

United States Senate

September 1, 2022

The Honorable Deborah G. Rosenblum
Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Industrial Base Policy
U.S. Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Acting Assistant Secretary Rosenblum:

We are writing to raise concerns regarding the domestic production capability of high purity aluminum (HPA) – and to highlight recent developments that could further increase the United States' reliance on foreign sources, including Russia, for the supply of HPA.

As you know, HPA is a type of aluminum that plays a critical role in defense platforms. HPA is used for the bulkheads for the F-35, the advanced armor for the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, and other defense and space platforms. We are particularly concerned that the United States is increasingly reliant on foreign countries to supply this critical material.

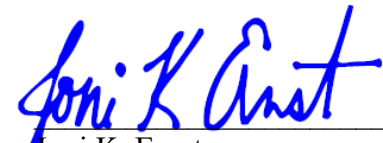
In recent weeks, the operator of the only domestic smelter producing HPA announced a curtailment of that plant due to high energy costs – estimating the facility will be shut down for at least 9-12 months. U.S. manufacturers who make crucial components for the aerospace, aviation, and defense sector are now forced to source HPA from foreign sources (including Russia) at an increased cost. Increasing our reliance on Russia for this critical material, particularly after Russia's unwarranted invasion of Ukraine and its increasingly malign behavior, is unacceptable. There is one domestic company now producing HPA with an efficient refining process that uses primary aluminum as an input material – the only company in North America making HPA at scale for defense applications today.

The Senate report accompanying S. 2987 (S. Rept. 115-262) of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 highlighted the importance of HPA to meet national security requirements. Specifically, the Senate report encouraged the Secretary of Defense to take affirmative steps to maintain secure sources of supply for HPA and to consider investing in appropriate improvements to make the production of domestic HPA more efficient than through the traditional smelting process. Unfortunately, to our knowledge, no action has been taken to date.

We were somewhat encouraged by the recognition of the importance of HPA in the Defense Department's 100-day report to Executive Order 14017 on America's Supply Chains. However, we believe more should be done. Once again language was included in this year's Senate report related to the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act on the importance of a robust domestic production capability. The committee's report directs the Department of Defense to brief the Congress on its plans to meet our HPA national security needs through domestic investments or working with our allies.

Ensuring the United States maintains critical mineral and material independence from our adversaries is a vital national security interest that compels your swift attention. The undersigned members of Congress urge a written response and follow-on briefing regarding the Department of Defense's efforts to secure domestic and allied sources of HPA within the next ninety days to ensure the continued viability and lethality of our military's weapons platforms.

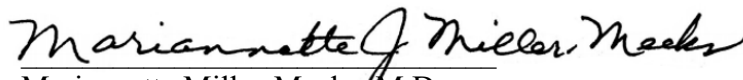
Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator



Mariannette Miller-Meeks, M.D.
Member of Congress