



Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust

Investigative Report

Investigators: Manuel W. Diaz

Case No: K14-073/ C14-031	Case Name: Ighodaro v. Ragoo	Date Open:	CASE CLOSED Date: <u>10/30/14</u>
Complainant(s): Erhabor Ighodaro	Subject(s): Francis David Ragoo	8/21/14	

Allegation(s):

Erhabor Ighodaro (Ighodaro), a candidate for election to Seat 6 of the City of Miami Gardens (CMG) City Council alleged that his opponent, Francis David Ragoo (Ragoo, willfully defaced campaign material supporting his (Ighodaro's) candidacy for office. Ragoo allegedly did so by removing Ighodaro's name from the flyer and substituting his name. The altered flyer (flyer) was handed out by Ragoo campaign workers at a voting precinct in CMG during early-election voting.

Relevant Ordinances:

Ethical Campaign Practices Ordinance Sec. 2-11.1.1. Ethical Campaign Practices Ordinance.

(C) Mandatory Fair Campaign Practices.

(c) willfully injure, deface or damage or cause to be injured, defaced or damaged by any means any campaign poster, sign, leaflet, handbill, literature or other campaign material of another candidate; or

(D) Voluntary Fair Campaign Practices.

Statement of Fair Campaign Practices

6. I shall not tolerate my supporters engaging in these activities which I condemn nor shall I accept their continued support if they engage in such activities. I will not permit any member of my campaign organization to engage in these activities and will immediately and publicly repudiate the support of any other individual or group which resorts to the methods and tactics

11. I will not use or permit the use of campaign material that falsifies, distorts, or misrepresents facts.

Investigation:

Interviews:

Erhabor Ighodaro (Ighodaro), CMG Councilperson and candidate for re-election to Seat 6.

Ighodaro was interviewed, he advised the following:

He was advised by one of his campaign workers that Ragoo campaign workers were handing out flyers which endorsed Ragoo and a candidate for vice-mayor, Charlene M. Butler (Butler).

According to Ighodaro, CMG civic activist Abraham Thomas (Thomas) endorsed a slate of candidates for state-wide offices in the August 23, 2014, election. Thomas had the names of those who he endorsed printed on a campaign flyer which he distributed at early- polling locations in CMG. Ighodaro's name was printed on the campaign flyer.

Ighodaro advised that the flyers that the Ragoo campaign workers distributed were the same campaign flyers that Thomas printed, but with his name removed. His name on the flyer had been replaced by Ragoo's name.

Ighodaro contacted Thomas to see if he had changed his endorsement and had authorized a change in the campaign flyers. Thomas advised that he still endorsed Ighodaro and that he had not authorized any changes to the campaign flyer.

Ighodaro advised the COE that one of his campaign workers, Elizabeth Judd (Judd), had taken photographs of the Ragoo campaign worker distributing the duplicate flyer and provided the photos to the Miami Times newspaper.

Ighodaro provided the name and contact information for one his campaign workers, Henrietta Lacy (Lacy), who was present when the duplicate flyers were distributed at the North Dade Library.

Erick Johnson (Johnson) – Editor - Miami Times

Johnson was contacted. He provided a copy of the photographs taken by Judd. According to Judd, the photos were taken in front of the North Dade Regional Library at NW 183 Street and 27th Ave, a Miami-Dade early-voting polling precinct.

Johnson advised that he authored the Miami Times story on August 21, 2014, after speaking to Judd. (Copy in file)

Henrietta Lacy, Ighodaro campaign worker.

Lacy was contacted. She advised that she was present when the duplicate flyers were handed out at the library by a Rago campaign worker. She does not know the name of the worker, but she stated that the worker had on a Rago campaign tee shirt.

Lacy is listed in the Ighodaro Campaign Treasurer Report as a contributor. The report indicates that she donated \$240.00 to the campaign.

Elizabeth Judd, Ighodaro campaign worker.

