FROM: Phyllis Schlafly
68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 (618)462-5415

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A STRATEGIC MINERALS POLICY

American dependence on imported oil is only a part -- and only the obvious part -- of American dependence on imported materials which are not only strategic, but absolutely essential to our standard of living. Americans may not be as consumer-oriented toward cobalt, bauxite, chromium, manganese, and platinum as they are to gasoline, but those minerals are just as important to our economy and their availability is just as tenuous.

The United States has imported more than 90% of our needs for each of those non-fuel minerals during the past several years. Unless we develop North American sources, or engage in major stockpiling, we will remain dependent on the good will of the source nations to sell to us and the good will of the Number One Navy in the world, the Soviet fleet, to leave the sea lanes open to our ships.

Those five non-fuel minerals are vital both in war and in peacetime to our transportation, electronics, manufacturing, mining, chemical processing, and construction. Whether we are talking about automobiles or tanks, jet airliners or fighter planes, housing or shipyards, we must have those minerals.

Cobalt is essential for jet engines, magnetic materials for electronics, metal cutting, and mineral tools. Zaire and Zambia account for about half of the known resources; other sources are Belgium and Finland. In 1979 we imported 97% of our needs.

Bauxite is essential to aluminum, and is also important to refractories, chemicals, packaging, mechanical equipment, and abrasives. It comes from Jamaica, Australia, Surinam, and Guinea. In 1979 we imported 93% of our needs.

Chromium is essential to metallurgical, refractory, and chemical industries. We import it from South Africa and the Soviet Union; Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) also has superior sources. In 1979 we imported more than 90% of our needs.

Manganese is essential to steel, pig iron, dry cell batteries, and various chemical processes. South Africa and the Soviet Union have 80% of the known sources; it also

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comes from Gabon, Brazil and France. In 1979 we imported 98% of our needs.

Platinum-group metals are essential to automobiles, chemical processing, the electrical industry, and petroleum refining as catalysts. South Africa and the Soviet Union have 90% of the known resources; some also come from the United Kingdom. In 1979 we imported 90% of our needs.

The strategic minerals list goes on and on. In 1979 we imported 100% of our columbium, mica, strontium, and rutile titanium. We imported more than 50% of 30 other essential minerals.

More than 98% of our imports of strategic minerals must come by water. Are we sure we can keep the sea lanes open? We used to have -- 35 years ago -- the strongest merchant marine force in the world. Today we rank a lowly tenth, and the Soviets have taken a commanding lead in both naval and merchant marine strength.

The Soviet Union is not dependent on freedom of the seas or on importing strategic minerals. The Soviet Union imports only nine critical minerals, and in no case does it import more than 50% of any mineral. Furthermore, the Soviets can get most of their imports by land rather than by sea.

One historical comparison shows our vulnerability today. During the World War II year of 1942, 25% of our ships bringing us bauxite were sunk by German submarines in the Caribbean. The Germans started World War II with 59 diesel submarines, and the U.S.S.R. has about 270 today, most of them nuclear.

Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., is hoping to raise the consciousness of his fellow Senators to realize the pressing need to create a national policy designed to ensure U.S. access to strategic minerals. He thinks we must change governmental regulations which are forcing smelters and other facilities to close their doors.

Byrd thinks that our ability to produce essential materials must not be destroyed by health and safety regulations. He doesn't want any more studies; he calls for positive action now.

American ingenuity must be permitted to mine the rich nodules of scarce materials which lie on the ocean floor between California and Hawaii. Our continued existence as a progressive industrial power depends on either the development of North American sources or the adequate stockpiling of essential minerals, or a combination of both.

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