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Leaders of Reform Rabbinate, World's Largest Group of Jewish Clergy, Decry Negative Campaign Tactics in U.S. Elections

Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) Points to Racism, Sexism, Ageism, Xenophobia, Talk of "Real Americans" and Lies as Destructive in the Campaigns

Last update: 10:47 a.m. EDT Oct. 29, 2008

NEW YORK, Oct 29, 2008 (BUSINESS WIRE) -- The leaders of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents nearly 2,000 Reform rabbis, the world's largest group of Jewish clergy, issued a statement decrying negative tactics in the campaigns leading up to U.S. elections next Tuesday, November 4, 2008.

According to the statement, "Neither racism, sexism, ageism, nor xenophobia is well disguised in some of these attacks...We are particularly shocked by statements distinguishing some citizens as 'real Americans,' apparently implying that other American citizens are something less than 'real'...We call on both the Obama-Biden Campaign and the McCain-Palin Campaign, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, candidates for offices across the land and all who support any of these to turn away from negative campaigning, racism, sexism, and lies that separate Americans. Let the debate continue to be vigorous on the issues. And let the campaign be for the sake of all that is good about the United States of America."

Following is the full text of the statement:

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Reform Rabbinical Leaders Decry Negative Campaign Tactics

Long ago, the ancient Rabbis distinguished between an appropriate argument ("a dispute for the sake of Heaven") and a non-productive debate which is to be avoided. The classic example of the regrettable dispute is found in Numbers 16. There, Korach and his band of rebels oppose the leadership of Moses, Miriam and Aaron. Korach and his allies offer no alternative plans for the Children of Israel; they merely lust after the power God has bestowed upon Moses, his brother and sister.

In the United States today, we find ourselves in the midst of a hard-fought Presidential election. In so many ways, debate is worthy. Our nation and our leading Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates face issues of war and peace, the welfare of the U.S. and global economies, health care, the future of our planet, and so many very real issues deeply affecting the future of every American -- and, by extension, of the whole world.

Sadly, though, in recent weeks, as in previous years, the tone of the campaign and events surrounding it has turned increasingly malicious, divisive and hateful. One campaign or the other launches an ad hominem attack against its opponents. More often, forces close to campaigns, as well as independent groups desperately seeking the election or defeat of one ticket or the other has engaged in vile, often false, accusations. Increasingly, we fear that the campaign is degenerating into a dispute that is not at all for the good of the United States and everything we hold dear.

Neither racism, sexism, ageism, nor xenophobia is well disguised in some of these attacks. We are especially saddened that some in the Jewish community have participated in perpetrating calumnies to further a particular political goal.

We are particularly shocked by statements distinguishing some citizens as "real Americans," apparently implying that other American citizens are something less than "real." Having been victims of such imprecations in ages past, even in our own beloved country decades ago, the Jewish community is and ought to be particularly sensitive to all such charges.

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We call on both the Obama-Biden Campaign and the McCain-Palin Campaign, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, candidates for offices across the land and all who support any of these to turn away from negative campaigning, racism, sexism, and lies that separate Americans. Let the debate continue to be vigorous on the issues. And let the campaign be for the sake of all that is good about the United States of America.

Faithfully,
Rabbi Peter Knobel Rabbi Steven A. Fox
President Executive Vice-President

To arrange a conversation with Rabbi Knobel or Rabbi Fox, please contact Adria Greenberg at Sommerfield Communications, Inc. at 212-255-8386 or adria@sommerfield.com.

About The Central Conference of American Rabbis

The CCAR was founded in 1889. Its members are the body of rabbis who consider themselves and are considered to be the organized rabbinate of Reform Judaism.

SOURCE: The Central Conference of American Rabbis

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