

**Written Testimony  
of Mayor Mila Besich, Town of Superior, AZ  
before the Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United  
States**

**April 13, 2021**

Good afternoon Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Subcommittee Chair Leger Fernandez, Ranking Member Young and members of the Committee. I am Mila Besich, Mayor of the Town of Superior, a small community located 60 miles east of Phoenix, Arizona.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to tell you about my Town and its history. Superior is a close-knit community with a long and rich history in mining that dates back to the first mining claim in the region in 1875. The Town evolved as a center of commerce serving the mining industry in the Copper Corridor of southeastern Arizona. However, copper mining is a volatile industry that has gone through numerous boom and bust cycles since the 1870's, turning many former mining communities into ghost towns.

The population of Superior is currently reported at 3,063 and has grown by about 8 percent since 2010. About 40 percent of the residents have lived in the town for more than 20 years and there are a number of multi-generational families. The median age of residents is 45.4 years and about 19 percent of residents are over the age of 65, which is slightly above the state average, but similar to Pinal County overall.

Many of the employed residents of Superior commute to jobs in Phoenix or other parts of the East Valley. Only about 15 percent of residents work in the local community. However, tourism could create small business opportunities that would allow more residents to work closer to home and could provide second income opportunities for families.

In Superior, we are proud to say that we're a town where mining is one of the major industries but not the only industry and thus the need to diversify our local communities with other economic opportunities. My Town is located at the base of Apache Leap Mountain in the high desert and is surrounded by the Tonto National Forest, which is the fifth largest national forest in the country covering close to 2.9 million acres in northeastern Arizona, extending north from Superior to the Mogollon Rim. The area surrounding Superior offers a diversity of climate zones from desert

vistas to mountainous areas with snow and waterfalls. This stunning natural landscape creates the perfect setting for tourism related to hiking, camping, birding, hunting and other outdoor activities. Three local segments of the Legends of Superior Trail (LOST) were recently completed making Superior an Arizona National Scenic Trail Gateway community. The combination of scenery, rich cultural experiences and gastronomy make for a lively and diverse town.

My family has been in this area for five generations and my children are part of that fifth generation. They are seeing a new future of opportunity for Superior and for our Copper Corridor region. Many of my friends and neighbors in Superior have roots tracing back seven or eight generations. When I graduated from Superior High School in the 1990's, opportunities were extremely limited and, in fact, my formative years did not include any hint of the bright days of a mining boom. My family has been actively involved in community leadership throughout all our generations, and I have served as Mayor of Superior since 2016.

For the past twenty years, leaders in Superior have been tasked with developing a diversified economy, but we would be remiss to think that mining would not be part of this plan with rich copper reserves and a long history of mining, these rich copper ore deposits are not going to magically disappear and we must figure out solutions to how these mines will work within our communities without our communities becoming solely reliant on the extraction industry. We have used the Resolution Copper project as a unique opportunity to help us build Superior's future. This includes working with the mining industry and the Resolution Copper EIS to ensure that the Resolution Copper Project is a net positive for Superior and our region. The Town of Superior has been actively involved in the FEIS process and to start over again is not in the best interest of the people of Superior and not fair to all of those stakeholders, including our Town, who will benefit greatly from this process and have actively participated in this arduous process.

On March 1st, 2021, the U.S. Department of Agriculture directed the Forest Service to withdraw the Notice of Availability and rescind the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and draft Record of Decision. This action has paused the many years of consultation by the Forest Service and the numerous stakeholders and the public - folks that participated and were at the table. We are hopeful that the Administration will move forward with the process and release the FEIS and Draft Record of Decision after consulting with all of the relevant stakeholders.

In order to survive and grow, Superior needs jobs and private investment. This mine is critical to the economic viability of our Town and region. In short, we need this mine to open with the full permitting in place as soon as possible. And yes, we need it to be done in a way that preserves not only the economy of the region, but also respects the cultural and environmentally sensitivity of the region and the tribes. And while we strongly support the rights of our Apache neighbors' voices to be heard, the fact remains that Resolution Copper and the Forest Service, through the EIS process, have

worked and consulted with the tribes throughout this process. The EIS process was a long and laborious but it achieved exactly what was intended: an intense process that has taken all of the stakeholders concerns and melded it into one document to address these diverse and divergent views.

While we like to say that Superior is a town with a mine - and not a mining town - mining is in our DNA and the Resolution Copper mine will be a huge boost to our economy. More than half of the 600 workers on-site will live within forty miles of the mine. The mine is expected to support 3,700 direct and indirect jobs for Arizonans, creating 2,600 jobs in Pinal County alone and adding an estimated \$60 billion to the state's economy over the 60-year life of the mine. Resolution Copper will also be purchasing around \$546 million per year in goods and services from local businesses.

As the nation looks to build a clean energy future, where copper will be an essential building block, Arizona's Copper Corridor holds the equivalent of Yukon gold. Some of the richest and most accessible copper ore deposits are found here in eastern Pinal and southern Gila counties. Two of the three copper smelters left in the United States operate in our region. Mining is vital to the economy in this part of Arizona, and it can be done responsibly while protecting the environment and the beautiful landscape that we love and cherish.

The land exchanged in the legislation that this bill will repeal will directly benefit Superior. For instance, we will obtain land south of the airport that will allow us to build new housing, retail and other development. This will allow us to provide housing for the expected doubling of our population because of this new mine and economic opportunities. Ironically, it will also prevent future mining claims in this area that several companies currently hold. Mr. Chairman, I'm sure this is something that you support.

This new mine will also allow Superior to diversify our economy. We have plans to build a new multi-generational center and new business incubator with an emphasis on bringing new tech companies and jobs to the area. These can only be realized by the opportunities this new mine will present.

Chairman Grijalva, you have been a champion for Arizona and your long tenure and service to our great state are appreciated. However, our Town's future is highly dependent on this mine opening. Therefore, we reluctantly oppose your bill and ask that Secretary Vilsack approve the FEIS in a timely fashion so we can get this project back on track and protect the future of Superior and the Copper Corridor region.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to address any comments or questions you or members of the Committee might have.