

Coffman Offers Rare Earth Amendment to Defense Bill

(WASHINGTON) - Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO) made the following statement on the House Floor today during consideration of an amendment he has offered to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011. Coffman's amendment, which builds on the GAO report he pushed for in last year's defense bill, would require the Department of Defense to develop a plan for establishing a domestic rare earth magnet capability. Rare earth magnets are currently used in many critical weapons systems:

"The Department of Defense is facing a near-term shortage of key "rare earth" materials necessary to support our defense weapon systems, and rare earth magnets are especially critical. Currently, over 97% of rare earth production is controlled by China."

"Today, the United States does not have a manufacturer of neodymium iron boron rare earth magnets, yet they are found in our precision guided munitions, ships, aircraft, and other critical weapons systems."

"Due to my concern over this critical security issue, last year I requested a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study on rare earth materials in the defense supply chain as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010. Released on April 14, 2010, the GAO report on rare earth metals in the defense supply chain highlighted the near-term need for a sustainable supply chain of rare earths in the United States, both for critical American national defense and industrial applications."

“One key finding of the GAO report was their determination that some U.S. defense contractors are currently utilizing “neo” magnets from Chinese sources and incorporating them into the weapons platforms delivered to the Department of Defense. At present, we have almost no alternatives to these Chinese components, as the United States is not currently producing these magnets. Though America is not currently producing these magnets, we have the technological know-how to do so, combined with significant deposits of rare earths.”

“The time to address this problem is now.”

“This essential amendment will help restore America’s ability to produce domestic “neo” magnets. It requires the Department of Defense to develop a plan for establishing a domestic neodymium iron boron magnet capability, and submit it to the congressional defense committees.”

“We cannot allow our nation to be dependent on a foreign source of these critical components. This amendment will help revitalize our domestic manufacturing sector and contribute directly to our national security.”

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