

LOCAL VIEW

Mineral supply gaps inevitable without more US mining

On Jan. 25, 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to ensure that “the future is made in all of America by all of America’s workers.” Among other imperatives, the order aims to increase the domestically sourced materials the federal government buys to “help American businesses compete in strategic industries and help America’s workers thrive.”



GLENN STEVENS

Two days later, the president signed another executive order, this one declaring that combating climate change was a vital national-security interest.

MICHauto, which represents the automotive and mobility industry in Michigan and across the country, strongly agrees that these are important actions that mirror the industry’s commitment to build the electric vehicles of today and tomorrow here in America. Indeed, virtually every major auto manufacturer has recently committed to increasing productions of battery electric vehicles.

As we work globally to combat the climate crisis, we in the automobility industry are proud to be part of this commitment to an electric future, which is vital in reducing emissions.

The industry and the Biden administration are also aligned on the goal of 50% of sales in the U.S. market to consist of battery electric vehicles by 2030.

However, we are alarmed by the contradictory nature of



Getty Images

Large dump trucks are used to load copper and other minerals at mining quarries.

several administration actions that could hinder our ability to effectively meet this goal.

Recent supply-chain volatility created significant challenges for the automotive industry. A global pandemic that has lasted more than two years, followed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February, has wreaked havoc on the worldwide semiconductor supply chain. Raw materials remain threatened by this ongoing instability and may continue to deprive automakers of critical components for battery electric vehicles for some time.

These disruptions come at a time when the industry and its customers are increasingly demanding that the materials used to produce vehicles be sourced in accordance with

conscientious labor and environmental standards. Currently, many of the materials, including rare earth metals used in battery electric vehicles and other components, are mined and processed in countries without the strong environmental protections found here in the U.S.

To make the transition to battery electric vehicles under challenging supply-chain realities and in alignment with proper environmental and labor standards, we are going to need to change how we do business. The Biden administration needs to take concrete actions to ensure this transition can happen.

Unfortunately, of late, the administration’s actions have done more to hinder

than accelerate America’s ability to meet its own goal for battery electric vehicles. As Wood Mackenzie, a global energy research firm, recently reported, electrification is driving massive increases in demand for the raw materials needed for the batteries for electric vehicles. At the same time, the firm stated that mineral supply gaps will be inevitable if we fail to accelerate our investment in mining and refining capacity within the U.S.

The mobility industry is deeply concerned about its ability to produce more battery electric vehicles in the face of these projected deficits.

We can address this by bolstering mining and refining in the U.S.

However, the Biden

administration’s current proposed revocations of mineral mining leases for the Twin Metals Minnesota mine, the 20-year withdrawal of lands in Northeastern Minnesota from mining, and the refusal to grant a permit to the Resolution Copper Mine in Arizona hurt our ability to increase domestic mining and refining capabilities.

We urge the administration to change course. If it does not, those projects and lands — which comprise significant portions of our nation’s critical minerals — will remain locked up, and our nation will likely fail to meet the carbon-reduction targets so hailed by the administration.

Facing the climate crisis in these challenging times means we have to become more independent as a nation. This should include shifting to a more domestically resilient economy in which we produce the raw materials we need to meet our battery electric vehicles goals under strong standards, expanding our mineral-processing capacity, and hiring American workers to build the battery electric vehicles we need right here in the U.S.

We think it’s possible, but it will not come to fruition unless the Biden administration reverses course on the misguided actions it has taken against domestic mining. Doing so would signal that it knows what “Made in all of America by all of America’s workers” truly means.

Glenn Stevens Jr. of Detroit is executive director of MICHauto, an automotive cluster association that advocates for Michigan’s automotive and mobility industry. He also serves as the Detroit Regional Chamber’s vice president of automotive and mobility initiatives. He wrote this for the News Tribune.

IN RESPONSE

Pro-mining column missed actual minerals solutions

State Sen. Michelle Benson’s March 24 commentary in the News Tribune, which told us we need to allow copper-sulfide mining for “moral” reasons, was full of disinformation, recycled and false talking points, and conveniently forgotten facts. It should have shown Minnesotans exactly what kind of governor she would be.



