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Rep. Clark: Unanswered Questions on Mining Legislation

MADISON – Prior to tomorrow’s Assembly Committee on Jobs, Economy and Small Business vote on Assembly Bill 426, the bill to allow out-of-state mining giant Cline Mining Group to build the state’s largest ever open-pit mine, Rep. Clark urged committee members to consider research that shows the long-term increases in poverty and unemployment in mining communities.

The Clark office shared research by UW scientists and others that shows, contrary to the usual assumptions, that in the majority of cases mine communities suffer from long-term high poverty and high unemployment rates (Freudenburg and Wilson, 2002).

Similarly, a report by University of Montana researcher Dr. Thomas Michael Power reviewing employment trends in Minnesota’s Iron Range concluded that mine mechanization and the worldwide slump in iron prices led to an 83% loss of Minnesota mining jobs (11,000 jobs lost) between 1979 and 2005. Power concluded that the ability of communities to recover from the inevitable “bust” that accompanies mining booms depends on both the degree of environmental damage and the local community’s ability to make investments in quality of life that attract new businesses and new residents.

Rep. Clark added, “Research by Freudenburg, Power and others should give us pause to consider carefully whether we are protecting the interests of our workers and their communities long-term, or just selling off our minerals and clean water for a very short-term gain. Members of the Assembly committee charged with promoting jobs and the economy in Wisconsin should carefully consider the reality that large scale mining projects usually result in higher unemployment and more poverty.

This research bears out what concerned citizens have been saying all year about this proposal. Any legislation to permit mining in Wisconsin must assure strong environmental protection, assure the rights and benefits for workers and their families, and assure that local communities benefit from the wealth their resource is generating.

If Cline Industries is allowed to build this mine in a way that is contrary to those principles the citizens of Iron and Ashland counties are likely to pay a very high price for years to come for this mistake.”

Copies of the Freudenburg and Power’s studies can be obtained through Rep. Clark’s office. The office contact information is provided in the foot of the release.