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July 21, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

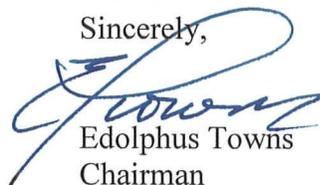
Thank you for your phone call yesterday regarding the decision to request the resignation of Shirley Sherrod as the Georgia state director of rural development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I appreciate and commend you for your stated commitment to civil rights enforcement within the Department, as well as your "zero tolerance" policy for discrimination.

However, since that discussion, additional details have emerged regarding the full scope of Ms. Sherrod's speech before the NAACP. These details seem to indicate that Ms. Sherrod's comments, when placed in context, were fully consistent with the Department's "zero tolerance" policy. It is also important that the Department have in place a personnel process that ensures fact-based decision making, and provides all employees with a fair opportunity to provide input into those decisions. In addition, the press is reporting today that you intend to conduct a "through review" of the facts and circumstances surrounding this issue.

As a result of these developments, I request that Department of Agriculture officials provide a comprehensive briefing to staff of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform as soon as possible regarding this matter. Please contact Ron Stroman of the Committee staff at 202-225-5051 to schedule the briefing.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Edolphus Towns
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Darrell E. Issa, Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform