ORAL ARGUMENT HELD SEPTEMBER 27, 2016

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CIRCUIT

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA, et al., *Petitioners*, v. UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, et al., *Respondents*.	No. 15-1363 and consolidated cases

PETITIONERS' AND PETITIONER-INTERVENORS' RESPONSE IN SUPPORT OF EPA'S MOTION TO HOLD CASES IN ABEYANCE

Petitioners and Petitioner-Intervenors respectfully submit this response in support of EPA's motion to hold these consolidated cases in abeyance in light of EPA's announcement that it has commenced a review of the Rule pursuant to the recent Executive Order.[1] Holding petitions for review in abeyance is the Court's usual response when, as here, the agency has indicated that it is undertaking a review of the challenged regulation, especially in the context of a turnover of presidential administrations. That policy has special force when pending agency action could render a challenge moot: Here, there is a real risk that a decision by this Court on the

[1] The Executive Order is included as Attachment 1 to the Notice of Executive Order, EPA Review of Clean Power Plan and Forthcoming Rulemaking, and Motion to Hold Cases in Abeyance, ECF No. 1668274 (Mar. 28, 2017) ("EPA Motion").

legality of the existing Rule will amount to a mere advisory opinion because the Rule may well be repealed or substantially altered in the near future. Similarly, further action by this Court on this case would unnecessarily expend judicial and party resources while lacking practical effect in light of the stay entered by the Supreme Court—an action predicated on the Supreme Court's determination that Petitioners are likely to succeed on the merits and that the balance of equities weighs against allowing the Rule to go into effect. Any concerns about EPA's review carrying on indefinitely can be addressed by accepting the agency's offer to report to the Court periodically on the status of its review. The Court should therefore grant EPA's motion to hold these cases in abeyance.

As detailed in EPA's motion, the President issued an Executive Order on March 28 that established a new energy policy of the United States focused on developing domestic energy sources, including coal and natural gas, free of regulations that "unduly burden the development or use" of these resources. Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth, Executive Order No. 13783 of March 28, 2017, §§ 1(a), (c). Among other things, the Order specifically instructs EPA to review the Rule for consistency with this policy and, if appropriate, take action to "suspend[], revis[e], or rescind[]" the Rule. *Id.* § 4(a). In connection with this change in policy, the Order rescinds a number of prior presidential actions, including the President's Climate Action Plan of June 2013 and the Presidential Memorandum on Power Sector

Carbon Pollution Standards, *id.* § 3(b), both of which served as cornerstones of the Rule, *see* 80 Fed. Reg. 64662, 64665, 64677 (Oct. 23, 2015).

This Court has repeatedly recognized that abeyance is appropriate when an agency is revisiting a challenged regulation, especially during a transition from one presidential administration to another. For example, in May 2008, petitioners challenged EPA's Ozone NAAQS Rule. After the January 2009 change in administrations, when briefing was already underway, EPA moved to hold the case in abeyance to allow the agency to review the 2008 revisions and determine whether they should be reconsidered. *See Mississippi v. EPA*, 744 F.3d 1334, 1341 (D.C. Cir. 2013). The Court granted the motion, holding the case in abeyance until further order of the Court. Order, *Mississippi v. EPA,* No. 08-1200 (D.C. Cir. Mar. 19, 2009); *see also* Order, *Mississippi v. EPA,* No. 08-1200 (D.C. Cir. Jan. 21, 2010) (granting a motion to continue the abeyance and denying a motion to resume the litigation). Likewise, in February 2009, the Court granted EPA's motion to hold in abeyance the State of California's challenge (originally filed in May 2008) to EPA's denial of a waiver for new motor vehicle emission standards so that EPA could reconsider the denial. Order, *California v. EPA*, No. 08-1178 (D.C. Cir. Feb. 25, 2009).[2]

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[2] In this regard, as noted below, the Court's ordinary practice is reinforced by the fact that there are additional challenges to the Rule ripened by the denial of petitions for reconsideration, that remain to be briefed and argued. *See, e.g.*, Joint Motion to Sever and Consolidate, *West Virginia v. EPA,* No. 15-1363 (D.C. Cir. Feb. 24, 2017) (ECF No. 1663046).

These are just some of the cases this Court has held in abeyance to permit EPA to reconsider a challenged regulatory program, including as part of the transition to a new administration. *See* Order, *Am. Petroleum Inst. v. EPA*, No. 08-1277 (D.C. Cir. Apr. 1, 2009) (holding case in abeyance pending EPA reconsideration); Order, *Sierra Club v. EPA*, No. 09-1018 (D.C. Cir. Feb. 19, 2009) (similar); Order, *Nat. Res. Def. Council v. EPA*, No. 08-1250 (D.C. Cir. Dec. 3, 2008) (similar). Indeed, the Court recently held a challenge to the Affordable Care Act in abeyance in light of the presidential transition. *See* Order, *House of Representatives v. Burwell*, No. 16-5202 (D.C. Cir. Dec. 5, 2016).

These cases reflect this Court's long "recogni[tion] that '[a]dministrative reconsideration is a more expeditious and efficient means of achieving an adjustment of agency policy than is resort to the federal courts.'" *B.J. Alan Co. v. ICC*, 897 F.2d 561, 562 n.1 (D.C. Cir. 1990) (quoting *Pennsylvania v. ICC*, 590 F.2d 1187, 1194 (D.C. Cir. 1978)). And here, the case for abeyance is even stronger because, unlike in these other cases, the existing regulation has been stayed by the Supreme Court and thus cannot take immediate effect even if upheld by the Court. There is thus no possibility of harm to other parties or the public interest from a delay in this Court's consideration of the case while EPA revisits the Rule. *See infra*. And periodic status reports will give the Court the opportunity to ensure that EPA acts in a timely fashion, and allow the Court to pick up where it left off if EPA's review does not produce a material change to the Rule. *See* EPA Motion at 9 n.2. Simply preserving

the *status quo* until then is amply warranted—and indeed, is precisely what the Supreme Court found Petitioners are entitled to in light of the irrevocable harm threatened by the Rule and Petitioners' likelihood of success on the merits.

The Court's established practice of granting abeyance in cases like these is a sound one, because any decision by this Court on the legality of the Rule as initially promulgated could amount to an advisory opinion. The Executive Order directs EPA to "immediately take all steps necessary to review the [Rule]." Executive Order No. 13783, *supra*, § 4(a). If EPA concludes that the Rule—which was designed to "aggressive[ly] transform[]" the domestic electricity sector away from fossil fuels[3]—"unduly burden[s] the development of domestic energy resources" like coal and natural gas, *id.* § 1(c), it must "as soon as practicable" initiate a rulemaking proceeding to "suspend[], revis[e], or rescind[]" the Rule, *id.* § 4(a). As EPA's motion explains, the agency has already implemented the first part of this directive by "immediately" commencing a review of the Rule and issuing a notice of review and advance notice of proposed rulemaking. EPA Motion at 7 & Att. 2.

If EPA rescinds or substantially modifies the Rule, the relief requested in the petitions for review will be unavailable because the Rule as it currently stands will no longer exist. Where "[e]ach cause of action challenge[s] the validity of" a regulation,

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[3] White House Fact Sheet (attached to State Pet'rs' Mot. for Stay and Expedited Consideration of Petition for Review, *West Virginia v. EPA,* No. 15-1363 (D.C. Cir. Oct. 23, 2015) (ECF 1579999)).

and "that regulation no longer exists, [the Court] can do nothing to affect [petitioners'] rights relative to it, thus making th[e] case classically moot for lack of a live controversy." *Akiachak Native Cmty. v. Dep't of Interior*, 827 F.3d 100, 106 (D.C. Cir. 2016); *see also Am. Petroleum Inst. v. EPA*, 683 F.3d 382, 388 (D.C. Cir. 2012) (holding case in abeyance where EPA's proposed course "if adopted, would necessitate substantively different legal analysis and would likely moot the analysis we could undertake if deciding the case now"); *Larsen v. U.S. Navy*, 525 F.3d 1, 4–5 (D.C. Cir. 2008) (challenge to withdrawn policy was moot); *Coal. of Airline Pilots Ass'ns v. FAA*, 370 F.3d 1184, 1190–91 (D.C. Cir. 2004) (similar); *cf. U.S. Bancorp Mortg. Co. v. Bonner Mall P'ship*, 513 U.S. 18, 25 n.3 (1994) (noting that a prior suit "became moot on appeal because the regulations sought to be enforced by the United States were annulled by Executive Order"). As a result, an opinion regarding the legality of the Rule after EPA has already withdrawn or revised it "would accomplish nothing—amounting to exactly the type of advisory opinion Article III prohibits." *Akiachak Native Cmty.*, 827 F.3d at 106 (internal quotation marks omitted). Nor is this a case in which the legal issues raised by the Rule will necessarily survive EPA's action rescinding or modifying the Rule; unlike in cases such as *Chlorine Chemistry Council v. EPA*, 206 F.3d 1286, 1290 (D.C. Cir. 2000), EPA's rescission or modification may very well obviate Petitioners' challenges here.[4]

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[4] The Supreme Court's recent denial of an abeyance request in *National*

Even if the Court were to issue a decision before EPA completed an effort to rewrite or repeal the Rule, EPA's forthcoming action could still moot the case, and the parties would be entitled to seek vacatur of the Court's ruling in this Court, *see Clarke v. United States*, 915 F.2d 699, 706 (D.C. Cir. 1990) (en banc), or in the Supreme Court, *see Arizonans for Official English v. Arizona*, 520 U.S. 43, 71 (1997) ("When a civil case becomes moot pending appellate adjudication, '[t]he established practice … in the federal system … is to reverse or vacate the judgment below and remand with a direction to dismiss.'" (quoting *United States v. Munsingwear, Inc.*, 340 U.S. 36, 39 (1950))); *see also Am. Bar Ass'n v. FTC*, 636 F.3d 641, 649 (D.C. Cir. 2011) (explaining the reasons favoring vacatur based on intervening legislative changes). Indeed, the Supreme Court is highly unlikely to allow such important issues to be determined by a decision that it may not be able to review. *See Munsingwear,* 340 U.S. at 40 (vacatur is proper to "clear[ ] the path for future relitigation of the issues"); *see also A.L. Mechling Barge Lines, Inc. v. United States*, 368 U.S. 324, 329 (1961) ("We think the principle enunciated in *Munsingwear* at least equally applicable to unreviewed administrative orders…."); *cf. Relf v. Weinberger*, 565 F.2d 722, 727 (D.C. Cir. 1977) (vacating orders

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Association of Manufacturers v. Department of Defense, *see* Order, No. 16-299 (S. Ct. Apr. 3, 2017), likewise says nothing about the appropriateness of abeyance in these cases. The question presented to the Supreme Court is limited to whether the federal courts of appeals, or instead the federal district courts, have jurisdiction to review a rule defining the term "waters of the United States" under 33 U.S.C. § 1369(b)(1)(F). This jurisdictional question about the proper forum for review will be implicated by any rule defining the reach of the Clean Water Act.

where agency announced its "inten[tion] to issue a new notice of rule making … at the conclusion of which it will promulgate [new] comprehensive regulations").[5]

Finally, for many of the same reasons, a decision by this Court regarding the current Rule would require an unnecessary expenditure of additional party and judicial resources. Although briefing and oral argument have taken place on challenges to the Rule in Case No. 15-1363, this Court has not yet issued its decision, and there are now additional challenges to the Rule ripened by the denial of petitions for reconsideration that remain to be briefed and argued. *See supra* n.2. The Court thus would need to expend the significant resources to resolve all issues, to issue a decision for the *en banc* Court, as well as any separate concurrences or dissents, and, potentially, deal with any petitions for rehearing. The non-prevailing parties surely would file protective petitions for writs of certiorari in the Supreme Court, requiring all of the numerous parties and the Justices to expend further resources. Given the large number of parties and counsel involved in this matter and the complexity of the issues, such an effort would be extensive. Because, as explained above, the case could ultimately be mooted by EPA's forthcoming action, all of this effort would be wasted.

