Utah Mining Association

April 29, 2026

The Honorable Pete Stauber
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Yassamin Ansari
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
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Dear Chairman Stauber and Ranking Member Ansari:

On behalf of the Utah Mining Association, thank you for holding today's oversight hearing, "Powering the 21st Century with American Copper." The hearing is timely because copper is no longer simply an industrial input; it is a critical mineral that underpins electrification, digital infrastructure, water systems, transportation, defense technologies, and the power networks needed to support artificial intelligence and economic growth.

S&P Global's January 2026 report which will be discussed in the hearing explains why congressional oversight is warranted now. S&P projects global copper demand to rise by 50 percent, from 28 million metric tons in 2025 to 42 million metric tons by 2040, while warning that the market could face a 10 million metric ton shortfall by 2040 without meaningful supply expansion. The report further emphasizes that copper's central role in electrification, digitalization, and security makes it an indispensable material whose constrained supply and concentrated processing capacity could become a bottleneck to growth and innovation.

The Subcommittee's hearing memorandum properly frames the national stakes. It notes that copper is essential for wiring, circuitry, motors, communications devices, home appliances, vehicles, water delivery systems, medical uses, and advanced military applications, and it underscores that reliable and affordable supplies of copper are indispensable to national security, energy security, and U.S. economic competitiveness. The memo also highlights a second urgent concern: As global demand grows because of electrification, AI, manufacturing, and defense needs, China's dominance in copper processing creates geopolitical leverage that the United States should not ignore.

These realities point to a straightforward conclusion: America needs more domestic copper production, more domestic processing capacity, and more policy certainty for projects that can be developed responsibly under strong environmental and labor standards. S&P Global concludes with a message which the mining industry has long advocated: That even aggressive recycling cannot close the projected supply gap on its own, and that streamlining mine development, expanding processing capacity, and fostering investment and innovation across the copper value chain are all necessary to build a resilient supply chain.

Utah is well positioned to help meet that challenge. Our state has a long history of responsible mineral development, a skilled workforce, established mining industry, and policymakers who increasingly recognize that minerals such as copper are foundational to modern energy systems, manufacturing, and national security. Utah has long held the position as the second-largest producer of copper in the U.S. Utah's copper producers already demonstrate the diversity of projects and operating models that can contribute to the domestic supply chain.

Rio Tinto Kennecott remains Utah's most prominent example. Kennecott is one of the largest copper operations in the world and has supplied copper and other essential minerals for over 123 years. They continue to show how large-scale domestic mining can support American manufacturing, grid infrastructure, and strategic supply chains. Kennecott is a completely vertically integrated producer going from mine to finished pure copper cathodes in the same operational footprint. Critically, it also operates one of the U.S.' remaining three copper smelters.

Rio Tinto Kennecott has long been a prodigious producer of copper, and it is also Utah's largest supplier of other critical minerals which are produced as a byproduct of its copper operations, including silver, platinum, palladium, and tellurium, and strategic minerals such as gold, selenium, and molybdenum. Kennecott is actively in engaged in researching opportunities for producing more critical minerals from processing and waste streams including germanium, gallium, indium, bismuth, rare earth elements, and more.

As Congress considers how to reduce import dependence and strengthen mineral security, long-lived operations such as Rio Tinto Kennecott illustrate the value of maintaining and modernizing existing domestic production centers close to U.S. workers, rail, power, and downstream customers. Using Kennecott as an example, Congress should also consider measures to protect the U.S.' remaining smelter and expand smelting capacity, and explore ways in which the federal government can incentivize increasing critical mineral production from existing, permitted operations via secondary recovery.

Milford Mining is another example of Utah's importance to the domestic copper supply chain. Milford Mining is a mid-sized copper producer in rural Beaver County, Utah. The company has publicly stated that intends to invest $100 million in a long-term infrastructure initiative to expand its operations in Utah in response to accelerating copper demand. Milford Mining operates in an area of Utah with prolific historical mineral production and illustrates the value of brining modern mining methods to bear in historical mining districts with continued mineral potential. Milford Mining also recently announced a partnership Rio Tinto Kennecott to have some of its copper ore smelted at the Kennecott smelter, underscoring the role that smaller and mid-sized producers can play alongside larger legacy operations in diversifying and expanding American mineral supply.

Utah also offers examples of next-generation copper investment. The hearing memo notes that Mariana Copper One in Utah restarted production in 2026 (just last week, in fact) with a focus on advanced software and end-to-end autonomous operations, allowing operators to optimize drilling, haulage, blending, and energy use while incorporating both mined ore and scrap feedstocks into processing. That kind of innovation matters because it

can improve efficiency, reduce costs, and help extend the useful life and productivity of domestic mineral assets at a time when the nation needs more copper, not less.

