

House Committee on Energy and Commerce
February 7, 2023, Joint Hearing of the
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security and the
Subcommittee on Environment, Manufacturing, and Critical Materials
“Unleashing American Energy, Lowering Energy Costs, and Strengthening Supply Chains”

Responses to Submitted Questions for the Record

Katie Sweeney

Executive Vice President and General Counsel, National Mining Association

The Honorable Rick W. Allen

1. Permitting is a primary hindrance to securing our mineral supply chains. Can you describe another key hinderance – a qualified and robust mining workforce?

a. How can we support our workforce to ensure we have the tools and the women and men necessary to achieve our energy and security objectives?

Sweeney Response: A strong domestic mining workforce is critical to the success of American economic competitiveness, national security, and emissions reductions for our current and future generations. Unfortunately, nearly all mining company have highlighted worker shortages and trouble with recruiting enough qualified and skilled workers as an issue affecting their business. This is in both skilled trades and also professional occupations like engineers, geoscientists, and metallurgists. In addition, the industry is experiencing increasing labor shortages due to retirements, with increasing numbers of workers nearing retirement age.

Modern mining is a people first industry that supports the communities where we live and work. Mining depends on a 21st century workforce to drive innovation while continuing to prioritize health and safety and working to reduce environmental impacts. To do this, we must recruit, educate, train, and develop tomorrow's workforce today, giving them the tools they will need to meet the challenge head on.

Coordinated federal, state, local, and industry efforts are needed to address this issue and invest in the mining workforce. The National Mining Association strongly supports federal actions to support the recruitment and training of a robust domestic mining workforce, specifically:

- The bipartisan and bicameral Mining School Act, which directs the Department of Energy, in coordination with the Department of the Interior, to establish a competitive grant program for mining schools to support recruitment and education opportunities for engineers and other qualified professionals in the field of mining.
- The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 authorized DOE under Section 7002(K) to promote a secure and robust critical minerals supply chain by requiring the Secretary of Labor and the Director of the National Science Foundation to develop curriculum and an interdisciplinary program for institutions of higher education to strengthen the workforce for exploration and development of critical minerals and critical minerals manufacturing. The program will be designed to support the critical mineral supply chain and improve the ability of the United States to increase domestic, critical mineral exploration, development, production, manufacturing, research, including fundamental research into alternatives, and recycling.
 - To date, no funding has been appropriated for these activities. NMA encourages Congress to support these activities and fully funding the authorized amount under Sec. 7002(K) at \$50 million annually through FY 2029.

The Honorable Mariannette Miller-Meeks, M.D.

The draft bill "to prohibit the importation into the United States of unirradiated low-enriched uranium that is produced in the Russian Federation, and for other purposes" currently includes waiver authority until January 2028, meaning that

the Secretary of Energy can authorize imports to sustain U.S. nuclear reactors or operations, or if it is in the national interest. In January 2028, imports of low-enriched uranium from Russia will no longer be allowed under any circumstances. I agree that importing uranium from Russia even in select circumstances needs to be limited, but Mrs. Sweeney, I am interested to get your thoughts on 2028 as the cutoff point.

1. Would you say waiver authority until January 2028 is reasonable, or does this timeline need to be adjusted?

Sweeney Response: Our uranium import dependence is a case study in how our vital domestic minerals supply chains have atrophied to levels that result in a dire national security risk. The U.S. is home to the world's largest fleet of nuclear power plants, significant uranium reserves, and yet we import virtually all of the uranium we use – half of which comes from Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Aggressive action must be taken to address this vulnerability and immediately reinvest in American-sourced, essential mined materials produced under world-leading environmental and labor standards.

As we continue to rely on Russia's artificially low-priced uranium to supply U.S. commercial reactors, domestic uranium production and employment are at levels not seen since the dawn of the nuclear industry in the 1940s. The Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act (H.R. 1042) is a lifeline providing needed certainty to supply chains in the future, however, given the precarious state of the front-end of America's nuclear fuel cycle, it is urgent that Congress and the Department of Energy take immediate action to support and fully fund the Strategic Uranium Reserve. This reserve will ensure the availability of nuclear fuel in the very likely event of a market disruption. Further, it will preserve our uranium production capabilities and provide a means to supply the U.S.-origin uranium required for defense programs, which currently rely on stockpiles that are finite and diminishing.

2. What actions would Congress need to take to prepare for an end to all imports of Russian LEU by January 2028?

Sweeney Response: Congress must fully fund the Strategic Uranium Reserve, as recommended by the U.S. Nuclear Fuel Working Group and originally proposed by the Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Energy to address our nation's overreliance on imported uranium that has undermined energy security and impacted fuel supply capabilities. The time to act is now while we still have the infrastructure and licensed capacity in place to begin supplying the uranium reserve, capabilities, and human resources that would take decades and enormous financial commitments to rebuild if lost.

3. What means at the federal level would be needed for the U.S. to withstand a ban on all imports of Russian LEU even earlier than January 2028?

Sweeney Response: Continued funding of \$150,000,000 annually to support the Strategic Uranium Reserve will support the uranium mining and conversion industries, further ensuring that energy and national security supply chains will not be impacted by the loss of Russian uranium imports.