SCOTT BEAUCHAMP

While Sen. Benson seems willing to publicly sell out our state’s clean water, someone needs to set the record straight.

Sen. Benson used the victims in Ukraine as a political tool to say we must stop relying on Russia to mine nickel by allowing the potential pollution of copper-sulfide mines in Minnesota.

Sen. Benson incorrectly asserted that the world must open copper-sulfide mines in Minnesota to counter the loss of Russian nickel. But only 7% of the world’s nickel comes from Russia, as the

Washington Post reported in mid-March, and there are efforts underway to create batteries for electric vehicles that won’t need nickel or cobalt.

Metals recycling and innovation would provide far more metal than the rejected Twin Metals mine. Why isn’t she advocating for this?

Sen. Benson strangely made the jump from Russia to China in her column, invoking another boogeyman to apparently score cheap political points while leaving out key facts. Antofagasta, the parent company of Twin Metals, sends its copper to China for smelting. How would giving a mining conglomerate that sends its materials to China a pass to mine in Minnesota remove China from the supply chain? It wouldn’t.

Of course, what bit of pro-sulfide mining rhetoric would be complete without shamelessly evoking child labor? This set aside that Glencore, owner of the proposed PolyMet mine, owns mines said in lawsuits to be using child labor. If these copper-sulfide

mining backers really care about stopping child labor, they should support the Bad Actor Bill now being considered by the Minnesota Legislature. This legislation would prevent companies with histories of international human rights violations or environmental degradation, like Glencore and Antofagasta, from operating nonferrous mines in Minnesota.

The same people telling us we have a “moral obligation” to mine copper in Minnesota while also actively lobbying against the Bad Actor Bill, which would actually incentivize conglomerates to change bad business practices, should tell you everything you need to know about those people.

There is legislation to punish nonferrous mining companies for labor abuses.

Better recycling infrastructure would increase the amount of copper and nickel in our supply chains far more than any mine in Minnesota.

And yet, Sen. Benson supports none of these actual solutions.



Mike Keefe / Cagle Cartoons

A wise person once said that when someone shows you who they are, believe them. Sen. Benson has repeatedly shown herself to be someone willing to spread disinformation and

divide Minnesotans. It is time Minnesotans believe her.

Scott Beauchamp of St. Paul is the advocacy director for the Friends of the Boundary Waters Action Network, the 501c4 affiliate of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness (friends-bwca.org).

READERS’ VIEWS

**Trump needs a time machine**

I learned something earth-shattering recently while driving. I heard President Donald Trump on the radio saying at a rally that we need to “throw out a very, very bad situation that occurred.” I’m wondering how we do that. Has he a time machine?

**Bob Holtz Cloquet**

**Can’t wait for the bugle of the elk**

I read the March 29 story, “Minnesota House committee hears Fond du Lac Band elk plan,” with great hope for the

future success of elk reintroduction to the Fond du Lac Reservation and the adjoining Fond du Lac State Forest. The progress of the House bill (HF4482) and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resource’s repeated support for the project, including \$1 million, are great news. Please contact your state reps and senators to support this legislation as it works its way through the Minnesota Legislature.

Elk once roamed as far north as Duluth until they were wiped out in the 1800s. We have an obligation to return this charismatic species to its home. My hunt-

ing land abuts the southern border of the Fond du Lac State Forest, where I have the young aspen that elk need to eat and for shelter. They are welcome to my place!

Elk herds in neighboring Wisconsin and nearby Michigan are growing — and in the presence of wolves. Elk will succeed and expand in Northeastern Minnesota, too. The state and others can compensate for any damage to the few alfalfa farms in the area and control the population, if need be someday, by public hunting.

Until then, I can’t wait to hear the mighty bugle of the elk echo through the forest

when I’m up grouse hunting or just sitting by the campfire.

**Mark Herwig White Bear Lake, Minnesota**

Readers’ Views and Local Views

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