

Dear Mr. Johnson;

I acknowledge your letter of July 1, 2015. I'm unsure if you are inviting us to support your efforts or if the purpose of the communication is to criticize our efforts in support of the American free enterprise system. At any rate, let me clarify our mission, goals, and how I think your coalition might be somewhat more effective and free from our interference.

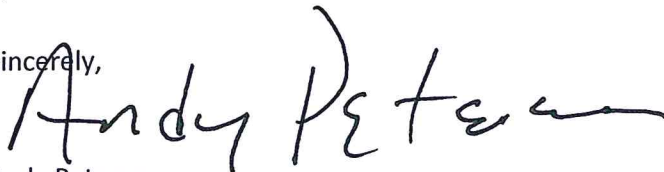
Chambers of Commerce – whether they be local, state, or federal – work to support free enterprise. Our mission at the GNDC is to “make North Dakota’s business climate the best in the United States.” To that end we are funded entirely by members’ dues and generosity. As such, we feel it our right to stand up for their right to pursue commerce so long as they are carrying out that commerce legally.

I understand your support of the State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP). It has, in my opinion many great objectives. I also understand your seeming frustration with our organization. However, our activities at the legislature in this arena involved opposing a massive tax increase upon a legal product. There was no plan for how the additional state revenues would be spent or even if they might go to health care at all, or if they might be earmarked for use by the coalition.

In either case it appears Tobacco Free North Dakota Coalition seems to have unlimited funds already. Witness the seemingly endless commercials on television. The focus of the commercials attack legally run companies and the free enterprise system as a whole. It is within your right to run such commercials, although most are mean spirited and many stretch the truth. As you likely already know, North Dakota spends more per capita than any other state in the country in regards to tobacco prevention, and is one of two states (Alaska being the other) that spend the recommended amount prescribed by the Center for Disease Control. It is my opinion that you should refocus your efforts towards prevention and quitting. We would welcome the coalition refocusing their efforts on goals that would reflect the SHIP plan.

Let me reiterate that we will continue to advocate for our members so long as they operate with the confines of the law. I would welcome face to face discussions regarding the goals of tobacco prevention as long as they do not include continued attacks upon a legally run company or the free enterprise system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andy Peterson
President & CEO
Greater North Dakota Chamber of Commerce