

Chairman Alan S. Lowenthal
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Legislative Hearing:

Uranium Mining: Contamination and Criticality
June 25, 2019

The Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources will come to order.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on the legacy and future of uranium mining, and on H.R. 3405, Chairman Grijalva's Uranium Classification Act of 2019.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member or their designees.

I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5:00 pm today. [*pause*] Hearing no objection, so ordered.

First, I would like to welcome to our witnesses and thank them for being here today.

Stop me if you've heard this one before: a sector of the mining industry is in decline, and the Trump Administration steps in to try to bail it out.

Turns out this isn't unique to coal. It's also the situation with uranium.

Over the past two years, the Trump Administration has bent over backwards to make the uranium industry's wish list come true.

Just look at the steps they've taken.

Shrinking Bears Ears National Monument.

Recommending lifting the withdrawal on new uranium claims around the Grand Canyon.

Possibly imposing a domestic quota for uranium in the next few weeks.

And labeling uranium as a “critical mineral.”

The argument we hear is that we need to secure “critical minerals” for “national security.”

But the Department of Defense, whose job it is to ensure our national security, has not identified uranium supply as a risk to our national security.

The Department of Defense does classify climate change as an “immediate risk” to national security, but the administration is in no hurry to address that.

No, the Administration is in a hurry to shrink national monuments and declare uranium a critical mineral.

The fact is, a “critical” mineral is not the same as an important mineral.

Even the President, who has a hard time with simple definitions such as for the word “fake,” seems like he understands this.

In 2017, he signed an Executive Order that provided a definition of a critical mineral, and it’s actually pretty good.

Under that E-O, a critical mineral must be a “non-fuel mineral” or “mineral material,” and it must be vulnerable to a supply chain disruption.

Uranium doesn’t meet any of these requirements.

Uranium is not a mineral material. That is defined in law as a common mineral like sand, gravel, or crushed stone.

Uranium certainly isn't a non-fuel mineral, since it has been defined in law as a *fuel* mineral since 1970.

Yes, we do import most of our uranium.

But over half of our uranium supply comes from Australia and Canada.

Let me be clear: uranium doesn't meet the definition of a critical mineral set by the E-O, or by anyone else.

Arbitrarily classifying uranium as a critical mineral and declaring it a matter of national security is just a way for the Trump Administration to speed new mine permitting and prop up the declining uranium mining industry.

We don't need to speed up new uranium mines.

We do need to clean up the thousands of abandoned uranium mines that date back to the beginning of the Cold War.

We haven't come close to cleaning up abandoned uranium mines or addressing the ongoing public health issues they cause.

Most of these abandoned mines – over 500 of them – are on the Navajo Nation.

These mines contaminate groundwater, crops, livestock, and homes, and have severe impacts on the health of the Navajo people.

But we haven't cleaned up these abandoned uranium mines because we don't have a dedicated source of funding.

The environment suffers, American taxpayers suffer, but most of all the Navajo suffer, just as they have for decades.

Calling uranium a critical mineral as an excuse to bypass our environmental laws and encourage new mining won't solve these problems. They'll just make them worse.

With that, I look forward to the testimony from our witnesses, and I now recognize Ranking Member Gosar for his opening statement.