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September 25, 2006

AN OPEN LETTER TO HON. CHUCK STRAHL, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Re: Question in the House of Commons concerning government involvement in an anti-Canadian Wheat Board plan

Dear Minister Strahl,

A person, namely Paul Orsak, that you recently appointed to a Task Force on the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), has recently been involved in a scheme to ghost-write anti-Wheat Board letters intended for publication.

On September 19, 2006, an e-mail from Charlton Communications, a Regina-based public relations firm, was sent to Paul Orsak, a Board member of Agricore United (a subsidiary of US grain multinational Archer Daniels Midland). The same e-mail was also sent to representatives of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, the Western Barley Growers Association, and the Alberta Barley Commission. The e-mail was then forwarded by at least one of these organizations to their membership.

In the e-mail, the representative of Charlton Communications indicates that "government, MPs, and others" have been urging anti-CWB people to "get into the game with letters to the editor in weeklies, dailies and agriculture trade publications as the other side is embarrassing us…"

The Charlton Communications writer then goes on to ask "Would you mind contacting your membership list and asking a wide variety of your members if they would agree to be potential signers of letters. I can then write letters, contact your suggested folks… and start sending at least 5 letters a week… I think this would get us into the propaganda game and save you people time…"

This appears to be an orchestrated campaign aimed at creating the false impression that farmers are opposed to the Canadian Wheat Board, with Charlton Communications acting at the request of your government.

This scenario begs a number of important questions:

1. The public needs to know that your department was in no way involved in this scheme. First, will you agree to cooperate with an investigation into this incident? And secondly, if Paul Orsak is confirmed as a participant in this scheme, will you immediately disband the Task Force on the Canadian Wheat Board?

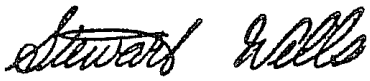
2. Will you publicly condemn this ghost-writing campaign and the organizations that forwarded the e-mail from Charlton Communications?

3. Is the e-mail from Charlton Communications accurate when it says your government has suggested to Charlton Communications that they "get into the game" of attacking the Canadian Wheat Board?

4. Has your government had any dealings with Charlton Communications, located in Regina, Saskatchewan?

5. Does your government have contracts with Charlton Communications; or is your government funding, in any way, the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, the Western Barley Growers Association, or the Alberta Barley Commission?

Yours truly,



Stewart Wells
President
National Farmers Union
Swift Current, SK
(306-773-6852)

APPENDIX – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following is the original e-mail which was sent September 19 from Charlton Communications of Regina to:

Blair Rutter - Executive Director of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association;
Jeff Nielsen - President of the Western Barley Growers Association;
Mike Leslie - General Manager of the Alberta Barley Commission;
Paul Orsak - Board member of Agricore United, Chair of Grain Vision, recently appointed by Minister Strahl to the Task Force on the Canadian Wheat Board, and a former Board member of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association.

The Charlton Communications website lists Alanna Koch among its associates. Koch is the former Executive-Director of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association and a current board member of Agricore United (a subsidiary of Archer Daniels Midland).

Randy Hoback, the former Chair of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, is currently the political staff person in Minister Strahl's office in charge of all communications and strategy related to the Canadian Wheat Board. He operates out of MP David Anderson's office in Ottawa.

> From: Mary-Lynn Charlton [mailto:marylynn@charltoncomm.com]
> Sent: September 19, 2006 11:00 AM
> To: Blair Rutter; Jeff Nielsen; Mike Leslie
> Cc: paul orsak
> Subject: Letters to the editor
>
> Hi guys - I has been suggested to us by government, MPs and others that
> we must get into the game with letters to the editor in weeklies,
> dailies and agriculture trade publications as the other side is
> embarrassing us with their propaganda. Would you mind contacting your
> membership list and asking a wide variety of your members if they would
> agree to be potential signers of letters? I can then write letters,
> contact your suggested folks, have them approve anything that goes out
> and start sending at least 5 letters a week to a variety of sources. Or,
> if you prefer, rather than contacting them first, you can send me names
> directly and I can contact them and ask permission directly? I think
> this would get us into the propaganda game and save you people time.
> Thanks so much!
>
> --
> Mary-Lynn Charlton
> President
> Charlton Communications
> Suite 300 - 1914 Hamilton St.
> Regina, Sk S4P 3N6
> Ph: 306-584-1000
> Fax: 306-584-5111
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