

Rep. Rob Wittman, Opening Remarks
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Critical Minerals Policy Working Group Meeting #1
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Thank you for joining me today for the first session of our new critical mineral policy working group.

I am pleased to lead this group of Select Committee members with Congresswoman Castor as we dig into the details of the U.S. overreliance on critical mineral supply chains that the People's Republic of China dominates.

In addition to our work to educate the American public on these challenges, we will also explore opportunities to produce legislation—in conjunction with our standing Committee colleagues—to counter the Chinese Communist Party's dominance of critical minerals. We intended to build upon the Select Committee's December policy recommendations to fundamentally reset the United States' economic and technological competition with the PRC.

Now, on to today's roundtable. Critical minerals and materials are essential to the economic and national security of the United States. Whether it is the batteries in the vehicles we drive, the superalloys that maintain strength of jet engine turbine blades, the catalysts that convert oil to gasoline, or the permanent magnets used in electric motors, wind turbine, and industrial automation systems, there is simply no part of emerging technologies that do not rely on processed critical minerals.

For decades, PRC policies have aimed to concentrate rare earth elements (REE) and critical mineral supply chains in China. Export quotas and value added tax incentives on rare earth elements, vertical integration of mining and production by state-owned companies, and investment restrictions prohibiting foreign companies from extracting or refining rare earth elements in the PRC contributed to this control.

The first red flag came in 2010, when the PRC sharply reduced REE exports to Japan over a maritime dispute over the Senkaku islands. Then in 2020 the PRC restricted foreign investment in exploration and extraction of rare earths and is currently contemplating export controls on REE refinement technologies, limiting refinement outside of the PRC. On August 1st, China also imposed export restrictions on gallium and germanium, then later in the year on graphite. It is clear the PRC is eager to leverage the choke points it developed in this critical sector to harm the national security of the United States.

Congress has taken steps to reduce this reliance, but we cannot focus exclusively on the downstream production of batteries, electric vehicles, solar panels, and wind turbines—all of which rely on processed critical minerals. If even one stage of the production process remains in the PRC its chokehold on American economic and national security will remain. We must do more to unlock our resources domestically—and with allies and partners—as we also invest in the processing, refinement, and metallization of critical minerals. No step in the production process can be left in the PRC.

Today we have three terrific participants to help us explore these issues:

Abigail Wulf is the head of the American Battery Materials Initiative at the U.S. Department of Energy and one of the foremost experts on critical mineral supply chains.

Matt Sloustcher is Senior Vice President at MP Materials, one of the only companies actively mining and concentrating rare earth elements domestically in the U.S.

Abigail Hunter is executive director of the Center for Critical Mineral Strategy at Securing America's Future Energy (SAFE) where she works to secure all aspects of the critical mineral supply chain to ensure U.S. economic and national security.

With that, I turn over the floor to Congresswoman Castor.