



Statement for the Record

**The United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber,
Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and
Service Workers International Union (USW)**

for the

U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Field Hearing on

**“Protecting Workers and Powering America: The Future of
Mining”**

May 8, 2026

Chairman Walberg, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, on behalf of our 850,000 members, we want to thank you for holding this important hearing on the issues facing the mining sector.

Background

The United Steelworkers union (USW) is one of the largest mining unions in both the United States and Canada, representing 30,000 miners between the two countries. In the U.S., we are the largest union in metal/nonmetal mining. Our members work in both underground and open-pit mines extracting and processing iron ore, copper, nickel, limestone, clay, sand, talc, potash, salt, trona, silver, gold, and other minerals and materials.

Beyond our density in the mining sector directly, we also have particular interests throughout the supply chain. As the largest manufacturing union in North America, our members across sectors rely on the critical minerals and materials sourced from U.S. and Canadian mines.

It is with these unique equities in the mining industry that we provide the following comments.

We Share the Goal of Revitalizing the Domestic Mining Sector

Throughout our nation's history (whether in coal or metal/nonmetal settings), unionized mining jobs have been sources for high wages — especially in rural communities. Some of our mining members' earnings range from \$50,000 to \$100,000 per year before overtime. Also due to strong collective bargaining agreements, these members have a robust set of benefits, including retirement plans, health/dental/vision insurance, paid time off, profit sharing, and more.

In addition to providing good union jobs, the mining industry also plays a critical role in our nation's economic supply chain. Whether it be the coal used to power our integrated steel mills, the limestone necessary to create cement, or the lithium that goes into batteries, much of our modern economy fundamentally relies on abundant access to critical minerals and materials. This will only become more true in the coming years, especially as we attempt to build out the 21st century economy of wind turbines, solar panels, electric vehicle (EV) batteries, and more — all of which rely heavily on these mined inputs. As such, we support policies that will responsibly bolster domestic supply of these critical materials and minerals.

Given the importance of this sector, our union has constantly been pushing companies and policymakers to establish a system that promotes — not deters — responsible investment in the mining industry. For example, in recent years our union has been partnering with Talon Metals, a company with a pending nickel mine and

processing facility in Minnesota and North Dakota, respectively. We also have worked with Rio Tinto to help realize a new copper mine project in Arizona, which if completed, could potentially provide up to 25 percent of total U.S. copper demand¹ — a prime example of reshoring a critical part of the supply chain. Beyond the employer-specific agreements, our union has long participated in groups like the BlueGreen Alliance and the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA). Through that work, we have been — and will continue — advocating for pro-mining policies, including permitting reform and others.

We appreciate the Committee's focus on this important industry and stand ready to work with you on policies that can accomplish this shared goal.

However, Safety Standards Can Never Be Compromised

With all of that said, we also want to speak to issues that are of particular relevance to this Committee's jurisdiction: namely, workplace health and safety. Simply put, worker safety can never be traded in exchange for speeding up the development of domestic mining capacity. In fact, our union would strongly argue that promoting strong health and safety practices is vital to ensuring a successful revitalization of the industry.

Mining remains one of the most dangerous industries in the country: according to the 2026 AFL-CIO *Death on the Jobs* report, mining has consistently ranks second in terms of highest workplace fatality rates by sector over the past 15 years.² Concerningly, the Department of Labor's Inspector General just released a report that found that the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) "may be insufficiently prepared to handle multiple simultaneous mine emergencies or a larger mine emergency, such as a mine disaster."³ As such, we urge this Committee to push for more funding and staffing at MSHA to ensure that they can carry out their duties to protect our miners.

Moreover, it's also worth pointing out that these tragic death statistics do not even account for the many injuries and illnesses associated with working in mining. For example, silica poses a major threat to miners in both coal and metal/nonmetal settings. Multiple independent academic studies and government reports have found that miners' exposure to silica presents a major health risk. In an earlier MSHA proposed rulemaking, the agency states that "based on [an] extensive review of the health effects literature", unsafe silica exposure is clearly linked with "material health impairment due to the risk of developing silicosis, lung cancer, and renal disease."⁴

¹ [Rio Tinto](#), "Resolution Copper completes historic land exchange", March 16, 2026.

² [AFL-CIO](#), "Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect", April 2026.

³ [U.S. DOL Office of Inspector General](#), "Despite Past Success, MSHA's Mine Emergency Response Preparedness Hampered by Persistent Issues", April 30, 2026.

⁴ [U.S. DOL Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#), "Federal Registers – Lowering Miners' Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica and Improving Respiratory Protection; Proposed Rule", July 13, 2023.

To address this crisis, we urge the Committee to pass legislation that would codify the strong final rule issued by MSHA back in 2024.

While it is vital to give MSHA sufficient staffing and funding resources and to enact a strong silica protection standard, much more is needed to ensure that any expansion of the mining sector does not put workers' well-being in harm's way. Specifically, our union calls for the reintroduction and passage of the Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act, which would enact a number of key health and safety updates to our nation's laws.

Conclusion

In closing, our union clearly has a vested interest in the successful continuation (and hopefully expansion) of the domestic mining industry. Given our direct membership in the sector, along with our indirect interests further along the supply chain, we know the importance of enacting policies that keep the United States competitive in a 21st century economy that relies on critical mined inputs. We have, and will continue, to advocate for policies that do just that.

However, we must also prioritize and protect worker safety in the process. This is a red line for our union, and no domestic mining expansion can come at the expense of strong health and safety protections. For those reasons, we will continue to push for adequate funding for MSHA, strong health and safety standards for threats like silica, and holistic mine safety reforms like those embodied in the Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments and look forward to working together on this important issue.