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Washington Update: Sustainable Energy & Infrastructure — September 2026

September 01, 2026 | Article | By **John Lushetsky**, **R. Neal Martin**, John McEachern

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August turned into Critical Minerals Month as the Trump administration took several major steps to accelerate domestic critical minerals production and strengthen supply chain resilience, headlined by billions in new mining investments announced at a White House roundtable with global industry leaders. DOE followed with hundreds of millions in grants for battery manufacturing, mineral processing, and recycling capacity, while EXIM finalized new project-level financing for a number of key critical minerals. The Department of War's (DoW's) Industrial Base Program (IBP) and Economic Defense Unit (EDU) also made a number of direct investments while the DoW's Office of Strategic Capital opened applications for a new National Security Fund Finance Program, offering large-scale term loans to credit funds targeting critical minerals supply chain vulnerabilities.

On the oversight front, congressional Democrats are escalating investigations into the administration's minerals deals, citing conflicts of interest and insufficient transparency. Meanwhile, notable departures at the White House National Energy Dominance Council showed continuing flux in the White House's energy and minerals policy leadership.

Critical Minerals Roundtable Announces Over $2 Billion in Investments

On August 7, the Trump administration hosted a roundtable with mining industry leaders where they announced over $2 billion in critical mining and mining-related projects to revitalize the domestic mining industry, leveraging the US Export-Import Bank (EXIM) and the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) and direct DoW authority. Over $180 million in mining school investments to bolster the American mining workforce were also announced through the DOE and DoW. The roundtable served to highlight the 160 minerals deals totaling almost $40 billion the Trump administration has signed or approved to date.

EXIM's transactions totaled over $58 million and included a $25 million loan to Westwater Resources in Alabama for graphite, a versatile component of battery manufacturing; a $25 million loan to Global Advanced Metals in Pennsylvania for tantalum and niobium, critical minerals used in electronics, magnets, and steel production; and an $8 million loan to 5E Advanced Materials in California for their 5E Boron Americas project.

These commitments are part of EXIM's broader critical minerals financing push, which has totaled over $14 billion in the past year and includes the landmark $10 billion Project Vault direct loan approved in February 2026 to establish the US Strategic Critical Minerals Reserve. The August 7 deals were financed under EXIM's China and Transformational Exports Program (CTEP), which directs the Bank's resources toward countering China's dominance in critical supply chains.

DOE Awards $500 Million for Critical Mineral and Battery Supply Chain Projects

On August 20, the US Department of Energy's Office of Critical Minerals and Energy Innovation announced $500 million in grants to seven companies to expand critical mineral processing, battery manufacturing, and recycling capacity in the United States. The largest awards, $100 million each, went to Lilac Solutions for a direct lithium extraction facility on Utah's Great Salt Lake, to the Jervois Group for the country's only cobalt refinery in Idaho, and to Nth Cycle (backed by Trafigura) for a battery metal scrap recycling facility. Four additional companies — Princeton NuEnergy, Arcanum Ventures, Elevated Materials, and Coreshell Technologies — each received $50 million for cathode reprocessing, battery electrolyte production, fast-charging battery materials, and silicon-anode manufacturing, respectively.

The awards represent DOE's third round of funding from its Battery Materials Processing and Battery Manufacturing and Recycling programs and come amid a broader administration push to make the US the "minerals superpower of the world" — an effort given added urgency by the Iran war's strain on weapons inventories and defense supply chains. The announcement arrived just two days after DOE separately announced $162 million in funding to recover scandium, copper, antimony, and rare earth elements, selecting nine companies — including Felix Gold (up to $18 million for a pilot antimony processing plant in Alaska), Alcoa, SiTration, and Thompson Creek Metals — to advance bench- and pilot-scale technologies for extracting critical materials from mine waste, tailings, and industrial byproducts.

Department of War Announces $900 Million in Critical Minerals Investments

The Department of War announced a series of critical minerals investments during the latter part of August:

- On August 24, the Economic Defense Unit (EDU), in partnership with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War for Industrial Base Policy (IBP), announced a $750 million investment with US SIIE, LLC through the Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment (IBAS) program. These funds will be utilized to support an offtake agreement for mixed rare-earth carbonates (MREC) produced at Serra Verde's Pela Ema Project in central Brazil. This $750 million is part of a broader $1.55 billion total investment structure mobilized by EDU, which includes a $300 million purchase commitment from the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) and a $500 million commitment from a money-center bank.
- On August 28, the DoW IBP, in partnership with the EDU, announced a $100 million follow-on preferred equity investment in Atlantic Alumina Company LLC (Atalco) through the Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment (IBAS) program. The investment brings DoW's total investment in Atalco to $400 million and, together with $350 million in parallel investments from Atalco's current backers — and an additional $50 million expected within 75 days — would bring total third-party investment to $400 million and collective public and private investment to $800 million. The DoW and private investments will purchase Class A Preferred Units to sustain operations, overcome foreign competition, and fund capital expenditures to return Atalco's Gramercy, Louisiana refinery to its 1.2 million metric ton annual nameplate capacity.
- On August 28, the DoW IBP and EDU announced a second IBAS program investment of $35.6 million in Trilogy Metals, Inc. The transaction secures a 10% direct ownership stake in Trilogy and penny warrants representing an additional 7.5%, for a combined 17.5% US government economic position. Proceeds will support exploration, engineering, and infrastructure development at the Upper Kobuk Mineral Projects (UKMP), a district-scale land package in Northwest Alaska managed by Ambler Metals LLC, and a 50/50 joint venture between Trilogy and South32 Limited. The DoW said the transaction directly follows the revival and approval of the Ambler Road Project, a proposed 211-mile industrial access road connecting the Dalton Highway to the remote UKMP site.

These transactions show that the DoW's organizations for critical minerals investments — the IBP, EDU, and OSC — are all now up and running to address strategic gaps in the US defense supply chain. Discussions with DoW officials and congressional staff at the recent Defense Industrial Base Exposition (DIBX) in Philadelphia indicate that this only the beginning, as defense budgets continue to support further action.

OSC Opens Applications for National Security Fund Finance Program

On August 20, the Department of War's Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) posted a Notice of Funding Opportunity for the National Security Fund Finance (NSFF) Program, which will provide multi-draw term loans of $500 million to $1 billion per fund to qualified credit fund managers that combine federal financing with privately raised capital to make secured loans to companies addressing critical minerals supply chain vulnerabilities. Proposals are due on November 1, 2026, with applicant selection expected by January 10, 2027, and conditional commitments by March 10, 2027. Our full analysis of the announcement is **available here**.

House Democrats Challenge Administration's Critical Minerals Agreements

Fifty-four House Democrats, led by Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Jared Huffman (D-CA), Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee Ranking Member Linda Sánchez (D-CA), and Rep. Jonathan Jackson (D-IL), sent a **letter** to Ambassador Greer, Secretary Rubio, Secretary Lutnick, and Secretary Bessent raising serious concerns about the administration's international critical minerals agreements — including framework agreements, reciprocal trade deals, MOUs, and a potential Plurilateral Agreement on Trade in Critical Minerals. The members argue that these deals lack transparency and enforceable protections for labor rights, human rights, and the environment, while potentially enriching administration insiders and shifting financial risk onto taxpayers without congressional oversight.

The letter singles out the Strategic Partnership Agreement with the Democratic Republic of Congo — which reportedly calls for sweeping changes to the DRC's constitution and grants US companies a "right of first offer" on mining concessions — as well as reports that administration-linked families may profit from a critical minerals agreement in Kazakhstan.

The Democrats also flag antitrust concerns with proposed price-floor mechanisms for critical minerals, warning they could facilitate cartel-like behavior and inadvertently benefit Chinese state-linked firms. The letter poses ten detailed questions to the administration covering binding environmental and labor standards, DFC and EXIM taxpayer-backed loan guarantees, conflicts of interest in government equity stakes, and deep-sea mining environmental impacts.

Leadership Transitions

In August, Brittany Kelm, a senior energy policy adviser on the White House National Energy Dominance Council, departed to lead the Washington, DC policy office of Sable Offshore, a Houston-based oil company whose projects she had championed while in government. Kelm had been closely involved in the Trump administration's energy dominance policy efforts.

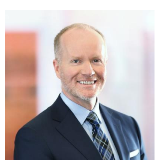
Looking Ahead

ML Strategies continues to monitor these developments and the broader legislative and regulatory activity shaping the energy and infrastructure landscape. We welcome the opportunity to discuss how these policies may affect your organization, identify emerging funding and market opportunities, and inform potential federal engagement strategies.

Authors

John Lushetsky, Senior Vice President

John Lushetsky draws on over 30 years of experience in government and industry to help clients identify strategic opportunities, secure federal funding, and position innovative technologies for success within evolving energy and infrastructure policy landscapes. He has successfully helped clients navigate complex issues through a variety of federal agencies.



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Neal Martin brings more than two decades of experience in government and federal relations to his work, helping clients navigate a wide range of issues. He provides strategic guidance to organizations seeking to advance their legislative priorities and enhance their visibility before Congress and federal agencies.

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