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[5] The Executive Order's rescission of the presidential actions that formed the cornerstone of the Rule indicates that substantial revisions or even rescission of the Rule is not merely speculative. In any event, EPA's requested abeyance, EPA Motion at 8-9, would allow for an orderly review of the Rule. As EPA notes, it can provide periodic status reports on the progress of its review, allowing the Court to pick up where it left off if EPA decides no further action is necessary. *See id.* at 9 n.2 (offering to provide periodic status reports).

Moreover, a decision by this Court would have no practical effect while EPA revisits the Rule because the Supreme Court has stayed the Rule pending disposition of any petitions for writs of certiorari (or a decision on the merits if the petitions are granted). Order, *Chamber of Commerce v. EPA*, 136 S. Ct. 999 (2016) (No. 15A787). Thus, even if this Court were to uphold the Rule, the Rule would not take effect until, at the very least, the Supreme Court denied the inevitable petitions for writs of certiorari. And such a denial is highly unlikely, given the importance of the issues, EPA's ongoing efforts to revisit the Rule, and the fact that, in staying the Rule, the Supreme Court necessarily found that a petition for certiorari filed by Petitioners would likely be granted.

For the foregoing reasons, Petitioners and Petitioner-Intervenors support EPA's motion to hold this case in abeyance.

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Respectfully submitted,

/s/ F. William Brownell
F. William Brownell
Allison D. Wood
Henry V. Nickel
Tauna M. Szymanski
HUNTON & WILLIAMS LLP
2200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
Tel: (202) 955-1500
bbrownell@hunton.com
awood@hunton.com
hnickel@hunton.com
tszymanski@hunton.com

Counsel for Petitioners Utility Air Regulatory Group and American Public Power Association

/s/ Peter S. Glaser
Peter S. Glaser
TROUTMAN SANDERS LLP
401 Ninth Street N.W., Suite 1000
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 274-2998
peter.glaser@troutmansanders.com

Carroll W. McGuffey III
Justin T. Wong
TROUTMAN SANDERS LLP
600 Peachtree Street, N.E., Suite 5200
Atlanta, GA 30308
Tel: (404) 885-3000
mack.mcguffey@troutmansanders.com
justin.wong@troutmansanders.com

Counsel for Petitioner National Mining Association

/s/ Elbert Lin
Patrick Morrisey
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF WEST VIRGINIA
Elbert Lin
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
Erica N. Peterson
Assistant Attorney General
State Capitol Building 1, Room 26-E
Charleston, WV 25305
Tel: (304) 558-2021
Fax: (304) 558-0140
elbert.lin@wvago.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of West Virginia

/s/ Scott A. Keller
Ken Paxton
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
Jeffrey C. Mateer
First Assistant Attorney General
Scott A. Keller
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, TX 78711-2548
Tel: (512) 936-1700
scott.keller@texasattorneygeneral.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Texas

/s/ Peter D. Keisler
Peter D. Keisler
C. Frederick Beckner III
Ryan C. Morris
Paul J. Ray
SIDLEY AUSTIN, LLP
1501 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005
Tel: (202) 736-8027
pkeisler@sidley.com
rbeckner@sidley.com

Counsel for Petitioners Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America; National Association of Manufacturers; American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers; National Federation of Independent Business; American Chemistry Council; American Coke and Coal Chemicals Institute; American Foundry Society; American Forest & Paper Association; American Iron & Steel Institute; American Wood Council; Brick Industry Association; Electricity Consumers Resource Council; Lignite Energy Council; National Lime Association; National Oilseed Processors Association; and Portland Cement Association

/s/ Andrew Brasher
Steven T. Marshall
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF ALABAMA
Andrew Brasher
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
501 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130
Tel: (334) 353-2609
abrasher@ago.state.al.us

Counsel for Petitioner State of Alabama

/s/ Thomas A. Lorenzen
Thomas A. Lorenzen
D.C. Cir. Bar No. 394369
Daniel W. Wolff
CROWELL & MORING LLP
1001 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 624-2500
tlorenzen@crowell.com
dwolff@crowell.com

Counsel for Petitioners National Rural Electric Cooperative Association; Big Rivers Electric Corporation; Brazos Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.; Buckeye Power, Inc.; Central Montana Electric Power Cooperative; Central Electric Power Cooperative, Inc., Corn Belt Power Cooperative; Dairyland Power Cooperative; East River Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.; Georgia Transmission Corporation; Kansas Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.; North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation; Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative; Oglethorpe Power Corporation; PowerSouth Energy Cooperative; Prairie Power, Inc.; Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.; Seminole Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Southern Illinois Power Cooperative; Sunflower Electric Power Corporation; and Upper Missouri G. & T. Electric Cooperative, Inc.

/s/ Lee Rudofsky
Leslie Rutledge
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF ARKANSAS
Lee Rudofsky
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
Jamie L. Ewing
Assistant Attorney General
323 Center Street, Suite 400
Little Rock, AR 72201
Tel: (501) 682-5310
lee.rudofsky@arkansasag.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Arkansas

/s/ Frederick Yarger
Cynthia H. Coffman
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF COLORADO
Frederick Yarger
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
1300 Broadway, 10th Floor
Denver, CO 80203
Tel: (720) 508-6168
fred.yarger@coag.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Colorado

Of Counsel

Rae Cronmiller
Environmental Counsel
NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION
4301 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22203
Tel: (703) 907-5500
rae.cronmiller@nreca.coop

Counsel for Petitioner National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

/s/ Eric L. Hiser
Eric L. Hiser
JORDEN BISCHOFF & HISER, PLC
7272 E. Indian School Road, Suite 360
Scottsdale, AZ 85251
Tel: (480) 505-3927
ehiser@jordenbischoff.com

Counsel for Petitioner Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.

/s/ Brian A. Prestwood
Brian A. Prestwood
Senior Corporate and Compliance
Counsel
ASSOCIATED ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE,
INC.
2814 S. Golden, P.O. Box 754
Springfield, MO 65801
Tel: (417) 885-9273
bprestwood@aeci.org

Counsel for Petitioner Associated Electric Cooperative, Inc.

/s/ Jonathan L. Williams
Pamela Jo Bondi
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF FLORIDA
Jonathan L. Williams
Deputy Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
Jonathan A. Glogau
Special Counsel
Office of the Attorney General
PL-01, The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1050
Tel: (850) 414-3818
Fax: (850) 410-2672
jonathan.williams@myfloridalegal.com
jonathan.glogau@myfloridalegal.com

Counsel for Petitioner State of Florida

/s/ Sarah Hawkins Warren
Christopher M. Carr
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF GEORGIA
Sarah Hawkins Warren
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
40 Capitol Square S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30334
Tel: (404) 656-3300
Fax: (404) 463-9453
swarren@law.ga.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Georgia

/s/ David Crabtree
David Crabtree
Vice President, General Counsel
DESERET GENERATION & TRANSMISSION CO-OPERATIVE
10714 South Jordan Gateway
South Jordan, UT 84095
Tel: (801) 619-9500
Crabtree@deseretpower.com

Counsel for Petitioner Deseret Generation & Transmission Co-operative

/s/ John M. Holloway III
John M. Holloway III
EVERSHEDS SUTHERLAND (US) LLP
700 Sixth Street, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20001
Tel: (202) 383-0100
Fax: (202) 383-3593
jayholloway@eversheds-sutherland.com

Counsel for Petitioners East Kentucky Power Cooperative, Inc.; Hoosier Energy Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Minnkota Power Cooperative, Inc.; and South Mississippi Electric Power Association

/s/ Thomas M. Fisher
Curtis T. Hill, Jr.
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF INDIANA
Thomas M. Fisher
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
Indiana Government Ctr. South
Fifth Floor
302 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46205
Tel: (317) 232-6247
tom.fisher@atg.in.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Indiana

/s/ Jeffrey A. Chanay
Derek Schmidt
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF KANSAS
Jeffrey A. Chanay
Chief Deputy Attorney General
Counsel of Record
Bryan C. Clark
Assistant Solicitor General
120 S.W. 10th Avenue, 3rd Floor
Topeka, KS 66612
Tel: (785) 368-8435
Fax: (785) 291-3767
jeff.chanay@ag.ks.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Kansas

/s/ Patrick Burchette
Patrick Burchette
HOLLAND & KNIGHT LLP
800 17th Street, N.W., Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20006
Tel: (202) 469-5102
Patrick.Burchette@hklaw.com

Counsel for Petitioners East Texas Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Northeast Texas Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Sam Rayburn G&T Electric Cooperative, Inc.; and Tex-La Electric Cooperative of Texas, Inc.

/s/ Christopher L. Bell
Christopher L. Bell
GREENBERG TRAURIG LLP
1000 Louisiana Street, Suite 1700
Houston, TX 77002
Tel: (713) 374-3556
bellc@gtlaw.com

Counsel for Petitioner Golden Spread Electrical Cooperative, Inc.

/s/ Mark Walters
Mark Walters
Michael J. Nasi
JACKSON WALKER L.L.P.
100 Congress Avenue, Suite 1100
Austin, TX 78701
Tel: (512) 236-2000
Fax: (512) 236-2002
mwalters@jw.com
mnasi@jw.com

Counsel for Petitioners San Miguel Electric Cooperative, Inc., South Texas Electric Cooperative, Inc., and Petitioner-Intervenor Gulf Coast Lignite Coalition

/s/ Joe Newberg
Andy Beshear
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF KENTUCKY
Mitchel T. Denham
Assistant Deputy Attorney General
Joseph A. Newberg, II
Assistant Attorney General
Counsel of Record
700 Capital Avenue
Suite 118
Frankfort, KY 40601
Tel: (502) 696-5611
joe.newberg@ky.gov

Counsel for Petitioner Commonwealth of Kentucky

/s/ Steven B. "Beaux" Jones
Jeff Landry
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF LOUISIANA
Steven B. "Beaux" Jones
Counsel of Record
Duncan S. Kemp, IV
Assistant Attorneys General
Environmental Section – Civil Division
1885 N. Third Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
Tel: (225) 326-6085
Fax: (225) 326-6099
jonesst@ag.state.la.us

Counsel for Petitioner State of Louisiana

/s/ Randolph G. Holt
Randolph G. Holt
Jeremy L. Fetty
PARR RICHEY OBREMSKEY FRANDSEN & PATTERSON LLP
Wabash Valley Power Association, Inc.
722 N. High School Road
P.O. Box 24700
Indianapolis, IN 46224
Tel: (317) 481-2815
R_holt@wvpa.com
jfetty@parrlaw.com

Counsel for Petitioner Wabash Valley Power Association, Inc.

/s/ Megan H. Berge
Megan H. Berge
BAKER BOTTS L.L.P.
1299 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 639-7700
megan.berge@bakerbotts.com

Counsel for Petitioner Western Farmers Electric Cooperative

/s/ Steven C. Kohl
Steven C. Kohl
Gaetan Gerville-Reache
WARNER NORCROSS & JUDD LLP
2000 Town Center, Suite 2700
Southfield, MI 48075-1318
Tel: (248) 784-5000
skohl@wnj.com

Counsel for Petitioner Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative, Inc.

/s/ Lesley Foxhall Pietras
Lesley Foxhall Pietras
Greg Johnson
LISKOW & LEWIS, P.L.C.
701 Poydras Street, Suite 5000
New Orleans, LA 70139
Tel: (504) 556-4010
Fax: (504) 556-4108
lfpietras@liskow.com

Counsel for Petitioner Louisiana Public Service Commission

/s/ Christina F. Gomez
Christina F. Gomez
Jill H. Van Noord
Holland & Hart LLP
555 Seventeenth Street, Suite 3200
Denver, CO 80202
Tel: (303) 295-8000
Fax: (303) 295-8261
cgomez@hollandhart.com
jhvannoord@hollandhart.com

Patrick R. Day
HOLLAND & HART LLP
2515 Warren Avenue, Suite 450
Cheyenne, WY 82001
Tel: (307) 778-4200
Fax: (307) 778-8175
pday@hollandhart.com

Emily C. Schilling
HOLLAND & HART LLP
222 South Main Street, Suite 2200
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
Tel: (801) 799-5800
Fax: (801) 799-5700
ecschilling@hollandhart.com

Counsel for Petitioner Basin Electric Power Cooperative

/s/ Aaron D. Lindstrom
Bill Schuette
ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR THE PEOPLE OF MICHIGAN
Aaron D. Lindstrom
Michigan Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
P.O. Box 30212
Lansing, MI 48909
Tel: (515) 373-1124
Fax: (517) 373-3042
lindstroma@michigan.gov

Counsel for Petitioner People of the State of Michigan

/s/ Harold E. Pizzetta, III
Jim Hood
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
Harold E. Pizzetta
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Litigation Division
Office of the Attorney General
Post Office Box 220
Jackson, MS 39205
Tel: (601) 359-3816
Fax: (601) 359-2003
hpizz@ago.state.ms.us

Counsel for Petitioner State of Mississippi

/s/ C. Grady Moore, III
C. Grady Moore, III
Steven G. McKinney
BALCH & BINGHAM LLP
1901 Sixth Avenue North, Suite 1500
Birmingham, AL 35303-4642
Tel: (205) 251-8100
Fax: (205) 488-5704
gmoore@balch.com
smckinney@balch.com

Counsel for Petitioner Alabama Power Company

/s/ Margaret Claiborne Campbell
Margaret Claiborne Campbell
Angela J. Levin
TROUTMAN SANDERS LLP
600 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 5200
Atlanta, GA 30308-2216
Tel: (404) 885-3000
margaret.campbell@troutmansanders.com
angela.levin@troutmansanders.com

Counsel for Petitioner Georgia Power Company

/s/ Donna J. Hodges
Donna J. Hodges
Senior Counsel
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
P.O. Box 2261
Jackson, MS 39225-2261
Tel: (601) 961-5369
Fax: (601) 961-5349
dhodges@deq.state.ms.us

Counsel for Petitioner Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality

/s/ Todd E. Palmer
Todd E. Palmer
Valerie L. Green
MICHAEL, BEST & FRIEDRICH LLP
601 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20004-2601
Tel: (202) 747-9560
Fax: (202) 347-1819
tepalmer@michaelbest.com
vlgreen@michaelbest.com

Counsel for Petitioner Mississippi Public Service Commission

/s/ Terese T. Wyly
Terese T. Wyly
Ben H. Stone
BALCH & BINGHAM LLP
1310 Twenty Fifth Avenue
Gulfport, MS 39501-1931
Tel: (228) 214-0413
twyly@balch.com
bstone@balch.com

Counsel for Petitioner Mississippi Power Company

/s/ Jeffrey A. Stone
Jeffrey A. Stone
BEGGS & LANE, RLLP
501 Commendencia Street
Pensacola, FL 32502
Tel: (850) 432-2451
JAS@beggslane.com

James S. Alves
2110 Trescott Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32308
Tel: (850) 566-7607
jim.s.alves@outlook.com

Counsel for Petitioner Gulf Power Company

/s/ D. John Sauer
Josh Hawley
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF MISSOURI
D. John Sauer
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
P.O. Box 899
207 W. High Street
Jefferson City, MO 65102
Tel: (573) 751-1800
Fax: (573) 751-0774
john.sauer@ago.mo.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Missouri

/s/ Dale Schowengerdt
Timothy C. Fox
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF MONTANA
Dale Schowengerdt
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
215 North Sanders
Helena, MT 59620-1401
Tel: (406) 444-7008
dales@mt.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Montana

/s/ James S. Alves
James S. Alves
2110 Trescott Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32308
Tel: (850) 566-7607
jim.s.alves@outlook.com

Counsel for Petitioner CO_2 Task Force of the Florida Electric Power Coordinating Group, Inc.

