

# MYTHS AND REALITIES OF APPALACHIAN POVERTY: PUBLIC POLICY FOR GOOD PEOPLE SURROUNDED BY A BAD ECONOMY AND BAD POLITICS

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I am going to talk about the bad economy, bad politics and good people in Appalachia. The bad economy feeds the bad politics, and together they hold back people who could do much more for their region. In the 25 years since Harry Caudill wrote *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, we have tried to address the economic problems without facing the political problems, but you cannot achieve development on any scale this way.

Harry Caudill has fed an inaccurate and convenient stereotype by characterizing the Appalachian people as backward, ignorant, and lazy. In doing so, he has spread myths about Appalachia. But he has always faced the reality of corrupt local politics that characterize the region. His energetic efforts to improve the region have been based on a gut-level understanding of the way the bad economy and bad politics are tangled up together and prevent greater economic progress. He has always started from the premise that politics shaped everything else in the mountains. That is why his Southern Mountain Authority's first task was consolidation of the small counties that were political fiefdoms doling out jobs through patronage. That is why he proposed job creation through *federally* administered public works. Many of his ideas to improve the Cumberland Plateau were right on target in 1962, and, I will argue, are still right on target.

This conference is a chance for all of us concerned with conditions in Appalachia to take another critical look at Appalachia's land and economy, reassessing the issues Harry Caudill and others raised in the early 1960s. Although 25 years later we find ourselves considering the same issues---in an abstract or intellectual sense---I think we do so with a deeper understanding.

We understand better how to separate the myths about Appalachia from the reality, and we understand better how to come up with pragmatic strategies for regional development. People in the mountains know the limits of the coal economy, and they know the limits of branch plant attraction as a source of jobs for them.

But there is a new, progressive spirit, several layers deep, in people who know the importance of education.

First, I am going to tell you briefly what MACED does and how we see our job as developers. Then, from the perspective of an economic developer, I am going to argue that an inaccurate depiction of mountain people as lazy and backward handicaps development efforts and gets everyone "off the scent" of the real problems. The real problems are a bad economy and the bad politics it has fed over the years.

I will describe what people living in the coal fields have told me over the last year about the way the coal economy affects their own livelihoods and their children's futures. You will agree that the Appalachians I describe are good, hard working people. But they endure more than a bad economy. I will describe what people tell me about the stultifying effect of bad local politics. Politics affects who gets what few jobs there are, and immobilizes efforts to improve education and other aspects of community life that are crucial to development.

Finally, given this combination of good people, bad economy, and bad politics, I will get back to why some of Harry Caudill's development ideas are still right for today, and why they may get a better hearing in the mountains now.

## MACED's Conception of Development

Our concern at MACED is economic development. We think of economic development as fundamentally a process of redistribution. By this we mean redistribution of economic benefits and opportunities to the people left out by the natural flow of a market-driven economy. Notice that we say *people*, not *places*. What drives a small community economic development organization like ours is expanding economic opportunities for poor people. In Appalachia there are so many poor

people concentrated in one area that it is a poor place. But we do not see our job as developing every county or every hollow. Our job is to rechannel economic benefits and economic opportunities to the *people* who are left out.

Over the last 10 years we have tried a variety of strategies to rechannel the economic main stream---starting in 1975 with technical and financial assistance to small, locally-owned businesses and cooperatives, and later expanding to what we call *sectoral interventions* (trying to change the way particular important economic sectors affect low income people, like timber, banking and credit, even coal). Work on coal and water has led to policy analysis. Over this last year, we have become involved in a drive to raise the educational climate in southern and eastern Kentucky. It is not just a cliché that expanding economic opportunities requires improving the quality of education and other public services; it is also true. We find, on a day-to-day basis, that a vital education system is the most critical element in development.

Needless to say, we do not have it all figured out. But we, like everyone else in this room, have learned a lot, just by being out there and trying to figure out how to make some tangible difference. The question is how to accomplish some actual *redistribution*, given the lack of consensus supporting that notion---or any notion---of development.

The evolution of our development strategy has flowed from our staff's changing understanding of what the obstacles are. Bill and I were laughing the other day because we realized that what we really thought was important about development now, after 11 years, could have been gleaned from two classics about the region that Gurney Norman gave us in 1975 when he helped us load the last box onto the U-Haul we were to drive from northern California to the coal fields. Gurney handed us two well-worn books to help us "get oriented:" John Campbell's *Southern Highlander* and Harry Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*.

