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Hastings: Obama Administration Once Again Blocks U.S. Energy Production, Costs American Jobs

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) released the following statement regarding Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's announcement to impose a 20-year ban on uranium mining on one million acres of federal land in Arizona:

"The Obama Administration is putting politics above American jobs and American energy security by blocking mining on what is the most uranium-rich land in the United States. Safe and responsible mining of this land could have produced thousands of high paying, family wage mining jobs. The United States is already 90 percent dependent on foreign sources of uranium and this decision only exacerbates our foreign dependence by locking up our own clean energy resources.

"This unilateral, arbitrary decision is an extreme action that is not based on science. The Department's own Environmental Impact Statement does not justify the withdrawal and studies have shown that uranium mining outside the park's border can be done safely with negligible environmental impacts. We can responsibly mine while still protecting the environment. It doesn't have to be the all or nothing approach that the Administration has unfortunately decided to take."

Background:

Since July 2009 the Obama Administration has imposed a unilateral moratorium on new uranium mining on one million acres of land in Arizona. This Arizona strip contains the highest-grade known uranium deposits remaining in the United States, representing 40 percent of our nation's domestic uranium resources.

The Administration's decision to withdraw these areas from uranium mining terminates a long-standing agreement, forged through compromise between mining interest and environmental groups, and carried out through bipartisan legislation that became law in 1984. The agreement allowed certain areas in Arizona to be protected through Wilderness designations, while others were to remain open for uranium production.

In April 2011, the Arizona Geological Survey [wrote a letter](#) to Arizona Governor Jan Brewer with a [report](#) on the safety of uranium mining near the Grand Canyon. The study concluded that:

- “Even the most implausible accident would increase the amount of uranium in the Colorado River by an amount that is undetectable over amounts of uranium that are normally carried by the river from erosion of geologic deposits.”
- “Even if the entire annual uranium production from an operating mine were somehow implausibly dumped into the river, the resulting increase in uranium concentration in river water would increase from 4.0 to 12.8 parts per billion (ppb) for one year, which is still far below the 30 ppb EPA Maximum Contaminant Level.”
- “We believe the fears of uranium contamination of the Colorado River from mining accidents are minor and transitory compared to the amounts of uranium that are naturally and continually eroded into the river.”

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