

West Virginia is one of the most centrally managed states in the nation. The power of government rests more in Charleston than in its 55 county seats or myriad municipalities. As power and spending grow on the state government level, local government units are left with less power and resources. While the Charleston-centric arrangement may be good for politicians – especially members of the Legislature – it poses some real problems for the folks back home.

County and municipal governments, limited in how they can raise revenues, often have to scramble to finance and manage necessary government functions. While government minimalists applaud such an arrangement, local elected leaders find themselves unable to provide what many see as essential services.

This week, The State Journal's Beth Gorczyca Ryan reported on the sad condition of law enforcement in many rural West Virginia counties. Local sheriff's departments struggle to keep cars and deputies on the road.

Relieved of managing county jails, sheriff's still must transport prisoners to regional jails.

While they maintain their duties as tax collectors and the like, some sheriffs have all but given up on law enforcement, leaving that responsibility to the West Virginia State Police.

Again, some may see that arrangement as satisfactory, but are our citizens – especially those who live outside of municipalities – adequately served? Perhaps not. That's this week's report suggests.

West Virginia is not the only state to struggle with providing essential government services to

make difficult decisions fundamental services

Coal has become an intensely competitive industry that operates against a backdrop of uncertainty. Federal courts in West Virginia have concluded the **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** has not complied with federal law when it comes to issuing permits for surface mines.

The Corps' legal entanglements – the result of persistent and highly motivated environmental groups – have jeopardized the employment of hundreds of southern West Virginia miners, the viability of businesses that support the coal industry and investment in future coal development.

A plaintiff's recent decision to in a lawsuit against a Logan County mountaintop mine

The federal court may be right in its interpretation of the federal law. But the result is not right. The law must be changed.

In 1999, in the wake a federal decision that threatened mountaintop mining and any other activities that required the construction of valley fills, West Virginia's governor stood up for coal. West Virginia's congressional delegation stood up for coal and promised to rewrite the laws to allow miners to recover coal and compete in the nation's and world's energy markets.

What happened?

Evidently, Congress' work in 1999 was only a temporary answer. Again, the coal industry in West Virginia is held hostage to plaintiffs and their legal strategy. That means coal companies have little confidence they can find a way to operate in West Virginia.

Investors see vast coal reserves – acquired in good faith – remain unearthened. Coal companies have no reason to call miners to work. Truck drivers, train engineers and barge pilots have less West Virginia coal to carry to power plants, who must turn to non-West Virginia coal as a fuel supply.

As a result, the cost of electricity stands to go up. Fewer West Virginia miners and truckers go to work.

Congress has failed

As the future of West Virginia coal appears increasingly bleak, West Virginia's leadership has been remarkably quiet. Our politicians' passion for coal and the state's economic well-being is muted now as coal-related jobs fall by the wayside.

Today, however, few are expressing any concern whatsoever. Where is the furor?

If the law is right, the law must be A nation that demands energy and a state that needs employment opportunities have a right to meet their

The result, however, is very, very wrong if the people of this state and nation value our potential as a energy state that contributes substantially to the American economy.

interpreted the law