

ONONDAGA COUNTY FAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICES COMMITTEE
Coordinated by the Syracuse League of Women Voters
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Immediate Release

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**FAIR CAMPAIGN FINDINGS REGARDING COMPLAINTS
BY AL STIRPE AGAINST DAVE KNAPP**

The Onondaga County Fair Campaign Practices Committee met on October 31, 2008 to hear complaints filed by Al Stirpe against Dave Knapp, both candidates for the New York State Assembly, 121st District.

Mr. Stirpe was in attendance. Mr. Knapp sent a representative. Both candidates had signed a Fair Campaign Pledge.

1. COMPLAINT: Mr. Stirpe complained that Mr. Knapp accused him of voting for legislation to send jobs from Central New York to New York City.

FINDING: UNFAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICE

The Committee found that the legislation referred to had no connection to Central New York and was intended to encourage businesses that had moved out of lower Manhattan after the 9/11 attack and relocated to Connecticut and New Jersey to return to New York City. Mr. Knapp offered no evidence to the contrary.

2. COMPLAINT: Mr. Stirpe complained that Mr. Knapp accused him of voting to hold an economic development bill in committee.

FINDING: FAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICE

Mr. Stirpe did vote to send the bill to committee for review and modification.

3. COMPLAINT: Mr. Stirpe complained that Mr. Knapp published *The Stirpe Squeeze* website which violated his pledge to conduct his campaign honestly, openly and fairly.

FINDING: NO FINDING IN PART; UNFAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICE IN PART

The Committee had no evidence indicating that Mr. Knapp was responsible for this website and he denied having anything to do with the site. His representative says he found out about it only when he received the complaint from Mr. Stirpe. The portion of the Pledge Mr. Knapp violated is the requirement that he "publicly repudiate support from any individual or group whose activities would violate this Fair Campaign Pledge." The Committee believes the site disseminates content that violates the Pledge. Mr. Knapp had an obligation under the Fair Campaign Pledge to repudiate this site and its distortions of fact as soon as he received Mr. Stirpe's complaint on October 20th. He had not done so by the time of the hearing on October 31st.

4. COMPLAINT: Mr. Stirpe complained that a post card ad published by the New York Republican State Committee “Photo-shopped” his head onto the likeness of a bank robber.
FINDING: FAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICE

Altered images of political figures are in the accepted tradition of political cartooning.

5. COMPLAINT: Mr. Stirpe complained that negative images and wording on post card ads published by the New York Republican State Committee falsely accused him of voting for wasteful spending and tax increases.

FINDING: NO FINDING

The Committee believes that while the assertions in these ads about wasteful spending and tax increases do not rise to the level of outright distortion (which is the standard promulgated by the Pledge), such assertions are nevertheless misleading and should have been repudiated by Mr. Knapp during the campaign.

6. COMPLAINT: Mr. Knapp referred to Mr. Stirpe in an interview with the Syracuse Post-Standard as a “serial tax hiker.”

FINDING: NO FINDING

The committee believes that this statement does not rise to the level of outright distortion (which is the standard promulgated by the Pledge). It is nevertheless misleading.

If a candidate or campaign wishes to quote from this finding, the Committee requires that the finding be quoted in its entirety. The Committee regards selective quotation of its findings as a violation of the fair campaign process.

Committee Members: Minna Buck, Thomas Costello, Steven Kulick, Joseph O’Hara, Marilyn Pinsky, Bernhard Mollrem, Jr., Grant Reeher, and David Rubin, chair. **Ex officio Members** are representatives from the recognized political parties.

The purpose of the Onondaga County Fair Campaign Practices Committee is to promote a climate in which candidates conduct honest and fair campaigns. The Committee encourages candidates to conduct campaigns openly and fairly, to discuss issues, to refrain from defamatory attacks, and not to use campaign materials that distort the facts.

The Committee does not enforce election law or make legal decisions. Its task is to accept written complaints about alleged unfair campaign practices and to determine whether the action complained about is indeed unfair. The Committee has no power to compel anyone to stop doing what it has found to be unfair. If the Committee acts on a complaint, it will release its findings to inform the public.

The Fair Campaign Practices Committee is coordinated by the Syracuse League of Women Voters and co-sponsored by the Onondaga Citizens League. The campaign manual and findings are located on the League’s website: www.lwvsyr.org.