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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4103

October 21, 2004

The Honorable Paul Cellucci
The Embassy of the United States of America
490 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1G8 Canada

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

I am deeply concerned by your recent comments regarding the reopening of the U.S. market to Canadian beef.

It has been reported by the Associate Press that, on October 20, you told Ottawa business leaders that the U.S. border would be open to Canadian beef imports if it were not for politics. In addition, you cited my personal actions as a reason that the Canadian border remains closed. Your statement confirms with great clarity what many of us have known – that the Administration wants to reopen the border to Canadian beef products as soon as possible – and demonstrates the Administration is more concerned with Canadian politics and international meatpacking conglomerates than the safety of the U.S. beef supply and the American consumer.

As you know, the U.S. border was closed to Canadian beef in May of 2003 after a Canadian-born cow was found to have Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). In August 2003, Secretary of Agriculture announced that the border would not reopen to certain beef products, including ground beef, until a public rulemaking and comment period took place. I completely agreed with the Administration's decisions to close the border, enforce the strictest food safety standards, and ensure the health of our domestic livestock herds. In fact, I publicly commended the Administration for those actions.

Unfortunately, in April of this year, we all learned that the Administration had, in fact, secretly opened the border to the previously precluded beef products for 12 special permit holders, including international meatpacking conglomerates. Only after the issuance of a federal court order, was the border again closed. At the request of several senators, USDA's Inspector General launched an investigation into this and other related matters. That investigation is ongoing.

Mr. Ambassador, it is the Administration's extremely poor handling of this important food safety issue that has led to this investigation and raised serious concerns about what special favors were granted to a select few in the meatpacking industry.

There is no question that the Administration favors an integrated North American beef industry. In fact, the Secretary of Agriculture has called for a single North American label for all beef products. In this regard, it is clear that the Administration's actions favor the powerful international meatpacking conglomerates and our foreign trading partners at the expense of U.S. ranchers.

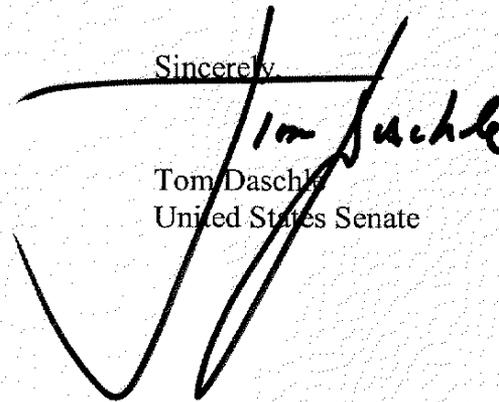
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Until the Inspector General's report is completed and reviewed by the appropriate congressional committees and any needed remedial actions are taken, the border should remain closed, not because of politics, but because of the Administration's irresponsible policy, which has allowed unsafe standards to threaten consumer confidence and the livelihood of our nation's beef producers.

Mr. Ambassador, it is clear that the Administration needs to remedy not only the policies with regard to beef and the U.S. border, but also the perception that government officials, like yourself, are actually working against the interests of U.S. ranchers and consumers. Instead of making excuses to Canadian businessmen, which offers tacit support for the Canadian government's refusal to pursue a BSE testing regimen as strong as that of the United States and pleases international meatpacking conglomerates, we need U.S. government officials who are on the side of American ranchers and consumers. Therefore, I urge you to retract and correct your egregious comments.

Finally, as I have said before, we need to make improvements to our system to ensure safety and confidence in U.S. beef markets. This can happen only with candid, open dialogue and public hearings to ensure all views are heard and that needed remedial actions are taken so that we do not repeat the missteps of recent events. I look forward to working with the Administration and others in that regard.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Tom Daschle". The signature is written over the typed name and title.

Tom Daschle
United States Senate