

A look at Michael Myer's Sunday column (March 31)

On weekends, Editor Michael Myer usually has a column in either the Saturday *Intelligencer* or the Sunday *News-Register*. While I've not kept statistics, his political targets are frequently the policies of the Obama Administration, politicians who are not as right wing as he is, Obama, those who are part of the "war on coal," Obama, liberals who are ending civilization as we know it, and of course, Obama. As an editor, you would think that Myer would be very careful with the kinds of support that he uses to back up his claims. My experience, in occasionally checking his sources, has been that he sometimes uses vague and questionable sources. So, let's examine the Michael Myer column for March 30, "Committing Economic Suicide."

Myer begins:

We Americans often are accused of not keeping up with more "progressive" folks in slashing our use of coal. We're supposed to feel inferior, somehow, because we haven't stopped using the most economical means of generating electricity.

Don't believe it. A few weeks ago, I was among a group of newspaper people listening to an energy policy analyst. She asked us if we knew what country imports the most U.S. coal.

China, you think?

Wrong. It's Germany. Yes, Germany, home to one of the most militant "green" movements in Europe.

His first paragraph contains his obligatory cheap shot at liberals or "progressives" (they are "so-called.") Looking at his support, note what he does in the second paragraph – he does not identify his source or whom she works for. Why not tell us who she is or who she works for so that the reader can decide if she might be biased? (My hunch is that the source is not a neutral one, otherwise Myer would have used her name and the source. If I had to take a guess it would be that she works for Murray Coal or the coal industry.) Most importantly, look at what she claims – that Germany imports the most U.S. coal. Is this correct? If you google "U.S. coal exports," the first source listed is the U.S. Energy Information Administration and if you go to their site you will find a list of countries and how much coal they import from us. Was Germany first? No, they were ninth in 2013 and seventh in 2012. How hard would it have been to check the policy analyst's assertion? (It took me two or three minutes to find the data.) Shouldn't an editor be checking her assertion? I guess not if there's a chance it won't support his already-formed conclusion.

Myer additionally asserts that Germany has increased its coal use from 44% in 2012 to 45.5%. Those numbers check out but he doesn't explain all of the story. Under Germany's Energiewende, the country is attempting to move away from nuclear and

coal to renewable energy sources. Nuclear dropped from 15.8% to 15.4% and renewable sources increased from 22.8% to 23.4% in the same period. (Yes, over 23% from renewable.) Why did coal use go up? Coal's gain comes at nuclear's loss as the U.S. Energy Information Administration notes:

Although coal is Germany's most abundant indigenous energy resource, its role in the country's energy mix, albeit significant, has been decreasing steadily over time. However, coal use has increased since the Fukushima reactor accident since it can be used as a substitute for nuclear power in electricity generation.

Finally, Myer compares U.S. coal production with China which produces four times what we do. His numbers are accurate but the conclusion that he draws from this is that because we are looking at alternatives to coal, we are committing "economic suicide." Maybe he needs to take a closer look at the vibrant German economy where renewable sources of energy now cover almost one-fourth of Germany's energy needs.