To: R3 ORC[R3_ORC@epa.gov]; Howell, Amie[Howell.Amie@epa.gov]; lomax, bonnie[lomax.bonnie@epa.gov]; Smith, Bonnie[smith.bonnie@epa.gov]; Brown-Perry, Kinshasa[Brown-Perry.Kinshasa@epa.gov]; Libertz, Catherine[Libertz.Catherine@epa.gov]; Sternberg, David[Sternberg.David@epa.gov]; Heron, Donna[Heron.Donna@epa.gov]; schafer, joan[schafer.joan@epa.gov]; Koffi, LaRonda[Koffi.LaRonda@epa.gov]; Mohollen, Laura[Mohollen.Laura@epa.gov]; Miller, Linda[miller.linda@epa.gov]; Ferrell, Mark[Ferrell.Mark@epa.gov]; Mackey, Megan[Mackey.Megan@epa.gov]; frankel, michael[frankel.michael@epa.gov]; egan, patrick[egan.patrick@epa.gov]; Seneca, Roy[Seneca.Roy@epa.gov]; White, Terri-A[White.Terri-A@epa.gov]; damm, thomas[Damm.Thomas@epa.gov]
From: Smith, William (Region 3)
Sent: Wed 1/15/2014 8:17:51 PM
Subject: "Hurrah for Feds" in W.Va.

Accolades in the W.Va. Gazette for federal assistance with the recent Elk River spill

http://www.wvgazette.com/Opinion/Editorials/201401130031

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Hurrah for feds

For years, most West Virginia politicians have painted U.S. regulators as evil, saying that federal pollution laws suppress business.

For years, most West Virginia politicians have painted U.S. regulators as evil, saying that federal pollution laws suppress business.

Now, however, leaders suddenly see the "feds" as rescuers helping West Virginia cope with the Elk River chemical leak that halted safe drinking water for 300,000 people.

Gov. Tomblin asked President Obama for a national disaster declaration, and state emergency officials turned to U.S. authorities for information about the little-known pollutant that caused the calamity.

Keep this in mind, the next time a conservative politician denounces federal "interference" in West Virginia pollution issues.

Meanwhile, the Elk pollution mess raises some troubling questions:

First, it's disturbing that a bankrupt Charleston businessman with a criminal record was involved with the decrepit Freedom Industries tank farm, where safety controls were so weak they allowed 7,500 gallons of hazardous fluid to pour into the river.

As reporter David Gutman revealed, founder Carl Lemley Kennedy II first was convicted of cocaine violations in the 1980s, then he filed for bankruptcy in 2005 and pleaded guilty to tax evasion and failure to give the government more than $1 million in taxes he had withheld from employee paychecks. He drew a federal prison term.

Should executives like this be connected to chemical firms with the potential to contaminate the water supply of 300,000 West Virginians?

Second, it's disturbing that West Virginia and Kanawha County officials ignored a recommendation by the U.S. Chemical Safety Board that the Kanawha Valley region create a better safeguard against chemical threats.

As reporter Ken Ward Jr. revealed, after a fatal 2008 explosion at an Institute plant, the federal board proposed a "Hazardous Chemical Release Prevention Program" for the Charleston vicinity. But the plan never was funded or activated.

The 2014 water crisis is almost over. As soon as safe drinking water is restored, state and local leaders must get busy on renewed efforts to protect the public.

For starters, they might stop denouncing federal rules against pollution, and express gratitude for U.S. help in this emergency.