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Posters attack Crawford over ban

The campaign, initiated by beverage association, depicts him as a dictator.

By Kathleen Quilligan
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It's no surprise to City Councilman John Crawford, R-at-large, that the smoking ban he championed has upset more than a few people. Neither is he surprised some of them have organized in an effort to vote him out of office.

"It's definitely not Crawford country out there," Crawford said of some areas of Fort Wayne.

What might be surprising is how District 4 of the Indiana Licensed Beverage Association is attempting to oust Crawford and other council members who voted for an ordinance that bans smoking in all enclosed public places in the city beginning June 1.

On March 1, posters went up in bars across the city featuring Crawford's face on the body of a Nazi leader, whom Peter Tsuleff, ILBA District 4 chair, identified as Dr. Josef Mengele, commonly known as the "Auschwitz Angel of Death." Crawford is a doctor, an oncologist. A voice balloon coming from his mouth says "Smokers do not vote." At the bottom, the poster says "Register here to vote; we need your vote. Ask your bartender for a voter's registration form."

A second poster shows a picture of Crawford, with a mustache drawn on his face, next to a picture of Saddam Hussein. It also instructs people to ask their bartender for a voter's registration form.

The posters are the first phase of a two-part campaign intended to keep the council members who voted for the ban from being re-elected in May's primary election or in the November general election, said Mark Coates, treasurer for ILBA District 4, which includes Fort Wayne, and owner of the Elco Tap, 2516 E. Pontiac St.

The posters were distributed to all bars and tobacco stores in the city, Tsuleff said. The second phase of the campaign will begin later this month, educating voters on the candidates' views of the smoking ban.

Tsuleff said the idea of comparing Crawford to Mengele and Hussein stemmed from a presentation Crawford himself gave before City Council. One of Crawford's posters at the presentation showed a cartoon featuring a caricature of him as Julius Caesar.

"He likened himself to a demagogue, we'll make him a demagogue," said Tsuleff, owner of the Northwood Bar and Grill, 6035 Stellhorn Road.

But some people don't get the message behind the comparisons when they see the posters. Hoagland resident and Iraq war veteran Anthony Johnson said he saw the posters in the American Legion Post 296 at 130 W. Tillman Road and complained to the bartender.

Post Commander Manuel Fernandez, who thought the poster of Crawford as Mengele depicted Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, said the posters were put up without his permission.

"Hitler was responsible for the death of 6 million people, to compare him to a doctor who is trying to save lives. ..." Johnson said. "I don't know if they were trying to be funny, to compare him to two of the most maniacal dictators. There's nothing humorous about that."



By Steve Linsenmayer of The News-Sentinel

Signs in the 2400 block of Crescent Avenue protest the city's impending smoking ban and City Councilman John Crawford.





Tsuleff, also a war veteran, said he found it refreshing that someone was upset by the posters and had the freedom to express his distaste.

"A lot of people might be offended by the means we used (to try and get people to register to vote). Well, we're offended by what they did to us," he said.

Two signs in front of a house in the 2400 block of Crescent Avenue also articulate the anti-Crawford sentiment. "Show 'King Crawford' That He Does Not Rule! Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em!" reads one. "There Is Strength in Numbers/Oppose The Smoking Ban By Smoking!" shouts the other. No one answered the door to the house, and calls there went unreturned last week.

Andy Downs, director of the Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics, said candidates, especially incumbents, should expect to be campaigned against. How formal that campaigning is, is the question. He said the ILBA District 4 has the potential to have an impact on the election, as would any other advocacy group.

Tsuleff and Coates said District 4 will not financially support any candidate, nor will it tell anyone explicitly for whom to vote.

"The bottom line is to go the polls and register your opinion," Tsuleff said.

Crawford remains unfazed by the attention he and the ban have received. "If 40 percent of residents are opposed, that still means 60 percent are in favor."

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