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November 14, 2005

Speaker J. Dennis Hastert  
United States House of Representatives  
H-232 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi  
United States House of Representatives  
H-204 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As you know, the debate regarding minerals development in our federal lands has been a contentious one for many years. The process by which a privately owned entity would develop minerals and surface rights on federal lands is significantly undermined in the Fiscal Year 2006 budget reconciliation language as passed by the House Resources Committee. I am writing to you today to express concern with this language.

As you know, in 1994 President Clinton placed a moratorium on all existing patent claims on federal lands with the intent of reestablishing these laws. An effort to revamp the nation's mining policy, Title IV, Subtitle B of the budget reconciliation, however, contains language that would lead to a free-for-all giveaway of federal lands. This section leaves few protections for states and communities to employ against foreign companies eager to develop these lands. This language waives the current standards which call for developers to provide proof of valuable mineral deposits to qualify for patent rights. In removing this provision from law, we are allowing developers to stake a claim on federal lands without exercising due cause for mineral development – leading to surface development on federal lands with no federal regulation. Let it be clear, all existing federal protections no longer will apply to land purchased under these new laws.

At a time when a hasty reaction to raise revenues seems tempting, I strongly urge you to consider alternatives to policies such as this as a solution to budgetary shortfalls. As the time for action on the budget reconciliation quickly approaches I look forward to working with you on this and other issues relating to our nation's natural resources.

Sincerely,

JAY INSLEE  
Member of Congress