Campbell recognized in the early 1900s that the mountaineers were the quintessential rural Americans---not ignorant, but *isolated* and in need of better institutional supports, like schools, to take control of their lives. From improved education, improved economic opportunities would follow. Harry Caudill, in his anguish about the ruinous exploitation he saw around him, characterized his fellow mountaineers as defeated---backward and ignorant. But he came up with some sensible ideas for improving the mountains that make even more sense in the late 1980s.

### Ignorant, Amoral, and Lazy People?

Harry Caudill described a troubled regional economy that depended on coal, subsistence farming, and welfare. He saw coal as the region's curse, ruining both the land and the spirit of mountain people. According to Harry, "the more intelligent and ambitious people moved out," leaving a region filled with poorly educated people, disabled, unskilled, and unemployed, "subsisting on the generosity of the welfare state."

*The mountaineer has become depressingly defeatist in attitude. Company domination and paternalism and two decades of uninspired Welfarism have induced the belief that control of his destiny is in other hands (1964:392).*

Everywhere he looked, he saw exhaustion---"exhaustion of soil, exhaustion of men, exhaustion of hopes." He predicted that, unless the nation took heed, 80% of its inhabitants would one day be welfare recipients.

Harry Caudill's images of Appalachia swept across the nation in the early 1960s, shaping public perception of the region as backward and exploited. In *The New York Times Book Review*, Harriet Arnow described his book as "the story of how this rich and beautiful land was changed into an ugly, poverty-ridden place of desolation, peopled mainly by the broken in spirit and body, the illiterate, the destitute and morally corroded." Like John Fetterman's *Stinking Creek* and Jack Weller's *Yesterday's People, Night Comes to the Cumberlands* left the world with the idea that those who stayed in the mountains were lazy, broken people who no longer had the will or wherewithal to pull themselves out of poverty.

In 1964, Herman Lantz published an article in *Blue-Collar World* entitled "Resignation, Industrialization, and the Problem of Social Change: A Case History of a Coal-Mining Community." He argued that the problems of coal communities went much deeper than their economic impoverishment, that "apathy and hopelessness about change and making life different or better" plagued the area. Indeed, he saw resignation stifling economic potential, leaving a community "largely dependent on miners' pensions, Social Security, and public assistance." He cited Harry Caudill.

While people might acknowledge that a bad economy and ruthless coal operators had caused underdevelopment, they really believed that the problem *persisted* because the people had an inferior character. These biases thrived in urban areas to which Appalachians migrated, and local social problems were attributed to the "hillbillies." The reality, disclosed by studies of

who was in trouble, was that Appalachians were not disproportionately trouble-makers. But the stereotypes persisted.

These perceptions about mountaineers are alive and well today. In 1982, Ken Auletta wrote an article in *The New Yorker* on the underclass, and in it he described white Appalachian poverty as no different from that described by Fetterman in 1967: the "rural populace in the countless hollows have adopted the welfare rolls as a way of life." Kentucky poet and scholar Jim Wayne Miller recently reminded a conference of physicians that if there are any differences between Appalachians and other Americans, it is that they still might have rural values "of individualism and the importance of family in a traditional way."

But most observers do not have Jim Wayne Miller's insightful perspective. On October 28, 1986, the *Wall Street Journal* carried a front-page article describing the violent, immoral local politics of Clay County. The headlines included "Appalachian clan is prolific, accustomed to violence."

Unlike Harry Caudill, the reporter did not make the crucial connection between a bad economy and bad local politics. People outside of rural areas honestly do not recognize that a dearth of jobs in an undiversified economy makes public jobs--like in education and local government--valuable commodities that are assigned according to political loyalties rather than on the basis of merit.

Without this understanding of how scarce jobs are and how bad politics flourish when jobs are scarce, people attribute local political corruption to the particular character of Appalachian "clans". *Wall Street Journal* readers and *New Yorker* readers are going to continue to think of Appalachia's problems as problems of character, not economics. And these mistaken perceptions limit public commitment to enlarge economic opportunities for people in the region.

