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Statement to Pend Oreille County Commissioners

Good afternoon. My name is Curt Holmes and I am Executive Director of Public & Governmental Affairs for the Kalispel Tribe as well as a member of Tribal Council. I have come here today to formally share the Tribe's concerns regarding the HiTest silicon smelter, and to propose an alternative pathway to revitalize the local economy.

Let me start by saying that the Tribe understands the allure of HiTest's sales pitch, particularly in light of the budget crisis the County is facing. If the smelter really generated 170 high-paying local jobs with no hazardous emissions as HiTest originally claimed, we would support it.

The reason we have decided to oppose the smelter is because HiTest's original claims are belied by its own data. The number and average wage of jobs available to local citizens has declined significantly, and the claim of no hazardous emissions is simply untrue. The smelter would be the State's 5th largest emitter of sulfur dioxide, 12th largest emitter of nitrogen oxides, and 15th largest emitter of greenhouse gases.

HiTest has tried to quell community fears over this air pollution by saying that the permitting process will protect us. This claim is also untrue. The Clean Air Act is a pollution enabling law until a certain threshold is met. Because air quality in Pend Oreille County is generally very good, there is far more room to pollute the air here than in a more urban or industrial area. Permits are necessary to make the smelter's emissions lawful, but legal should not be mistaken for harmless.

The smelter's emissions will degrade our air quality and cause health problems for children, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations. They will also destroy a natural asset that draws people and businesses to our community rather than areas with poorer air quality. The mere specter of the smelter's emissions has already driven some concerned citizens out of town and decreased property values.

HiTest and Governor Inslee have also dismissed the community's air quality concerns by saying that the smelter's emissions will be offset by the use of its silicon in solar panels and other green technology. We've seen no contracts or data to prove up this claim, but even if it were true, that offset will not protect our community from chronic exposure to large amounts of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and other contaminants emitted by the smelter. HiTest's and the Governor's "greater good" argument is rooted in the exploitation on our community. We should all be insulted by it.

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The Tribe realizes that you've heard most of these concerns before and likely feel that the economic situation in Pend Oreille County is too dire to pass on HiTest. However, in case we've misread the situation or the Commission is open to changing its mind, we want to go on record today as asking you to join the Kalispel Tribe and other concerned citizens in opposing the smelter.

There are good reasons for taking this stance.

First, our community will be stronger if the County and Tribe are able to work together to improve the local economy. The Tribe is committed to helping you quickly fill any economic void left by HiTest if you decide to oppose the smelter.

Second, HiTest isn't the County's only option for economic development. Our forests are in dire need of management actions to promote forest health, wildlife conservation, and wildfire risk mitigation, and those actions would create new jobs in the forests and the processing of timber. The Tribe is in the process of developing a plan with the Forest Service under the Tribal Forest Protection Act to catalyze this economic and stewardship activity.

Third, HiTest isn't the only business looking for cheap power. The Tribe, PUD, and County could work together to make a powerful pitch to new businesses that would stimulate our economy without degrading our health and environment.


Fourth, the smelter has caused widespread concern among elected officials throughout the region, and they are likely to be eager to bring their expertise and resources to the table to help the County develop a plan to revitalize the economy without HiTest.

Fifth, the smelter will not provide any economic relief soon. Given the widespread opposition to the smelter, HiTest and the County are likely to be embroiled in litigation for a long time if HiTest decides to move forward with its project.

Sixth, there is reason to be skeptical about HiTest's care and diligence. HiTest withheld emissions data for over a year, and that data disproved its prior claims that the facility wouldn't generate hazardous emissions. It acquired a site for the smelter that prohibits industrial uses. It used a BPA right-of-way without permission. The United Silicon Smelter debacle in Helguvik, Iceland provides recent, tangible evidence that silicon smelters cause massive problems if they are operated without care and transparency.

Seventh, you won't have to answer to concerns from your electorate when meteorological conditions are such that they are prohibited from using their wood stoves while the smelter continues to operate.

Eighth, you won't have to live with the knowledge that you could have stopped the smelter if it turns out to be as bad for our community as many people fear. The Commission can stop the



smelter in its tracks by refusing to rezone the land out of public health concerns. But if those public health concerns become apparent after the smelter is constructed, it will be too late. This is the lesson we learned from Libby.

Thank you for listening. The Tribe sincerely hopes that we will be able to work together. I'd like to hear your thoughts and questions now.