/s/ John J. McMackin
John J. McMackin
WILLIAMS & JENSEN
701 8th Street, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20001
Tel: (202) 659-8201
jjmcmackin@wms-jen.com

Counsel for Petitioner Energy-Intensive Manufacturers Working Group on Greenhouse Gas Regulation

/s/ William M. Bumpers
William M. Bumpers
Megan H. Berge
BAKER BOTTS L.L.P.
1299 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 639-7700
william.bumpers@bakerbotts.com
megan.berge@bakerbotts.com

Kelly McQueen
ENTERGY SERVICES, INC.
425 W. Capitol Avenue, 27th Floor
Little Rock, AR 72201
Tel: (501) 377-5760
kmcque1@entergy.com

Counsel for Petitioner Entergy Corporation

/s/ Justin D. Lavene
Douglas J. Peterson
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF NEBRASKA
Dave Bydlaek
Chief Deputy Attorney General
Justin D. Lavene
Assistant Attorney General
Counsel of Record
2115 State Capitol
Lincoln, NE 68509
Tel: (402) 471-2834
justin.lavene@nebraska.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Nebraska

/s/ John R. Renella
Christopher S. Porrino
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF NEW JERSEY
David C. Apy
Assistant Attorney General
John R. Renella
Deputy Attorney General
Counsel of Record
Division of Law
R.J. Hughes Justice Complex
P.O. Box 093
25 Market Street
Trenton, NJ 08625-0093
Tel. (609) 292-6945
Fax (609)341-5030
john.renella@dol.lps.state.nj.us

Counsel for Petitioner State of New Jersey

/s/ Paul J. Zidlicky
Paul J. Zidlicky
SIDLEY AUSTIN, LLP
1501 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005
Tel: (202) 736-8000
pzidlicky@sidley.com

Counsel for Petitioners GenOn Mid-Atlantic, LLC; Indian River Power LLC; Louisiana Generating LLC; Midwest Generation, LLC; NRG Chalk Point LLC; NRG Power Midwest LP; NRG Rema LLC; NRG Texas Power LLC; NRG Wholesale Generation LP; and Vienna Power LLC

/s/ David M. Flannery
David M. Flannery
Kathy G. Beckett
Edward L. Kropp
STEPTOE & JOHNSON, PLLC
707 Virginia Street East
Charleston, WV 25326
Tel: (304) 353-8000
dave.flannery@steptoe-johnson.com
kathy.beckett@steptoe-johnson.com
skipp.kropp@steptoe-johnson.com

Counsel for Petitioner Indiana Utility Group

/s/ Paul M. Seby
Wayne Stenehjem
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF NORTH DAKOTA
Margaret Olson
Assistant Attorney General
North Dakota Attorney General's Office
600 E. Boulevard Avenue #125
Bismarck, ND 58505
Tel: (701) 328-3640
maiolson@nd.gov

Paul M. Seby
Special Assistant Attorney General
State of North Dakota
GREENBERG TRAURIG, LLP
1200 17th Street, Suite 2400
Denver, CO 80202
Tel: (303) 572-6500
Fax: (303) 572-6540
sebyp@gtlaw.com

Counsel for Petitioner State of North Dakota

/s/ Eric E. Murphy
Michael DeWine
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF OHIO
Eric E. Murphy
State Solicitor
Counsel of Record
30 E. Broad Street, 17th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215
Tel: (614) 466-8980
eric.murphy@ohioattorneygeneral.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Ohio

/s/ F. William Brownell
F. William Brownell
Eric J. Murdock
HUNTON & WILLIAMS LLP
2200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
Tel: (202) 955-1500
bbrownell@hunton.com
emurdock@hunton.com

Nash E. Long III
HUNTON & WILLIAMS LLP
Bank of America Plaza, Suite 3500
101 South Tryon Street
Charlotte, NC 28280
Tel: (704) 378-4700
nlong@hunton.com

Counsel for Petitioner LG&E and KU Energy LLC

/s/ David B. Rivkin, Jr.
Mike Hunter
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF OKLAHOMA
David B. Rivkin, Jr.
Counsel of Record
Mark W. DeLaquil
Andrew M. Grossman
BAKER & HOSTETLER LLP
Washington Square, Suite 1100
1050 Connecticut Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel: (202) 861-1731
Fax: (202) 861-1783
drivkin@bakerlaw.com

Counsel for Petitioners State of Oklahoma and Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality

/s/ P. Stephen Gidiere III
P. Stephen Gidiere III
Thomas L. Casey III
Julia B. Barber
BALCH & BINGHAM LLP
1901 6th Ave. N., Suite 1500
Birmingham, AL 35203
Tel: (205) 251-8100
sgidiere@balch.com

Stephanie Z. Moore
Executive Vice President & General Counsel
VISTRA ENERGY CORP.
1601 Bryan Street
22nd Floor
Dallas, Texas 75201

Daniel J. Kelly
Vice President & Associate General Counsel
VISTRA ENERGY CORP.
1601 Bryan Street
43rd Floor
Dallas, Texas 75201

Counsel for Petitioners Luminant Generation Company LLC; Oak Grove Management Company LLC; Big Brown Power Company LLC; Sandow Power Company LLC; Big Brown Lignite Company LLC; Luminant Mining Company LLC; and Luminant Big Brown Mining Company LLC

/s/ James Emory Smith, Jr.
Alan Wilson
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF SOUTH CAROLINA
Robert D. Cook
Solicitor General
James Emory Smith, Jr.
Deputy Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
P.O. Box 11549
Columbia, SC 29211
Tel: (803) 734-3680
Fax: (803) 734-3677
esmith@scag.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of South Carolina

/s/ Steven R. Blair
Marty J. Jackley
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF SOUTH DAKOTA
Steven R. Blair
Assistant Attorney General
Counsel of Record
1302 E. Highway 14, Suite 1
Pierre, SD 57501
Tel: (605) 773-3215
steven.blair@state.sd.us

Counsel for Petitioner State of South Dakota

/s/ Ronald J. Tenpas
Ronald J. Tenpas
MORGAN, LEWIS & BOCKIUS LLP
1111 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 739-3000
rtenpas@morganlewis.com

Counsel for Petitioner Minnesota Power (an operating division of ALLETE, Inc.)