Those of us in this room know better. Since *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, we have all done a lot of thinking and writing about the region's poverty problems. Some have organized health clinics, others have worked with welfare recipients, and many have been the backbone of social and environmental movements to improve the mountains. Many of us have tried a variety of economic development projects and strategies, ranging from humble pig and garden coops of the first community development corporations to massive highway construction by the federal government.

In 1960, when Harry Caudill and Herman Lantz saw rampant welfarism, people living in Appalachia

earned almost the same proportion of their total income as people outside the region--77%, compared to 79%. Today the difference is 65% in Appalachia, 66% outside Appalachia. Then and now there was a slightly higher dependence on government assistance in Appalachia, but not less dependence on work.

Those of us who have worked in the mountains know that the region's problems do not stem from character flaws. What we have here are economic problems.

We have seen the coal industry boom in the 1970s, drawing people willing to work in the mines back to the coal fields again. Coal executives have told us that no one in the world works like the American coal miner. Plant managers say the same thing about their workers in eastern Kentucky. We have seen the lines of people waiting at the door of a new plant offering minimum wage jobs to make greeting cards or overalls. There is no doubt in our minds that people want to work. The problem is finding work.

### Hard Times Again

Once again, hard economic times plague the coal fields. Coal jobs are evaporating before people's eyes, and every mountain household and community feels the effect. Not just coal is bad, of course. Tobacco is bad, and rural manufacturing plants are laying people off, moving plants overseas or further south to capture still lower wages. Just since 1980, Kentucky as a whole has lost over 20,000 manufacturing jobs.

But coal is the life blood of Appalachia. And while coal production continues to climb slightly, and the largest companies start to report profitable quarters, coal employment continues to decline. Since more productive mining, not decreased demand, drives these reductions, they clearly represent structural changes in the coal industry, rather than one more bust in a boom/bust cycle.

Of course, boom and bust conditions have plagued the Appalachian coal fields for over a century. Sometimes people have stayed and just barely scraped by, and other times there has been massive outmigration. During the 1950s and 1960s, when mechanization in the coal mines brought dramatic reductions in coal employment, over a million people emigrated from Central Appalachia in search of work (Brown, 1972). Everyone I have interviewed has either personally worked outside the coal fields or has had a family member who left for Pontiac or Ford, and then returned.

The coal boom of the 1970s brought people back

home from northern cities to work in the mines. At first trailers were set up next to parents' homes; later homes were built. Times seemed good in the coal fields, even for young people. Kids getting out of school could work in the mines. But today there is no work.

Raymond Bradbury of Martin County Coal described the difference between the early 1970s and the present for us in an interview a year ago:

*We are at the point of saturation in the mining industry in Martin County. The youngsters who were getting out of high school in the early 1970s have now been working for my company for ten years. They were the fortunate ones. The ones who graduated in the latter 1970s and early 1980s: the jobs (for them) aren't there now (Seltzer and Duncan, eds., 1986).*

Coal counties in Kentucky and West Virginia have among the highest unemployment rates in the nation. In 1980---before the coal downturn of 1982---almost one fourth of coal-field families had no one working, and over one third of coal-field teenagers were not working, looking for work nor studying in school. Appalachia's coal employment declined from a high of 188,000 in 1978 to 129,000 in 1984, a loss of 59,000 jobs in six years. Eastern Kentucky lost 10,000 jobs and West Virginia lost over 23,000. Fewer coal miners are mining more coal, and the trend is likely to continue.

*This county has always thrived on coal and will continue to depend on whatever coal there is..... Used to be we had plenty of coal and plenty of coal mines. You couldn't hardly sit on your porch here for the steam engines pulling coal. The future is bleak because the coal is down.....*

Independent coal operators are cutting back, laying people off, ending health plans, and seriously considering closing up shop and moving to a city:

*A friend of mine is just barely making it now. He is a real good person.....he's had a real hard time making it now. It has wore him down. I've been praying for him. He's got dirty coal---he's in the same coal we're in---and it is a depressed market. Where can he go? Lexington? What can he do? Maybe his wife can get a job as a nurse, he could do odd plumbing jobs.....*

Unemployed miners have especially hard times:

*You go talk to somebody in the office and they tell you they ain't hiring none. They ask you how old you are and you tell them. And they say "Check back with us in a week or two." And you do, and*

*they tell you the same old thing again.*

Nobody expects their children to be able to stay in the coal fields and find work. The question is whether the parents can stay, and what the children need to make it outside the mountains:

*I need to get my kids out of here. If I can, I'm going to. Because I figure at the rate it's going it's going to be a ghost town in 10 years. Hell, it's already dried up. There is a dark cloud hanging over this county..... I want to move closer to the interstate, where there is a lot of factory type work, and maybe get into business down that way.*

Most people want to stay in the mountains, if they can only find work. People say "It's home" or "It's where I'm from." One businessman said:

*It's a paradox. Nobody wants to leave here, but damn it, we can't get anybody to do anything to improve the place..... I guess it's just home, and all those emotional things tied to home come into play..... I know everybody here and their brother. I know the area. Just the familiarity with the people and the place.*

Over and over people told us these things about living in the mountains, even as they deplored the quality of schools, the garbage problem, the way everything depends on who is on whose side. And everyone we talked with said local political problems are exacerbated by the lack of work.

#### Politics and Jobs, Jobs and Politics

Jobs are scarce in the mountains, and the scarcity affects who gets both private and public jobs. One 40-year old unemployed coal miner told us how much things had changed over the last few years. He had worked in the mines 15 years before being laid off 3 years ago:

*Eighteen, nineteen years ago---it was easy to get a job then. During the coal boom there was a lot of work available. You could just about take your pick.....Now, you know, people around here just can't buy a job. If you work for somebody, you're going to have to pay them.*

Others told us that all jobs go to friends and families of those doing the hiring:

*If you're not tight with the people that own it, you're not going to get a job. The people that have the authority to hire will make sure that their*

## MYTHS AND REALITIES OF APPALACHIAN POVERTY

*friends or their families get the jobs because they know there are none anywhere else. I know if I had the authority, I'd hire my brother before I'd let him work in a 'scab mine'.*

Independent coal operators, looking for coal reserves, figure their only chance to mine coal without being a subcontractor is if they "can marry into it." Most of those with whom I talked were already married, so they were not optimistic. A young woman described how politics permeates job giving and getting:

*Politics are too involved in all the hiring up here. They need to get the politics out and get people in who would concentrate on the good of this place, not on 'who owes who what'.*

*For such a small place, there is a lot of politics going on. A lot of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." There's a lot of people with a lot of pull, but you have to know which ones are on the same side.*

Others distinguished between state and local jobs and federal jobs. Federal jobs are not subject to the political machinations that determine who works in poor rural counties:

*I knew a lady that was trying to get a job at the food stamp office, and they told her she had to go to the Democratic party chairman and to another political figure to get letters. She had to switch her politics, to have a chance at the job. In a federal job--like social security--I don't think it has anything to do with politics. The social security office has a new supervisor who is black and from out of state, and that never would have happened in state politics.*

A disabled coal miner told us that "anymore, even the odd jobs are hard to find." But "odd jobs" are all that a lot of people have. Unemployed miners who were accustomed to making \$12 to \$14 an hour just a year ago are now working as custodians, messengers, shade tree mechanics, drivers, carpenters. Wives are selling Avon, taking care of other people's kids, hoping to get work in a store through connections. Any one who has work feels fortunate to have that opportunity. This scarcity translates directly into exacerbated corrupt local politics that puts a brake on progress.

Twenty-five years ago Harry Caudill described the way schools were bogged down in politics:

*.....school politicians.....fortify themselves with massive dispensations. As a rule the school clique*

*is interwoven with the courthouse political machine..... These powerful allies are thus so well-financed and entrenched that they are extremely difficult to overturn and their foremost objective is political perpetuation (1962:336-70).*

He described how state and national politicians depended on the votes local school and other government officials could deliver.

Parents MACED interviewed about education problems figured the biggest problem facing their communities was corruption in the schools:

*.....the biggest problem you get into with the school board is the fact that they control more jobs and more people and more people's lives than any other thing in this county. They have the employees, and anytime you have that type of situation in a low economic area, you have a beautiful setup for bribery, corruption, and political power plays. And that is what happens in eastern Kentucky.*

Word is that a school board seat in eastern Kentucky costs \$100,000. You hear that figure often. I asked a knowledgeable community leader why it would be worth that much, and he said "Why, to have power over jobs"---not just in the schools but throughout the county. He had been offered \$20,000 recently to deliver a certain community. He refused this time, but he told us how he would have done it, based on how he handled a governor's race in 1959:

*The way I work is I pick the families, and I'll get 30 people working for me over there. So I've got 30 people working for, say \$40 a piece. They're all working for the same thing. They all have families. You get them out of big families, you know. I had families I relied on, whom I had taught how to do this.*

He went on to describe in great detail how he picked the families, covered both sides of the families, and built a little movement of votes for his candidate.

