

Sign posted on Lynn house draws ire of area Jews


By James Haynes

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LYNN -- A bluntly worded sign posted on the Nahant Street home of a local lawyer criticizing Israeli expansionism, is upsetting some Diamond District residents.

Martin J. McNulty, familiar to longtime Lynn residents for his multiple runs for mayor and congress, is drawing the ire of some members of Lynn's Jewish community because of a large, hand-lettered sign affixed to the front of his 84 Nahant St. home, reading "Land Grabbing Israel is Bleeding America."

McNulty confirmed hanging the sign - and said he intends to leave it in place until members of the community have had a chance to see it - as a medium for expressing his opinion over perceived impacts on American and international politics due, he believes, to Israel's foreign and domestic policies.

"I think the war in Iraq is, for a large part, due to Israel's actions in the Middle East. I think the London bombing is due to Israel's actions in the Middle East. The French, the Germans, billions of Muslims, and many former allies hate America today, largely due to what Israel has done in the Middle East," said McNulty. "I don't think media coverage of this situation is balanced. Because I don't own a newspaper, because the Daily Item won't publish my letters, I feel my option to make my viewpoint known is to put a sign on my property."

McNulty flatly denied being an anti-Semite. His publicly displayed viewpoint, however, has caught the attention of some watchdog organizations.

"We started getting calls on Monday, also got complaint from our Web site. We have made numerous calls to attorney McNulty to talk about this, and he hasn't returned any of our calls," said Robert Trestan, Civil Right Council of the New England regional office of the Anti-Defamation League, an American organization established by the B'nai B'rith to discourage anti-Semitism and bigotry. Trestan stopped short of suggesting the sign was illegal- and it appears not to violate any of Lynn's sign ordinances- or hate speech, but said it shares phrasing with sentiments sometimes expressed by avowed anti-Semite or anti-Israeli groups.

"There are non-offensive, non-divisive ways to make a political statement if that's what he is trying to do. The language of this sign is offensive. We would encourage him to take the sign down and we'll work with the community encourage him to take the sign down," he said.

McNulty said, afforded a different forum, he could produce "a more rational" explication of his views. The sign, he said, was more intended to provoke discussion.

"I hope it will provoke some thought among people in the community about ongoing issues in Middle East and how it impacts America," he said.

While McNulty said several neighbors have reacted "favorably" to his sign, or expressed the belief that he has the legal right to publicly advertise his view, in a neighborhood with a large Jewish population and only blocks from Congregation Ahabat Sholom on Ocean Street, the sign is drawing a strong negative reaction.

"It's very offensive, and we take great umbrage to that sign," said Rabbi Avraham Kelman, Rabbi of Congregation Ahabat Sholom in Lynn's Diamond District. "I don't understand the motivation behind this. Every individual is entitled to their own opinion, but we view this as an insult to the members of the Jewish community who love Israel."

For James Breed, aspiring to a spot on the School Committee, McNulty's sign came as a double shock. Not only does Breed disagree with the sentiment, but was alarmed to learn that one of his own campaign signs was on display in McNulty's yard.

"I had no idea about this. I disagree with the message, obviously, and I've made sure my sign has been removed from that yard."

Councilor-at-Large Tim Phelan, currently living in the Diamond District, said several neighbors have contacted him.

"I'm appalled and offended by what the owner of the property has put up," he said. "It seems a political statement more than anything else, and the ability to speak your peace is one of the things that makes America great, but it seems distasteful and inappropriate for the area. There is a large Jewish population in the neighborhood, the Temple is up the street, and I think it's a slap in the face to those people."

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