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April 24, 2026

United States House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
ATTN: Honorable Pete Stauber, Chairman; and Honorable Yassamine Ansari, Ranking Member
1333 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

RE: Letter for the Record; April 29 Subcommittee Hearing “*Powering the 21st Century with American Copper*”

Dear Chairman Stauber, Ranking Member Ansari and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Montana Mining Association (MMA), I thank you for the opportunity to provide this letter for the Congressional record. Given our state’s past, present and future in copper mining, we are thrilled your subcommittee is focusing on the vital importance of domestic copper to our nation’s future prosperity, "*Powering the 21st Century with American Copper.*"

MMA is the trade association for Montana’s mining industry, now representing nearly 200 members in all aspects of mining in the Treasure State, with critical minerals producers that include the nation’s only platinum group metals facility (Sibanye Stillwater <https://www.sibanyestillwater.com/about-us/about-pgms/>), the U.S.’s only antimony smelter (U.S. Antimony Corporation <https://www.usantimony.com/uamy-production-facilities>) and many suppliers and service providers that make responsible mining for critical minerals – including copper – in Montana possible.

Historically, Montana supplied more of America’s copper than anywhere else when we arguably needed it most – during the electrical industrial revolution and through WWI and WWII. An old state legislator from Butte – known as “the Richest Hill on Earth” because of its vast copper production – routinely quipped that if not for Butte’s copper, “we all might be speaking German or Japanese.” He was only half joking!

Montana Resources’ Continental Pit in Butte still employs over 400 workers who responsibly produce copper concentrate (also molybdenum and silver) 24-7-365 and has the mineral reserves to keep going for at least another 30 years (<https://www.montanaresources.com/>). And true to our name the “Treasure State” has mineral resources that extend far beyond Butte.

The Black Butte Copper project (Sandfire Resources America <https://blackbuttecopper.com/>) in White Sulphur Springs is the latest large scale mine to earn a permit in Montana – the first one in 30 years – and is getting nearer to production. And while this project is certainly a model for responsible mining in the 21st century, it has also been a model for why there is a need for permitting and judicial reform if we are serious about domestic mining. It’s taken the company

over 15 years and two litigation victories appealed before Montana's Supreme Court to get a permit. Both projects are in Congressman Downing's district and I'm sure he'd agree.

In addition to Montana Resources and Black Butte, Montana has two other copper projects that are on the Federal FAST-41 list: Hecla's Libby Exploration Project (<https://libbyexplorationproject.com/>) and the Blue Copper Project by Falcon Copper (<https://falconcopper.com/projects/#1>). Sadly, one of them is already being litigated by a group of NGOs, even though the project is only at the exploration stage and has years to go before a mine could be economically justified and properly designed.

It is my understanding that your subcommittee is aware of a January 2026 S&P Global report, "*Copper in the Age of AI: the Challenges of Electrification*," which emphasizes how sufficient, reliable, and affordable domestic production of copper is vital for national and economic security. The report details growth in global demand and projects a major supply shortfall by 2040 if significant actions aren't taken to increase primary copper supply. I add emphasis to primary – that is, newly permitted and developed copper mines – because new mines are absolutely necessary in order to meet our domestic (and global) demands. According to the S&P report, “while recycling could possibly meet up to a quarter of total demand by 2040, it cannot close the gap – *primary mined supply remains essential*.” We should recycle all that we can. But we must mine more in America, where our safety, labor and environmental standards are the best in the world.

Further, if we as a nation do not increase our smelting, refining and manufacturing capacity in line with new mines, we are not solving anything and we are giving the greatest economic benefits of beneficiation or upscaling of the raw materials we produce to other nations, primarily our geopolitical adversaries. China currently leads the world in copper smelting and refining capacity and is continuing to invest in growth. Encouragingly, the current administration rightfully recognized that reliance on imports for copper constitutes a national security risk and has imposed trade actions to protect and encourage domestic smelting and refining. However, this can only become feasible if we make the permitting reasonable and are willing to invest, both financially and socially as a nation to bringing the downstream components of our mineral supply chains home.

Americans are consuming the metals more than anyone; we know we treat our workers more fairly and safely and are more responsible about our air, land and water resources than other jurisdictions where copper and other metals are produced. Therefore, we have a social and I would argue moral duty to make sure we lead the responsible mining movement in the 21st century by example. No more allowing developing nations and our adversaries to cheaply and haphazardly produce and sell us what we use and need as a nation to flourish, while pretending not to know that children are being exploited and environments – places just as special as anywhere in America – are being irreparably harmed along the way. The standards we hold our mining industry to operating at in America are the product of the lessons we learned along the

way to winning World Wars because of places like Butte. Those days are gone here, and so should us consuming metals produced by these outdated and irresponsible means.

Montana is proud to lead the industry with innovative regulations that other jurisdictions have yet to formally adopt, like its global-leading tailings storage safety standards; its innovative Hard Rock Mining Impact Act, which includes measures that minimize the economic and social impacts of large mining projects to small rural communities; and the community benefit agreement examples of Stillwater's Good Neighbor Agreement and Black Butte's Meagher County Stewardship model.

As a nation, we also need to continue to invest in our workforce, through expansions of measures like the Mining Schools Act, which benefits institutions like Montana Technological University. We also need to expand our education efforts from our general public, so they understand how our industry operates in 2026, all the way down to our students in grade school so they know that mining is an exciting and admirable career choice. If all the problems with policies and permitting were fixed and the litigation reform was settled tomorrow, America would still be looking to bolster the workforce necessary to drive future growth in the mining industry. It is currently forecasted that half of the existing mining workforce will retire by 2029 and 71% of companies report that talent shortage is a key reason they are unable to meet production targets.

In higher education in 2024 there were 327 degrees awarded at the U.S.'s 14 recognized mining and mineral engineering schools – a 39% net drop since 2016. Conversely, China currently has 44 mining schools graduating more than 5,000 students annually.¹ These sorts of shortfalls in labor and talent take significant time and focus to address and we need to start making up ground more quickly. The most direct way to address the existing and coming shortfalls is to get more mines exploring, developing and operating so that the next generation of our society understands the needs and the excellent opportunities for them in this challenging and exciting industry.

In closing, we again thank you for the opportunity to provide this information for the record and for your subcommittee's interest in focusing on this vital topic of concern. Your leadership in understanding the risks and working to address how we can improve our policies to resolve them is admirable. Montana stands ready to be part of the solution so that we can responsibly develop our vast mineral resources and help reestablish a secure American supply chain for copper and other critical minerals.

Make no mistake: this critical minerals focus is no "contrived crisis," as I recently heard a representative of an environmental NGO incredulously contend in the media. That is exactly what our adversaries would love for us to believe. In fact, if we continue to drag out good projects at home through litigation indefinitely, two things are likely: 1) companies will invest in lesser projects to be developed more rapidly and less responsibly in somebody else's "special areas" just so we can continue to get our metals, and 2) if we keep it up, we may be speaking Chinese before we know it.

¹ Figures from the National Mining Association presentation, "Mining Workforce & Trends" at the MMA 2024 annual meeting.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have and to staying engaged should you address this topic further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Vincent", is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Matt Vincent
Executive Director