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Cleveland NAACP endorses Issue 7 - renewal of tax on alcohol, tobacco

CLEVELAND - April 22, 2014- The Cleveland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) today endorsed Issue 7, touting the importance of publicly-owned sports facilities and regional sports teams to the continued growth and development of the city and county.

Kent Whitley, chairman of the NAACP's political action committee, said "We realize that the jobs retained by the passage of Issue 7 and renewal of the 'sin' tax are significant to our community. And our accord with the sports teams is an opportunity to further extend economic opportunities to residents in our neighborhoods and underutilized small and minority businesses."

Whitley acknowledged that the sports teams' support of community, civic and social organizations has been significant and their relationship with the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County continues to grow and develop.

"We appreciate that the teams have been proactive and open in reaching out to the NAACP and the community. Building and growing our neighborhoods and communities will be a process, and we are encouraged by our discussions that the teams will be enthusiastic partners and contributors, and with us for the long haul."

The NAACP is the latest of a growing number of organizations and individuals to endorse Issue 7, which will be on the May 6 ballot and is not a tax increase. It consists of 1.5 cents a beer, a penny on a glass of wine and 4.5 cents on a pack of cigarettes.

Cuyahoga County Councilman Pernel Jones was among those who welcomed the NAACP endorsement.

"The people and the organizations backing Issue 7 are diverse and growing," Councilman Jones said. "We need to continue this small tax for the good of Cleveland's neighborhoods and all of Cuyahoga County. I welcome the NAACP endorsement – it's a significant endorsement, and it shows that Issue 7 is important to a growing and diverse array of people and organizations."

Money from the tax renewal would be used to pay for major repairs and improvements at publicly-owned Progressive Field, FirstEnergy Stadium and Quicken Loans Arena. None of the money would go to team owners.

If the tax is not renewed, the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County will have to supply the funds for the major repairs and improvements. That money would come from the city's General Fund, which is used to pay for services such as police and fire protection and road repairs.

Even though the three teams don't own the major league venues, they have spent more than \$350 million on maintenance, minor repairs and other building expenses. They will continue to pay for those building expenses – with the public legally responsible for major repairs and improvements. The existing tax on alcohol and tobacco would supply the public funds for those areas.

Kevin Kelley, President of Cleveland City Council, said Issue 7 has received newspaper endorsements and earned support from various and diverse sectors – business groups and labor groups, elected officials civic leaders and a growing cross-section of Cuyahoga County residents.

Among the reasons many organizations cite about their support of the issue. Cleveland's major league sports teams generated more than \$5 billion in economic benefits for Greater Cleveland and thousands of jobs for our people. Since 1994, the three venues have generated more than \$400 million in local tax revenues

Kelley said that if the tax is not renewed, the city of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County will be responsible for finding the funds to pay for looming major repairs at Progressive Field, Quicken Loans Arena and FirstEnergy Stadium.

"This is a welcome endorsement," he said. "The NAACP carries a lot of influence in Cleveland. It's gratifying to see the growing numbers of individuals and groups that are supporting Issue 7. The Cleveland NAACP is a big and important endorsement for a very important issue throughout Cuyahoga County."

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