

## Vandals target state attorney campaign

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By Ed Offley

PANAMA CITY BEACH -- State attorney candidate Glenn Hess has a message for the people who have been defacing his campaign signs with obscene drawings.

"This has to stop," an angry Hess said Tuesday.

His opponent agreed.

"They did one of mine on Thomas Drive and several others," incumbent State Attorney Steve Meadows said Tuesday. A number of other signs have been torn down, he added.

For the past two weeks, Hess said, unknown people have spray-painted the outline of male genitalia across a dozen of his campaign signs.

When this first occurred in the Laird Street neighborhood where he resides, Hess said he dismissed it as the work of neighborhood pranksters. However, on Tuesday, Hess said he noticed the same obscene drawing had been sprayed on a large campaign sign posted in front of Beach accountant Mark Godwin's office on Back Beach Road.

"People have been throwing signs in the ditch ever since there have been campaign signs," Hess said. "But this is different. It's vulgar, and it's being forced on the community, including women and children."

Hess said the perpetrators ignored other campaign signs and only defaced his.

Meadows said whoever has defaced or torn down his campaign signs most likely is not a Hess supporter but rather someone angry at a decision he or his staff has made in the course of prosecuting crimes.

"I don't think this involves (campaign) supporters on either side," Meadows said. "When you make decisions, someone wants you to do it their way and when you don't, they carry it (anger) away with them."

When he announced his entry into the race as the Democratic candidate against Meadows on March 5, Hess predicted the campaign would be marred by mudslinging and negative attack ads. He pledged that his own effort would be "a campaign worthy of your vote."

Hess already has been attacked in several TV advertisements sponsored by a 527 campaign organization independent of Meadows' campaign called Keep Our Families Safe Inc.

The State Attorney race still is in its earliest phase, with candidates engaged in fundraising and planning for the active campaigning season this fall.

"It's almost time for the summer festival season" which attracts candidates to meet with voters, Hess said.

Meanwhile, both candidates urged people not to engage in vandalism.

"There is a point where we need to say, 'This is not right,'" Hess said. "Thrusting this obscene material into the faces of women and children is wrong."

Meadows took a more philosophical stance. "This goes with the territory," he said.