

/BY: Carlos Moncada

# STATE TARGETS LARGO MAN FOR SPEAKING OUT

## ARMED AGENTS QUESTION ARMY VET WHO SENT CRITICAL POSTCARD

**"HE HAS NEVER COMMITTED A CRIME. NEITHER OF US OWN A GUN. THERE WAS NO REASON WHATSOEVER FOR THE POLICE TO BE SENT TO OUR HOME."**

-Cathy O'Gara

**L**ARGO—It was one of perhaps thousands of unflattering postcards that James O'Gara has sent to elected leaders over several decades.

But the response was like nothing the 77-year-old U.S. Army veteran ever experienced.

Two armed and armored state investigators showed up at his west Largo home Oct. 1. As a dog barked and a child cried inside, O'Gara was questioned about a postcard he had sent Florida's chief financial officer, Blaise Ingoglia, in which he simply wrote, "You lack values."

"They asked, 'Did you write this?'" O'Gara's wife, Cathy, told the Largo City Commission on Oct. 7. "He said, 'Yes, I was exercising my First Amendment rights.'

The pair were with the criminal division of the state's Department of Financial Services (DFS), which Ingoglia oversees. They apparently were making a "threat assessment" of the one-sentence postcard that O'Gara signed and mailed five weeks earlier.

But they did not identify themselves

*James and Cathy O'Gara, who are politically active, say they won't be deterred by what they called intimidation tactics. Photo courtesy of Cathy O'Gara.*



*State investigators question James O'Gara about a critical postcard he sent to Florida's chief financial officer, Blaise Ingoglia. Photo courtesy of Cathy O'Gara.*

more than a blatant form of intimidation — and a violation of the politically active couple's First Amendment rights.

"There is no person more patriotic than Jim," Cathy O'Gara said of her husband, who at 19 fought in hand-to-hand combat during the Vietnam War. "He has never committed a crime. Neither of us own a gun. There was no reason whatsoever for the police to be sent to our home."

directing audits aimed at identifying what it deems as "wasteful spending" by numerous local governments, including Pinellas County and the city of St. Petersburg. Both communities have pushed back against accusations that they are wasting taxpayer money.

The O'Garas have been critical of the DOGE effort.

"That's how they're using the taxpayer's money," Cathy O'Gara said of the



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or say who sent them, said Cathy O'Gara, 70, a retired nurse. She described them as wearing brown clothing with no identifiable markings other than "Police" stenciled across their bulletproof vests. She later learned who they were with help from the Largo Police Department, which was not aware of and played no role in the matter.

"They weren't mean to us when they were here," Cathy O'Gara told Pinellas Press last week. "The officers were very nice. In fact, they seemed to think it was a joke. Because they said, 'You don't have to worry. You didn't do anything.' They told us that like five times."

She and some of her neighbors told commissioners the visit was nothing

She urged city leaders to "refuse to comply in any way with these unconstitutional actions by the state and/or federal officers."

The DFS did not respond to a request for comment from Pinellas Press this past week.

None of the postcards that James O'Gara — an amateur photographer and prolific card sender to family members and friends — has mailed to presidents, judges and others over the years were threatening in nature, his wife said. He was simply expressing his opinion, as was the case when he wrote to Ingoglia, she said.

Ingoglia has been spearheading Gov. Ron DeSantis's Florida DOGE task force,

state's decision to send two officers to their home.

The couple plans to continue exercising their free-speech rights, including not only voicing their opinions to officials via postcards but also publicly denouncing President Trump's immigration policies. They helped organize a local "No Kings" demonstration in June and another on Oct. 18th at Largo Central Park.

But all is not back to normal. Cathy O'Gara said the encounter has left the couple on edge — she's wary about answering the door now — and has sparked speculation among some neighbors in the normally quiet Imperial Groves neighborhood.

It also left her 11-year-old granddaughter, who was home at the time, frightened and confused.

As she drove the child to school later that fateful morning, Cathy O'Gara said she noticed two unmarked black Ford Broncos parked down the street, indicating more than two agents were involved.

A few days before they showed up, the investigators had questioned a neighbor about the couple — including whether they were armed, she said. They also were aware that her husband was a former infantryman, she said.

"All of our lives, we're trying to tell our children — including me — the police are your friend," Cathy O'Gara said. "Well, that just puts that to sleep completely. From now on, my kids are going to know, 'Maybe the police are your friend.' That's what we're telling them."

Vice Mayor Curtis Holmes urged the city administration at the end of the meeting to look into the account that O'Gara shared with commissioners.

"If what she told us was gospel, that's just wrong," Holmes said. "And I'm a conservative, and that's wrong."