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June 30, 2008

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## Look harder, commissioner

We read with interest the first annual report of the new Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, Christiane Ouimet. She mentions that there are 400,000 public servants but that there is little to no reporting to the new office. This issue is definitely one of trust, as she clearly states. We also agree that there is a strong need for education regarding whistleblowing. Based on her report, it is apparent that she has spent considerable time talking with former colleagues. When we have asked public servants about her office, the general comment is, "I didn't know it existed." Obviously her message isn't reaching the people it matters to most— those at the working level who witness the acts of wrongdoing and are the victims.

To address the need of helping people and promoting knowledge of whistleblowing, we have formed a new organization: Canadians for Accountability. This organization is to help all Canadians, not just federal public servants. As such, we are not concentrating on the legislative agenda which is sadly lacking in this country. We are much more concerned with providing advice and resources to help people understand their situation and alternatives when they are considering whistleblowing.

With respect to the commissioner's report, we disagree that there is little to no wrongdoing taking place in the federal public service. Although we have far fewer resources and limited means both in funding and available time, we have been able to validate whistleblowing situations. As with the Commissioner's Office, we work under extreme confidentiality so can not provide more details.

The issue of trust is one that concerns all of us. Canadians for Accountability is an organization of whistleblowers for whistleblowers. One of our members, Mark Halfacree, is a whistleblower from Agriculture Canada. His case predates the formation of the Public Sector Integrity Office.

It also needs to be understood that there is a strong and pervasive culture of secrecy in the federal government—often using the pretext of protecting ministers to justify itself. Reprisals can take many forms, some very subtle. If Ms. Ouimet is seen as being too close to and favouring her former colleagues—the senior bureaucrats—her office will be doomed to be a failure and will be less trusted than its predecessor (the Public Service Integrity Office). We also find it significant that she now employs the same staff as had worked in that office.

The consequences of failure for the commissioner do not take much imagination to predict. There would eventually be another scandal, and possibly another fallen government. It is in her interest, the government's and ours that this be prevented.

Ms. Ouimet states that the Public Sector Integrity Office will build a credible organization and she wants to "establish Canada as a world leader in the promotion of integrity in the workplace." We wish her well in this endeavour. However, she should be aware that her success will be measured by the trust that her office builds with the workers, not with the management. Her effectiveness will be measured through education and compliance, and in establishing a new culture in the federal public service.

NEW COMMUNICATIONS

Andrew Cardozo

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July 14, 2008  
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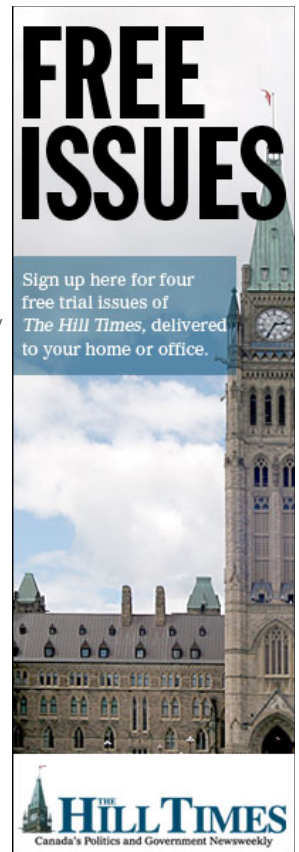
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