Judd is the Ighodaro campaign worker who photographed the Rago campaign worker handing out the duplicate flyer at the Miami-Dade North Dade Regional Library. She provided those photograph to Johnson. She is mentioned in the Miami Times article written by Johnson. (Copy in the file)

Judd is listed on the Ighodaro Election Campaign Treasure Report (Expenses) as a “consultant.”

Judd did not respond to several contacts to contact her. Messages were left.

Francis David Rago, Candidate for Miami Gardens Seat 6

Rago was interviewed. He confirmed that he had spoken to Ighodaro and Thomas about the duplicate flyer.

Rago denied being responsible for altering the original Thomas campaign flyer. He was not a member of the slate of other candidates endorsed by Thomas. He ran individually. His campaign had nothing to do with the Butler campaign.

He does not know who altered the Thomas campaign flyer or who printed the flyer. He suspects that it was his opponent, Ighodaro, who put out the duplicate flyer, since Ighodaro's campaign worker contacted the Miami Times. He believed that the Miami Times article which blamed him for the altered flyer, seriously hurt the credibility of his campaign.

Rago was contacted by Thomas, who he acknowledged paid for the printing of the original campaign flyer. Rago assured Thomas that he had nothing to do with any alterations to the campaign flyer. After speaking to Thomas, Rago took the remaining duplicate flyers from his campaign worker and discarded them.

He advised that his campaign was poorly funded and could not afford to re-print the altered flyers.

He does not know if the other candidate listed on the flyer, Butler, had anything to do with altering the Thomas campaign flyer.

He volunteered the name and contact number for the campaign worker whose photograph was taken by Judd.

Cheryl Waterman (Waterman), Rago campaign worker.

Waterman was interviewed. She confirmed that she was photographed handing out the flyers at the library. She advised that she was an unpaid volunteer.

Waterman advised that when she arrived at the North-Dade Regional Library she was handed stack of flyers by Butler. She advised that Butler had a box of flyers. Waterman handed out the flyers until she was told by Rago to stop. Waterman did not know who re-printed the flyer altering the endorsements.

Abraham Thomas, Civic Activist

Thomas was interviewed. He paid for the printing of the original campaign flyer. The flyer listed a slate of candidates that he endorsed. He endorsed Ighodaro. He distributed the flyers throughout CMG. He noted that the flyers are properly identified as his endorsements. Thomas advised that the campaign flyers that he paid for did not list either candidates Butler or Rago.

Thomas contacted Rago when he was told that his campaign flyer had been altered. Rago, according to Thomas, denied altering the names on the flyer. Rago told him that his campaign would discontinue the distribution of the flyers.

Thomas advised that he accepted Rago's explanation. Thomas advised the COE that he had the flyers printed at Union Printing in Broward.

Barbra Stuart (Stewart), Union Printing – 2321 Pembroke Rd. Hollywood, Florida 33020.

Stuart is the owner of Union Printing. She recalled Thomas printing 10,000 campaign flyers. She advised that Thomas contacted her and told her that the campaign flyer had been altered and distributed before the election. Stuart did not know who re-printed the campaign flyers. She advised that there are a number of printers in Miami and Broward that can do the re-printing.

Stuart was concerned because whoever reprinted the flyer misused the Union Printers button or trademark seal. She advised that she pays to use the seal.

Ralph Williams (Williams), Chris Graphic Design, 1624 NW 188 Terr., Miami Gardens, FL

The Campaign Treasurer Report (Expenditures) filed by the Butler campaign listed Chris Graphic Design. Williams was contacted. He advised that the campaign ordered 4 x 6 palm cards. He does not know who reprinted the Thomas campaign flyer.

Williams, the owner was contacted. According to Williams, the campaign only paid for the printing of 4 x 6 palm cards. Williams provided the COE with copies of the card. (Copy in file)

Richard Rutherford (Rutherford) , Xpress Media, 18166 NW 2 Avenue, Miami Gardens Florida.

