

Kentucky Libertarian Party compares 'vaccine passports' to stars Jews wore in Holocaust

Lucas Aulbach and Billy Kobin

March 30, 2021

The Libertarian Party of Kentucky compared coronavirus "vaccine passports" to star-shaped identification badges people of Jewish descent were forced to wear during the Holocaust in a tweet this week, drawing outrage from across the nation.

The post, sent just after 5 p.m. Monday, compared "vaccine passports" – credentials that would show whether a person has received the coronavirus vaccine and would theoretically grant access to businesses and other spaces that will require proof of vaccination before entry – to "the stuff of totalitarian dictatorships" that the party considers a "complete and total violation of human liberty."

"Are the vaccine passports going to be yellow, shaped like a star, and sewn on our clothes?" the party wrote on Twitter.

The tweet had been reposted more than 4,000 times as of Monday afternoon, with many reposts adding messages disavowing its message. Nearly 7,000 comments were left in response as well, including one from Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt that called the post an "ignorant and shameful comparison" and another from Jewish actor Seth Rogen, who explicitly suggested the party take its message elsewhere.

The Kentucky Democratic Party ripped the statement as "unconscionable and unacceptable," while Republican Party of Kentucky spokesman Mike Lonergan said the commonwealth's GOP members "will always condemn this kind of hateful and extreme rhetoric."

Virginia Woodward, chair of the Louisville Democratic Party, said the comparison between vaccine passports and "Hitler's mark of death" is "just disgusting."

"If the Libertarian Party wanted to make a public splash, they did for all the wrong reasons," Woodward said in a statement.

In a tweet, Gov. Andy Beshear said "comparing vaccines to the Holocaust is shameful."

"This group should stop politicizing the pandemic and apologize — there is no place for anti-Semitism in Kentucky," he wrote.

U.S. Rep. John Yarmuth, a Democrat who is Jewish and represents the Louisville area, said the post shows "the problem with modern conservative thinking."

"They see all rules as equally egregious, whether they protect public health or are used to systematically round up millions for genocide," Yarmuth told The Courier Journal in a statement. "It's as ignorant as it is disgusting, and they should be ashamed for disrespecting the victims of the Holocaust to score political points."

Jewish people in Europe were forced to wear yellow badges shaped like the Star of David during the Nazi occupation of Europe during World War II, a practice that made practicing Jews easier to identify and separate from society.

The tweets also come during Passover, a sacred time for Jewish people that celebrates the ancient liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt.

The national Libertarian Party did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday afternoon as to whether it agrees with the Libertarian Party of Kentucky's statement.

Meanwhile, Jared Hall, political director for the Libertarian Party of Indiana and alternate Region 3 representative on the Libertarian National Committee, condemned the comparison in a Twitter post. He told The Courier Journal that the party's national chair had discussed the tweet with the Kentucky chair on Tuesday.

David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, a national Libertarian think tank, said any relevant points the Kentucky party had attempted to make were undercut by the inappropriate comparison.

"Governments shouldn't be imposing vaccination requirements for activities, but restaurants, movie theaters, and other private businesses may well want to assure customers that everyone in the space has been vaccinated," Boaz said. "There are reasonable debates about those issues, and clumsy Holocaust comparisons aren't helpful."

The Libertarian Party of Kentucky defended the post in a series of Twitter posts Wednesday morning, acknowledging its statement was not "the most polished tweet" but that it started "a conversation that needed to be had" about vaccine tracking and distribution.

"Our tweet the other day, while it may have been insensitive especially, considering the timing of passover, was in no way antisemitic," the party wrote on Twitter. "We fight hard against this because the holocaust was evil and we want to prevent atrocities like it."

Similar vaccine credential systems are currently used in Israel, which has the highest rate worldwide of citizens who have received the vaccine. A certification called the "Excelsior Pass" was recently made available in New York as well, where residents of the state will be able to use a printout or code on their cellphone to prove that they've been vaccinated or have recently tested negative for COVID-19. It will be accepted at many events around the state as early as next week, [USA TODAY reported](#).

President Joe Biden's administration has said it wants to allow nonprofit and private sectors to handle vaccine credential systems, with the White House also saying any certification process must be free, equitable, safe and private.

The Libertarian Party of Kentucky stood by its statement in several posts later Monday, amplifying a tweet from former U.S. Rep. Justin Amash that compared vaccine passports to

"being required to show your 'health papers' wherever you go," and saying his message mirrored the party's tweet but was "less abrasive."

The party also published a tweet Tuesday that claimed "banksters and politicians play by a different set of rules" and included a quote the party attributed to German Jewish banker Mayer Amschel Rothschild – "Let me issue and control a nation's money, and I care not who writes the laws." That post was later deleted.

In February, Kentucky became the first state in the country to condemn anti-Semitism as defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Rabbi Shlomo Litvin of Chabad of the Bluegrass in Lexington helped craft that resolution.

On Tuesday, Litvin told The Courier Journal the Libertarian Party of Kentucky's tweets show the state that has otherwise "taken significant strides to combat anti-Semitism" still has more work – and more teaching – to do.

To compare vaccine passports to "the murder of 6 million Jews is an amoral argument to make," Litvin said.

It's also, he added, an "ahistorical argument."

"The Holocaust had nothing to do with a choice," Litvin continued. "This passport issue is a choice."

The rabbi noted the Nazis sought to kill and did kill anyone with Jewish heritage, regardless of how devout a person was or whether it was only their grandparent or far-removed relative who was a follower of Judaism.

The Libertarian Party's tweets could negatively impact how observers from outside Kentucky view the Bluegrass State when it comes to anti-Semitism, Litvin said.

He also commented on the tweet's timing.

"While it would be nice if I had Passover off, I'm here for my community every single day of the year," Litvin said, referring to him taking time away from his Passover observation to respond to the Libertarian Party of Kentucky. "So yes, it is painful it happened on Passover, but we've been combating hate regardless of the day of the week, regardless of the time of the year."