Michigar

Uber driver describes history with U-M student who yelled anti-gay slurs

By **Darcie Moran | dmoran@mlive.com**
Follow on Twitter
on March 30, 2016 at 3:55 PM, updated March 30, 2016 at 5:18 PM

ANN ARBOR, MI -- Sitting in an Ann Arbor restaurant, pulling up screenshots on his phone, Artur Zawada noted his hand was shaking.

"I'm stressed out," he said. "It's getting to me."

The 50-year-old Uber driver was berated by University of Michigan student Jake Croman in a now internet-famous **video he posted on YouTube** on March 23.

The video begins with Croman questioning why Zawada would cancel his fare and devolves from there.

"F**k you Arthur, you little f****t f**k," Croman yelled as he pulled out his own phone, the clip showed.

"You're an Uber driver, go f**king drive you little f**k," he said. "Minimum wage f****t, go f**k yourself."

Croman said in a statement March 28 that the tirade was prompted by anti-Semitic commentary by Zawada.

But Zawada said the first verbal exchange during the encounter on March 20 was shown in the video he posted.

Now, Zawada said he's had to explain to friends that he didn't say any anti-Semitic comments to provoke the student's anti-gay tirade.

U-M STUDENT'S RANT AGAINST UBER DRIVER

University of Michigan student won't be prosecuted for yelling anti-gay slurs at Uber driver

Uber driver who recorded U-M student's rant sues Uber for tips

Uber driver describes history with U-M student who yelled anti-gay slurs

Police say U-M student, Uber driver both filed reports -- but not initially about anti-gay or ethnic slurs

University of Michigan student who yelled anti-gay slurs at Uber driver responds to viral video

All Stories

He's not working right now -- Uber suspended both his and Croman's accounts while they investigate the incident -- and he thinks the company should have to pay him for his losses.

He also said he's worried for his safety, because of comments he's seen online.

Zawada claims he only posted the video when he thought nothing would be done about Croman's verbal assault, and so that he could learn the student's name to identify him to police. He said he reached out to the school and police before posting the video.

"I'm not vicious," he said of posting the video, adding that if he were, he would have posted it immediately after the incident.

A request for further comment from Croman and his family was not returned.

Multiple encounters

Zawada has lived in Ann Arbor for around 20 years and has been an Uber driver since November 2015, he said.

It was during his first month that he had a run-in with Croman and his friends, he said. He was called after dark to the 200 block of East Liberty Street in downtown Ann Arbor for a ride to Mary Markley Hall on the other side of campus.

Croman was the first to get in the car, Zawada said.

Then others got in, crowding four people in the space for three in the back seat, he said. The group smelled of marijuana and alcohol and were getting belligerent, he said. He added that they were touching things, looking for a phone cord and blasting the music.

Zawada said he told the group to behave and stop touching things, noting he was doing them a favor by taking an extra person in the car -- something he said he's never done before or since, he said. He said he took a different turn than the one needed to head to Markley Hall, because he was trying to figure out how to end the ride. The group unleashed slurs on him, he said.

"They got out of the car, they are pounding on the trunk," he said.

Zawada said Croman got out of the car and started yelling that he would have Zawada deported.

"I told him, 'Go see a good doctor,'" Zawada said.

Zawada said he had two run-ins with Croman in March 2016, though he said he didn't know the student's name at the time.

On March 9, Zawada was called to pick up riders in the 400 block of East Washington Street in Ann Arbor.

Zawada said Croman got into the front seat, but Zawada informed him that his group would not get a ride, due to the previous encounters in November and December. A friend of Croman's, who was also in the YouTube video, asked Zawada if he said something about a dirty Jew, Zawada said of the encounter. Zawada refutes that he said anything anti-Semitic.

They got out of the car, but were still talking at him, Zawada said. So he told them he was recording them and they quieted, he said.

As he wrote a complaint to Uber, the group took a different lift service or Uber, and issued a "slew of slurs" to him as they drove away, he said.

Zawada said he informed Uber of the issue and approached student services after the March 9 incident. He asked the university to send a mass email to students regarding their behavior in cabs -- a large issue on days where people often drink in town, he said.

The day of the tirade

After the previous incidents and a failed attempt to get Uber to cover the costs of a camera to record incidents, Zawada said he put a holder in his car and set his phone for easy access to his camera.

On March 20, Zawada said he was called to the 100 block of West Washington Street.

"I said no word to the guy," he said. "Nothing, nothing, nothing. I didn't say anything to the guy and he went cuckoo."

The ride was not requested under Croman's account, Zawada said, so he didn't know it was the same group. Riders can see the driver's name, photo, vehicle make, model, and plate number. They could have canceled the trip, he said, but he believes they were looking for trouble. After the rant, Zawada drove off, he said.

He said he went to student services the Monday after the incident and showed them the video. A meeting was scheduled with the dean of students for Wednesday.

To his knowledge, the dean met with the students involved the previous day.

The university declined comment on these meetings, but Zawada said it was implied that he was attacking the students because he showed the video to other student riders.

He said he showed the video to other students to get help identifying those in the video. He said the conversation led him to believe that the students claim he was making physical threats toward them. He said the dean made no mention of anti-Semitic comments.

University of Michigan spokesman Rick Fitzgerald previously said the university is waiting on the police report ahead of any further steps.

"We find the actions depicted in this video to be reprehensible and completely inconsistent with our community's closely held values," he said. "We expect more from our students. Regardless of the circumstances, no one deserves to be treated that way."

The aftermath

Police confirmed that both Zawada and Croman filed reports following the March 20 run-in.

Croman filed a report on the evening of March 22, the Tuesday after the incident, and Zawada filed his report the next day.

Neither party initially alleged the issue was one of a religious, LGBT-related or ethnic identity, said Ann Arbor police Detective Lt. Robert Pfannes.

However, after Zawada's video went viral, a representative of the Croman family released this statement:

> "This video shows one side of an argument I had with an Uber driver two weeks ago after he refused to pick me up on the basis of my religion. What you don't see in the video is that the driver had made a number of offensive anti-semitic remarks that provoked my response. I am not proud of my reaction to his discrimination and I regret my choice of words. Shortly after the verbal altercation, I filed a complaint with the Ann Arbor police department and they are now dealing with the issue."

Pfannes said the prosecutor's office will decide whether charges will be brought.

While the consequences may come in court or through the university, Croman also faces possible disciplinary measures from his fraternity, Tau Kappa Epsilon. The national organization said in a statement that they are investigating the exchange and could expel the student from membership if deemed appropriate.

Zawada believes Croman and his friends should face some repercussions.

"I want them to change, it's not about me," he said.

*Darcie Moran covers cops and courts for MLive and The Ann Arbor News. Email her at **dmoran@mlive.com** or follow her on Twitter **@darciegmoran**.*