Buying elections not only fills local institutions with corruption that puts loyalties over school quality. It also absorbs the energy of those in the system who would prefer to work on the content of their job. Teachers told us that even the well-meaning school administrators had to devote all their energy to surviving, and had none left for educational leadership. People say they cannot come in "and relax, and pay attention" to their jobs. They have to be alert to how the political winds blow, how they are changing, who's in and who's out.

In 1962, Caudill described outmigrants with high school degrees that were "officially" deemed useless by factories in California, and who proceeded to fail the tests given by the factories, proving they were right. Several weeks ago a businessman told me, with alarm and regret, that he had young adults--20, 21, 22 year olds--come in to his business who "can't even write their names." "It's ridiculous," he said. But the "totally ridiculous" part is that "these kids have graduated from high school!" He said it came from the "past history of the county schools":

*It speaks for itself. Hell. Nobody has to tell any lies on that subject. It's right here.*

Many people had examples of how their own education, or that of family members, had been inferior when they had to measure up outside their own communities.

Besides low educational quality in the present, this corruption also prevents those who want change from getting involved. One businesswoman told us, "nice people don't get involved in education." Education is regarded as dirty and corrupt, and best left to politicians. Time and time again, people described the local politics as an iron grip, a big wheel that turns and turns, a pall lying over the community that you can't escape. They don't like it, but they don't see a way out either.

Despite this gloomy assessment, we find that people of all walks of life value education. They know it is the most important issue in their depressed communities, and, as parents, they want the best for their kids.

*People want change, they want improvement....I think they are just hindered in getting to those points by this political mess. It seems to be clouding the atmosphere in which we live and work.*

*Business and professional people are not just concerned about their own kids---there's an urgency because they hire these people. They don't want a bunch of yo-yos working for them.....*

People of all income levels value education for their children and see it as their only hope. They are proud when their children do well in school, and they go to a lot of trouble to be sure their own kids get the dedicated teacher, the special class for the gifted or the dyslexic, or other special opportunities.

A laid off coal miner and his wife, neither of whom had finished high school, told us proudly how their son would read with a flashlight in bed at night. The father hopes both their boys will become school teachers, and the mother told us how they have been chosen to compete on quiz teams and in reading contests.

A young woman on welfare described her father's pride in her when she returned to school to get extra training for a good job:

*My father hates the idea that I draw a welfare check, period. And when I decided to go to school, he would come and pick me up early in the morning, and he would have a smile on his face the whole time we was going. He's the quiet type; he doesn't talk a lot at all. He just smiles. And when he'd see me getting discouraged or something---'cause you do---he would say, "Oh, hang in there, honey. You can do it." He's real proud, he is.*

People seek out special opportunities for their children, sometimes aggressively. Both middle class, educated parents and low-income parents told us at great length of their struggles to get their handicapped children into the special programs they need. One mother told us she had stayed at home, not even driving a car, getting out only to go to the store a couple of times a month, until her son started school and had trouble learning. Then:

*I went through pure hell trying to get my child into a program where he could learn something. Well, that's been four years, and I'm still not there yet. I've got him in a program where he's learning something, but it's private, it's not public. I searched and I searched and I called and I wrote and I went everywhere in the world.*

People with high achievers are equally aggressive about getting their children special assistance. A laid off coal miner told us of the interest he takes in his daughters' education:

*I stretch them. I push them to do a lot more than what the classroom wants them to do. I've got two kids that's probably going to go to college if there's any way I can possibly get them there. My youngest daughter is real, real intelligent. And she's a bit lazy but, you know, I push her. And I've had her in every special, you know, advanced class I can get her into to stimulate her mind and make her keep working. But as far as anything else goes, that's about all I can do, you know, besides in the summertime, make her read some books through the summer. Because reading is probably the key to all education; if you can't read you can't do anything.*

Education and other community public goods matter not just for the place, and its attempt to secure a

future, but for those *people* who should be the real beneficiaries of the economy in general and development efforts in particular.

