

OPINION

FIRST AMENDMENT “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

OUR VIEW

E-2 best of all options

U.S. Highway 53 between International Falls and Duluth is a major corridor transporting people, goods and services across northeastern Minnesota and to points north and south.

That’s why it makes sense for the Minnesota Department of Transportation to select a route for relocation of the federal highway between Eveleth and Virginia that requires the shortest bridge over a mine pit, allows the project to be finished in 2017 and is the lowest cost of all the alternative routes considered.

MnDOT revealed its preferred route, called the E-2 option, Tuesday. The northernmost route alternative, E-2 will cost an estimated \$220 million and require a 1,000-foot bridge across the Rouchleau Pit.

A portion of the highway between Eveleth and Virginia must be moved to allow mining companies to access land the highway was built upon to continue mining operations there. Since 1960, portions of Highway 53 in St. Louis County were located on land owned by the mining companies through easement rights.

Kudos to MnDOT for reconsidering a “Westerly Route” option after concern was voiced the option would lengthen commute times between Iron Range communities, threaten local businesses, add time on the road for emergency vehicles and cost local school districts millions of dollars. MnDOT responded to

those concerns, voiced among others by 8th District Congressman Rick Nolan, by conducting a thorough review, after which MnDOT staff determined the additional cost to the traveling public, and the potential economic impact on the cities, were indeed significant enough to consider other alternative routes.

After lengthy study of several other alternatives, E-2 rated highest in “constructability” and cost, according to MnDOT. Other alternatives had more difficult technical challenges or passed over land that could potentially be mined. The E-2 alternative offers the most workable challenges and has the lowest cost of all the alternatives.

In addition, MnDOT ought to get credit for its decision to speed the approval process for relocation of Highway 53 by up to two years. The expedited process was made possible under the federal MAP-21 — Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act passed by the House Transportation Committee and signed into law in 2012.

The northern part of the highway has been the focus for several years of widening to four lanes and the addition of turn lanes to improve travel safety.

Now, it’s time to move the road to allow for job-creating mining operations and to maintain the safety and ease of travel by moving forward with the E-2 option.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Veterans are the fabric of our flag

To the editor,

This last week I was in International Falls on Veterans Day. I came into town because a dear friend, Ann Reff, was being honored by fifth grade school teacher, Mark Glowak, and his class.

It was a program to honor his students’ veteran relatives. And it was wonderful. Perhaps my lasting impression will be how

this classroom of students were not only attentive, but later circled Mrs. Reff to ask questions and look at all her WWII photographs, her duffle bag and a map. It was touching to see these children have such an interest in their country’s history.

Sometimes we all get a little too busy to stop and think of others who have worked hard and have suffered much. If there

are other teachers in this country like Mr. Glowak, heroes like the Vietnam and Korean War veterans and Ann Reff, who were honored last week in International Falls, will never be forgotten. Their sacrifice will never be taken for granted.

In my opinion, veterans are the fabric of our flag. Thanks to Mr. Glowak and class.

Becky Bonnell  
Apple Valley, MN



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Ann Reff

GeoWeek: Think, learn geography

To the editor,  
I am the Minnesota state coordinator for the National Geographic Bee. Next week, Nov. 16-22, is Geography Awareness Week (GeoWeek). GeoWeek is an annual awareness program organized by National Geographic that encourages everyone to think and learn about what geography means in our everyday lives. Geography is a crucial discipline, teaching us

about the relationships that exist between people and their environments, natural and otherwise. However, it is neither widely available nor well taught in American schools. GeoWeek is an opportunity to learn about and appreciate geography, while drawing attention to the need for policies to improve American students’ access to meaningful geography education. National Geographic

invites everyone to celebrate GeoWeek. One of the best ways is to participate in the National Geographic Bee. Schools across the country host Geo Bee competitions, and the champion of each school Geo Bee gets a chance to compete to go to the national competition at National Geographic headquarters in Washington, DC, where a \$50,000 scholarship is on the line. To start a Geo Bee, check out http://

www.nationalgeographic.com/geobee/ for more information.

For countless other ways to celebrate GeoWeek, go to GeoWeek.org, where you can learn more about geography and find ideas and free resources to organize your own GeoWeek celebration. Celebrate GeoWeek and spread the word about the importance of geography education.

Kerri Westgard  
Dilworth, MN

Final thoughts as EPA comment period ends

To the editor,

The Clean Water Act has brought progress to Minnesota lakes and rivers, but in order to continue on the path to success we must protect all the waterways in Minnesota.

A loophole in the Clean Water Act has left more than 51 percent of Minnesota’s rivers and streams, including many that feed into the Mississippi River, vulnerable to pollution.

All of Minnesota’s waterways deserve protection.

Fortunately, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed restoring protections to all of the state’s waterways this past March. After almost eight months, the public comment period ended this Friday, Nov. 14th.

In these last few days, the submission of public comments is essential as powerful polluters are

waging an acrimonious campaign against the EPA’s rule. Despite this bitter opposition, nearly 740,000 supportive comments. were delivered to EPA officials in Washington D.C. last month, including more than 2,000 collected by Environment Minnesota.

If we push back against polluters in these last few days we can restore safeguards to all of the waterways that support strong local economies

and make our state beautiful.

Environment Minnesota recognizes the EPA for taking the steps needed to protect Minnesota’s waterways. I encourage every Minnesotan to actively side with our state’s waters before the end of the public comment period.

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