The Campaign Treasurer Report (Expenditures) filed by the Ighodaro campaign listed Xpress Media. Rutherford was contacted. He advised that the Ighodaro campaign ordered flyers electronically. He did not keep copies of the flyers that he printed. He recommended that the COE contact Ighodaro.

Glen C. Joseph (Joseph), Munro & Associates Group, Inc. 4747 Hollywood Blvd. Suite 314. Hollywood, Florida

Joseph was contacted. He stated that Rago had a limited campaign budget. Muro & Associates coordinated the printing of Rago campaign signs and Rago campaign flyers. The campaign did not print any flyers containing any slate of candidates. He confirmed that Rago did not run with a slate of candidates, he ran individually.

Rago told him that when he learned of the altered flyers, he took the flyers from his campaign workers and discarded them.

Joseph recommended that the COE contact Butler. He believes that she may have been involved, since the flyers first appeared in her campaign tent.

Joseph provided copies of the flyers printed by the Rago Campaign. (Copies in the file)

Charlene M. Butler, Candidate for CMG Seat 2.

Butler was interviewed. She confirmed that she was present at the North-Dade Library on Sunday, August 17, 2014. When she arrived at her tent she found that some unknown individual had left a box containing flyers. She inspected the flyers. She noted that her name was on the flyer. She knew that the flyer had been altered. The fact that her name had replaced Lisa Davis concerned her. She did not hand out the flyers.

Butler advised that she spoke to Waterman who was handing out the flyers. Butler denied telling Waterman that she could hand out the flyers.

Butler was present when Rago came to the North-Dade Regional Library. She spoke to Rago about the flyer. According to Butler, Rago said that they could not use the flyer. The flyer could only be handed out if the lower section of the flyer containing her name and Rago's name were removed. She said that Rago took the box with the remaining flyers. She does not know what he did with the remaining flyers.

Butler stated that she saw campaign flyers being handed out later in the week by other candidate's campaign workers. She cannot identify the workers. She does not know if the flyers that she saw the workers handing out were the same flyers that Ragoo took with him.

She believes that her opponents may have altered the flyers and reported the altered flyer to the news media to hurt her campaign.

She said that she was a first time candidate and had a poorly funded campaign. She also called the Miami Gardens Police Department and made a police report concerning the altered flyer case #2104-015018.

Documents Reviewed:

Election Campaign Report – Ragoo and Ighodaro
(Copies in file)

Thomas campaign flyer

Original Flyer – 11 x 4 laminated cardboard

Side 1

The flyer is headed "CANDIDATES WE CAN BELIEVE IN MIAMI-DADE 2014 VOTER GUIDE." The flyer lists the name of 15 candidates running for a number of offices on in the August 23, 2014, General Election at the federal, state and local levels. The flyer has the following printed on the lower portion of the documents.

"Paid Political Advertisement paid for and approved by A. Thomas. 1835 NE Miami Gardens Drive, #447, North Miami Beach, Fl. 33179 independently of any candidate or committee."

Side 2

The flier has the names and photographs of seven individuals.

Altered Flyer – 11 x 4 laminated cardboard

Side 1 & 2

The flyer is headed "CANDIDATES WE CAN BELIEVE IN MIAMI-DADE 2014 VOTER GUIDE." The flyer lists the name of 15 candidates running for a number of offices on in the August 23, 2014 General Election at the federal, state and local levels. The flyer has the following printed on the lower portion of the documents.

"Paid Political Advertisement paid for and approved by A. Thomas. 1835 NE Miami Gardens

Drive, #447, North Miami Beach, Fl. 33179 independently of any candidate or committee.”

Note: The names of candidates Lisa Davis and Erhabor Ighodaro have been removed from the original slate of candidates endorsed by Thomas and replaced by the names Charlene M Butler and Francis Dave Rago.

A third name Barbra Watson, a candidate for State Representative District 107, had been removed and replaced with the name Michael Joseph.

Conclusions:

Report turned over to COE Advocate for probable cause recommendation.