

Chairman Vitter, Ranking Member Shaheen and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify here today. My name is DeAnne Gallegos and I am the Executive Director of the Silverton Colorado Chamber of Commerce.

I hope to accomplish three tasks with my testimony. First, I want to introduce my town and county to the Committee so that you better understand who we are and how we have been impacted by the Gold King spill. Second, I'd like to explain the immediate issues created by the Gold King spill on our community. Third, and most important, I want to detail the concerns our community has about the ramifications that are likely to occur to our town and county when the EPA and the federal government now turn to address the problems of old leaky mines.

As you may know Silverton is located approximately nine miles south of the Gold King Mine, which breached on August 5, 2015. Silverton Colorado is the only municipality in San Juan County and is situated at an elevation of 9,318 feet in the heart of the Southern Rocky Mountains. The year-around population of San Juan County is estimated at 702 people with an influx of seasonal residents in summer and winter.

Silverton is one of the most isolated municipalities in the continental United States. There is one highway running through town and one way in and out. The mountain passes often close from mid-fall to mid-spring due to deep snow and avalanche runs. State Highway 550 coming into Silverton is known as the most dangerous roads to travel in the country.

Although Silverton is the only municipality in San Juan County, that was not always the case. We are surrounded by over a dozen of what are now ghost towns, but what once were bustling mining town at the turn of the century. As mining left, these towns all died. Silverton is fortunate that it was able to adapt and capitalize on its mining heritage in creating a tourism-based economy. Still, we face many challenges. Forty-eight percent of our employment base is in the services industry with an average annual wage of \$22,872. Due to the remoteness of our community, business owners and residents do not have easy access to goods or merchandise. Our growing season is only two months long, ruling out commercial agriculture. There are no financial institutions in San Juan County. There are no foundations or individuals with private wealth that can step up in times of need. Lending resources have always been difficult in San Juan County.

With this backdrop in mind, the immediate impact of the Gold King mine spill to our community was, fortunately, not as bad as it could have been but only time will tell what the true ramifications will be. Immediate drop-offs in tourism and hotel cancelations seem to be recovering due to the perfect fall weather but until we can analyze true end of season statistics it is hard to say what that will actually look like. While there was concern about our water supply we were quickly able to get the word out that our drinking water comes from a different drainage than the Animas River and was not impacted by the spill. But tourists still have concerns and we still receive many questions.

Our bigger fears and concerns are the possible long-term economic and tourist-related impacts once the federal government starts to address the issue of the hundreds of old leaky mines north of our town.

For instance, currently federal workers and contractors who are working on the temporary water treatment plant are occupying an entire hotel as well as other rental properties. Most communities would welcome this situation – an entire hotel filled with paying guests! But, as I mentioned above, we're not like most communities. As winter arrives, and it will be here soon in Silverton, we would normally receive an influx of seasonal workers staffing skiing, snowmobiling and other winter recreational outfitters. It is unclear whether there will be enough rooms to house those seasonal workers that staff these recreational small businesses. That's a big problem, because without those workers those businesses can't operate.

As the spotlight leaves San Juan County, and the public forgets about what happened at the Gold King Mine, our concern is that the barriers fortified by this incident become unbreakable. The remote nature of our community does not allow an economy that can react swiftly to changing forces, such as an influx of federal workers. Getting materials and equipment over the passes is difficult, costly and time consuming, and the weather that shortens our growing season also shortens our construction season.

Continued construction and remediation projects at the Gold King Mine site could keep tourists away. Our small town is a quiet picturesque community nestled in the mountains. An influx of heavy equipment and workers to work at the mine site could destroy the serenity that brings people to visit us in the first place. I am also concerned that if a family that has previously come to San Juan County decides to vacation somewhere else next year that they will be gone forever. Repeat tourism business is a vital anchor to our critical yet vulnerable economy.

For these and other reasons I am confident that we will not know the impact of the spill to our economy and our small businesses for years to come.

Mr. Chairman, as your committee and Congress debates how to remediate the environmental issues associated with decades of mining, we ask that you keep in mind the current rich and vibrant community that is Silverton, a place steeped in history and surrounded by the most amazing landscapes you will have ever seen. It is also a community so remote and isolated it faces challenges unique from even other mountain communities.

We want to work in partnership with the federal government, the State of Colorado, our downstream neighbors and all interested parties to find a clean-up solution that is good for everyone, the environment and the economy. Our community recognizes both issues – the need to clean up the mines and the need to make sure we don't lose what is pure about Silverton in the process. We look forward to your suggestions and to working with you.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions the committee may have.