

Secretary McDonnell and the Environmental Quality Board,

I am Dr. Phil Covert, a retired pastor living in York, Pennsylvania. Thank you for allowing me the privilege to share my comments today. Since living in Pennsylvania for several years, I've witnessed the effects of pollution on the health and well-being of the citizens of our commonwealth. Delivering Meals on Wheels in York County, I see many people that are disabled, and home bound with lung diseases. It saddens me to see senior citizens struggling to live a full life in their golden years.

As an evangelical Christian my faith shapes and informs my beliefs and actions. In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, Jesus commands us to *care for the least of these*. To me the *least* are the people who have no voice, no power, no status in our society. Psalm 82: 3-4 directs us to: *Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy.* Jesus said in John 10:10 *I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*. There are more scriptural texts to support the importance of caring for the least of God's creatures, but I don't have time to mention all of them. Suffice to say it is our responsibility to care for those who are unable to care for themselves and to provide the highest quality of life for all people.

To put this into perspective, Pennsylvania holds the inauspicious claim of having the third most air pollution-related deaths in the U.S., after California and New York and has the fifth dirtiest power industry in the nation, seriously jeopardizing the health of Pennsylvania's children — both born and unborn. More than a quarter of a million children and over 1 million Pennsylvania adults suffer from asthma. According to the American Lung Association's State of the Air 2020, smog levels are increasing in Pennsylvania, as temperatures rise, escalating the number of people suffering from asthma. Driving down Mt Rose Avenue in York, on many days, I can see a haze of smog hanging low over the city. And I think, we are inhaling that stuff. It has to have a negative effect on our lungs.

If you've never experienced an asthma attack it is difficult to explain. Asthma attacks feel like needles piercing one's lungs. My granddaughter has told me this is how it feels as she gasps for breath during an attack. If you've never struggled for your next breath you have no idea how scary that is. Also, increased temperatures caused by fossil fuel warming are a leading factor behind the growing incidents of insect-borne diseases such as West Nile Virus and Lyme Disease with an estimated 120,000 cases a year in Pennsylvania.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats we face. We are already starting to see the effects here in Pennsylvania with stronger storms and more flooding. This past July was the hottest July ever recorded. The earth just notched its warmest November and 2020 is close to the record for being the hottest year. Temperatures in Pennsylvania are projected to increase by 5.4 degrees by 2050 and the number of days with a heat index above 90 degrees is increasing dramatically. In our home from April through September we did not turn off our air conditioning. This is unprecedented and may be something your family experienced.

This changing climate is harming public health and straining our infrastructure and emergency services. For example, PennDOT spent more than \$125 million in 2018 alone to repair flood and landslide damage. In 2018 medical research concluded that over 2,700 Pennsylvanians died prematurely from air pollution, including pollution produced by the electric generation industry. Pollution is also believed to have contributed to more than 2,300 (2018) premature deaths in other states as well.



One of the state's largest greenhouse gas polluters are coal and natural gas power plants. There are no limits on the amount of climate warming carbon dioxide these power plants can spew into the air.

The good news is that PA can reduce its carbon pollution by participating in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) — an effort to cut carbon pollution from power plants across 10 states. By joining RGGI, we can achieve significant pollution reductions, defend our children's health, create more than 27,000 new jobs, and add \$1.9 billion to our commonwealth's economy. The health benefits to Pennsylvanians include \$6.3 billion in health care savings, 30,000 fewer hospital visits for respiratory illnesses like asthma among children and adults, and 45,000 fewer asthma attacks and 1,000 fewer cases of childhood bronchitis. These are not simply statistics but represent real effect on real lives.

I understand when we discuss cutting carbon pollution, red flags are raised because of the fear of the potential of lost jobs and financial security from those whose lives maybe threatened by these changes. The truth is that jobs will be lost regardless of what is being done as more and more energy producing companies are turning to wind and solar which are more sustainable and cheaper sources of energy.

For more than a century, the fossil fuel industry has realized profits at the cost to the lungs, hearts, minds, and even lives of our children. This pattern continues today as the total costs of fossil fuels continue to be ignored and denied. I believe it is past time for us to stop negating the health issues associated with the current fossil fuel industry and provide a brighter, cleaner, healthy, hope-filled future for all Pennsylvanians.

RGGI has been an enormous success in the 10 states where it is in place, cutting climate pollution by a third and raising nearly \$3 billion to invest in clean energy and other purposes. This is not insignificant and cannot be ignored. It is time for Pennsylvania to tap into this record of success, reduce its carbon pollution and create thousands of new jobs by participating in RGGI.

If adopted by the Legislature, RGGI would acknowledge the reality of the energy market, economics, and science, and provide a revenue to help coal and energy transition to other skilled careers. Through its participation in RGGI PA will continue to have the lowest electricity prices across RGGI states. With investments in energy efficiency that can come from RGGI, electric bills can actually go down. In the states already participating in RGGI, investments under the program have helped save consumers more than a billion dollars on their energy bills so far. Participating in RGGI would provide incentives for power companies to invest in cleaner energy, while improving efficiency and reducing air pollution. In fact, by participating, PA could reduce carbon pollution by 188 million tons from 2022 through 2030 — equal to removing more than 4 million cars off the road. PA would continue as a leading energy exporter under RGGI. At the same time, RGGI could also defend our children's health.

Just to bring this back to my personal reason for talking with you today. As a father and grandfather, I love my children and my grandchildren. I am concerned about the future world that they will inherit. I want this world to have cleaner air, cleaner water, cleaner soil. I want this world to be a safer and healthier world for all people. I pray that you will join me and others in re-creating a healthier world.