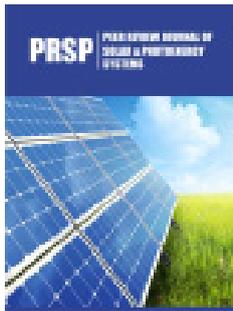


Servicing a \$6.01 Trillion Dollar U.S. Budget for 2022

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Opinion



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With approval of a 6.01 trillion-dollar fiscal 2022 budget and an expected 1.87 trillion-dollar deficit contributing to a surging U.S. national debt, the U.S. must now address how to restore the economy and regain the health and welfare of its citizens. There are practical considerations that could make vital contributions to our recovery. These are not major budget items like resolving the economic fallout from the corona virus and the securing the future of U.S. health care and environmental quality. What the U.S. Congress should do besides providing financial handouts and more deficit spending is to approve changes in the permitting process for new U.S. mines so that the country doesn't depend upon critical minerals and metals from overseas sources, especially China. The full impact of COVID-19 upon the world will prove to be epic.

Hard-rock minerals, particularly metals, are the building blocks of the U.S. economy. These processed minerals are required for health care (e.g., medical ventilators) and national defense, transportation, telecommunications, and energy technologies. The burgeoning solar industry is very dependent upon strategic minerals for which China is the major supplier. Virtually every U.S. industry must have a secure, affordable supply of these minerals.

Minerals, ranging from commodity metals like copper and magnesium to the 17 rare elements, are required in the production of critically important hardware and successful recovery of the United States. The need for minerals has grown steadily over time, but there are now serious threats to U.S. access for many of the most strategic minerals. The U.S. Congress should address and resolve this now.

Although public lands in the Western U.S. hold enormous mineral resources, the U.S. is now over 50% dependent on imports for 48 minerals. The U.S. is completely dependent for 18 of these minerals and 14 have been designated as "Critical" by the Departments of Defense and Interior. This dangerous import dependence has doubled in the past 20 years and is poised to worsen.

What's troubling about this situation is that mineral product deficiency is of U.S. making. Until the early 1990's, the United States was the world's largest producer of processed minerals. But then other countries surpassed U.S., often subsidizing foreign mining industries, while struggling U.S. mining operations couldn't compete and were closed. Today, the U.S. has only one operational rare earth mine and its ore must be shipped to China for processing. Ominously, China now controls 80% of the global rare earth market. China is the principal supplier of 26 out of the 48 minerals that the U.S. must import. At a time when the U.S. and China must negotiate terms for a mutual trade treaty, China has the advantage and may exert it.

China has made minerals production a strategic priority, while the U.S. has done just the opposite. U.S. mining has been pushed to the margins and overburdened with excessive environmental requirements. Mining anywhere in the United States has been made unnecessarily difficult and must address a permitting process that can last for decades or more.

More importantly, U.S. dependence upon foreign countries for essential minerals carries a huge cost in lost revenue and jobs that the U.S. can ill-afford now. It is a cost that can be avoided by pursuing a policy that recognizes the essential contribution that U.S. domestic resources make to our minerals supply and economy.

We cannot prudently postpone dealing with the threat to our national security and economy from the rapidly rising demand of imported minerals. Expediting the mine permitting process so

that new U.S. mines can open in three years like those in Canada and Australia would be an essential step in showing that the U.S. is prepared to deal with foreign dependence on strategically important minerals and head off shortages that could harm U.S. national defense and stifle economic growth. The U.S. Congress has a responsibility to act in the nation's best interest and recognize the threat poised by current U.S. federal and state restrictions.

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