

Fresno council candidate's flier uses Nazi death camp image, clergy say (video)

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By BoNhia Lee

A campaign flier from District 7 City Council candidate Mike Wells is drawing fire from the Christian and Jewish community for its use of a Holocaust image.

The mailer, sent to homes on Saturday, shows a rundown building surrounded by barbed wire with a wooden sign.

A closer examination reveals what looks like a building from the Auschwitz concentration camp, according to a couple religious leaders who joined City Council Member Clint Olivier at a Monday afternoon news conference to call for withdrawing the mailers and an apology from Wells.

The fliers were available at Fresno's Democratic Party headquarters Monday morning, but were removed later in the day.

Rabbi Rick Winer of Temple Beth Israel, Pastor Jim Franklin of Cornerstone Church and Olivier, who is running for reelection in District 7, called the image offensive to the entire community.

"This is not the kind of politics we want," Winer said. "I think, I hope, this was a stupid mistake. I hope it wasn't an intentional thing."

Wells apologized Monday afternoon and said he did not know where the image came from.

"I am as surprised as anyone, and if true, sincerely apologize for its use," Wells said. "Anyone who knows my heart and long history of working for disadvantaged and ethnic communities realizes this was unintended."

Wells said he asked his graphic designer to find a photograph that showed urban blight. The designer told him that she found a picture resembling a "Keep Out" sign in front of an empty building.

"When I saw the print for the draft, I didn't recognize it from anything I had seen before," said Wells, a community advocate who worked for four years at Fresno Metro Ministry.

Neither Wells nor his campaign members thought to check the origins of the image, he said. The words used in the mailer belong to Wells, but the image did not, he said.

Olivier said he knew immediately that the photo was of the Nazi death camp and he wasn't the only one who noticed. Several residents approached him about the flier during a campaign walk and barbecue on Saturday.

"I think that people of all faiths can join me in categorically rejecting this mailer," Olivier said. "When I first saw them, I was sickened. I was disgusted. I find them to be reprehensible and I reject them."

Franklin, of Cornerstone Church, wanted to know how the image ended up on the flier.

"There are just certain images you wouldn't use because of what they do," Franklin said. "It's far

more than a mistake. It's a bad decision and it needs to be really quickly corrected."

The remaining fliers at Fresno's Democratic Party headquarters were removed immediately and the Wells committee is working to find out what happened, said party chairman Michael Evans who apologized on behalf of the party.

"The use of the image was inadvertent and regrettable," Evans said.

"It doesn't speak at all to who Mike is," he said. "I feel absolutely certain that if he knew what the image was, it would not have been used."

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