/s/ Allison D. Wood
Allison D. Wood
Tauna M. Szymanski
Andrew D. Knudsen
HUNTON & WILLIAMS LLP
2200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
Tel: (202) 955-1500
awood@hunton.com
tszymanski@hunton.com
aknudsen@hunton.com

Counsel for Petitioner Montana-Dakota Utilities Co., a Division of MDU Resources Group, Inc.

/s/ Tyler R. Green
Sean Reyes
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF UTAH
Tyler R. Green
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
Parker Douglas
Federal Solicitor
Utah State Capitol Complex
350 North State Street, Suite 230
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-2320
pdouglas@utah.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Utah

/s/ Misha Tseytlin
Brad D. Schimel
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF WISCONSIN
Misha Tseytlin
Solicitor General
Counsel of Record
Andrew Cook
Deputy Attorney General
Delanie M. Breuer
Assistant Deputy Attorney General
Wisconsin Department of Justice
17 West Main Street
Madison, WI 53707
Tel: (608) 267-9323
tseytlinm@doj.state.wi.us

Counsel for Petitioner State of Wisconsin

/s/ William M. Bumpers
William M. Bumpers
Megan H. Berge
BAKER BOTTS L.L.P.
1299 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 639-7700
william.bumpers@bakerbotts.com
megan.berge@bakerbotts.com

Counsel for Petitioner NorthWestern Corporation d/b/a NorthWestern Energy

/s/ Joshua R. More
Joshua R. More
Jane E. Montgomery
Amy Antoniolli
SCHIFF HARDIN LLP
233 South Wacker Drive
Suite 6600
Chicago, IL 60606
Tel: (312) 258-5500
jmore@schiffhardin.com
jmontgomery@schiffhardin.com
aantoniolli@schiffhardin.com

Counsel for Petitioner Prairie State Generating Company, LLC

/s/ James Kaste
Peter K. Michael
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF WYOMING
James Kaste
Deputy Attorney General
Counsel of Record
Erik Petersen
Elizabeth Morrisseau
Senior Assistant Attorneys General
2320 Capitol Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
Tel: (307) 777-6946
Fax: (307) 777-3542
james.kaste@wyo.gov

Counsel for Petitioner State of Wyoming

/s/ Allison D. Wood
Allison D. Wood
Tauna M. Szymanski
Andrew D. Knudsen
HUNTON & WILLIAMS LLP
2200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
Tel: (202) 955-1500
awood@hunton.com
tszymanski@hunton.com
aknudsen@hunton.com

Counsel for Petitioner Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc.

/s/ William M. Bumpers
William M. Bumpers
Megan H. Berge
BAKER BOTTS L.L.P.
1299 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 639-7700
william.bumpers@bakerbotts.com
megan.berge@bakerbotts.com

Counsel for Petitioner Westar Energy, Inc.

/s/ Jeffrey R. Holmstead
Jeffrey R. Holmstead
Brittany M. Pemberton
BRACEWELL LLP
2001 M Street, N.W., Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel: (202) 828-5852
Fax: (202) 857-4812
jeff.holmstead@bracewelllaw.com

Counsel for Petitioner American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity

/s/ Dennis Lane
Dennis Lane
STINSON LEONARD STREET LLP
1775 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20006
Tel: (202) 785-9100
Fax: (202) 785-9163
dennis.lane@stinson.com

Parthenia B. Evans
STINSON LEONARD STREET LLP
1201 Walnut Street, Suite 2900
Kansas City, MO 64106
Tel: (816) 842-8600
Fax: (816) 691-3495
parthy.evans@stinson.com

Counsel for Petitioner Kansas City Board of Public Utilities – Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas

/s/ Geoffrey K. Barnes
Geoffrey K. Barnes
Wendlene M. Lavey
John D. Lazzaretti
Robert D. Cheren
SQUIRE PATTON BOGGS (US) LLP
4900 Key Tower
127 Public Square
Cleveland, OH 44114
Tel: (216) 479-8646
geoffrey.barnes@squirepb.com

Counsel for Petitioner Murray Energy Corporation

/s/ Andrew C. Emrich
Andrew C. Emrich
HOLLAND & HART LLP
6380 South Fiddlers Green Circle
Suite 500
Greenwood Village, CO 80111
Tel: (303) 290-1621
Fax: (866) 711-8046
acemrich@hollandhart.com

Emily C. Schilling
HOLLAND & HART LLP
222 South Main Street, Suite 2200
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
Tel: (801) 799-5753
Fax: (202) 747-6574
ecschilling@hollandhart.com

Counsel for Petitioners Newmont Nevada Energy Investment, LLC and Newmont USA Limited

/s/ Charles T. Wehland
Charles T. Wehland
JONES DAY
77 West Wacker Drive, Suite 3500
Chicago, IL 60601-1692
Tel: (312) 782-3939
Fax: (312) 782-8585
ctwehland@jonesday.com

Counsel for Petitioners The North American Coal Corporation; The Coteau Properties Company; Coyote Creek Mining Company, L.L.C.; The Falkirk Mining Company; Mississippi Lignite Mining Company; North American Coal Royalty Company; NODAK Energy Services, LLC; Otter Creek Mining Company, LLC; and The Sabine Mining Company

/s/ Robert G. McLusky
Robert G. McLusky
JACKSON KELLY, PLLC
1600 Laidley Tower
P.O. Box 553
Charleston, WV 25322
Tel: (304) 340-1000
rmclusky@jacksonkelly.com

Counsel for Petitioner West Virginia Coal Association

/s/ Eugene M. Trisko
Eugene M. Trisko
LAW OFFICES OF EUGENE M. TRISKO
P.O. Box 596
Berkeley Springs, WV 25411
Tel: (304) 258-1977
Tel: (301) 639-5238 (cell)
emtrisko7@gmail.com

Counsel for Petitioner International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers

