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In Maplewood, flier attacking candidate as gay-supporting outsider hits new low

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James Llanas, candidate for Maplewood City Council. (Submitted)

The flier that landed in Kay Hattestad's yard was straightforward. It asked, who is James Llanas?

It noted the Maplewood City Council candidate's

support of the gay community and that he isn't originally from around here. The flier also urged residents to ask neighbors about whether certain candidates like Llanas — who is Hispanic and gay — reflect their values and desires for Maplewood.

"I'm disgusted this is being distributed," said Hattestad, who returned from church Sunday afternoon to find the literature stuck to her mailbox.

Politicking is not new in Maplewood, a Ramsey County suburb that has seen its share of finger-pointing and harsh talk among city leaders. But some observers say it has fallen to a new level, calling the flier racist and homophobic.

The fliers appearing in mailboxes and on doors in parts of the city describe Llanas as a "non-native of Maplewood" and notes "Jim is a prominent supporter of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay-Bi-sexual and Trans-gender) rights in Minnesota." They do not say who distributed the fliers.

Llanas, 41, a sales consultant who was born in Denver and has lived in Minnesota since he was 1 year old, said his personal life and the color of his skin should not be election issues.

"The use of 'non-native' is a racial slur, in my opinion. ... It's a shame that these people think this would appeal to the residents of Maplewood. It isn't what we stand for," he said. "(The flier's authors) think if they cast the mud, it will stick on some level."

Llanas said he does not plan to lodge a formal complaint because he wants to focus on his campaign.

Llanas is vying for one of two council seats against Rebecca Cave, Dave Hafner and incumbent Kathleen Juenemann. Some of his opponents said that while

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they were not surprised the campaign has been contentious, the latest piece of literature was over the top.

"We've hit a new all-time low," said Juenemann, who said her personal life has been the target of attacks in past campaigns. "What does this have to do with his ability of being a councilperson?"

Cave, who has seen her campaign signs stolen from lawns, said such tactics are a fact of life.

"If it's negative and these things are meant to hurt somebody, that's unfortunate," she said.

"In politics, you have to handle everything that's handed to you. There are always those people that go over the line. That's politics."

Hafner chose not to comment, saying he feared being misquoted.

"There's nothing I have to say about it," he said. "I don't want to be quoted."

Council member John Nephew said the fliers were distributed throughout Parkside, the neighborhood where he lives. Though Nephew said he did not receive a flier, several neighbors did.

Though no one has taken responsibility for the fliers, there has been a lot of finger-pointing.

Nephew predicted the flier would do the author — should he or she be identified — more harm than good.

"My perception is this is something that is likely to backfire," he said. "I think what we'll see is it will anger the community because it doesn't reflect our values. We are not prejudiced."

He added, "I'm sure that James (Llanas) might not have been born in Maplewood, but how many of us were?"

Monica Meyer, public policy director for the gay advocacy group OutFront Minnesota, said the flier was a ploy to distract from Llanas' qualifications as a candidate.

"This is someone calling into question his ability to be a council member based on his sexual orientation and not what attributes he would bring to the city," she said.

She said it was unfortunate someone would use fear in an attempt to influence an election.

Hattestad already planned to vote for Llanas before the flier landed on her lawn last weekend.

She said the incident has inspired her to be more outspoken this election season.

"This makes me even more active in supporting him," she said. "I want to have reasonable people running for office."

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