

Curbing Cronyism in the Mining Industry while Protecting the Public Interest

By Chelsea Hodgkins, EV policy advocate, before the [Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resource](#) of the House Committee on Natural Resources,

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Written Testimony

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Chelsea Hodgkins, and I am the senior EV supply chain policy advocate at Public Citizen, a national public interest advocacy organization with over 1 million members.

Mining is already the most toxic industry in the United States. Domestic operations are governed by gold rush-era laws, subsidized by billions of public dollars, and cause long-lasting harm to the environment, communities near mines, and public health more generally.

President Trump's minerals policy worsens these harms, undermines efforts to improve U.S. industrial capacity, and ushers in more corporate corruption and cronyism.

It will enrich this administration's allies with handouts of taxpayer dollars while destroying the environment and violating human rights. This agenda makes the United States more vulnerable, not stronger.

As written, the bills under consideration, particularly the Finding ORE Act and the SECURE Minerals Act, will institutionalize President Trump's misguided minerals policies, enrich mostly foreign-owned mining companies, reduce environmental protections, and risk exposing the United States to supply chain and economic disruptions. Instead, Congress must consider high-road mineral policy that builds domestic industrial capacity, secures important supply chains, and protects the environment and communities.

President Trump's mineral policy is enriching corporations and his political allies with taxpayer dollars at the expense of our public lands, health and wellbeing while exposing the United States to economic risk.

A recent Public Citizen [analysis found](#) that 13 companies seeking to mine the nation's public lands—including several Australian and Canadian corporations—spent more than \$8.4 million to lobby federal agencies and Congress over the past two years alone.

The mining industry's lobbying efforts have resulted in a profit bonanza with public dollars. Since the beginning of the President's second term, the federal government has made sizable investments in six mining and minerals processing projects in exchange for equity stakes. For example, last month, the Trump Administration announced a \$1.6 billion loan and investment in mining firm USA Rare Earth Inc.

These equity stakes have resulted in increased stock values and generous payouts for Trump's billionaire friends and mining executives.

The use of taxpayer money to buy ownership stakes in mining projects creates a conflict of interest that incentivizes the government to push mining without proper environmental,

ethical, and community input standards and puts public lands and tribal nations at risk of harm.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and President Trump are already promoting the opening of public lands for a new gold and minerals rush. A January 2025 [executive order](#) expedited federal permitting for mining while exempting projects from requirements under the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act. In June 2025, the Interior Department [rolled back](#) mining standards and opened up national forests and public lands to expand mining areas.

Investments in mining without investments in mineral circularity weaken U.S. competitiveness.

Doubling down on new mining projects may hinder the growth of an internationally competitive, circular minerals industry in the United States. China supplies [60% of rare earth elements globally](#), is a leading refiner of 19 out of 20 strategic minerals with an [average market share of 70%](#), and accounts for [two-thirds of global battery recycling capacity growth](#) since 2020.

The United States is the largest consumer market in the world, and innovations in material substitutions and recycling could help the country become more competitive globally while building industrial capacity and creating jobs. The Trump administration's "mine, baby, mine" policy overlooks strategic investment opportunities in infrastructure, like battery recycling, that are sustainable jobs for future generations and reduce climate-warming emissions. Its approach will also make mining more expensive. The [IEA](#) has reported that without the uptake of recycling and reuse, mining capital requirements would need to be one-third higher.

Uplifting the power of innovation, research, and investments in material substitution and battery chemistries would simultaneously curb the need for new mining and create the type of supply chain resilience that competes more effectively with the Chinese mineral supply chain.

The bills under consideration do not create the incentives needed to build out this high road circular economy for minerals. Instead, they facilitate conflicts of interest and create loopholes that could be further exploited in the future.

SECURE Minerals Act

The SECURE Act, if passed, will waste billions of taxpayer dollars to benefit corporations and the President's cronies while polluting the environment and putting Americans' public health at risk.

The Act would establish the Strategic Resilience Reserve Corporation of the United States (the Reserve) as a government corporation with the power and authority to shape and control the U.S. minerals market. This body would have similar powers as public agencies, including to issue regulations and purchase public lands for natural resource

exploitation and related infrastructure. The Reserve would be financed with an initial \$2.5 billion of U.S. taxpayer dollars and managed by a presidentially appointed Board.

Giving authority to the President to appoint Board members puts the Board's work at risk of partisan political priorities more than data-driven market needs. This Reserve would hand President Trump the opportunity to give his supporters power to direct public dollars to projects that personally enrich themselves while destroying our natural environment.

Additionally, unlike public agencies, the Reserve would not be subject to strong congressional oversight or transparency requirements. The Reserve's Board has discretion to forgo public notices of meeting and publishing meeting notes if it deems their content proprietary or sensitive.

These records are also exempted from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and related State, Tribal, and local open government and transparency laws.

The Finding ORE Act

The Finding Opportunities for Resource Exploration (ORE) Act would create memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between the U.S. and partner countries to jointly map and develop critical minerals and rare earth elements abroad.

This bill establishes a right of first refusal for U.S. companies and foreign allied companies to exploit discovered mineral resources in partner nations, thereby facilitating a new wave of dispossession in the Global South.

The bill also fails to clearly define human rights and environmental standards that projects must adhere to or clear criteria for how standards will be selected for projects. In doing so, it opens the door for weak reporting and accountability requirements regarding companies' social, environmental, and labor practices. This will harm communities, destroy the environment, and undermine high quality, safe jobs for workers.

Instead of acquiescing to Trump's vision of a mineral rush that results in a profit bonanza for the mining industry, Congress should push for a strategic and forward-thinking minerals policy that helps build our industrial base, promotes recycling and reuse over new mining, creates real economic benefits for local communities, and respects human rights and the environment.

There are four key strategies for building out a forward-thinking, responsible minerals policy.

First, Congress should take full account of public subsidies for mining before appropriating more funds to the mining industry. Congress has the responsibility to ensure public dollars are being used responsibly and for the common good.

Second, we need a clear roadmap of the priority sectors, strategic material needs, and safeguards that will facilitate a high-road industrial policy for minerals that prioritizes worker and community prosperity and environmental sustainability, not corporate profit.

Third, Congress should invest in generative solutions, like circularity, re-mining, and resource substitution. These create compounding benefits such as reducing the impacts of new mining, creating good-paying jobs, and keeping materials in domestic supply streams, which supports overall national security and U.S. competitiveness and economic resilience.

And lastly, any project funded with public dollars should have strong, legally binding, enforceable labor, human rights and environmental protections. At a minimum, contracts and the project developer must be made subject to good governance provisions, local hire requirements, full transparency of contract terms, tax payments to host countries, and strong Congressional oversight.