

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-2308**

April 20, 2021

Secretary Vilsack:

I write today concerned about intent to politicize potential mining projects in the Superior National Forest, which is at odds with President Biden's goal of developing our domestic critical mineral supply chain.

Northern Minnesota is the generational and cultural home of iron mining. The ore we currently mine, with two existing operations in the Superior National Forest, feed our steel mills and build our nation. The reclaimed mines in northern Minnesota are full of crystal-clear water, as many are made into recreational lakes that also provide drinking water for entire communities. This is our backyard, and we mine the right way.

Recently, Senator Tina Smith wrote to you and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland requesting initiation of a mineral segregation and withdrawal process in the Superior National Forest, while parroting talking points of activists that oppose any responsible development.<sup>1</sup> This position is out of touch with the needs and interests of the region, the reality of our country's import reliance on critical minerals, and President Biden's desire to develop domestic mineral supply chains.

Occurring alongside our iron mining is the Duluth Complex, a massive mineral formation featuring 95 percent of America's nickel reserves, 88 percent of the nation's cobalt reserves, 75 percent of the nation's platinum group element reserves, and 34 percent of the nation's copper reserves.<sup>2</sup> I recently sent a letter to President Biden explaining that we need to mine these reserves with our workforce to meet his Administration's goal of onshoring our supply chains, instead of relying on grotesque child labor that empowers Chinese and other hostile interests internationally.<sup>3</sup> If we are to have a secure supply chain for our infrastructure and modern way of life, we need these minerals.

The Twin Metals project offered a Mine Plan of Operation (MPO) in 2019, formally initiating dual regulatory reviews at both the state and federal level while signing a Project-Labor Agreement with the Iron Range Building Trades Union. As you know, this proposed mine is outside of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the nearby buffer zone established for this exact reason.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.wilderness.org/sites/default/files/media/file/LTO.21.3.26%20Sen.%20Smith%20to%20USDA%20and%20DOI-%20Rainy%20River%20Watershed.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.mesabitrubune.com/mine/minnesota-has-the-metals-for-ev-green-energy-economy/article\\_810ada2c-7646-11eb-bb2c-bb7589cbe044.html](https://www.mesabitrubune.com/mine/minnesota-has-the-metals-for-ev-green-energy-economy/article_810ada2c-7646-11eb-bb2c-bb7589cbe044.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://stauber.house.gov/media/press-releases/stauber-urges-president-biden-empower-minnesota-s-miners-responsibly-develop>

I realize the position taken by Senator Smith is similar to your previous position you articulated in your MinnPost op-ed you penned in 2018.<sup>4</sup> However, since then, the MPO offering initiated focused and science-based state and federal reviews. As Secretary of Agriculture, it's imperative you allow these reviews to move forward instead of the arbitrary position articulated in Senator Smith's letter and in your MinnPost op-ed.

The Duluth News Tribune, the largest paper in the region, clearly articulates this reasonable objective and correctly disputes the need for an unfocused study:

"... the senator's continued support for an is-it-a-good-idea study of non-specified mining near – and not in – the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is a puzzler... because a sans-detail study came off as pure politics when it was initiated by President Barack Obama during his final days in office, an apparent nod to his environmental-extremist supporters."<sup>5</sup>

Forcing through a politically motivated mineral segregation study disempowers our local workforce and only placates litigation-prone activist groups, eliminates union jobs, and runs counter to the President's vision of onshoring supply chains. I instead urge you to put aside your preconceived notions, reject outside influences, and trust our local, state, and federal regulators to follow the science and do their job.

Sincerely,



Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2018/12/how-to-both-protect-the-bwca-and-support-a-sustainable-economy-in-northern-minnesota/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/editorials/6958803-Our-View-Scrap-general-study-for-fair-thorough-review-of-underground-mining-plan>