

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS

LOCAL NO. 49, 49A, 49B, 49C, 49D, 49E, 49L
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Chairman Pete Stauber
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee
1324 Longworth House Office Building

From: Jason George—Business Manager, International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 49

Date: May 10, 2023

Subject: House Concurrent Resolution 34

The International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 49 (Local 49) strongly supports House Concurrent Resolution 34. Local 49 agrees with this legislation's aim to rescind PLO 7917, because from the start we have disagreed with a withdrawal of lands and mineral rights in northeast Minnesota from future leasing and potential development. As a construction labor union comprised of over 14,500 heavy equipment operators, mechanics and stationary engineers working in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Many of our members live in this region and would likely play a major part in the construction and maintenance of the potential projects this withdrawal has impeded.

We support this resolution because it corrects the mistakes of PLO 7917's withdrawal of lands. This withdrawal process did not consider any of the science or data from the Twin Metals Minnesota mine proposal, a collection of over 10 years of hydro-geological and environmental studies, engineering, community engagement and design, nor would it consider the specific information pertaining to any other project proposed to be sited on the withdrawn lands for the next 20 years. The only way to properly determine whether mining can be done safely is by thoroughly examining the facts behind a specific mine plan, such as the one from Twin Metals that has been available for review since the company submitted it in 2019. The current land withdrawal under PLO 7917 supposes a level of risk for a project that is based on generic and

out of date mining practices. This process completely disregards innovations in mining process and technology and increases to environmental safeguards proposed by applicants that can mitigate these risks.

By rescinding the 20-year withdrawal of land this resolution will allow potential projects to prove, through a specific mine plan, that they can safely and legally build their project. If these projects are again allowed to move forward, those that can fulfill Minnesota's rigorous environmental and labor standards will have a substantial positive socioeconomic impact on northern Minnesota. These proposed projects have the potential to create thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in future investment. Our members have a long history building and maintaining mines to meet the stringent standards that are applied to Minnesota mining projects. Our members have a lot at stake to ensure these standards are met, as many of these projects reside in the communities where they live.

Rescinding this withdrawal will also reopen the potential of accessing a significant domestic source of critical minerals needed to combat the climate crisis with technologies like electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels, and energy storage. Climate change is the most imminent and concerning threat to Minnesota's wilderness areas, and mining is crucial in supporting the technologies we need to mitigate the negative effects of the climate crisis. The blanket withdrawal of these lands from exploration and development of Federally owned minerals to protect and preserve its natural resources is only serving to accomplish the opposite outcome. These minerals are critical to our ability to combat the severity of climate change effects on all our natural environments, including the Rainy River watershed. This withdrawal serves only to stall our nation's efforts to combat climate change.

Additionally, mining these minerals in the United States, and reducing our dependence on foreign sources of these materials, is vital for shoring up our supply chains and bolstering our national security efforts. The Biden Administration's supply chain assessment released in February of 2022 found that "over-reliance on foreign sources and adversarial nations for critical minerals and materials posed national and economic security threats." Along with these security concerns sourcing minerals locally eliminates the immense costs, both monetary and environmental, of transporting vast amounts of raw materials across the globe. Taking the critical minerals available in northeast Minnesota off the table for development with a blanket withdrawal completely contradicts our nation's long-term priorities.

We urge the adoption of House Concurrent Resolution 34 to correct what we feel was a mistake caused by the withdrawal of lands and mineral rights in northeast Minnesota from future leasing and potential development.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason George". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Jason A. George
Business Manager - Financial Secretary
International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 49