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ENERGY
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AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

March 1, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

In October of last year, I wrote to you regarding the emergency situation at Jana Elementary School in Florissant, Missouri. I called on you to declare a federal emergency and immediately authorize federal relief to children, parents, and teachers who may have been exposed to radiation at that elementary school. But you failed to act, and your Administration has refused to fix the problem.

The lack of urgency from your administration is outrageous. Children and parents in my state have had their lives upended by the closure of this elementary school. These families may not be from wealthy New York suburbs or the Bay Area—and they may not be your party’s donors—but they are just as important as any American family and deserve the same attention from your Administration. I will wait no longer. Until these children get the help they deserve, I will hold all of your Senate-confirmed nominations to the Department of Energy. For as long as it takes.

As you may know, testing performed over the last year has revealed radioactive contamination on the property of Jana Elementary, a school in Florissant, Missouri and part of the Hazelwood School District. The contamination was caused by the federal government. It stems from activities related to the United States’ early nuclear program and can be found at sites throughout the St. Louis area. Ever since contamination was found, the parents of the Hazelwood School District have requested that testing be performed at other schools in the district. At this point, both the Department of Energy and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have received repeated requests for such testing from myself, from the school district, and from concerned parents.

These requests have been met with equivocation and abdication of responsibility by your Administration. To date, no real action has been taken to ensure the safety of Hazelwood schools. Instead, your Administration has pointed the finger at each other, refusing to give parents a straight answer. In January, my office received a letter from USACE stating that it “does not have authority...to conduct additional testing beyond the scope of the record of decision.” This followed a meeting in which USACE recommended that the school district send a letter to the Department of Energy, so that the Department could authorize further testing.

The school district followed that advice and sent a letter to the Department of Energy. But on February 15, 2023, the Department of Energy responded, directly contradicting USACE’s position and asserting that “USACE may determine if there is a basis for investigation of any or all of [Hazelwood School District]’s properties as vicinity properties.” This inability to decide who is actually responsible for helping the Hazelwood School District was further underlined by Deputy

Secretary of Energy David Turk, who testified to me in a recent Senate hearing, “I don’t particularly understand where the Army Corps is coming from on this.”

We are well past the time for passing the buck on this issue. The parents of Hazelwood School District deserve answers—and they deserved them months ago. Direct your Administration to stop pointing fingers and actually fix the problem in front of them. As noted, I intend to hold all nominees to positions at the Department of Energy until this issue is resolved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

Josh Hawley
United States Senator