# American mining should be the foundation for our economic recovery

BY RICH NOLAN, PRESIDENT AND CEO, NATIONAL MINING ASSOCIATION

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On May 17, 1943, the men and women of the Bradley Mining Company in Stibnite, Idaho, received an unexpected telegram.

It came from Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Commander and Chief of Allied Forces in Africa. Following allied victory, he wrote to express his appreciation for the work done on the home front that kept his troops equipped, saying, "there is glory for us all in the achievement."

The men and women of Bradley Mining produced the tungsten and antimony used to harden Allied armor and munitions. So important was the discovery of tungsten at Stibnite in 1942, and the mining effort that followed, that the U.S. Munitions Board estimated it "shortened World War II by at least one year and saved the lives of a million American soldiers."

The U.S. once again finds itself in an all-out battle. The enemy is different, but the mining industry is ready to do its part to make sure we not only win but come out stronger.

As an essential U.S. industry, mining continues to produce the materials that are the building blocks of American life—and that the American people rely on, including the nation's medical and healthcare sectors.

Antimicrobial metals like copper, silver, gold and zinc are found in every hospital room and in much of the equipment and medicines that help the nation's doctors and nurses save lives.

As a recent study from researchers at the National Institutes of Health concluded, while the coronavirus can live for days on hard surfaces like plastic or glass, copper's passive antimicrobial properties begin killing the virus almost immediately. Within four hours of contact, virus levels are undetectable.

Mining and mined materials are playing a vital role in helping the nation weather this storm, but it will be after the crisis that the nation's miners can provide the foundation for our recovery.

With the unprecedented economic toll already wrought by the virus, and the measures taken to combat it, policymakers are exploring additional rounds of policy changes to jumpstart the economy. An infrastructure package appears to be on the horizon — and is the perfect place for mining to contribute.

Rebuilding and modernizing our critical infrastructure — everything from our roads and bridges to our water treatment systems and airports — will require an immense amount of material and the industrial base to provide it.

If we are to make the most of an infrastructure package, it should include efforts to re-shore our industrial supply chains and to make sure we are rebuilding and modernizing when possible with American-made materials, equipment, and jobs. If done correctly, rebuilding our infrastructure can happen in parallel to reenergizing our industrial base — in the face of troubling vulnerabilities.

Now is the moment to commit to increasing the competitiveness of existing industries and reestablishing pieces of our supply chains that have disappeared altogether. The mining industry — the front end of our industrial base — exemplifies this opportunity and the need for action.

The U.S. possesses vast domestic mineral reserves, but mineral import reliance has grown to alarming levels. In 1990, 20 percent of all global mining investment flowed into the U.S.

Today, it's only 8 percent. The U.S. is now 50 percent or more import-reliant for nearly 50 vital minerals and metals, and 100 percent import-reliant for 18 of them.

We shouldn't wait a moment longer to reverse this trend.

America's industrial base, led by American mining, was once the envy of the world. It built our cities and infrastructure, and helped see us through the greatest conflicts of the 20th century.

With foresight and smart policy, it can help see us through this challenge and be the foundation upon which we launch our recovery.

*— Rich Nolan is president and chief executive officer of the National Mining Association*