

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## A community response

The termination of 265 jobs at the Boise Inc. paper mill here is unfortunate for the entire community.

That said, we are fortunate that a variety of responses intended to help the community address the loss of jobs and income spent here are being put in place.

Sub-teams created from community meetings held by a Greater International Falls Economic Response Team are meeting, mill officials and members of the team are sharing information, and Trade Adjustment Assistance meetings for the displaced mill workers are scheduled for next week.

Add to all this the attention we have gained from our elected state and federal leaders who have already stepped up to support our needs. U.S. Sens. Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar, as well as Congressman Rick Nolan, helped in the application to obtain Trade Adjust Assistance for the mill workers who will lose their positions.

And Nolan told The Journal that the TAA program directly benefits American workers who lose their jobs due to unfair competition from a foreign company that receives subsidies from its government. But, he said, “In the long term, we need

to fix our trade policies.”

We agree and Boise mill officials last week noted some of the assistance they need to keep this mill competitive. We urge our state and federal leaders to take a look at the list of concerns, challenges and needs outlined in a report in this edition and begin to consider how to move forward.

At the same time, our state and federal leaders have pledged to do all they can to help this community diversify its economy and meet the immediate needs of people who will be impacted by the job reduction. As jobs are lost at the mill, we believe that other jobs that relied on the mill and the income spent in the community may also be at risk.

The larger team has set out as its mission to leverage all available resources to help the greater International Falls area recover from the work force reduction at the paper mill this year. That’s a great place to start.

This community’s response to the job reduction at the mill has been swift and well organized. With the help of our elected officials and leaders who have stepped up to serve, this community will not only survive, but again feel economic stability and growth.



GUEST COLUMN

## Preventing the next spike in gas prices

While the price of gas can change, the needs of Minnesotans stay the same. People still need to get to work, businesses still need to transport their goods to market and farmers still depend on diesel fuels to harvest their crops.

Volatile swings in gas prices put Minnesota’s prosperity at risk. The effects are far-reaching, impacting family budgets and business’s bottom line and placing a hurdle in front of our recovering economy.

This spring Minnesota saw the price of gas jump 40 cents in one week and climb to a record \$4.27 a gallon, a full 65 cents above the national average. While prices have since dropped from those sky-high levels, action is needed to prevent the next spike in gas prices.

We now know what caused the increased gas prices this May, and it wasn’t the usual suspects. It wasn’t movement in the price of crude oil, it wasn’t turmoil in the Middle East, and it wasn’t a natural disaster. Instead, the culprit was simultaneous maintenance on several refineries that serve the Upper Midwest. This caused a gasoline shortage in the region and drove the price in Minnesota to the highest in the nation.

While refineries must perform necessary upgrades to protect worker safety and repair equipment, there is no reason routine maintenance should result in a major gasoline shortage that puts Minnesota’s economy in jeopardy.

That’s why, in addition to contacting the oil companies to seek immediate relief last May, I introduced legislation to



Amy  
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address the refinery closure issue. My bipartisan bill would require refineries to report to the Energy Information Administration any scheduled maintenance that might bring their operations off line and require refineries to give immediate notification of any unplanned outages.

This information can serve as an early warning system to protect consumers from production problems within the refinery industry. With more transparency and more lead time, the Energy Information Administration can work to make sure scheduled refinery shutdowns don’t send gas prices skyrocketing.

The bill would also ask the Secretary of Energy to look at the potential for additional refined fuel storage capacity in our region. Minnesota has less storage capacity for refined products than other parts of the country, making us more vulnerable to the kinds of refinery outages we’ve experienced this year, both planned and unplanned.

The recent price spike highlights the stubborn problem of our country’s reliance on foreign oil. We have made strides in recent years reducing our dependency on foreign liquid fuels from 60

percent to 40 percent in large part because of increased production in North Dakota as well as better gas mileage vehicles and an increased use of homegrown biofuels, yet people and businesses are still clearly vulnerable to increases in gas prices.

In addition to the refinery issue, we also need to crack down on the out-of-control oil speculation on Wall Street. We can attribute an average of 56 cents per gallon increase in gas prices to excessive oil speculation. I am committed to pushing regulators to hold these oil speculators’ feet to the fire and help give families some relief at the pump.

Most importantly, America needs an all-of-the-above energy agenda. One that continues to support domestic drilling in places like North Dakota, works to develop the next generation of biofuels and other alternative energy sources, and maximizes every gallon of gas through more fuel efficient vehicles on the road. Through these innovations, we can increase our energy independence and restart the economic engine that has always kept our country moving forward.

In many ways, the spike in gas prices this spring was déjà-vu all over again. It is time to break that cycle and get serious about developing long-term energy solutions that will strengthen our economy and build the next generation of energy innovation.

**Klobuchar serves on the Senate Agriculture, Commerce, Judiciary and Rules Committees, and is the Senate Chair of the Joint Economic Committee. She also serves on the President’s Export Council.**

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