

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS

LOCAL NO. 49, 49A, 49B, 49C, 49D, 49E, 49L
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JASON A. GEORGE
Business Manager/Financial Secretary

2829 Anthony Lane South, Minneapolis, MN 55418-3285
Phone (612) 788-9441 • Toll Free (866) 788-9441 • Fax (612) 788-1936

1/13/22

Republican Oversight Forum: “Minnesota Mining and American Potential; An Opportunity for a Brighter and More Secure Future.”

Opening Statement from International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49 Business Manager Jason George.

My name is Jason George, I am the elected leader of Minnesota’s largest construction union, the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 49. I thank my friend, Congressman Pete Stauber, for inviting me to speak at this forum, and I thank the committee members for being here. The topic at hand is a critical one for the future of Minnesota and our nation. The mining of minerals critical to the growth of a domestic clean energy economy is something that deserves your attention.

Minnesota is blessed in a lot of ways. Our state was populated because of our abundant natural resources and the people needed to develop them. We have grown and prospered as a community because of this development, and we have contributed mightily to the growth of our nation. With the discovery of the world’s largest and highest quality untapped strategic mineral deposit in our state, we are at the precipice of another hundred years of prosperity.

If we are allowed to pursue it. If we don’t submit to fear mongering. If we don’t let anti-development, not in my back yard political groups prevent us from mining.

The anti-development crowd is small but powerful. They have supporters at the highest level of government that are determined to keep these minerals in the ground. Their entire argument is based on fear. They are trying to scare people into believing that mining projects can’t be done without irreparable pollution that will destroy our environment. They are trying to stop scientific evidence from being collected and presented because they don’t want to let the facts get in the way of their mission.

If you traveled to Northern Minnesota, and talked to Congressman Stauber’s constituents, thousands of whom are members that I work for, they will tell you, from generations of experience, that we have been developing our natural resources in this region for hundreds of years, and we have the cleanest watersheds in our state.

They will tell you we want the good paying union jobs in our region that come with the mining industry. They will tell you that we have no intention of allowing the companies wishing to

develop these minerals to cut corners or to jeopardize our waters. They will tell you we can have clean water and mining, because we have had it for hundreds of years.

Minnesota doesn't need Washington DC or big city elites to look out for our interests, we do just fine on our own. Our regulators are the best in the country. We can be trusted to permit projects that demonstrate, through science and data, that they can be done safely. We can trust the judgement of the local communities, all of which support the exploration of these projects and allowing companies to go through the permitting process.

The alternative is stopping all development before we even get a look at whether it can be done. That means we will be dependent on foreign nations for critical minerals. That means supporting child labor mining the minerals we need for our batteries and phones instead of Americans making good wages and benefits in union jobs. That means supporting more pollution not less. And it certainly means a slower transition to the clean energy economy most of us realize is needed, in some regard, to slow the warming of the planet.

We have a choice to make. It's the same choice that generations of Americans have had before us. Do we avoid the difficult task because we don't know for sure if the outcome, or the politics are too difficult? Or do we forge ahead, figure it out, and get it right. We have never been a nation that lets false choices stop us.

We can mine these minerals and protect the environment. Of course, we can. We must, or this generation will be the one that stops the progress of our great nation.

Jason George
Business Manager
International Union of Operating Engineers
Local 49