/s/ Eugene M. Trisko
Eugene M. Trisko
LAW OFFICES OF EUGENE M. TRISKO
P.O. Box 596
Berkeley Springs, WV 25411
Tel: (304) 258-1977
Tel: (301) 639-5238 (cell)
emtrisko7@gmail.com

Counsel for Petitioner International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, AFL-CIO

/s/ Grant F. Crandall
Grant F. Crandall
General Counsel
UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA
18354 Quantico Gateway Drive
Triangle, VA 22172
Tel: (703) 291-2429
gcrandall@umwa.org

Arthur Traynor, III
Staff Counsel
UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA
18354 Quantico Gateway Drive
Triangle, VA 22172
Tel: (703) 291-2457
atraynor@umwa.org

Eugene M. Trisko
LAW OFFICES OF EUGENE M. TRISKO
P.O. Box 596
Berkeley Springs, WV 25411
Tel: (304) 258-1977
emtrisko7@gmail.com

Counsel for Petitioner United Mine Workers of America

/s/ Steven P. Lehotsky
Steven P. Lehotsky
Sheldon B. Gilbert
U.S. CHAMBER LITIGATION CENTER
1615 H Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20062
Tel: (202) 463-5337
slehotsky@uschamber.com

Counsel for Petitioner Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America

/s/ Quentin Riegel
Linda E. Kelly
Quentin Riegel
Leland P. Frost
MANUFACTURERS' CENTER FOR LEGAL ACTION
733 10th Street, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20001
Tel: (202) 637-3000
qriegel@nam.org

Counsel for Petitioner National Association of Manufacturers

/s/ Richard S. Moskowitz
Richard S. Moskowitz
AMERICAN FUEL & PETROCHEMICAL MANUFACTURERS
1667 K Street, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20006
Tel: (202) 457-0480
rmoskowitz@afpm.org

Counsel for Petitioner American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers

/s/ Karen R. Harned
Karen R. Harned
Executive Director
Elizabeth A. Milito
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF
INDEPENDENT BUSINESS
SMALL BUSINESS LEGAL CENTER
1201 F Street, N.W., Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 314-2061
karen.harned@nfib.org
elizabeth.milito@nfib.org

Counsel for Petitioner National Federation of Independent Business

/s/ Megan H. Berge
Megan H. Berge
William M. Bumpers
BAKER BOTTS L.L.P.
1299 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004
Tel: (202) 639-7700
megan.berge@bakerbotts.com
william.bumpers@bakerbotts.com

Counsel for Petitioner National Association of Home Builders

/s/ Kathryn D. Kirmayer
Kathryn D. Kirmayer
General Counsel
Evelyn R. Nackman
Associate General Counsel
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN RAILROADS
425 3rd Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024
Tel: (202) 639-2100
kkirmayer@aar.org

Counsel for Petitioner Association of American Railroads

/s/ Chaim Mandelbaum
Chaim Mandelbaum
Litigation Manager
FREE MARKET ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CLINIC
726 N. Nelson Street, Suite 9
Arlington, VA 22203
Tel: (703) 577-9973
chaim12@gmail.com

Counsel for Petitioner Energy and Environment Legal Institute

/s/ Catherine E. Stetson
Catherine E. Stetson
Eugene A. Sokoloff
HOGAN LOVELLS US LLP
555 Thirteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004-1109
Tel: (202) 637-5600
Fax: (202) 637-5910
cate.stetson@hoganlovells.com
eugene.sokoloff@hoganlovells.com

Counsel for Petitioner Denbury Onshore, LLC

/s/ Adam R.F. Gustafson
C. Boyden Gray
Adam R.F. Gustafson
Counsel of Record
James R. Conde
BOYDEN GRAY & ASSOCIATES, PLLC
801 17th Street, N.W., Suite 350
Washington, D.C. 20006
Tel: (202) 955-0620
gustafson@boydengrayassociates.com

Counsel for Petitioners Competitive Enterprise Institute; Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions; Independence Institute; Rio Grande Foundation; Sutherland Institute; Klaus J. Christoph; Samuel R. Damewood; Catherine C. Dellin; Joseph W. Luquire; Lisa R. Markham; Patrick T. Peterson; and Kristi Rosenquist

Sam Kazman
Hans Bader
COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE
1310 L Street, N.W., 7th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005
Tel: (202) 331-1010

Counsel for Petitioner Competitive Enterprise Institute

Robert Alt
BUCKEYE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS
88 E. Broad Street, Suite 1120
Columbus, OH 43215
Tel: (614) 224-4422
robert@buckeyeinstitute.org

Counsel for Petitioner Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions

Tristan L. Duncan
Thomas J. Grever
SHOOK HARDY & BACON L.L.P.
2555 Grand Boulevard
Kansas City, MO 64018
Tel: (816) 474-6550
Fax: (816) 421-5547
tlduncan@shb.com
tgrever@shb.com

Jonathan S. Massey
MASSEY & GAIL, LLP
1325 G Street, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20005
Tel: (202) 652-4511
Fax: (312) 379-0467
jmassey@masseygail.com

Counsel for Intervenors Dixon Bros., Inc., Nelson Brothers, Inc., Wesco International, Inc., Norfolk Southern Corp., Joy Global, Inc., and Peabody Energy Corporation in Support of Petitioners

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

1. This document complies with the type-volume limits of Fed. R. App. P. 27(d)(2) because, excluding the parts of the document exempted by Fed. R. App. P. 32(f), this document contains 2,299 words.

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/s/ Peter D. Keisler
Peter D. Keisler

Counsel for Petitioners

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that, on this 6th day of April, 2017, a copy of the foregoing response was served electronically through the Court's CM/ECF system on all ECF-registered counsel.

/s/ Peter D. Keisler
Peter D. Keisler

Counsel for Petitioners