

Billboard companies reject FOP message

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By Craig Boerner

A billboard message stating “Low Pay. Nashville’s #1 Cop Killer” has been labeled “offensive” and “not accurate” by two outdoor billboard advertising agencies, according to Fraternal Order of Police President Calvin Hullett.

The companies that rejected the billboards are the Nashville offices of Lamar Advertising Company and Infinity Outdoor.

“I think Lamar is making a big mistake by having this very narrow view,” FOP attorney David Raybin said. “I think people would applaud them if they took a stand and said, ‘we will run this ad.’ It’s respectful, it’s not in front of a school or anything and it’s obvious what the message is.”

Raybin said private enterprise as well as private industry and media have an obligation to give voice to controversial ideas. In his opinion, the FOP ad campaign is a good idea.

“I feel strongly that they should have the right to speak,” Raybin said. “These are police officers. These are men and women who risk their lives for us and we’re not willing to pay them enough. They’re trying to raise public consciousness and you’ve got some media company out there saying ‘You cannot be heard.’”

The general manager and president of Lamar Advertising, Joe McDowell, said he has chosen not to allow the billboard, which was scheduled to appear in a downtown location last Friday.

“We decided not to run the billboard because it said ‘Low Pay. Nashville’s #1 Cop Killer,’” McDowell said. “We felt that was not an accurate statement. I don’t know that low pay has ever killed a Nashville cop. I’m not going to put something up there that I don’t think is an accurate statement. And I do think people would find it offensive.”

The billboard, which would have cost the FOP \$3,000 for 30 days, was nixed by Lamar Advertising last week. Likewise, Infinity Outdoor, which was approached by the FOP after Lamar Advertising rejected the billboard, also refused the FOP’s message.

“With each agreement, we reserve the right to view and approve all ad copy. That’s standard, and we just felt it was not in good taste,” said Tom Wisz of Infinity Outdoor’s main office in Phoenix, Ariz.

An advertisement containing the same message but with more extensive text has already appeared in local print outlets.

Lamar’s McDowell said the company would have “gladly put something up there if the FOP had changed the copy line.” However, Hullett and the FOP committee decided at a meeting last week the billboard should go up, without changes, somewhere in town. Hullett said he is uncertain if

any billboards are available downtown that are owned by companies the FOP has not yet approached.

Hullett said he believes there is more to the situation than the “offensive” label. To make his point, he cited billboards advertising The World’s Largest Adult Bookstore and the strip club Déjà Vu. Both billboards are owned by Lamar, Hullett said.

“Our ad is not offensive. It’s effective,” Hullett said. “We wanted a good spot and we were willing to pay fair market for it. We weren’t asking for anything special, we were willing to pay what everybody else does for the board.”