Similarly, Mariana Copper One reflects how Utah can serve as a proving ground for advanced mining technologies and new production models. Projects that combine modern mine planning, autonomous systems, and more flexible processing approaches can strengthen domestic output while improving the competitiveness of U.S. operations in a tightening global market.

Both Mariana Copper One and Milford Mining also represent the importance of mining operations to rural areas. According to data from the Utah Department of Workforce Services, miners earn significantly higher wages than the county average wage in rural counties with major mining operations. In Beaver County where Milford Mining operates, miners earn 63% more than the average county wage. In San Juan County where Mariana Copper One operates, miners earn 95% more than the average county wage.

Utah has not waited on the sidelines as these supply-chain pressures have mounted. The state has developed practical policy tools to encourage new production and the infrastructure needed to support it. One of the most important is the High Cost Infrastructure Tax Credit, which supports projects that expand or create new industrial, mining, mineral processing, and manufacturing activity and that involve major infrastructure investments such as energy delivery systems, water delivery systems, roads, pipelines, electric transmission, railroads, and other linear infrastructure. The program also has provisions specific for increasing investment in mineral operations by incentivizing permanent underground mining infrastructure and mineral processing facilities.

That structure is especially significant for mining in rural Utah, where infrastructure costs can determine whether a promising mineral deposit becomes a producing mine. By helping offset the cost of essential enabling infrastructure, the High Cost Infrastructure Tax Credit can improve project economics, attract capital, and move mineral resources closer to production. Utah has also promoted mineral development through the Mineral Exploration Tax Credit, which has helped signal that the state welcomes responsible investment in finding and advancing new mineral resources.

The Utah Legislature built on this pro-development approach during the 2026 General Session by passing Senate Bill 254, Extracted Natural Resources Amendments, which was signed into law on March 26, 2026. The introduced bill states that Utah's policy related to critical minerals is to pursue market-based solutions while using public policy to accelerate market activity, diversify supply chains, encourage in-state value-added processing, support geological and mineral data development, and strengthen the state's strategic position in critical mineral development.

Senate Bill 254 creates a Critical Minerals Council comprised of representatives from state government, the legislature, industry, and academia which will provide statewide strategic planning and oversight of Utah's critical minerals efforts. The bill requires state regulators to provide accelerated permitting for critical minerals operations, and created Critical Minerals Zones with enhanced infrastructure and development incentives for critical minerals operations.

Senate Bill 254 also creates and appropriates money for the Minerals for Industrial, National, and Economic Security (MINES) Center. The MINES Center would provide large-scale, open-access infrastructure capable of

validating critical minerals processing technologies under continues operations using real feedstocks. Today, the United States has strong capabilities in discovery, resource assessment, and laboratory-scale technology development. However, the nation lacks sufficient infrastructure to demonstrate integrated processing technologies at commercially relevant scale before full industrial deployment. The MINES Center is designed to help close that gap and serve as a model for further national investment in increasing the U.S.' mineral processing capabilities.

Senate Bill 254 is important not only because of its policy direction, but because it reflects Utah's recognition that extracted resources are central to economic growth, energy reliability, and national security. Together with Utah's existing tax-credit tools and welcoming regulatory environment for responsible mineral development, the bill sends a clear message that the state intends to remain competitive in attracting investment for copper and other critical minerals.

From the Utah Mining Association's perspective, today's hearing should reinforce several core priorities for federal policymakers. First, Congress should continue to pursue permitting reform so that projects can move from discovery to production on timelines consistent with national need rather than being delayed for decades. Second, the federal government should support domestic processing, smelting, and refining capacity so that more U.S.-mined copper ore can be beneficiated here at home instead of being exported into foreign-controlled processing systems. Third, federal policy should complement state-led innovation by recognizing the role of tax incentives, infrastructure planning, workforce development, and modern mining technologies in expanding responsible domestic supply.

Utah stands ready to be part of the solution. From Rio Tinto Kennecott's large-scale production base, to Milford Mining's planned expansion, to Mariana Copper One's technology-driven restart, our state offers tangible examples of how domestic copper production can be increased in support of national priorities. With aligned federal and state policies, Utah can continue contributing copper and other critical minerals needed to power the 21st century with American resources, American workers, and American ingenuity.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your attention to the importance of domestic copper production. The Utah Mining Association looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to advance practical policies that strengthen U.S. mineral security, support responsible resource development, and ensure that copper remains an enabler of American prosperity rather than a constraint on it.

Sincerely,

Brian Somers
President
Utah Mining Association