Domestic Minerals Production Could Boost Manufacturing

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After decades of outsourcing, the resurgence in domestic manufacturing is now America's favorite comeback story. Factors that once drove companies overseas — including labor and energy costs — are no longer considered insurmountable obstacles, as companies from Apple to GE to Ford bring production back to our shores. A recent Boston Consulting Group survey of 106 companies with more than $1 billion in sales revealed that 37 percent planned to re-shore or were "actively considering" it. This encouraging development stands to reinvigorate our economy and advance our competitive edge.

Yet one troubling trend could signal a major complication for returning manufacturers: our nation's increasing reliance on unstable supply chains of imported minerals.

Industries across the country depend on minerals such as aluminum, copper, silver, cobalt, nickel and gold for the production of smartphones, solar panels, energy-efficient vehicles, military body armor, MRI machines and countless other high-tech products critical to the American way of life. Here in the United States, there are more than $6.2 trillion worth of key mineral resources ready to be developed and put to good use by our nation's innovators and manufacturers.

But despite our wealth of minerals, U.S. manufacturers were forced to import more than $42 billion worth of minerals last year — more than half of their needs. Domestic companies are completely dependent on imports for 18 different minerals and metals crucial to manufacturing supply chains, up from just eight minerals in

1995. Increasingly, our core industries are left with no choice but to rely on unstable, unreliable sources for the mineral raw materials they need — and this unpredictability comes at no small cost.

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