Insights Week 39 - Fri, March 27th 2026
Legislature & Geopolitics (Grey)

Helium Is Already Listed As Critical in Canada And The EU, With Asia Reliant On Qatari Supply, Which Nation Will Be Next to List It?

Helium is already officially recognised as a critical raw material in Canada, UK and the European Union. Canada includes helium on its national critical minerals list, while the EU's Critical Raw Materials framework classifies helium as essential due to its high economic importance, limited substitutability, and concentrated supply.

As detailed in Cliff Cain's recent article: 'Russia and China also treat helium as strategic in practice, even if their policy architecture differs from Canada's or the EU's. Russia's Amur gas processing plant was designed in part to raise Russia's global helium position, to support the new Vostochny Cosmodrome and to support a new strategic initiative to bring high tech companies to the Russian Far East. China just recently added "helium/operations/business" to the 2025 Encouraged Foreign Investment Catalog which went into effect in February of 2026.'

As widely reported across mainstream media, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, and the severe damage to Qatar's LNG and helium infrastructure at Ras Laffan Industrial City, one of the world's largest helium production centres, has turned supply risk into reality, with repairs potentially taking years. With helium production intrinsically tied to natural gas processing, Ras Laffan being offline directly constrains global supply, removing up to 30% of on-stream helium availability in real terms.

Asia relies heavily on Qatar for its helium supply. Qatar, in some cases, is the primary source of helium for several key industrial and technology markets across the region.

Producing roughly a third of the world's total helium, Qatar is the largest supplier outside of the United States, making it a cornerstone of the global supply chain. Recent data from March 2026 highlights the extent of this dependence, particularly within the semiconductor sector (source Fitch Ratings):

• **South Korea** imports approximately 65% of its helium from Qatar, leaving it highly exposed to disruption.
• **China** imports around 85% of its helium overall, with roughly 54% sourced from Qatar.
• **Taiwan** relies on Qatar for the majority of its helium supply.
• **Japan** sources between 28% and 33% from Qatar, alongside approximately 50% from the United States.

Helium plays a critical role in semiconductor manufacturing, where it is used in cooling, leak detection, and advanced fabrication processes. As a result, Qatar's helium output is, in many cases, directly linked to the operational continuity of Asia's technology sector, and, by extension, to the pricing and availability of consumer electronics in Western markets.

The disruptions at Qatar's LNG facilities are precisely the type of systemic exposure that critical mineral frameworks are designed to identify. In the EU and Canada, the conclusion has already been reached, helium is critical. In the United States, however, the question remains open.

As explored in previous #PLSRINSIGHTS pieces, helium underpins a growing number of strategically important sectors, from semiconductors and AI infrastructure to aerospace, defence systems, advanced medical imaging, and quantum research, and is widely regarded as an enabling input for the technologies shaping the next phase of global economic and geopolitical competition.

As supply shocks begin to materialise with increasing frequency, governments are being forced to confront a fundamental question: which materials are too important to be left exposed. The sale of the U.S. Federal Helium Reserve, combined with growing reliance on global supply chains and rising demand from high-tech industries, has introduced new layers of market sensitivity. Against this backdrop, the current geopolitical disruption may act as an accelerant, bringing forward the formal recognition of materials that are already, in practice, critical.

For investors, the signal is becoming clearer: Helium is already classified as critical in key jurisdictions. Demand is expanding across high-growth sectors. Supply remains concentrated and increasingly vulnerable to geopolitical disruption. Those already aligned with secure, scalable helium supply chains in stable jurisdictions may find themselves positioned ahead of a broader policy shift now beginning to take shape across multiple nations. As governments move to secure access, a new landscape could emerge, one where alliances are increasingly shaped by control over critical raw materials such as helium.

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