

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

February 3, 2022

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

The military tensions in and around Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan could have serious impacts on the United States' critical mineral supply chains.

At the beginning of January, anti-government protests in Kazakhstan turned violent, resulting in hundreds of deaths¹ and leading Kazakhstani authorities to call in the Russian military.² Backlash against the protestors has been fierce, with around 10,000 people detained and some allegedly facing death threats from government-backed forces.³ The Biden administration's response has been referred to as "toothless," illustrating that the President's "idealistic words alone are insufficient" to lead on the world stage.⁴

Almost simultaneously, Russia increased its military pressure on Ukraine, amassing more than 100,000 troops along the Ukrainian border, prompting the U.S. Department of Defense to place 8,500 troops on high alert and ready to deploy in response to a crisis in the region.⁵ While the Biden administration continues to fall short of its responsibility to lead a coordinated response to this growing international crisis,⁶ conditions in the region have deteriorated such that the White House confirmed that Russia could invade Ukraine "at any point."⁷ These escalations, and the Biden administration's failure to lead a global response, present an unknown number of risks to Europe and the rest of the world.

¹ Abdusalil Abdurasulov, "Kazakhstan unrest: 'If you protest again, we'll kill you,'" BBC News, January 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-60058972>.

² "Kazakhstan: Why are there riots and why are Russian troops there?" BBC News, January 10, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-59894266>.

³ Abdusalil Abdurasulov, "Kazakhstan unrest: 'If you protest again, we'll kill you,'" BBC News, January 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-60058972>.

⁴ Ingrid Burke Friedman, "Kazakhstan Exposes the Central Flaw of Biden's Foreign-Policy Doctrine," Foreign Policy, January 13, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/13/kazakhstan-csto-tokayev-biden-foreign-policy-democracy-autocracy/>

⁵ Robyn Dixon, David L. Stern, Isabelle Khurshudyan and John Hudson, "Russia moves troops and U.S. sends weapons as fear of war mounts in Ukraine," The Washington Post, January 25, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/25/ukraine-russia-nato-biden/>.

⁶ Michael Crowley and Steven Erlanger, "Biden Strengthens Words on Ukraine After Flustering European Partners," The New York Times, January 20, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/20/world/europe/ukraine-biden-eu.html>.

⁷ Shannon Pettypiece, "White House warns Russian invasion of Ukraine may be imminent," NBC News, January 18, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/white-house-warns-russia-invasion-ukraine-may-be-imminent-n1287649>.

One of many concerns is the effect these continued international crises will likely have on global supply chains, including for minerals sourced from these countries and the surrounding area. As you work to finalize the Department of the Interior's (DOI's) Final Critical Minerals List of 2022, we strongly encourage you to consider the prolonged unrest in the region and its potential impacts on mineral supply chains in your determination of which resources to include.

As you know, the Energy Act of 2020 (later included in Public Law No: 116-260) defines a "critical mineral" as a resource "the supply chain of which is vulnerable to disruption (including restrictions associated with foreign political risk, abrupt demand growth, military conflict, violent unrest, anti-competitive or protectionist behaviors, and other risks through-out the supply chain)," in addition to other qualifications.⁸ This makes the risk of supply chain disruptions a required consideration when evaluating minerals to include on DOI's List of Critical Minerals.

The 2021 Draft List of Critical Minerals was released on November 9, 2021, months before the period of elevated unrest involving Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. Unfortunately, the growing instability in the region and the Biden administration's confused response to these crises have increased uncertainty for a number of mineral supply chains. Resources listed as "critical" on the draft list are known to have insecure supply chains, by definition, but this recent unrest has also greatly affected resources that were not listed, such as helium and uranium.⁹

For example, Russia is a major producer of helium, and, as markets are already stressed by the upcoming closure of the Federal Helium Reserve in the U.S.,¹⁰ Gazprom's helium plants were expected to help ease global supply concerns in 2022.¹¹ However, recent fires and an explosion at Gazprom's Amur facility demonstrates how irresponsible it is to rely on Russia to meet the world's need for an element essential to medical imaging, high tech computing, semiconductor manufacturing, telecommunications and metal fabrication worldwide.¹² Similarly concerning, Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of uranium, and any supply disruptions due to the humanitarian and diplomatic crisis unfolding there could have vast effects on global markets.¹³ As it stands, about 97 percent of U.S. demand for uranium is met by foreign imports, despite a large domestic supply and repeated calls by Members of Congress for the Biden Administration to develop our own natural resources at home.^{14 15 16}

⁸ Energy Act of 2020, Section 7002(c)(4)(A).