### Wanted: Good Policy

It is 1986, and the government is retrenching. More and more social and economic responsibilities are being thrust upon state governments. We need to be pragmatic now--massive federal programs were not enough before, and they are diminishing as we speak. Even if coal expands, we know it does not solve the region's employment problems. Plant competition is stiff, and the big fish that governors catch like to go to the most desirable communities in the state. Places that are pretty well developed already.

But this does not mean we give up.

There are things we could do tomorrow that would make a big difference to people in the mountains--the "old poor", or people who have been left out of the stream all long, as well as the "new poor", the people who have just been tossed out of the stream and are flipping around on the banks.

A good state government would do things like:

1. Actually improve education. (We know what this means. Other states have made great strides. We need educational leadership, and we need it yesterday. I know you all will vote yes on Amendment I.)
2. Provide financial and other assistance to those who want to go back to school or get new training and those who want leave isolated places for growing areas of the state. Kind of a family scholarship.
3. Provide real help to local civic leaders in the "natural" growth centers like the London/Corbin area to develop their facilities, and to provide good linkages to surrounding areas.
4. Work with those more isolated areas that want to develop better tourism facilities.

But ideas like these would work best if local politics were cleaned up. Otherwise, every effort is like swimming against the tide. The first step toward achieving this is to consolidate counties. Anyone who has tried to work to improve Kentucky by working with local governments tells you that a primary obstacle to getting things done efficiently and effectively is the plethora of small counties, each with its own judge and magistrates and political battles. Which gets us back to Harry's

ideas in the early 1960s.

With the TVA as a model, he proposed the establishment of a Southern Mountain Authority which would modernize the people, institutions, and economy of the Cumberland Plateau. First, he would have it consolidate counties to make local government more efficient and less politically corrupt. Second, he would have it "resettle" much of the population, facilitating both the provision of services and jobs. Third, he would build this resettlement around sensible land stewardship. Finally, he would have the Authority expand and improve education.

Wise civic leaders and state policy makers who care about the future of the people in the mountains should do just what Harry suggested 25 years ago: consolidate counties, assist "resettlement" or outmigration, and improve education. Really improve it. The time is right. The people are ready. We need bold leadership to carry it forward.

And, importantly, I think they might find more resonance today than they did in 1962. As one businessman told me,

*Sure, there is a status quo---people that wouldn't change things around here for anything....But now young people are getting into key management positions. We will be making the decisions, and we are going to determine whether the quo remains status, or whether something is done.*

### Facing Reality, But Debunking the Myths

Our explanations for poverty directly shape our policy to alleviate it, whether we are talking about poverty in the Chicago ghetto or the coal fields of Appalachia. Today there is a renewed national debate about welfare, and we are once again debating whether poverty is primarily a problem of culture or a problem of inadequate economic opportunity. Journalists' accounts of how the poor live and make choices--like Charles Murray's *Losing Ground*, Ken Auletta's *The Underclass*, Nicholas Lemann's *Origins of the Underclass*, Leon Dash's "Chronicles of Teenage Pregnancy"--have rekindled the notion that there is a distinct culture of poverty. This summer *The New Republic* ran a cover story entitled "The Work Ethic State: The Only Cure for the Culture of Poverty".

It is discouraging to see the same debates about poverty today that we had in 1960. Then, as now, we mix up myths and realities. It is discouraging to see the

*THE LAND AND ECONOMY OF APPALACHIA*

Wall Street Journal telling the nation that Appalachia is violent and corrupt, and leave it at that. Blame the character of the Appalachian people again, and leave it at that.

Clearly there is a problem of politics in the mountains. We should face that reality and deal with it straight on. Actually the problem is found in most isolated rural places. People working in the Mississippi Delta tell you the same stories. We found people complaining about local political problems in non-coal and non-Appalachian counties when we were talking to people about education. I think it is a rural phenomenon,

caused and fed by limited economic opportunities over a long period of time.

The other reality is that people want to work. Kids need work. Let's, as a state and a nation, consider public employment again. Let's look at a youth service corps, that mixes together kids from all sorts of places and backgrounds, broadens horizons, builds personal expectations and public commitment. But people who care about rural development and Appalachian development need to work on the political at the same time that we work on the economic. In Kentucky, let's consolidate some counties as a start!