

LISA MURKOWSKI, Alaska, *Chairman*

JOHN BARRASSO, Wyoming  
JAMES E. RISCH, Idaho  
MIKE LEE, Utah  
JEFF FLAKE, Arizona  
STEVE DAINES, Montana  
CORY GARDNER, Colorado  
LAMAR ALEXANDER, Tennessee  
JOHN HOEVEN, North Dakota  
BILL CASSIDY, Louisiana  
ROB PORTMAN, Ohio  
LUTHER STRANGE, Alabama

MARIA CANTWELL, Washington  
RON WYDEN, Oregon  
BERNARD SANDERS, Vermont  
DEBBIE STABENOW, Michigan  
AL FRANKEN, Minnesota  
JOE MANCHIN III, West Virginia  
MARTIN HEINRICH, New Mexico  
MAZIE HIRONO, Hawaii  
ANGUS S. KING, Jr., Maine  
TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois  
CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO, Nevada

COLIN HAYES, STAFF DIRECTOR  
PATRICK J. McCORMICK III, CHIEF COUNSEL  
ANGELA BECKER-DIPPMANN, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR  
SAM E. FOWLER, DEMOCRATIC CHIEF COUNSEL

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

[WWW.ENERGY.SENATE.GOV](http://WWW.ENERGY.SENATE.GOV)

March 27, 2017

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to nominate an economic geologist to be the next Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and to request that you help us move the agency to a better path during your administration. We believe both steps are critical to improving our nation's mineral security and to meeting the goal of your recent order for steel to be domestically sourced.

When Congress established the USGS in 1879, the agency was instructed to assist in the "classification of the public lands and examination of the geological structure, minerals resources, and products of the national domain."<sup>1</sup> Despite the clear directives in its Organic Act, however, the most important charge for the USGS – the surveying of our nation's mineral resource base – is today being severely shortchanged. After a broad reorganization in 2011, the agency's Mineral Resources Program is now just one part of one of its seven mission areas, and accounted for just 4.6 percent of its total budget in Fiscal Year 2016.<sup>2</sup>

The lack of attention and resources devoted to domestic minerals has allowed our dependence on foreign sources to grow dramatically. The most apparent example of this is rare earth elements, which are fundamental to everything from smart phones to missile systems, but it now extends to a much wider range of minerals that are fundamental to our nation's infrastructure.

In 2016, the U.S. imported at least 50 percent of its supply of at least 50 minerals and 100 percent of its supply of 20 minerals, including many are essential components of building technologies or materials.<sup>3</sup> For example, graphite, manganese, niobium, tantalum, and vanadium are used to make steel. Fluorspar is consumed in cement production. Tantalum is used to make electronics for cars. Cesium is a component of oil and gas wells, solar cells, and aircraft guidance systems. Arsenic and thallium are used in telecommunication systems. These minerals are key components in the objects that we use to drive and power our economy, yet the United States imports its entire supply of them.

<sup>1</sup> Organic Act of March 3, 1879 (43 U.S.C. 31).

<sup>2</sup> [https://edit.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/FY2017\\_USGS\\_Budget\\_Justification.pdf](https://edit.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/FY2017_USGS_Budget_Justification.pdf) and [https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/FY2017\\_BIB\\_BH053.pdf](https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/FY2017_BIB_BH053.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/mcs/2017/mcs2017.pdf>

The long-term demotion of mineral work has put our economic and national security at risk. But this can be fixed, and that starts by having the right leadership in place at the USGS. We must restore the mineral supply chain in the United States, and one of our first steps must be the collection of the basic data needed give us a true understanding and reliable inventory of the location and extent of America's mineral base.

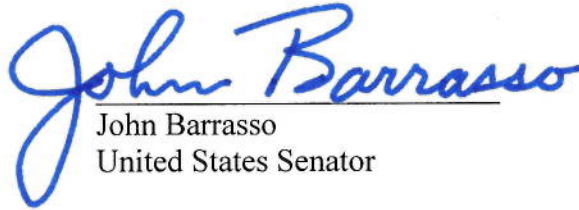
We strongly believe that having an economic geologist at the head of the USGS will embolden the agency to re-prioritize its original minerals mandate, and thereby allow the United States to take much-needed action to restore our mineral security. If we can achieve that, the benefits that follow for our manufacturing sector, economic growth, and international competitiveness will all be substantial.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and hope that you will swiftly nominate a well-qualified economic geologist to be the Director of the USGS.

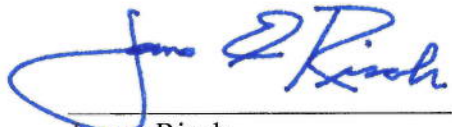
Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski  
Chairman



John Barrasso  
United States Senator



James Risch  
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy  
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Interior  
William Werkheiser, Acting Director of the U.S. Geological Survey