⁹ 86 FR 62199.

¹⁰ Bureau of Land Management, "BLM ANNOUNCES DISPOSAL PROCESS FOR FEDERAL HELIUM SYSTEM," Press Release, April 16, 2020, <https://www.blm.gov/press-release/blm-announces-disposal-process-federal-helium-system#:~:text=In%20accordance%20with%20that%20law, follow%20its%20statutory%20disposal%20process.>

¹¹ Phil Kornbluth, "Kornbluth: Latest Amur fire tightens helium supply for 2022," Gas World, January 17, 2022, <https://www.gasworld.com/kornbluth-latest-amur-fire-tightens-helium-supply-for-2022/2022514.article>.

¹² Vladimir Soldatkin, "Russia's Amur gas plant says a unit caught fire," Reuters, January 5, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-amur-gas-plant-says-unit-caught-fire-2022-01-05/>.

¹³ "Uranium sector monitors evolving Kazakh situation," World Nuclear News, January 7, 2022, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Uranium-sector-monitors-evolving-Kazakh-situation>.

¹⁴ U.S. Energy Information Administration, Uranium Marketing Annual Report, <https://www.eia.gov/uranium/marketing/table3.php>.

¹⁵ Letter to Secretary Granholm from Rep. Henry Cuellar and Rep. Vincente Gonzalez. April 15, 2021.

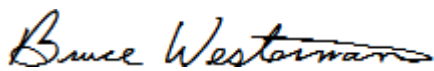
¹⁶ Volcovici, Valerie. U.S. House votes to protect 3 million acres of land from development. Reuters. February 26, 2021.

The lukewarm response from this administration regarding Russia's menacing behavior has been too slow and insufficient to mount a strong deterrent. Secretary Blinken may have threatened "a swift, a severe and a united response" should Russia invade Ukraine, but without an administration-wide willingness to address this challenge on every front, these strong words will remain hollow.¹⁷ By not using every tool at its disposal to bolster domestic mineral production, this administration is passively enabling our continued reliance on Russia and other adversaries for helium, uranium, and other mineral resources.

The relationship between national security and stable mineral supply chains is clearer now than ever as the world watches Eastern Europe continue to destabilize and the administration's response remains tepid. Careful selection of the mineral commodities included on DOI's Final List of Critical Minerals is an important aspect of ensuring a reliable supply of these necessary resources. As you continue your required consultations with the Secretaries of Defense, Commerce, Agriculture, and Energy and the U.S. Trade Representative, we urge you to bear in mind the troubling developments in Europe and the impacts of this administration's anemic foreign policy in your finalization of the 2022 List of Critical Minerals.

We appreciate your attention to this vital matter.

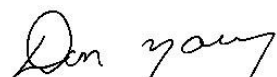
Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



Pete Stauber
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral
Resources



Don Young
Ranking Member
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the
United States



Russ Fulcher
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests,
and Public Lands

¹⁷ Jessica Bursztynsky, "Secretary of State Blinken warns of severe response if a single Russian force enters Ukraine in an aggressive way," CNBC, January 23, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/23/secretary-of-state-blinken-warns-of-severe-response-if-a-single-russian-force-enters-ukraine-in-an-aggressive-way.html>.



Cliff Bentz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and
Wildlife



Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



Garrett Graves
Member of Congress



Jody Hice
Member of Congress



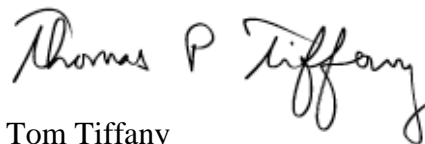
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Member of Congress



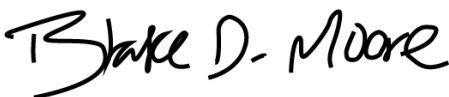
Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



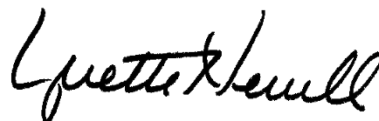
Jennifer González-Colón
Member of Congress



Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress



Blake Moore
Member of Congress



Yvette Herrell
Member of Congress

Secretary Haaland

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Jay Obernolte
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Lloyd Austin, Secretary, U.S. Department of Defense
The Honorable Thomas Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Gina Raimondo, Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
The Honorable Jennifer Granholm, Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy
The Honorable Katherine Tai, U.S. Trade Representative
The Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Chair, House Committee on Natural Resources
Dr. Dave Applegate, Acting Director, U.S. Geological Survey

Enclosure