

Full Committee Hearing on Mining Jobs
Statement of Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
September 16, 2011

For generations, Grand Canyon National Park has been one of America's most cherished and treasured family destinations. You can take your family on a hike along the canyon rim or you can hike down into the majestic gorge to the Colorado River below.

But if you take the Horn Creek Trail, you will come upon this sign.

(point to chart one)

It says, "Danger...Water in Horn Creek Exceeds EPA Health Standards for Radioactivity."

The water is so radioactive in Horn Creek, that it is UNDRINKABLE.

How did this happen you ask?

Well, uranium was discovered inside Grand Canyon National Park in 1953, and because of the way our Nation's mining laws work, a mining company with a previous claim inside the National Park was allowed to begin mining for uranium.

The mine closed in 1972, and was subsequently abandoned. Since then radioactively-contaminated water has leached into Horn Creek and the Grand Canyon below. The American taxpayers have already spent \$7 million just to assess the scale of the problem.

Achieving even a partial cleanup will cost tens of millions of dollars more.

[CHART TWO]: NPS Trail Description

When visitors decide to hike down the Horn Creek trail, the Park Service has to give those visitors a warning not to drink the water in Horn Creek, [Quote] “UNLESS DEATH BY THIRST IS THE ONLY OTHER OPTION.”

It took just one uranium mine to permanently contaminate an entire creek inside the Park.

But rather than learning a lesson from the unfortunate tragedy at Horn Creek, the Republican Majority has offered legislation that could lead to massive

additional uranium mining near Grand Canyon National Park.

The Department of the Interior has issued an emergency withdrawal of public land around the Grand Canyon from mining. This withdrawal would only prevent new mining claims – it would not affect existing mines or existing claims.

However, this summer, the Republicans included a rider in the Interior Appropriations bill, which would have permanently prevented the Interior Department from protecting lands around the Grand Canyon from uranium mining. They say they are doing this to create jobs.

Under the Republican plan, not only would visitors to the Grand Canyon be able to enjoy the glow of the sunsets, they would get to enjoy the glow of radiation after the sun has gone down.

Grand Canyon National Park generates over \$700 million dollars and tens of thousands of jobs each year for the local economy. These jobs depend on clean water and clean air. The Colorado River, which runs through the Grand Canyon, provides drinking water for 25 million people.

Imagine the Horn Creek warning not to drink the water “UNLESS DEATH BY THIRST IS THE ONLY OTHER OPTION” posted above the faucets of 25 million Americans.

We should be talking about protecting these jobs, these people, and one of our national treasures. But instead the Majority is seeking to imperil this key economic driver for the region and the water of millions of Americans.

And when the gap between our revenue and spending is nearly as wide as the Grand Canyon, we need to look at reforming our nation's mining laws to ensure that taxpayers receive a proper return.

Right now, mining companies don't pay any royalties to the American people for extracting hardrock minerals such as uranium, gold and copper on public lands. The Obama Administration has proposed to institute a royalty on minerals mined on public land. The

Administration has also proposed to institute an abandoned mine fee on the industry so that taxpayers are not left holding the tab for cleaning up abandoned mines, like the one in the Grand Canyon.

If we want to chip away at our dangerous deficit, we should be mining every opportunity to do so. That is why I will be introducing legislation shortly to implement these common sense proposals to reduce our deficit and have mining companies pay their fair share.

I Yield back.