

HB5660 - ENERGY CONSERVATION & COAL DEVELOPMENT ACT

This bill removes the legal mandate requiring the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to provide coal education for Illinois children

Background:

Illinois state law currently requires the development of a coal education program for our state's children? Hard to believe, but at a time when our state is under severe financial pressure and science is telling us that we need to move away from fossil fuels, a little-known law called the "Illinois Coal Technology Development and Assistance Act" includes a provision that requires the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to use tax dollars to produce and distribute coal educational materials for our kids.

In 2011 environmental organizations began a campaign to call for an end to the program, which included:

1. An extensive curriculum called "From the Coalfields to the Power Lines" developed for children in grades K-12.
2. An annual all-expenses paid, four-day retreat to Rend Lake Resort for teachers to earn professional development credits.



*From the Coalfields to the Power Lines
K-12 IDCEO Coal Curriculum*

3. A kids page on the IDCEO website, explaining the importance of coal and the effectiveness of environmental regulations in protecting lands impacted by coal mining.



7th grade winner, IDCEO art contest

4. A yearly art and essay contest in which 5th – 8th grade students in Illinois are invited to submit posters and essays on coal-related topics and compete for a spot in that year's Coal Calendar.

Taken as a whole, this has been a highly-biased program that casts coal and coal companies in an artificially positive light, encouraging public allegiance to the coal industry. It begins with the youngest and most impressionable members of society – our children.

Between 2012 and 2013, the DCEO paid \$116,000 for a professional evaluation of the coal education program. This study concluded that the program needs to be revised and updated. Rather than invest more funds in this program, we have a better idea. Let's put an end to the program, now. At a time when our state is facing severe financial challenges, we believe there are better uses for our public funds.

HB5660, sponsored by Representative Deborah Conroy (46th District), will amend the Coal Technology Development and Assistance Act, eliminating the mandate for state subsidized "coal education".

The Facts:

- The Coal Education Program is required by the “Illinois Coal Technology Development Assistance Act” (30 ILCS 730). It is funded by revenue from three ratepayer taxes and fees: the electricity excise tax; the gas revenue tax; and the Renewable Energy Resources and Coal Technology Development Assistance Charge.
- Between 2006 and 2012 the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (IDCEO) spent nearly \$1 million on coal education and teacher’s retreat.
- During that same period the IDCEO distributed approximately 700 copies of “From the Coal Mines to the Power Lines” its educational curriculum for children in grades K-12.
- This curriculum teaches environmental regulations significantly raise the cost of producing electricity, and that the evidence is not clear that the combustion of fossil fuels leads to a warming climate. Students are not taught about renewable energy, but are encouraged to use what they have learned to create commercials promoting coal.
- Each year up to 1,500 students in fifth through eighth grade participate in the Illinois Coal Calendar Contest, producing art and essays promoting the coal industry.
- Each year the IDCEO spends approximately \$25,000 on its four-day, all expense paid retreat for teachers held at Rend Lake Resort in Whittington, Illinois. Teachers are taken on tours of coal mines by industry representatives, provided information on the merits of coal and encouraged to teach about coal in their classrooms.
- In 2012-2013 IDCEO spent \$116,000 on a consultant’s evaluation providing recommendations for revising the coal education program.



Annual all-expenses paid coal education retreat for teachers at Rend Lake Resort

- The consultant’s 2013 Coal Education Program Evaluation Report determined that the coal curriculum first developed in 2004 was outdated and should immediately be retired.
- Revising and updating the coal education program will require a significant commitment of new public funds that could be put to much better uses.
- Educational professionals have no need for a state-funded coal education program. High-quality educational materials on coal and energy are already easily accessible to teachers. The 2013 Coal Education Program Evaluation Report acknowledges “...state and national level educational materials on coal, coal and the environment, energy, and energy literacy are readily available.”
- Education is not the mission of the IDCEO. Its stated mission is “To raise Illinois’ profile as a premier global business destination; and to provide a foundation for the economic prosperity of all Illinoisans, through coordination of business recruitment and retention, provision of essential capital to small businesses, investment in infrastructure and job training for a 21st century economy, and administration of state and federal grant programs”.

