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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public  
Lands, Chair  
Subcommittee on Water and Power

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR  
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections  
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President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C., 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Tomorrow, Vice President Biden will visit Grand Canyon National Park to highlight the Recovery Act's successes in creating local jobs and funding much-needed maintenance and repairs throughout our National Park system. Investment in our National Parks is an excellent way to stimulate the economy and put people to back to work improving what Ken Burns called "America's best idea."

While financial investment remains a key need at our parks, I write today to draw your attention to another urgent problem facing the Grand Canyon. Uranium mining threatens both the canyon's natural beauty and the people and habitats that depend on water from the Colorado River. Communities in Northern Arizona have experienced serious human health and environmental impacts from the mining, processing and transportation of uranium that occurred up until the late 1980s.

The legacy of this activity has yet to be fully understood or remediated. Uranium is a Class A human carcinogen, linked to lung and bone cancer, kidney disease, birth defects, liver failure and autoimmune diseases, among others. The legacy of disease and death is especially acute among the Native peoples of the Northern Arizona region, some of whom live in the Grand Canyon itself.

Management of the federal land in or near Grand Canyon National Park has direct impacts on sensitive habitats, listed and endangered species, groundwater, air quality, archaeological resources, recreational opportunities, downstream water users and the health and safety of visitors and residents near the Park.

In 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar instituted two-year halt to mining around the Grand Canyon while the department studies the potential need for a 20-year ban. The land in



question has not yet been administratively withdrawn from mining considerations. Passing a federal law is the only way to permanently protect the land.

In January of 2009, I introduced H.R. 644 to withdraw approximately one million acres of land around the Grand Canyon from future mining claims under the General Mining Act of 1872. The law is needed to protect this national jewel of our park system from invasive mining operations. The current impacts of uranium mining at the Grand Canyon highlight the urgent need to update our mining standards. The 1872 Mining Law, which is still the operative law governing most natural resource extraction in this country, does not adequately consider the environmental impacts of mining. Companies are able to avoid paying royalties and fees to the public even when extracting minerals from public land, which is made available at rates far below market value. What little environmental study is currently required before starting a new mine can be circumvented by the granting of a categorical exclusion, which precludes the very assessments policymakers need to oversee mining in this country.

Several changes should be made to the law without delay. It is imperative to eliminate the use of categorical exclusions, which have become far too prevalent and outstripped their intended use. Uranium must be classified as a "leasable" rather than "locatable" mineral, as the CLEAR Act (HR 3524) recently approved by the House Natural Resources Committee would do. That simple change would give the Secretary of the Interior far greater flexibility in determining which sites are unsuitable for uranium mining.

With or without these important changes, the Grand Canyon faces immediate challenges. I urge you to support HR 644, which will protect the Grand Canyon from uranium mining now and in the future. We must protect this national treasure from those who, through their negligence, pollute its water and spoil it for the public.

With your help, the beauty and wonder of the Grand Canyon can be preserved for future generations. The American people will thank this Congress and your administration for taking such a bold step not just on behalf of the Grand Canyon, but on behalf of the American spirit of conservation.

Sincerely,



RAÚL M. GRIJALVA  
Member of Congress