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Bond, Bayh introduce rare earth legislation

By Christopher Tritto – St. Louis Business Journal

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Citing America's dependence on China for 100 percent of its supply of critical rare earth elements, U.S. Sens. **Kit Bond**, R-Mo., and **Evan Bayh**, D-Ind., introduced legislation that would help jumpstart a domestic rare earth mining and refining industry.



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Pea Ridge owner Jim Kennedy of St. Louis-based Wings Enterprises Inc. has been working with U.S. Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., and other lawmakers for months in the hope of restarting a domestic rare earths industry with an epicenter in Missouri.

If passed, the bill could present significant economic development opportunities for Missouri, which is home to one of the nation's most valuable deposits of rare earth metals.

Bond's bill, introduced Thursday, would require a feasibility study on building a U.S. cooperative refinery to process rare earth ores extracted from mines in the United States and allied countries. It would also provide the U.S. Department of Defense with \$20 million to support the defense supply chain and another \$30 million for the development of rare earth magnets.

During a speech on the Senate floor Friday, Bond specifically cited the importance of a [rare earth deposit at Pea Ridge](#), a mine near Sullivan, Mo. He also promoted Missouri as an ideal location for a national rare earth refinery. Such a refinery would cost an estimated \$1 billion to build and would likely require significant federal subsidy, supporters say. But it could address rising national security and economic concerns tied to America's reliance on China for the country's rare earth supply.

The 17 so-called rare earth metals are essential to all sorts of sophisticated products. Missile guidance systems, next-generation radar, lasers, hybrid car batteries, high-strength magnets used in wind turbines and a growing list of other specialized items rely on rare earths, as do many more common devices such as smart phones, computer hard drives and fiber optic cables. But China has developed a near global monopoly on rare earth mining and refining. Not one commercial rare earth refinery exists in the western hemisphere.

Pea Ridge owner **Jim Kennedy** of St. Louis-based Wings Enterprises Inc. has been working with Bond and other lawmakers for months in the hope of restarting a domestic rare earths industry with an epicenter in Missouri. Pea Ridge is one of only two permitted rare earth mines in the country, and the only one with significant reserves of especially valuable heavy rare earths, according to the U.S. Geological Service. Just last week, a group of about [50 scientists gathered](#) at the Missouri University of Science & Technology in Rolla to network, brainstorm and share recent research related to rare earth mining, refining and technology development.

Bond acknowledges his proposed legislation will not be addressed between now and the end of the current session of Congress in January, when both he and Bayh will retire. But he said his bill and speech were presented to emphasize the importance of addressing the vulnerability of America's rare earth supply.

“While introducing legislation during the last days of the ‘lame duck’ may seem like a ‘Hail Mary,’ this issue is too important to continue to ignore,” Bond said during Friday’s speech. “In fact, ignoring our growing rare earth needs and China’s growing monopoly is how we got into this mess. Sen. Bayh and I have laid the groundwork with this bill, and I hope my colleagues in January will call it back up and see it passed.”

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