



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Nancy Lesic, 216.696.7686

## **Complaint filed against group opposing Issue 7; Misleading ad is long on sensationalism, short on facts**

**CLEVELAND – April 30, 2014** — A complaint was filed with the Ohio Elections Commission today regarding a misleading television commercial from Citizens Against Unfair Taxes (CAUT), a group opposing Issue 7 - which is the effort to extend the small tax on cigarettes and alcohol in Cuyahoga County.

“CAUT has been caught misleading the public,” said Cleveland City Council President Kevin Kelley. “Their commercial inaccurately gives the impression that money from extending the tax on alcohol and cigarettes would go to the team owners. That is false. Honest argument is always welcome. This is far from honest.”

The complaint was filed by Kelley on behalf of the Coalition for Greater Cleveland’s Future, which is promoting passage of Issue 7.

The truth that CAUT wants to hide is straightforward: The public owns the three sports venues and none of the money from Issue 7 – which costs 1.5 cents per beer and 4.5 cents per pack of cigarettes – will go to the team owners. Every penny would be used to repair and improve the facilities and extend their use for many years to come.

If the tax on cigarettes and alcohol is not extended, the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County may be forced to find the funds to pay for major, looming repairs and improvements at Progressive Field, Quicken Loans Arena and FirstEnergy Stadium that are the public’s responsibility.

CAUT’s misleading ad is another in a rapidly growing list of questionable activities involving two groups who are working to defeat Issue 7.

1. **CAUT has failed to disclose where it is getting the bulk of its money to pay for a last-minute television ad campaign.** CAUT reported contributions of \$35,000 on its April 24, 2014 campaign finance filing, even though it had reserved \$125,000 worth of television advertising time. All of the reported contributions to CAUT have come from organizations in Columbus, including the Wholesale Beer & Wine Association of Ohio.

2. **CAUT did not report the pre-recorded “robo-calls” urging voters to vote “No” on Issue 7 that it began making in early April.** The message on these pre-recorded calls was:

*“[FEMALE VOICE] Good afternoon. Please hold for an important message from the Coalition Against Unfair Taxes.*

*[MALE VOICE] Hello. This is former State Legislator Earl Martin. I want to urge you to vote no on Issue 7. A \$260,000,000.00 stadium tax. From the beginning, the lease agreements with the sports teams have been a bad deal for taxpayers. As a business owner, I’ve done the research and taxpayers are still being asked to pay way too much. I urge you to vote no on unfair taxes by voting no on Issue 7. Paid for by the Coalition Against Unfair Taxes. (216) 393-7690.”*

Earl Martin, whose recorded voice was featured on these calls, is the Treasurer of CAUT and his name appears on CAUT’s April 24, 2014 campaign finance report. Nonetheless, CAUT did not report any expenditure reflecting payment for the cost of producing or placing these calls on its April 24 report.

3. **CAUT did not report a contribution it made to another group opposing Issue 7.** On April 10 in a post on its Facebook page, another group opposed to Issue 7, the Coalition Against the Sin Tax (CAST), thanked CAUT for donating 3,000 anti-sin tax yard signs to their campaign. Neither CAUT nor CAST reported this contribution in their April 24 campaign finance filings.

In marked and refreshing contrast to both CAUT and CAST, the Coalition for Greater Cleveland’s Future has been extremely transparent and forthcoming.

“Why should we trust groups that conduct their questionable activities in secret without explaining to the public who is giving them money,” Kelley said. “What are they trying to hide?”

The Keep Cleveland Strong campaign called upon the Coalition Against Unfair Taxes to:

- Fully disclose to the public its contributors.
- Disclose if all of the financing is coming from out-of-town sources.
- Disclose how much money the tobacco, liquor, and beer and wine industries are contributing to its misleading campaign.

###