeny. But current law doesn’t allow for even a modicum of those revenues to directly support local kids and instead earmarks those funds towards irrigation projects in another part of the country. Although these environmental projects are certainly a worthy cause, we believe that there is an opportunity to reallocate a portion of those funds towards helping educate the children in rural parts of the country where federal lands are located.

If passed, this bill would be transformative for our community. Proceeds from the drilling in Wayne National Forest could bring back art and music in our schools, both of which were heavily cut in years past. We could invest in the physical, mental and behavioral supports that the high poverty students we serve need in order to be successful. We could provide our students with a vision for the future and the hope that they need to meaningfully engage in their studies.

In preparation for my testimony today I met with the American government students at Beallsville High School who used my preparation as a case study to learn more about how a bill becomes a law. The students there are painfully aware of the need for additional revenue as we were nearly forced to close the school a few years ago due to lack of resources. Two of them asked me to directly transmit what this bill would mean to them. One student, Mackenzie Perkins, remarked that “We have had issues pertaining to money, education, and staff...[n]ot knowing if we’d have a school. It was quite devastating to say the least...it doesn’t

feel good when you know your school is known for being the worst or poor.” The second explained “Seeing as I have spent the entirety of my life in this tiny, close knit community, it was heartbreaking to hear that they were shutting down the high school because the district couldn’t afford to keep it open...Although [it] remained open, several of my classmates chose not to return because at other schools they were offered many opportunities Beallsville couldn’t offer [due to lack of resources]. If our district received more money, [we] could offer these opportunities. This money could go to hiring more teachers...”

It is not often that representatives from our county have a chance to testify within these hallowed halls. It is my distinct honor to ask on behalf of our 2000 students and 300 members of our faculty and staff that this committee make an investment in our community and bet on our students and their future.