

Senate hearing examines U.S. reliance on foreign sources of minerals

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Industry and agency experts examined the United States' increasing dependence on foreign sources of minerals on March 28. The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a [hearing](#) to explore opportunities to rebuild and improve the supply of critical minerals in the United States.

Critical minerals are a group of elements that are essential to the economy and vulnerable to disruptions in supply. These include rare earth elements and other metals which are vital for the production of cars, cell phones, and medical imaging technology.

In her opening statement, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) emphasized the importance of developing mechanisms to track which minerals which are critical in use and susceptible to supply disruptions, fixing the permitting system to reduce delays for new mines, and promoting research into alternatives, efficiency, and recycling options.

According to Murray Hitzman, of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), in 2016 the United States was entirely reliant upon foreign sources for 20 mineral commodities, 8 of which were identified as critical. During the hearing, experts highlighted the potential threat of foreign mineral dependence to our nation's growth, independence, and national security. They identified several areas for potential improvement, including permitting processes, extraction techniques, and domestic mapping and exploration.

Another issue highlighted during the hearing was a lack of qualified workforce in the mining sector. Over the next ten years, an estimated 70 percent of mining engineers will retire, causing a shortage of skilled workers in the industry. Dr. Rod Eggert from Colorado School of Mines suggested that increased funding for research grants would help inspire new engineers. Sen. Murkowski also indicated that developing environmentally responsible mining practices would be necessary in order to gain permission to extract minerals.

Testimony from this hearing will inform the content of the [American Mineral Security Act](#), which is expected to be re-introduced later this year.

Source: Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
