

Ohio GOP candidate defends Nazi re-enactments

AP Associated Press

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12 mins ago

COLUMBUS, Ohio – A Republican congressional candidate from Ohio, countering criticism from a House GOP leader, said Monday that he did nothing wrong by wearing a Nazi uniform while participating in World War II re-enactments.

Rich Iott told The Associated Press in an interview that he took part in the historical re-enactments to educate the public, and does not agree with the Nazis' views or their actions against Jews.

Asked whether it was wrong to wear a Nazi uniform, Iott said: "I don't see anything wrong about educating the public about events that happened. And that's the whole purpose of historical re-enacting."

Iott faces Democratic incumbent Rep. Marcy Kaptur in northwest Ohio in the November election.

The Atlantic magazine first reported Friday that Iott had participated in the re-enactments wearing a Waffen-SS uniform.

Iott said Monday he was in a re-enactment group called Wiking for three or four years — though he believed his name remained on the group's roster for longer. He said he and his then-teenage son had joined as a part of a shared interest in history.

The House Republicans' No. 2 leader, Eric Cantor of Virginia, on Sunday said he repudiates Iott's actions and would not support someone who would dress in Nazi attire. His remarks on "Fox News Sunday" came after Democratic Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, of Florida, cited Iott as an example of GOP candidates with extreme views.

"You know good and well that I don't support anything like that," said Cantor, who is Jewish.

Iott said Cantor had no information or background about his re-enacting.

"What Cantor did is exactly the illustration of why people are disgusted with politicians," Iott said. "He made comments and took a position that was good for him at the time, regardless of whether it was good for anyone else or good for the voters."

Iott said he has been involved in re-enactments on and off for roughly 35 years. He said he has dressed as an American soldier for World War I and World War II re-enactments, as well as a soldier from each side of the Civil War. Iott said he could not recall when he and his son joined the Wiking group but that he was no longer involved.

"Never, in any of my re-enacting of military history, have I meant any disrespect to anyone who served in our military or anyone who has been affected by the tragedy of war, especially the Jewish Community," Iott said in a statement Saturday.

During the peak of his involvement in the early 2000s, Iott said he dressed up about a half dozen times a year at the most. He said he wore the Nazi uniform in battle re-enactments, presentations at schools and public events.

Asked what he said while wearing the Nazi uniform in the schools, he said, "We talked about the atrocities that were committed and it was a horrible, horrible part of history. But we can't forget about it or, you know, sweep it under the rug. Because those who forget about history are destined to repeat it."