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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MINISTER RITZ WASTES MORE TAXPAYERS' MONEY ON TWO FRONTS

The Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) is showing a reckless disregard by wasting more taxpayers' money on yet another taxpayer-funded anti-CWB meeting, says Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

In addition, the anti-CWB meeting in Ottawa January 29 shows that the Minister, Gerry Ritz, has no confidence whatsoever in the appeal process that he triggered in the Federal Appeal Court after the Conservatives were caught breaking the law in July 2007.

“So the Minister is wasting taxpayers' money on two fronts – the Federal Appeal Court process and the anti-CWB meeting in Ottawa,” said Wells. “There is, of course, no accountability regarding the spending of taxpayers' money simply because Prime Minister Harper says it is okay.”

A command issued late last week by Ritz – that the CWB attend a meeting with anti-CWB forces in Ottawa – shows again that the Harper Conservatives have no respect for farmer democracy and the “one-farmer, one-vote” rule that elected the majority of the Board of Directors of the CWB. “The summons of the CWB to Ottawa is strangely reminiscent of Chuck Strahl's anti-CWB taxpayer-funded meeting in Saskatoon in July 2006. I'm sure that the Western Barley Growers, with less than 130 farmer members, will also be invited to the Ottawa meeting at taxpayers' expense. (There were twice as many farmers supporting the CWB in one room at a meeting in Saskatoon a week ago as the Barley Growers have in their whole “organization”.)

Wells said the Harper regime has launched a series of ideologically-driven firings of senior officials in regulatory, crown and even shared-governance commercial agencies. The firings include: Adrian Measner, former President and CEO of the CWB; Jean-Pierre Kingsley, former Chief Electoral Officer; Johanne Gelin, former Environment Commissioner; and John Reid, former Information Commissioner. The Harper administration has also clashed with Marc Maynard, current Chief Electoral Officer, and Graham Fraser, Commissioner of Official Languages. And of course the latest firing is of Linda Keen at the Nuclear Safety Commission, who, like Adrian Measner, was fired precisely because she was doing her job.

“Farmers and all Canadians are getting fed up with the Conservatives' politicizing of federal agencies and regulatory boards,” stated Wells. “The Conservatives get indignant

when references are raised about jackboot tactics, but the Prime Minister is deliberately cultivating a climate of fear. If you are a regulator, a CEO, or a President, job number one for you is pleasing the Prime Minister – any other duties seem to be optional.”

In the summer and fall of 2006, the NFU was asking all Canadians to learn from the Harper Government’s assault on farmers and the CWB. When Adrian Measner was fired, Wells issued a statement saying, “For the first time in my life I am genuinely concerned about the future of this country. Watching the Harper Conservatives engage in what amounts to a reign of terror against the CWB has shattered my notion of Canada as a safe country that is based on democracy.” [NFU news release, December 19, 2006]

Wells said it is time for all citizens who understand what true democracy is to step up and say “enough is enough.”

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