

## Murkowski bill to overhaul minerals and mining regulations

May 12, 2015

On May 12, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (ENR) held a hearing to consider the American Mineral Security Act of 2015 (S. 883). The bill, introduced by ENR Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), would increase support for minerals science, information, and forecasting within the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) Mineral Resources Program and attempts to streamline the permitting process for mines in an effort to minimize dependence on foreign sources of critical minerals. The bill addresses concerns over America's dependence on mineral imports, especially rare earth elements (REEs) from China that are critical to renewable technologies and defense operations. The bill focuses on assessing America's own mineral supplies and creating a system for determining which minerals should be deemed "critical." At the hearing, Ed Fogels of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources admitted that even in a heavily mineralized state like Alaska, not all of the state resources have been mapped. USGS Director Suzette Kimball agreed that mapping the nation's resource supplies is needed.

The bill still received mild opposition from USGS and some Democrats, with Dr. Kimball expressing concerns over the feasibility of some of the new requirements proposed for USGS under current funding levels. Senator Al Franken (D-MN) raised environmental concerns over the bill, and Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-WA) requested an update to the industry's hardrock mining standards; she did not see the need for an update to the permitting process.

Along with mining reforms, Chairwoman Murkowski and industry supporters hope the bill will boost mineral workforce development and education. The Chairwoman has also expressed hope for additional funding for mineral recycling and the search for mineral substitutes that would lessen our dependence on foreign mineral supply.

Sources: E&E News, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

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