

Postcard to Ingoglia leads to armed visit

Investigators go to home of man who criticized state's CFO

By Jeffrey Schweers Orlando Sentinel

Two armed men wearing bulletproof vests with the word “police” stenciled on them showed up Wednesday at the Largo home of Cathy O’Gara while she was getting her 11-year-old granddaughter ready for school.

Dogs were barking. There was a loud knock at the door. She greeted the men, who didn’t identify themselves or the agency they were with. They asked if her husband, James, lived there and if they could speak to him about a postcard he’d sent to Florida CFO Blaise Ingoglia with the brief message: “You lack values.”

It was a scary “big red flag moment” for the O’Garas, a retired couple who are politically active supporters of progressive candidates, vocal critics of President Trump’s immigration policies, and helped to organize a local No Kings anti-Trump demonstration in June.

“Anything is possible, if you can send a postcard and have this happen,” Cathy O’Gara said.

Days after the visit — with the help of the Largo Police Department — they learned that the officers were investigators with the criminal division of the state’s Department of Financial Services, which is overseen by Ingoglia.

The visit was a precautionary measure given the current political climate, said a spokesperson for Ingoglia.

“In light of recent events and with political violence on the rise, ensuring the security of public figures and maintaining public safety is increasingly important,” said Sydney Booker, his communications director. “While it is unfortunate that law enforcement must sometimes go the extra mile to ensure public safety, let it be known that it is a direct result of an increasingly hostile political environment.”

She said Ingoglia was unaware of the postcard and did not “have any involvement in the threat assessment.” Ingoglia did not return a call seeking comment.

Booker did not explain how the postcard constituted a threat or how many other people the agency has investigated because their letters, postcards or emails appeared threatening. Nor did she respond to questions about what training the agents had for threat assessments, or how much it cost to send the agents to the O’Gara’s home.

The incident comes at a time of heightened tension between conservatives and liberals over the direction the country is headed, which has brought added concern about the safety of public officials. It also comes at a time when groups opposing the Trump administration are being labeled as “communists” and “terrorists” and subjected to law enforcement scrutiny.

In the two months since Gov. Ron DeSantis appointed Ingoglia to replace Jimmy Patronis as CFO after Patronis’ election to Congress, Ingoglia has become the public face of the governor’s crackdown on alleged wasteful spending and spiraling property taxes, barnstorming the state with charts demonstrating how much county governments have raised taxes on homeowners. Ingoglia was in Sanford for such an event on Tuesday. The O’Garas, who have been critical of those efforts, sent the postcard to Ingoglia after a press conference he held in St. Petersburg in August.

“I expected them to show up eventually because I’m an organizer, and it follows the state of play these days,” said Cathy O’Gara.

They’ve also sent emails to state Attorney General James Uthmeier and Gov. Ron DeSantis, criticizing their support of the president’s mass deportation policy, calling it “unlawful” and “un-American.”

Last week’s visit, though they expected it, was still disturbing for the entire family.

“They started right off with ‘Did you send a postcard?’ They showed a picture of it, asked if this was it. They didn’t give a reason why they were there. They just showed the picture of the postcard,” James O’Gara said of Wednesday’s visit.

His granddaughter was saying, “ ‘Oh my God. Why are the police talking to pop-pop?’ ” Cathy O’Gara said.

After some small talk, one of the officers remarked that O’Gara had been in the infantry during Vietnam, James O’Gara said.

“I was literally scared at that point,” he said. They obviously didn’t just check his name in the white pages or voter rolls, he continued, but had dived deep enough to find his military records. After a few more minutes of idle chatter, they left, he said.

When Cathy O’Gara drove her granddaughter to school moments later, she saw two unmarked Black Ford Broncos parked down the street, which led her to believe more than two agents were sent to their house.

Feeling compelled to explain what happened to her neighbors, Cathy printed out a letter and showed it to 40 of her neighbors. “I am trying to get people to see what is happening,” she said. “They could have easily taken him away under false pretenses.”

The Largo Police Department gave the O’Garas the contact number for DFS agents’ supervisor, based in the south central regional office in Lake Wales.

The supervisor, Captain Cynthia Campina, returned O’Gara’s message and talked with him on the phone about the visit. She seemed pleasant, he said, and explained that she was just responding to a request from the executive office in Tallahassee. She was almost apologetic, he added, and said she hadn’t actually seen the postcard, chuckling when he told her the message was simply, “You lack values.”

Campina did not return a call from the Orlando Sentinel seeking comment.

But O’Gara said he wasn’t satisfied with the explanation, and plans to take the issue up the chain of command. “I am going to have conversations as far up as I can go and say, ‘Why are you doing this?’ This is not appropriate. This is not the way we expect our elected officials to act.”