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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

The Honourable Diane Finley MP

Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada

Confederation Building Room 707

House of Commons Ottawa, K1A 0A6

May 9th 2014

RE: Political Interference into Access to Information at PWGSC

Minister Finley,

The report by the Information Commissioner recently tabled in Parliament documents troubling political interference by members of a Conservative Minister's office into the Access to Information System in regards to 5 separate files.

I ask that you reverse your decision and follow the Commissioner's recommendations to refer this matter to the appropriate authorities. Furthermore, I ask that you appear before a parliamentary committee to discuss the matter. We will be submitting a notice of motion on the matter shortly.

The Commissioner outlines how these actions may have broken the law, as they were deliberate acts of interference that contravened the Access to Information Act, and undermined the rights of Canadians and our democracy.

I would like to think that despite our political differences, we share a fundamental belief that political staffers who deliberately and repeatedly break the law must be sanctioned and their actions dealt with by the appropriate authorities. Yet time and again your government keeps standing in the way of ensuring that the Information Commissioner has the appropriate authority and tools to deal with such abuses of the public trust. Conservatives have regularly opposed providing officers of Parliament with the ability to levy fines or other penalties, or directly refer matters to the appropriate authorities for further sanctions.

As a result, the Information Commissioner is now put into the difficult position of being forced to rely on you, as Minister, to decide on how your staff members are held accountable for their inappropriate actions, creating a clear conflict of interest.

The Information Commissioner has asked, very clearly, that you "refer the five files in which the Commissioner has concluded there was interference to the appropriate investigative body." However, instead of agreeing to this request you stonewalled, stating that "it would not be a prudent use of the RCMP's limited resources to refer these current files to them."

It is astonishing to me that you claim to speak for the RCMP and their resources, an arms length body, especially when the matter for potential criminal investigation concerns possible criminal activity within your office.

It was the Conservative practice of putting narrow partisan interests above the obligation to serve the public that was at the heart of the possible criminal acts by staffers in your office. The Commissioner even went so far as to point out that "the culture of maintaining good relations with the Minister's Office that was in place at PWGSC which at times, came at the expense of its meeting their responsibilities under the Act."

It would be distressing to learn that this culture of interference would include obstructing the recommendations of an Officer of Parliament to continue the investigation by referring it to the proper authorities.

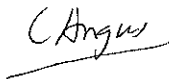
In promising to clean up the political culture in Ottawa in 2006, Stephen Harper said:

There's going to be a new code on Parliament Hill -- Bend the rules, you will be punished; break the law, you will be charged; abuse the public trust, you will go to prison.

But unfortunately, in Conservative Ottawa of 2014, those promises have been long forgotten. Conservatives who bend the rules, or break the law, are not held to account. It is a sad day when the government turns a blind eye to the abuse of the public trust when it is done to benefit the Conservative Party.

Canadians deserve better – and you now have an opportunity to do better. In order to start re-establishing Canadians faith in the rules, I ask you to immediately reverse your decision and accept the recommendations of the Information Commissioner to refer this matter to the appropriate legal authorities. I ask that you respect basic principles of accountability and allow any subsequent investigation to proceed free of political interference. Furthermore, I ask that you appear before the parliamentary committee to discuss this matter.

Thank you,



Charlie Angus
MP Timmins- James Bay

Cc The Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of the Treasury Board
Peter Mackay, the Attorney General of Canada