COMMENTS ON NEW CARBON RULES

I support the new carbon rules, though modest, reducing carbon emissions by only 30% by 2030, based on high emission 2005 levels. The European Union has adopted a much stronger reduction policy of 40% reduction by 2030 based on lower emission 1990 pollution levels.

That said, I dismiss the harsh rhetoric and claims made by numerous politicians and energy industry leaders that the new carbon rules are unattainable. As reported in the New York Times (6/8/14), the EPA gives Kentucky wide flexibility in reducing its carbon output by only 18% by 2030. Moreover, the state has many options under the rules to reduce carbon pollution, including efficiency improvements at power plants, energy conservation programs, and renewable energy standards for public utilities—a policy already in effect in half the states in the U.S.

Kentucky lawmakers can readily work towards the new EPA standards if they will support the Clean Energy Opportunity Act (HB195) which has been before the General Assembly the last four years. This bill sets a renewable energy goal of 12.5% from clean energy sources by 2024, sets energy efficiency standards for utilities, and establishes feed-in-tariff rates that utilities pay in-state energy producers. Moreover, a study by Synapses Energy Economics, Inc. estimated that 28,000 net new jobs could be created if this legislation passes.

Coal generates 93% of the electricity in KY. We rank #1 in the nation in carbon emissions per unit of electricity produced from all sources. Indeed, coal is a culture here. But even natives of coal country recognize the inevitable changes afoot. When I recently worked the crowds at the Cincinnati Coney Island Appalachian Fest soliciting signatures on a petition to stop mountaintop strip mining in Eastern KY, I was amazed by the number of those signing on who were natives of the area or who had family members who were or are miners.

Last year, the state kicked off project SOAR—Shaping Our Appalachian Region—to initiate new job opportunities in the region. Non-profits such as the Mountain Area for Community Economic Development and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth are working to enable a transition from a coal economy to jobs in energy efficiency industries and agriculture. Citizens like myself ask our leaders to stop the foot dragging and face the reality of a post fossil fuel era. I thank the EPA for nudging us forward.