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January 29, 2016

The Honorable Gina McCarthy
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

I write regarding the future of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC) site in Columbia Falls, Montana. I stand with this community and am committed to ensuring this shuttered aluminum plant and the surrounding area are cleaned up and repurposed for the economic benefit of the Columbia Falls and the State of Montana.

I contacted you at the behest of the Columbia Falls community just over a year ago after Glencore had walked away from the negotiating table yet again. As you know, Glencore mothballed the plant in 2009 and never re-opened the facility despite repeated commitments to its workforce, the community and to me that Glencore hoped to restart operations. Regrettably, it took the threat of EPA intervention to finally bring Glencore to the table to discuss how to properly remediate the CFAC plant. Since then, the community, small businesses and local officials have worked hard to consider and develop a meaningful cleanup strategy for the CFAC site. I believe the dialogue between local, state and federal entities has been crucial up to this point, and that it is just as important that it continue moving forward. With progress being made at the site, a Superfund listing would be premature at this time. That is why I appreciate recent public comments from EPA staff that the CFAC site would not be considered for a Superfund site listing this spring until the fall at the earliest.

As the investigation into the contamination level continues, I request that your staff continue its outreach to the community and local leaders to ensure they understand the process and options ahead of them. It is critical that the EPA make decisions only with significant public input and support. It is also critical that EPA understand its important role in informing the community of all of its options. Regrettably, Glencore has made it clear that it will not make its decisions with the community's best interests in mind. After all, the company only agreed to contribute to the remedial investigation after the specter of a Superfund listing appeared. Equally frustrating, it is likely that the continued option of a listing will be the most effective way to keep the company at the table.

As I told you last year, Columbia Falls is a special place full of resilient people. It is adjacent to the "crown jewel" of the National Park System, Glacier National Park, and the site of some exciting economic development. We must ensure this site is addressed in a responsible way that respects the wishes of the local residents.

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I appreciate your expeditious attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Jon Tester