



Committee: House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources

Event: [Powering the 21st Century with Copper](#)

Date: April 29, 2026

Executive Summary:

On April 29, 2026, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources held a hearing on the need to reshore and strengthen U.S. copper supply chains. Members of both parties agreed on the importance of reducing reliance on foreign sources, particularly China, and expanding domestic capacity across the copper value chain. Republicans emphasized increasing domestic mining production and advancing permitting reform to accelerate project development and avoid future supply shortages. Democrats highlighted the need for a strategy that includes recycling, expanded smelting and refining, domestic manufacturing, and strong environmental safeguards to ensure long-term competitiveness and public trust.

Member Toplines:¹

Subcommittee Chair Pete Stauber (R-MN-08): Stauber emphasized the importance of expanding domestic copper production to support U.S. economic growth, energy infrastructure, and national security. He pointed to projected sharp increases in global copper demand and warned of a potential supply shortfall by 2040 if the U.S. doesn't increase production quickly.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Yassamin Ansari (D-AZ-03): Ansari explained that mining alone is not enough for the U.S. to compete with China. She pointed to the U.S.' reliance on imports of finished products and raw materials from China and described it as a lost economic and national security opportunity. Ansari said that the answer to reshoring copper supply is to "mine responsibly, recycle aggressively, manufacture competitively, and build the clean energy economy in the U.S."

Full Committee Chair Bruce Westerman (R-AR-04): Westerman emphasized growing concern over copper supply constraints driven by demand growth from electrification, artificial intelligence, and infrastructure expansion. He warned that the U.S. has lost domestic production capacity over time, while China has expanded significantly. Westerman concluded that increased domestic mining, supported by permitting reform, is necessary to avoid copper becoming a bottleneck to economic growth and technological progress.

Witness Toplines:

[Daniel Yergin, Vice Chairman, S&P Global:](#) Yergin emphasized that surging global electrification will increase copper demand by roughly 50 percent within 15 years, creating a projected 10

¹ Opening statements were not available online at the time of this memo's distribution.

million ton supply shortfall by 2040 even with significant gains in recycling. He warned that China's dominance in copper processing capacity, including operating over 60 smelters, underscores the U.S.' supply chain vulnerabilities. Yergin urged policy action to accelerate domestic mine permitting, expand processing, boost copper recycling, and address workforce gaps.

[Adam Estelle, President and CEO, Copper Development Association](#): Estelle argued for an "all-of-the-above" copper sourcing strategy that includes new mining, refining, recycling, and allied trade. He highlighted the U.S.' sharp decline in copper smelting capacity, in contrast to China which controls 40 percent of global copper smelting capacity. Estelle called on Congress to pass [H.R. 8277](#) to designate copper as an applicable mineral for the advanced manufacturing production credit (45X).

[Debra Phillips, President and CEO, National Electric Manufacturers Association \(NEMA\)](#): Phillips explained that copper is indispensable to the electrical manufacturing sector and the broader U.S. energy system. She highlighted major ongoing industry investment in domestic manufacturing, but stressed that reliable, affordable access to copper is critical to sustaining that growth. Phillips called on Congress to pass the SPEED Act ([H.R. 4776](#)) and the Critical Mineral Dominance Act ([H.R. 4090](#)) to expand copper production on federal lands.

[Michele Bustamante, Staff Scientist, Natural Resource Defense Council](#): Bustamante argued that strengthening copper recycling systems, improving existing product design, and addressing processing gaps are the best ways to secure domestic copper supply. She cautioned against relying primarily on new mining to meet demand, highlighting the environmental risks associated with expanded copper extraction.

Major Takeaways:

Domestic Mining and Recycling:

- Stauber explained that even with increased recycling, the U.S. must significantly expand domestic copper mining to meet projected demand.
 - He emphasized that permitting reform is necessary to accelerate the development of copper mines at the scale and speed needed to meet growing demand.
- Rep. **Tom Tiffany** (R-WI-07) echoed Stauber's point that recycling alone is insufficient to meet increasing copper demand.
- Rep. **Luz Rivas** (D-CA-29) argued that Congress should prioritize expanding domestic copper recycling capacity over increased mining to boost supply and lower energy costs.

Clean Energy and Copper Demand:

- Ansari criticized policies that undermine clean energy development as counterproductive to strengthening domestic copper supply chains.
 - She cited canceled offshore wind leases and opposition to renewables as contributing to job losses and reduced investment in U.S. manufacturing.

- Tiffany added that many renewable energy technologies, such as wind turbines, require large amounts of copper to be built, making expanded mining vital.

China's Dominance of Copper Smelting Capacity:

- Rep. **Russ Fulcher** (R-ID-01) highlighted the sharp decline in U.S. copper smelting capacity compared to China's expansion.
- Rep. **Seth Magaziner** (D-RI-02) emphasized that the U.S.' limited domestic smelting capacity has forced companies to send their mined copper to China for processing.
 - He called on the U.S. to dramatically expand its copper smelting capability.
- Magaziner and Tiffany warned that China is both outpacing the U.S. in energy deployment and attempting to dominate global copper supply chains.
- Rep. **Mike Ezell** (R-MS-04) warned that copper shortages are straining global supply chains, particularly for transformers, and driving up utility costs for consumers.

Environmental Concerns:

- Rep. **Adelita Grijalva** (D-AZ-07) emphasized that nearly 90 percent of U.S. copper resources are located near Tribal lands, raising concerns about impacts to cultural sites, water, and air quality.
 - She opposed the Resolution Copper project, citing Rio Tinto's foreign connections, its intention to sell copper to China, and concerns that the project would destroy cultural sites at Oak Flat.
- Grijalva stressed the importance of "smart mining siting," including avoiding sacred sites for Tribal communities
 - Michele Bustamante agreed with Grijalva and acknowledged the historical harms of poorly planned resource development.
 - Grijalva called on Congress to pass her bill, [H.R. 7957](#), to protect the Tonto National Forest and preserve Tribal access to sacred lands.

Copper Theft

- Rivas and Stauber highlighted the growing problem of stolen U.S. copper being exported and then resold to the U.S. at higher prices, distorting markets and increasing costs.

Domestic Copper Production Capacity

- Rep. **Mike Kennedy** (R-UT-03) highlighted Utah's role as a major copper-producing state and emphasized the importance of expanding domestic production.
 - He pointed to the Kennecott Copper Mine, operated by Rio Tinto, as a key U.S. asset and one of only two copper smelters operating in the U.S.
- Kennedy asked how Congress can help Utah operations like Kennecott increase throughput at existing mines and smelting facilities.
 - Adam Estelle identified expanding 45X to include copper extraction via [H.R. 8277](#), along with permitting reform, regulatory certainty, and workforce support, as the most important policies to boost domestic mining and smelting capacity.