



**Testimony of Brian Somers
President, Utah Mining Association
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Wednesday, March 12, 2025**

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Heinrich, Senator Curtis, and other members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to testify. My name is Brian Somers and I am the president of the Utah Mining Association (UMA). UMA was founded in 1915 and advocates for Utah's hardrock, coal, and industrial mineral mine operators and related support industries. UMA works closely with the National Mining Association and other state and regional industry groups.

Mining is a critical industry in Utah, contributing \$7.7 billion to the state's GDP, supporting nearly 57,000 direct and indirect jobs¹, and powering Utah's broader economy by producing the coal which provides 62% of Utah's low-priced electricity². Mining jobs in Utah are family- and community-sustaining jobs with mining salaries averaging 46% more than the average Utah wage³.

The recent actions of China to ban or restrict the export of critical minerals or mineral processing technologies which they control should highlight the need to strengthen our domestic mining and mineral processing capabilities and re-shore critical mineral supply chains. Of the 10 minerals or mineral groups currently subject to Chinese export bans or restrictions—rare earth elements, antimony, germanium, gallium, graphite, tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, molybdenum, and indium—Utah has the capacity to produce nine. Utah is currently producing rare earth elements, tellurium, and molybdenum. Utah has proven—and very rare—primary resources of germanium, gallium, and indium, and significant historical production of antimony, tungsten, and bismuth.

According to the Utah Geological Survey, Utah hosts 40 of the 50 critical minerals on the Department of Interior's current critical minerals list. 40 of the 50 critical minerals in just one state—admittedly one blessed with an unusually rich and diverse mineral endowment.⁴ Add proven resources, occurrences, and historical production of critical minerals in other states and

¹ McCarty, T.J., Wang, Z., Kim, M., and Evans, J., 2022, The economic contribution of Utah's energy and mining industries: Utah Geological Survey Miscellaneous Publication 176, 12 p., 4 appendices, <https://doi.org/10.34191/MP-176>

² <https://www.nei.org/resources/statistics/state-electricity-generation-fuel-shares>

³ <https://jobs.utah.gov/jsp/utalmis/#/industry/list>

⁴ Mills, S.E., and Rupke, A., 2023, Critical minerals of Utah, second edition: Utah Geological Survey Circular 135, 47 p., <https://doi.org/10.34191/C-135>

there is little reason the U.S. should as dependent as it is on foreign critical mineral supply chains—again, with our geopolitical adversary, China, as the dominant global producer.⁵

Our current situation is the result of a lack of investment in and support of our domestic mining and mineral processing industries, as well as outright market manipulation by China and other foreign mineral producers. The U.S. mining industry is committed to responsibly developing our mineral resources, and it is appropriate that the U.S. has stringent labor, safety, financial, and environmental regulations. However, these regulations must also be rational, stable, economically feasible, and not misaligned with the regulatory environments in other free and developed nations with major mining industries—nations like Canada and Australia.

A report last year from S&P Global found that the U.S. had the second longest timeline in the world for developing a new mine. The report found that it takes an average of 29 years for a mine “...to go from discover to production in the United States, longer than any other country except Zambia.” The report states:

“The development of a mine in the U.S. is not only long and costly, it is unusually uncertain. While developing a mine in Canada or Australia can also take a long time...those mines do reliably enter production. In the U.S., even if mines receive all required permits, they are subject to higher litigation risk. Uncertainty and litigation risk may explain why exploration budgets committed by investors to Canada and Australia over the last 15 years have been 81% and 57% higher than to the U.S.”⁶

If the U.S. is to have any chance of becoming self-sufficient in supplying its own critical mineral needs, Congress and the federal government must commit to real permitting reform, litigation reform, ending federal land and mineral withdrawals, reviewing the diminishment of state primacy for the enforcement of federal labor and environmental laws, reversing the decline of mining engineering programs in U.S. universities, providing grants for research into new mineral extraction and processing technologies, and providing incentives to attract more mineral exploration and other mining investment in the U.S.

A positive first step is the recent introduction of the Critical Mineral Consistency Act of 2025 by Chairman Lee and Senator Kelly. This act will end the misalignment between the Department of Interior’s critical minerals list and the Department of Energy’s critical materials list. If the act is passed, it will have a positive effect on Utah as we have proven fluorine resources (fluorine is on the DOE list but not the DOI list) and because Utah is a major copper-producing state.

⁵ U.S. Geological Survey, 2025, Mineral commodity summaries 2025 (ver. 1.2, March 2025): U.S. Geological Survey, 212 p., <https://doi.org/10.3133/mcs2025>

⁶ https://cdn.ihsmarket.com/www/pdf/0724/SPGlobal_NMA_DevelopmentTimesUSinPerspective_June_2024.pdf

In fact, Utah is home to one of the largest and most productive copper mines in the world, the Rio Tinto Kennecott Bingham Canyon Mine. Rio Tinto Kennecott is not only a world-class copper operation—and has one of only two working copper smelters in the U.S.—it is also Utah’s largest producer of critical minerals, currently producing tellurium, platinum, and palladium, and with the potential to produce rare earth elements, indium, germanium, gallium, and many more critical minerals through secondary recovery.

The example of Rio Tinto Kennecott highlights the fact that many critical minerals are co-mingled with base metals, precious metals, and other mineral commodities, and why we must not only support and invest in new mines, but also expand production and secondary recovery at existing mines and mineral processing facilities.

Another Utah success story on this front is the Energy Fuels White Mesa Mill in Blanding, Utah. The White Mesa Mill is the last functioning conventional uranium mill in the U.S. and which is now also processing monazite, a mineral byproduct which contains uranium but also high concentrations of rare earth elements. Using an existing and already-permitted facility—and a high dose of rural Utah ingenuity—the White Mesa Mill has created the most advanced rare earth element processing operation outside of China, a great step toward ending that nation’s stranglehold on the rare earths supply chain.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to highlight some of Utah’s success stories and to discuss how the federal government can better support state efforts to lead on the critical minerals front. I look forward to any questions from the committee. Thank you.

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