



STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1315

William D. Pluecker

State Representative
1133 Finntown Road
Warren, ME 04864
(207) 273-3044
Bill.Pluecker@legislature.maine.gov

Good Afternoon, Sen. Brenner, Rep. Gramlich, and the entire committee of the Environment and Natural Resources, I am Bill Pluecker and I represent House District 44, which comprises the towns of Warren, Union, and Hope. I wanted to take an opportunity to speak broadly to several of the mining bill that you will be hearing today.

I encourage you to not change our current mining regulations creating opportunities to mine spudomene ore for lithium extraction. The commercial benefit to our state of the mining operations is questionable and the environmental consequences are beyond a doubt. I serve on the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee where we struggle daily with the fact that Maine industries such as forestry and paper, blueberry and potato, and dairy are continually threatened by the global commodity markets. When our products are being sold on the global markets, we have no power to set prices. We know that alternatives are already being developed to lithium batteries, replacing the lithium with sodium. Just this week, the New York Times reported that China has made huge strides in development of these cheaper batteries. After the global demand for lithium has dropped, making the mining of low grade spudomene no longer economically feasible, our state will be left with the consequences of the mining, whether that be acres of open pits, potentially polluting tailings, or surface and ground water pollution. This is a story that has been played out in Maine for generations whether we are talking about egg production, timber production or wool. We build industries based on the needs of populations not living here and then the bottom drops out, leaving us struggling once again to pick up the pieces.

From my understanding of the issue, the U.S. and Maine will never equal the lithium production of other countries, such as Australia and Chile, that have much larger deposits that are more easily accessible. These are developed countries and allies with the U.S. It

is not an issue of national defense or economics to have a domestic supply of these resources, and we will never be in a situation where we will be able to control the pricing or marketing of lithium.

There are also cheaper, more environmentally accessible sources of lithium in the U.S. One of these sources is the Salton Sea in California. While existing in an ancient lake bottom, the current water body was created through mismanagement of canals and levies some 100 years ago. At this site, a water brine can be extracted from the ground and the lithium can be directly extracted from this brine without the construction of mines or the processing of the ore.

In light of this global and national reality, I encourage this committee to take no action to change our current laws making the extraction of spodumene easier in our State. I encourage you to pass LD 1508 to create a moratorium, and pass LD 1495 to study the issue, taking the time to look at the national and global, economic and environmental, reality of the mining of this ore.

In my opinion, the only way that Maine may benefit from the extraction of spodumene is through the collection of taxes on the resource. Our mining excise taxes are much too low, especially when seen in the context of the risk of essentially permanent environmental destruction and ongoing pollution. If we are selling our precious land, we should at least get a market rate for it. Once again, I urge this committee to take no action easing the extraction of spodumene until the legislature has taken action to increase these excise taxes.

I ask the committee's patience for a moment so that I may speak briefly to LD 1564, because this bill addresses issues currently affecting my own district. A company from Canada has come to my hometown and other towns in my district to undertake exploratory mining activities to extract primarily nickel and a couple other associated metals. This extraction is undoubtedly sulfide metallic mining that carries with it the proven harm of sulfuric acid production and pollution of surface and groundwater supplies. My small rural towns are being targeted by this multinational corporation because they do not expect that we will be able to mount a formidable defense quickly enough. We have local mining ordinances on the books that are almost 30 years old and have not been appropriately updated to keep up with the changes in the mining industry in the last 30 years. This is an issue that has united my communities left and right in a way that I have never seen before. We will mount a defense of our land and water, but if LD 1564 were on the books, we would have had an earlier warning of the exploratory activities of this corporation and would have had more oversight of their operations.

I encourage this committee to pass this bill with a couple amendments that I have been passed by the sponsor and she has approved. In paragraph 1. Sec. 1, I believe that this committee should take it upon itself to define "advanced exploration" in statute not rule. This is an issue that the people of Maine, through their democratically elected representatives, should have a say on. We want to know that we are protected when corporations come from away to attempt these activities, and that we will be notified, and the appropriate permits will be obtained.

In Section 2 paragraph 6, current law allows exploration activity on a per pit or per-trench basis with a max of 300 square feet. It would be wise to also limit the combined impact of this exploration activity. I suggest limiting the combined impact of exploratory activity to $\frac{1}{4}$ acre or 10,890 square feet to limit.

Thank you for your indulgence, and I am happy to entertain any questions.