

Ranking Member Westerman Opening Statement – May 24, 2022

Today, the Subcommittee will consider H.R. 2794, sponsored by Chair McCollum. I strongly oppose this deeply misguided and harmful legislation.

This bill would put over 234,000 acres in the Iron Range of Northern Minnesota permanently off limits to mineral development. Specifically, this legislation is designed to stop development of the Twin Metals mining project, which could generate 180 tons of copper, nickel, cobalt, and platinum group metals. As my colleagues across the aisle are aware, these very minerals will experience staggering demand growth in the coming decades due to increases in renewable energy and battery storage.

We hear often Congressional Democrats talk about the importance of so-called bedrock environmental laws, such as the National Environmental Policy Act, and about the necessity of “following the science.” But H.R. 2794 flies in the face of that position. This bill completely circumvents the NEPA process, banning development before we can even evaluate the proposed operation. Twin Metals submitted a Mine Plan of Operation to the Bureau of Land Management in 2019 – why not take a look at that instead of preemptively blocking off the entire area? This bill is simply an effort to codify the unlawful, politically-motivated actions taken by the Obama Administration, and now the Biden administration, to kill this project without fair review.

In the last days of the Obama administration, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior began a mineral withdrawal of over 234,000 acres in Minnesota, and failed renewed mineral leases that have been in place for over 50 years.

Even Senator Klobuchar agrees with me on the political nature of these decisions. In an email to then Secretary Vilsack, the Senator said

this matter “should have been handled through the normal process,” and that she “truly believed a thorough EPA review would have told us if it is safe or not, but other considerations prevailed.”

I couldn't agree more. I was extremely disappointed to see the Biden administration follow the same steps in the anti-mining playbook. Mere days after my colleague, Congressman Stauber, and I sent a letter to Secretary Haaland asking her for fair consideration of the project, the administration decided to reinstate the Obama-era mineral withdrawal. In January, the Department doubled-down and cancelled Twin Metals' mineral leases.

Does the Biden administration truly not see how contradictory their actions are? They are doing everything possible to block mining in the Duluth Complex, one of the best undeveloped mineral reserves on the planet. At the same time, they have invoked the Defense Production Act to support supply chains for certain minerals, and even created an Interagency Working Group “to promote the sustainable and responsible domestic production of critical minerals.” Less than two weeks ago, in this very Subcommittee, the administration testified on the importance of domestic mining to increase renewable energy development.

While I appreciate the administration's acknowledgement of reality, their words are *meaningless* if operators cannot develop the areas where mineral deposits exist. Saying you support domestic mining *in theory* is not enough. We cannot recycle our way to a carbon-free grid. We cannot morally allow continued imports from countries with unacceptable environmental and labor standards, without even trying to maximize our resources at home. We need to break new ground. Based on China's overwhelming dominance of the entire minerals supply chain, our nation is already way behind schedule.

Instead of the preemptive, permanent withdrawal laid out in H.R. 2794, I strongly urge my colleagues to follow the science and allow the regular review process to play out uninterrupted.

I yield back.