

Dear Senator _____:

I write to ask for your support to expand the Mineral Resources External Research Grants Program within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), which was started in fiscal year 2004 but is slated for elimination, along with other vital parts of the USGS Minerals Resources Program, in the proposed budget for the Department of Interior.

Each year nearly 25 tons of non-fuel mineral materials are mined for each person in the U.S. These commodities - ranging from metals to fertilizers to construction materials - directly contribute \$400 billion annually to the U.S. gross domestic product (according to USGS figures for 2004) and are fundamental to sustaining a competitive modern economy. The U.S. is the global leader in mineral consumption and must be able to produce or acquire minerals in a sustainable and responsible manner. The USGS provides scientific information and research on minerals but is increasingly unable to address national needs due to budgetary constraints and a reduction in workforce during the last 15 years. The numbers of faculty, degrees granted, and research grants funded in mineral resource programs in U.S. universities have also declined. We believe there is a dire need for increased federal investment in sustained scientific expertise to expand this critical part of our economy.

The National Research Council (NRC) has published three reports that highlight the need for federal funding of mineral-resource and related research. In 1996 (and reiterated in 2004), the NRC recommended funding an external grants program for minerals-related research within the USGS. In 2003, the NRC recommended funding a program in Material Flows, the tracking of supplies, use, and paths of minerals and other materials within the global economy, which has tremendous implications for national security.

The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, American Institute of Professional Geologists, Society of Economic Geologists, and National Mining Association have recommended funding for a Mineral Education and Research Initiative (MERIT). MERIT would be a peer-reviewed external grants program within the USGS for applied research and education in mineral resources and material-flows analysis conducted by universities, state organizations, and individuals in the private sector. This small investment will strengthen our nation's research capabilities by building external scientific expertise, and it will maintain strong educational and training programs so that we remain the world leaders in these fields. Given the current constraints on funding of federal programs, we feel that restoration of the funding for the USGS Minerals Program is needed and that funding for the external grants program at a level of \$5 million in FY2006 and \$10 million in FY2007 is an appropriate ramp-up for the external grants program, which ideally should reach a level of \$20 million per year.

Please indicate your support for the Mineral Resources External Research Grants Program in fiscal year 2006 by contacting Senator Thad Cochran, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Senator Conrad Burns, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Interior Appropriations. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
