



REPRESENTATIVE JANET BEWLEY

WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

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Flawed Mining Bill Moves Wisconsin In The Wrong Direction

Bewley Amendment To Adopt Minnesota Timelines Rejected

Madison – State Representative Janet Bewley (D-Ashland) released the following statement in response to Assembly action on the mining bill, AB 426:

“Yesterday I offered a substitute amendment that would have provided the clarity and definitive timelines that Gogebic Taconite President Bill Williams told the people of northern Wisconsin his company wanted. It would have left all Wisconsin’s current environmental standards in place, which is what Matt Fifield, managing director of GTAC, told us was the company’s intention. In addition, my amendment would have changed the tax on iron mining so that local governments would start getting revenue as soon as a mine became operational. And it wouldn’t have let the state steal 40 percent of the revenues out of the Local Impact Fund.

My alternative would have provided certainty and predictability for the mining company, as well as certainty and predictability for local governments and residents. I based my amendment on the laws in Minnesota, which has a longer history of surface taconite mining. Unfortunately, it was rejected on a party line vote. The bill that passed has nothing to do with making Wisconsin law more predictable. It provides less certainty than we have in current law and to paraphrase a former governor, sticks it to the locals.

The Assembly bill doesn’t solve problems with our current mining laws. It creates new ones. It creates problems for local governments by reducing the funds they would have gotten to help prepare for and deal with the impacts of mining. It shifts costs that would have been paid by mining applicants onto taxpayers. It creates problems for other businesses whose applications will be put on hold while DNR scrambles to meet the accelerated deadlines for mining permits. It creates conflict with the Army Corp of Engineers which will likely result in a longer, not a shorter review period. And as unbelievable as it may sound, the bill creates problems for thousands of homeowners across the state who could lose their federal flood insurance policies.

Wisconsinites are known for their hard work, creativity, and common sense. We have a proud tradition of being good stewards of our lands, air and water. We need to make sure that changes to our mining laws continue that tradition. This bill fails that test. My constituents aren’t fooled. They know the difference between a good bill and a bad bill, the difference between an honest attempt at reform and political theatre. As I said on the floor of the Assembly, we could have gotten this right. Hopefully the State Senate will throw this out and start over.

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74th Assembly District