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City of Duluth - Communications Office

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SUBJECT: Mayor Larson Issues Open Letter To Rolling Stone Magazine

BY: Phil Jents, Community Relations Officer

Mayor Larson Issues Response To Rolling Stone Article

[Duluth, MN] Mayor Larson issues a response to a recent article in Rolling Stone Magazine. Writer Ana Marie Cox was in Duluth this week covering the president's visit. Mayor Larson's response is below:

Friday, June 22nd, 2018

An Open Letter to Ana Marie Cox and Rolling Stone:

Those of us here on our "...lonely island of electoral blue" wish to respond to your Rolling Stone article on your recent Duluth visit covering the president's political rally.

Reading your experience in our hillside city, we can only say this: We see things differently. And it's not just our rose-colored sunglasses needed for the brilliantly glittering sun off Lake Superior.

You see, it's not necessarily what you wrote that's at issue here. Some of the points you raised are actually spot-on. Like many communities around the country, we have serious issues as it relates to opioid abuse and domestic violence. And it's true we are not the economic hub for the steel industry we once were.

What may be lacking, however, is context.

In Duluth, we own our problems - and we do something about them. There's no doubt that we are an imperfect community, but allow me to shed some light on who we are and what it is we're about. Because it seems to have gotten lost in the article.

You saw our downtown as a place where "...every surface is covered with a thin layer of grime..." What you call grime, we call reconstruction dust and progress. Just blocks from the Arena where you spent your time, we are embarking on a bright future for our main street, replacing 100-year-old pipes, improving our infrastructure to advance our city's energy system and building towards a more efficient Duluth. There's a reason we call it Superior Street.

The focus on red and blue politics overshadowed all of our green. In our city of 86,000, we boast 7,000 acres of parkland, over 225 miles of trails and a 7-mile sandy beach for sailing, surfing and just soaking in the wondrous good that blows in off our great unsalted sea. Which happens to hold 10% of the world's fresh water.

And while you saw all that beautiful freshwater crashing "...against a town whose shoreside skyline is dominated by stolid, brutalist mid-century relics and precarious-seeming industrial shipping contraptions, rusty and mostly silent," we see vital industry. Our international port is the conduit for moving 35-million tons of cargo annually — that's heartland grains that cross oceans to feed the world, taconite pellets which becomes America's steel, and colossal wind turbine blades that create green energy to run our country.

We aren't buying the label of Trump Country. We are more than one person. We are teachers, health care workers, and police officers. Bus drivers, engineers, and planners. We're also musicians. Isn't your magazine named after a song by some guy? Yeah. He was born here.

We are magazine buyers, too.

Here in Duluth, we aren't anyone's country. Simply put, we are America — where changing industry meets innovation. Where mental health and drug addiction hit home. Where cities roll up their sleeves to take care of the many problems the federal inefficiency leaves on our lap.

Of course, like all cities we have problems. But unlike some places, we are boldly facing them with political will and getting real results. We're putting our attention where our issues are — like investing in sexual assault victims advocacy and our opioid crisis.

In the 1980s, Duluth pioneered a new response to domestic violence, which is now the most practiced model of domestic violence intervention in the country. The. Most. And while we have no shelter "...in the shadow of the Amsoil arena...", our shelters take domestic violence victims from all over the country, as an innovative leader in the field. It was because of this status that Duluth was the first anywhere to use a Direct-to-DNA technology to start clearing a shameful backlog of sexual assault test kits. I'm proud to say on behalf of our victim-survivors, we will be caught up by fall.

Now, let's talk opioid crisis for a minute. Yep — you're right; it's bad here. So, we're applying our successes in domestic violence

prevention to our nation's fevered use of opioids and heroin.

Our commitment has been to work with our county, the Center for Alcohol and Drug Treatment, courts, local hospitals and other partners to create an Opioid Withdrawal Unit: a safe place for those who overdose and want help to medically withdraw and be connected seamlessly to other support and resources. This is the first such program in the state. This safe place and support system is the first step in disrupting the cycle of addiction.

Just to be clear, you're not the first national media we've received. Duluth has been voted "Best Outdoor City" by Outside Magazine, and just last month was featured in The Atlantic for our "unfolding saga of start-up businesses as the crucial creators of new jobs ...like craft breweries (along with tech incubators, arts companies, manufacturing "maker spaces," and others) in bringing life to fringe areas of recovering cities...". James Fallows wrote that - and I was able to thank him in person after he also chose to feature us on CBS Sunday Morning.

Come to think of it, I'd like to thank you, too, Ms. Cox. Nothing brings a community together more than being dismissed by others. We are proud of who we are. We'd like you to see and experience why. So come on back for another visit. We'll leave the Enger Tower light on for you. Who knows? You might find that you like it here in Duluth.

We sure do.

Sincerely Yours,

Emily Larson,

Mayor, City of Duluth

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