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State Senate Candidate Publishes Scathing Criticism of Insight Communications and CEO Michael Willner

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Local writer and publisher Scott Ritcher released a scathing critique yesterday of Insight Communications and its CEO Michael Willner. This comes as Ritcher and a team of volunteers are collecting signatures to place his name on the November 4th ballot as an independent candidate for District 35 State Senator.

On his current events website, Ritcher, 38, chastises the cable and Internet provider for promoting itself with a "friendly neighbor" image while being owned by a \$19 billion conglomerate and censoring or manipulating what is made available to users of its services.

The article begins with Ritcher taking on Willner's weblog and Insight's television commercials, which he says attempt to portray Willner "as some sort of Dave Thomas character," referring to the late founder of Wendy's Restaurants.

Willner's blog, MichaelsInsight.com, was launched in May as a direct line from the CEO and it welcomes comments posted by users. However, Ritcher argues, what he sees as valid criticisms and questions about the company are instantly removed. The site claims Willner himself is the moderator of these comments.

The article is not Ritcher's first lambaste of Insight. In September 2006, he published a piece titled "We Want the Airwaves Back" which called out Insight's deceptive marketing techniques, non-competitive franchise agreement with Louisville Metro Government, and ownership by private equity firm the Carlyle Group, controversial due to its intermingling of investments from both the Bush and Bin Laden families.

Ritcher's new commentary revisits those same topics and slams Willner and other Insight executives for their sizable and seemingly influential contributions to political campaigns, including those of former Kentucky Governor Ernie Fletcher and US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Willner and former Insight executive Keith Hall both gave the maximum allowable amount to Fletcher's campaign and seemed to reap rewards within months of Fletcher taking office. Many more Insight executives have contributed heavily to McConnell as well.

In February 2004, Insight announced Hall's appointment by Governor Fletcher as Kentucky's chief of homeland security. The following month, Willner was quoted in a Fletcher press release touting the benefits of a restructuring of the state's telecommunications taxes. And Ritcher cites a September 2007 incident in which Insight refused to air an anti-McConnell ad from the Public Campaign Action Fund, a Washington-based nonpartisan group that advocates for clean campaigns.

Ritcher also discusses his objection to the way Insight's Internet service redirects users to pages of contextual advertising when they enter an incomplete URL, rather than auto-completing the addresses as most browsers are configured to do.

Both of Ritcher's columns about Insight can be found on the current events website NewsNShit.com (note to editors: site can also be accessed at NewsTheMagazine.com) and on his campaign website, ScottRitcher.org.

Scott Ritcher is the publisher of K Composite Magazine, author of the book "Letters to Saint Clinton" and has been a contributor to LEO Weekly, Louisville Magazine, and public radio's "This American Life."

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