

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden:

Thank you for carrying forward the Trump Administration's work of prioritizing our domestic supply chains for semiconductors, modern energy technologies, healthcare applications, and others with publication of Executive Order 14017, "America's Supply Chains" (EO 14017). Minnesota stands ready and able to lead, as northern Minnesota contains one of the largest, untapped mineral formations in the world, the Duluth Complex.

The legendary Iron Range has fostered a culture of mining since the mid-19th century. Today, it provides nearly 80% of our domestic steel production and provides quality jobs, school funding, and community resources for recreation, water access, and others.¹

Meanwhile, the Duluth Complex is a massive precious metal formation existing alongside our taconite resources on the Iron Range. The Duluth Complex contains cobalt, copper, nickel, platinum-group elements, and the potential for rare earth elements, according to the University of Minnesota-Duluth.²

EO 14017 explicitly calls for reports detailing risks in semiconductor, high-capacity battery, and pharmaceutical supply chains, among others. As you are aware, semiconductors, batteries, and medical devices all require minerals like cobalt and nickel, which are primarily sourced abroad.

In fact, the Duluth-Complex is home to 88% of the United States' cobalt reserves and 95% of the United States' nickel reserves.³ Unfortunately, America remains dependent on countries with little to no labor or environmental standards for the materials needed to feed manufacturing supply chains.

For example, the United States is 78% import-reliant on cobalt, according to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).⁴ The top cobalt-producing country in the world is the Congo, which produces 16 times more cobalt than the second-place country, Russia. Amnesty International reports that approximately 40,000 boys and girls work as forced slave laborers in the Congo. These children, as young as seven, work in horrific conditions where they are forced to extract cobalt by hand or face the wrath of traffickers, if the precarious mines do not collapse around their ears first.⁵

¹ https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/lands_minerals/mcc_docs/2016_explore_iron_ore.pdf

² https://stauber.house.gov/sites/stauber.house.gov/files/8th%20District%20Mineral%20Deposits%20Info_FINAL.pdf

³ https://www.mesabtribune.com/mine/minnesota-has-the-metals-for-ev-green-energy-economy/article_810ada2c-7646-11eb-bb2c-bb7589cbe044.html

⁴ <https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2021/mcs2021.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/06/drc-cobalt-child-labour/>

Our entire supply chain for cobalt is vulnerable. 70% of the Congolese cobalt mining is owned by Communist China, who takes the minerals extracted by slave labor and ships them back to their own mainland for manufacturing of end products.⁶ The products are then exported to the United States as electric vehicle batteries, for example, which are to be used in the entire federal fleet of vehicles, according to your EO 14008, “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.”

According to USGS, the United States is also about 50% import-reliant on nickel. The top three producing countries are Indonesia, the Philippines, and Russia.⁷ Nickel is used in countless applications; however, it’s especially crucial to medical technologies like hip replacements.⁸ We fear our medical device coatings are reliant on supply chains from unreliable and hostile foreign actors.

EO 14017 also calls for “economic growth in communities of color and economically distressed areas.” A mining project focusing on these metals in northern Minnesota, held up by frivolous environmental lawsuits, has the potential to bring a \$500 million annual economic impact in an economically distressed region of the Iron Range.⁹

Finally, EO 14017 directs consultation with labor as an outside stakeholder. Therefore, we urge you to consult with the Iron Range Building Trades, who signed a Project Labor Agreement to build a mine in northern Minnesota using union labor.

In 1978, then-Representative Oberstar, who served during 34 years of your time in the Senate, wrote a letter to then-President Jimmy Carter referencing the mining way of life in northern Minnesota:

“... I urge you not to trade off life styles, livelihoods, and legitimate desires of the people of northeastern Minnesota for equitable treatment in favor of the vague and ill-defined interests of other, perhaps more clamorous constituencies far removed...”¹⁰

President Biden, we urge you to faithfully carry out the spirit EO 14017 the way Mr. Oberstar would. Let’s rely on American, union jobs, not child miners. Let’s move our economy forward by fostering investment in the American worker. Let’s move our important mineral supply chain to the Duluth Complex.

Sincerely,



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress



Jim Hagedorn
Member of Congress



Michelle Fischbach
Member of Congress

⁶ <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/podcasts/focus/02252021-jim-rogers-oil-gas-renewables-agriculture>; <https://www.mining.com/what-chinas-increasing-control-over-cobalt-resources-in-the-drc-means-for-the-west-report/>

⁷ <https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2021/mcs2021.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/products-and-medical-procedures/metals-used-medical-devices>

⁹ <https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/4557930-our-view-stauber-makes-good-priority>

¹⁰ Kevin Proescholdt, Rip Rapson, Miron Heinselman, *Troubled Waters* (St. Cloud: North Star Press, 1995), 269.