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Palmesano: Immoral Overseas Child Labor Is Being Used For NYS To Get Electric Cars

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Assemblyman Phil Palmesano is objecting to the use of child labor in the Congo, to get cobalt, to make batteries for electric cars. Palmesano says it's about 35 to 40 thousand children, some as young as six years old, being used in mines to dig up cobalt for car batteries. Palmesano says this is unacceptable.

See full statement below:

Palmesano, Tague and Human Rights Advocates Shine Spotlight on Child Cobalt Mining in The Democratic Republic of The Congo

Nearly 70% of the world's cobalt is produced in the DRC; Cobalt is used to help produce batteries to power electric vehicles

Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) and Assemblyman Chirs Tague (R,C,I-Schoharie) were joined in Albany for a press conference by Founder and Executive Director of the International Rights Advocates Terry Collingsworth, Representative of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and Executive Director of Investor Advocates for Social Justice (IASJ) Courtney Wicks and Dr. Bill Jackson Mlongetcha who grew up in Kolwezi, a city in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Each speaker touched on the horrific human rights abuses occurring on the estimated 35,000-40,000 Congolese children who are mining for cobalt, some of these children are as young as six years old.

As part of the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) there is a push to meet clean energy goals for zero greenhouse gas emissions. Along with the Climate Action Council's (CAC) draft-scoping plan, the legislature previously passed a law requiring that no new gasoline-powered car sales can happen in New York by 2035 and there is an electric school bus mandate that all schools must have a fully electric fleet by 2035. In addition to the affordability and energy reliability concerns with the CLCPA, lawmakers and advocates are also working to make sure that the people of New York, the Hochul administration and legislators in the Majority also understand the human and environmental costs of these ambitious climate goals and green energy policies, some moving forward with little to no media coverage.

Cobalt is one of the main elements used to produce batteries that power electric vehicles. Nearly 70% of the world's cobalt is produced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where many of these mines are loosely regulated. Unfortunately, thousands of children are working in these mines and it is reported that many are dying, being maimed and injured in mining collapses.

Palmesano and Tague introduced legislation, A.9241A, that calls for the state of New York common retirement fund to divest from any company that cannot independently verify that their cobalt and lithium mining production is not using child labor and that any adult workers are subject to acceptable criteria lined out in the Conventions of the International Labor Organization.

Assemblyman Phil Palmesano (R,C,I-Corning) said: "Electric Vehicles are part of the state's plan to meet the zero

emission goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). Cobalt is an element used to help produce batteries to power electric vehicles. About 70% of the world's cobalt is extracted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Part of the Congolese cobalt comes from artisanal mines with little to no government regulation. Of the approximately 250,000 artisanal miners, an estimated 35,000-40,000 are children, some as young as 6 years old. There are reports of children dying, being maimed and seriously injured from mining collapses. This is unacceptable. And, this is just one clear example that 'green is not so green,' and that there are significant human and environmental costs mining for cobalt, lithium and other elements needed to make electric vehicles and achieve full electrification.

"Whenever I talk about my concerns regarding the CLCPA, it has to do with my questions on the true impact it will make when the CLCPA only impacts New York and nobody else. I remind my colleagues that New York only contributes 0.4% of the total global emissions, while China contributes 29% and continues to build coal plants. The response I hear back from my Democratic colleagues is that 'New York will lead. New York is leading.' However, when I mention the despicable human rights and environmental problems associated with mining for elements like cobalt and lithium, particularly this well-documented use of child labor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this administration and my Democratic colleagues choose not to lead and say it is up to the federal government to do so. I disagree with this hypocritical and unacceptable response. If you claim New York needs to lead on the CLCPA, you can't pass the buck to the federal government regarding these horrendous child labor violations just to advance clean energy goals. There are actions we can take because 'the end does not justify the means' to get to all electric vehicles and full electrification of our state.

"The comptroller has, in the past, used his office to divest pension funds based on other societal issues, like fossil fuels and others. I have introduced A.9241A, which does not allow any money or assets of the common retirement fund to be invested in the stocks, securities or other obligations of any institution or company engaging in cobalt and lithium mining or production, if such companies cannot establish though approved independent monitoring that their mining operations do not use child labor and that their adult miners and other workers are employed under conditions that meet accepted criteria by the Conventions of the International Labor Organization.

"Thank you to the human rights advocates and fellow lawmakers who stood here today to say, 'NO more child cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or anywhere else around the world.'"

Assemblyman Chris Tague (R,C,I-Schoharie) said: "A transition to green technology cannot come at the cost of human suffering. What innocent children are going through to mine materials needed to mass produce electric vehicles is sickening, and having managed mining operations myself professionally, is beyond the pale of anything anyone in this country would stand for. If we wouldn't let our kids go through this, we shouldn't be OK with kids anywhere being made to risk their lives like this. We need to act immediately to divest from companies who can't guarantee their materials aren't the products of child labor."

Founder and Executive Director of the International Rights Advocates Terry Collingsworth urges passing of A.9241A saying: "Tesla and the other major electric vehicle manufacturers are on full notice that children are being killed and injured in DRC cobalt mines and that these mines are environmental disasters. We need a tool to create real leverage to require them to bring their cobalt supply chains for their futuristic vehicles out of the Stone Age. Electric vehicles powered by blood cobalt are neither good nor green."

Representative of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and Executive Director of Investor Advocates for Social Justice (IASJ) Courtney Wicks said: "While the electric vehicle transition presents a critical opportunity for faith-based institutions to invest in climate solutions, the prevalence of child labor in cobalt mining to produce EV batteries also puts investors at grave risk of contributing to human rights violations. Until automakers can guarantee that their cobalt supply is child labor-free, investors are faced with the decision to engage in shareholder advocacy or consider divestment from companies for poor human rights performance. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd New York – Toronto Province have chosen to engage Tesla, the leader in this industry, through shareholder proposal filings requesting human rights disclosure for three years now, while global Sisters affiliated with Bon Pasteur Kolwezi are

working directly in DRC cobalt mining communities to ensure a better future for children. Investor Advocates for Social Justice believes that moving forward too quickly with divestment from cobalt producers risks devastating impacts to communities relying on income from mining activities, and any divestment strategy must be coupled with reinvestment in mining communities to contribute to sustainable development

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