

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIFTEENTH JUDICIAL
CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA

CASE NO.:

ANTHONY M. RUFFA

Plaintiff,

v.

KEVIN NEAL individually, and
REPUBLICAN PARTY OF PALM
BEACH COUNTY, a.k.a. PALM BEACH
COUNTY REPUBLICAN EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE

Defendants.

COMPLAINT

COMES NOW the Plaintiff, ANTHONY M. RUFFA (hereafter "RUFFA"), by and through his undersigned attorney, and sues the Defendants, KEVIN NEAL individually (hereafter "NEAL") and REPUBLICAN PARTY OF PALM BEACH COUNTY, a.k.a. PALM BEACH COUNTY REPUBLICAN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (hereafter "the REC"), and alleges as follows:

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. This is an action for damages that exceed fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000.00), exclusive of interest, costs and attorney's fees.
2. This cause of action accrued in Palm Beach County, Florida as the slanderous statements that are the subject of this litigation were published by NEAL in Palm Beach County

to third parties.

3. All conditions precedent to this action, if any, have been performed or occurred.

PARTIES

4. At all times material hereto, RUFFA was and still is, a resident of Palm Beach County, Florida and is otherwise sui juris.

5. At all times material hereto, NEAL was and still is, a resident of Palm Beach County, Florida and is otherwise sui juris.

6. At all times material hereto, the REC was and still is, a political organization with an assigned Employer Identification Number (EIN) that is registered with the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to §527 of the Internal Revenue Code, and has its principal offices located in Palm Beach County, Florida.

GENERAL FACTS

7. RUFFA is a licensed physician who is also registered as a member of the Republican Party generally and further serves as a member of the REC here in Palm Beach County.

8. NEAL is a registered member of the Republican Party generally and is also a member of the REC here in Palm Beach County serving as the Chairman of the REC.

9. On or about October 19, 2023, the REC held a meeting at the West Palm Beach Airport Hilton which was attended in person by dozens and dozens of REC members. NEAL was also present in person for this meeting and presided over it in his official capacity as the REC Chairman.

10. At this meeting, standing at a podium using a microphone, and in his official capacity as the REC Chairman, NEAL verbally made false statements of fact about RUFFA which were published to the REC members in attendance at the meeting. Specifically, NEAL published the following false statements of fact about RUFFA:

- a) RUFFA sent over 75 unwanted emails to NEAL's personal email account; and
- b) in these emails, RUFFA threatened NEAL and his family.

NEAL also stated to the audience that because of the alleged threatening emails that he received from RUFFA, that NEAL fears for his own safety as well as the safety of his family, and that he filed a criminal complaint against RUFFA with the police.

11. NEAL's comments referenced in paragraph 10 above, falsely accuse RUFFA of felony criminal conduct. Specifically, the comments paint RUFFA as a stalker under the criminal definition set out in Fla.Stat. 784.048 and also infer that RUFFA threatened to do bodily harm to NEAL and his family criminally in violation of Fla.Stat. 836.10.

12. The comments referenced in paragraph 10 above that NEAL made about RUFFA are incompatible with RUFFA's status and reputation in the community as a licensed physician, a member in good standing of the Republican Party and a law-abiding citizen.

13. At this time, RUFFA does not know the identity of all the REC members who were in attendance at the subject October 19, 2023 REC meeting, but will request this information through discovery.

COUNT I: SLANDER PER SE AGAINST NEAL

14. RUFFA adopts, re-alleges, and re-affirms all allegations contained in paragraphs 7 to 13 of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein and further states as follows.

15. The aforementioned October 19, 2023 comments that were published by NEAL about RUFFA at the REC meeting were made by NEAL with malice, and NEAL's primary motivation to publish these statements was to harm RUFFA.

16. The aforementioned statements referenced in paragraph 10 above that NEAL made about RUFFA contain false statements of fact about RUFFA that either accuse RUFFA of criminal behavior or infer that RUFFA has engaged in criminal behavior.

17. The subject false statements of fact referenced in paragraph 10 above that NEAL made about RUFFA were published to other third parties that work and reside in the same local community as RUFFA and who are also members of the same political party as RUFFA for which RUFFA is a very active participant.

18. NEAL made the subject false statements of fact referenced in paragraph 10 above about RUFFA:

- a) knowing that they were false or uttered with a reckless disregard of the truth;
- b) without reasonable grounds to believe they were true; and
- c) with evil intent to defame and injure RUFFA.

19. The subject false statements of fact referenced in paragraph 10 above that NEAL published accusing RUFFA of criminal activity exposed RUFFA to hatred, distrust, ridicule, obloquy and contempt. These false statements of fact also have potential to injure RUFFA in his business reputation or occupation and to further cause RUFFA a loss of goodwill that he has built up in the local community.

20. As a direct and proximate result of the subject false and defamatory statements published by NEAL about RUFFA, RUFFA has suffered injury to his reputation, shame,

embarrassment, humiliation, and hurt feelings. These losses are either permanent or continuing in nature, and RUFFA will continue to suffer these losses in the future.

WHEREFORE, RUFFA demands judgment for damages against NEAL and further demands trial by jury.

COUNT II: RESPONDEAT SUPERIOR AGAINST THE REC

21. RUFFA adopts, re-alleges, and re-affirms all allegations contained in paragraphs 7 to 20 of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein and further states as follows.

22. At the time and place of the October 19, 2023 REC meeting when NEAL made the false statements of fact about RUFFA as referenced in paragraph 10 above, NEAL did so on behalf of the REC in the course and scope of his official capacity serving as Chairman of the REC.

23. These false statements of fact published by the REC about RUFFA through its Chairman, accused RUFFA of criminal activity. These statements further exposed RUFFA to hatred, distrust, ridicule, obloquy and contempt. In addition, these statements also have potential to injure RUFFA in his business reputation or occupation and to further cause RUFFA a loss of goodwill that he has built up in the local community.

24. As a direct and proximate result of the subject false and defamatory statements published by the REC about RUFFA through its Chairman, RUFFA has suffered injury to his reputation, shame, embarrassment, humiliation, and hurt feelings. These losses are either permanent or continuing in nature, and RUFFA will continue to suffer these losses in the future.

WHEREFORE, RUFFA demands judgment for damages against the REC and further demands trial by jury.

DESIGNATION OF EMAIL ADDRESSES FOR SERVICE

(Pursuant to Rule 2.516 Fla. R. Jud. Admin)

The undersigned attorneys of the Law Offices of Thompson & Thomas hereby designate the following Email Addresses for service in the above styled manner. Service shall be complete upon emailing to the following email addresses in this Designation, provided that the provisions of Rule 2.516 are followed:

Service@tntlegal.com

Lawyers@tntlegal.com

SERVICE IS TO BE MADE TO EACH AND EVERY EMAIL ADDRESS LISTED IN THIS DESIGNATION AND TO NO OTHERS.

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