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The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals heard testimony mostly in favor of H.R. 1937, the National Critical Minerals Act (NCMA), on June 25. During the hearing, the bill's sponsor, Representative Mark Amodei (R-NV), cited the need to speed up the permitting approval process for mining in order for America to remain economically competitive. Mark Fellows of SNL Financial and Luke Russell of Hecla Mining Company, both testifying as mining industry representatives, echoed Amodei's statements. Jeffery Green, a national security expert, testified that the United States should further develop domestic mines to remain independent of negative geopolitical influence.

According to the testimony, new mining permits take 20 years on average to be approved by state and federal governments and this makes planning difficult for mining companies. The NCMA would standardize the amount of time for the permitting process, directing agencies to conduct environmental impact assessments in parallel instead of sequentially. Russell noted that Canada and Australia have similar environmental standards and are able to approve mine permits in 3 years.

This fast tracking of mine permits would apply to critical minerals as defined by the new legislation, which differs from the Department of Energy and USGS definitions. Under the broader new definition, any hard rock that is mined could be classified as critical and thus eligible for regulatory fast tracking. Sam Kalen, a law professor at the University of Wyoming, and Representative Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) expressed concern about the redefinition because they viewed it as circumventing preexisting regulation, thus creating potential environmental risk.

Source: Committee on Natural Resources

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