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## CLIMATE

# Coal Is Dying, But Hillary Clinton Has A Plan To Save Coal Communities

BY [SAMANTHA PAGE](#) NOV 12, 2015 1:45PM

CREDIT: AP PHOTO/DAVID GOLDMAN

*Clinton wants to help coal communities... but will they return the favor?*

Coal is dying. Pushed out by natural gas, improvements in renewable energy, or pressure from climate change regulation, the fact is that coal use has fallen 25 percent in the United States since 2005.

This is really good news for our climate, but it's really bad news for miners and the people who live in places that depend on mining for the bulk of their economy.

Several Republican candidates have released energy plans that call for increasing coal production, but now Democratic presidential candidate and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has unveiled a plan to revitalize coal country — one that doesn't rely on digging more fossil fuels out of the ground.

"Today we are in the midst of a global energy transition," the Plan For Revitalizing Coal Communities says, citing the rise of natural gas and renewable energy. "We can't ignore the impact this transition is already having on mining communities, or the threat it poses to the healthcare and retirement security of coalfield workers and their families."

Clinton's plan calls for \$30 billion towards infrastructure improvements, mine land remediation, training and education programs, and incentives for business investment in Appalachia, the Illinois Basin, and the Western coal areas.

"What I like about this plan is that it's multi-faceted," Evan Hansen, president of Downstream Strategies, a West Virginia-based environmental consulting firm, told ThinkProgress. "There is no one solution."

Hansen pointed to education, for example. While many people in coal communities need training and

education that will make them more attractive employees, training the workforce alone is not enough. The areas also need to bolster the businesses that will hire people, Hansen said, and that means improving standard of living in order to attract new investment. Clinton's plan includes both infrastructure and broadband improvements.

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*We are starting to hear more and more... this is the new reality*

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The Obama administration has already devoted millions to propping up the coal industry's health and retirement plans, as company after company goes under. Obama also proposed \$1 billion towards environmental remediation projects in mining country.

Coal is on the decline — especially in Appalachia — for a number of reasons. As mentioned above, demand across the country is down. More and more power plants are turning to natural gas, which is now cheaper than coal in many places. But increased mechanization of mining has also made it possible to do the same job with fewer people. And as Appalachia runs out of the easiest-to-reach coal, it has had to compete with cheaper, Western coal, further stressing the industry's economics.

But despite the evidence, many in coal country view the industry's decline as part of a war on coal — a deliberate attack by Big Green and the Obama administration — or as part of coal's generations-old boom and bust cycle.

Hansen said that, slowly, that sentiment is starting to change. Reality is starting to sink in.

"We are starting to hear more and more... this is the new reality," Hansen said. "I think there is a little more opening now than there was in the past to actually devote resources to economic diversification."

Last month, the president of Appalachian Power, the electricity company that serves West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee, admitted that the coal era in the United States was coming to an end.

Whether Clinton's plan will translate into votes, though, remains to be seen. It's a tough time for Democrats in coal country. From 1960 to 1996, West Virginia only favored the Republican presidential candidate two times (Ronald Reagan's second term, and Richard Nixon's second term). But the state has gone red in every presidential election since 2000. So has Kentucky (which is more historically red, but went for Bill Clinton in both 1992 and 1996). So has Wyoming, which hasn't gone for a Democrat since Lyndon Johnson practically swept the nation in 1964.

"Whether Hillary can get votes from coal communities based on a plan like this — I have no idea," Hansen said. "This is a very raw issue for coal miners and their families."