

GUEST COLUMN

MARK DAYTON

Governor

'We must get this right. I am determined we will.'



MARK SAUER/MESABI DAILY NEWS

Gov. Mark Dayton during an interview at Mesabi Daily News.

ST. PAUL — My Iron Range education began, when I went to work for Gov. Rudy Perpich in 1977.

I learned a lot from him about the character of Rangers (and also about a few Range characters!). I learned about the importance of a job, and how drastically family life changed, when there was no work in the mines. Those hardships have forged the exceptional strength, resiliency, and determination of Iron Rangers.

For them, mining means jobs, mostly good-paying jobs, with health and retirement benefits. They enable Rangers to live in the area they love, raise their families in tight-knit communities, and enjoy hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities.

That is why the shock waves were enormous when, in 1985, Butler Laconite Company announced it was closing its plant in Nashwauk. I was then Minnesota's commissioner of Economic Development. I will never forget walking with Gov. Perpich into the high school gym, filled with sev-

eral hundred miners and their families. They were praying for a miracle, and we didn't have one.

Years later, I had the same feeling, when U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone and I met with LTV workers in Hoyt Lakes. It was awful to see the suffering of good men and women, who had worked hard to help the company achieve success, who wanted to keep on working, and who then were abandoned.

When a community has endured a plant closing and hundreds of citizens have lost their livelihoods, more jobs and new business opportunities become high priorities. Thus, most Rangers I know support the proposed non-ferrous mining projects in their region. After 115 years excavating iron ore and then processing it into taconite, people on the Range are used to mining.

Non-ferrous mining, however, is different. Extracting the desired metals requires deep digging, followed by processing, which leaves behind toxic

wastes that must be contained. Other residents in the Arrowhead region, especially along the North Shore, as well as other Minnesotans, are strongly opposed to this kind of mining.

The environmental review of Minnesota's first non-ferrous project has dragged on for eight years. That's far too long, even allowing for the project's complexities. More environmental review lies ahead, primarily by two federal agencies and the Minnesota DNR.

A draft of their preliminary review will soon be made public. That will be followed by months of public comments. By law, all of that additional information must be considered by the responsible agencies before they issue their final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). If the final EIS is determined "adequate," then the company begins to apply for the necessary permits from state and federal agencies. However, an agency's decision that the final EIS is "adequate" does not signify its approval of the

permits required for the project.

I know many Minnesotans who support non-ferrous mining, and many who oppose it. They all care deeply about the future of our state. Both proponents and opponents are certain that they are right, and that the other side's position would be ruinous.

I intend to remain undecided, until all of the scientific studies, expert analyses, and public comments have been completed and I have reviewed them.

I have always believed that sound economic development and strong environmental protection are complementary objectives. Minnesotans want and deserve both. Each one is crucial to our state's future.

That is why we must get this right. I am determined that we will.

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DFLer Mark Dayton was elected governor in 2010. He plans to run for re-election in 2014.