

Claws are out in Commissioner Race

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EVANSVILLE — The claws are coming out in the Vanderburgh County Commissioner race.

Democrat Jeff Hatfield and Republican Mike Duckworth are vying for a seat on the Board of Commissioners — Vanderburgh County's three-member executive governing body.

As Election Day gets closer, the race has become muddied with past incidents and questions regarding who's backing who, according to campaign mailers distributed by both candidates.

Hatfield sent out a mailer calling Duckworth a "liar" this week. The mailer contained images of car crashes and stated, "As deputy sheriff, Mike Duckworth lied about his role in hit-and-run crashes."

Below the headline, two short, but separate, paragraphs saying Duckworth was a liar on two accounts.

One paragraph stated Duckworth "creating new overtime pay" for himself while he was Deputy Sheriff in 1991, totaling a little more than \$14,000 in taxpayer dollars.

In 1991, the Courier and Press reported that former Sheriff Ray Hamner criticized Duckworth for submitting more than 1,000 hours of overtime for his live appearances, inside and outside the county, as "Deputy Duck." Deputy Duck was the feathered mascot for the Vanderburgh County Sheriffs' youth program.

"That was all compensatory time and time that I worked at grocery stores, fairs and daycares as the Deputy Duck," Duckworth explained. "I did that as part of my job. That's no different than somebody that worked overtime during an accident. That was my assignment, and that's what I did."

Duckworth said the information on the mailer is correct, but the way it was presented recently is "sleazy."

"This is the kind of campaigning you get from a politician like Jeff (Hatfield)," Duckworth said Wednesday. "Choose the political party that is most convenient, run a negative campaign, win at all costs. His deceptive negative attacks show everything you need to know about his character: he trades his integrity for ambition, and I think voters will see through it."

The second paragraph in the same mailer said Duckworth "admitted to lying in a police report when he and two other officers were involved in multiple hit-and-run crashes after leaving a nightclub."

A 1984 Evansville Press report stated all three men were under the influence at the time of the incidents.

The Press reported that Detective Mike Kingston (driver) and officers Duckworth and Kenny Patterson were in an unmarked police car during their off hours when they knocked over a traffic pole on Diamond Avenue. The trio also hit two parked cars on Stringtown Road that night.

After the incident, Kingston, Duckworth and Patterson filed false police reports about the accident, according to the archived article.

Initially, all three men were charged with obstruction of justice and suspended for 60 days without pay and placed on one-year probation by the merit board. Later, Duckworth was convicted of false reporting, fined \$200, was required to help pay for the cars'



County commissioner candidate — District Two — Jeff Hatfield prepares for the start of his debate against Mike Duckworth at the WNIN studio Monday night. DENNY SIMMONS / COURIER & PRESS

"I've discussed my qualifications and my experience," he said. "I've not gotten down in the weeds about my opponent and really refrain from that. Frankly, people are tired of that. If you can't get elected on what you've done, and you try to get elected on what somebody else has done — I think that's a slippery slope."

Democrat Jeff Hatfield

damage and ordered to perform 50 hours of community service.

Duckworth said these incidents occurred more than 30 years ago.

"I have prided myself to work very hard since then," he said Wednesday. "That happened in '84. In 1989, I was the Police Officer of the year for the Indiana Sheriff's Association. From that point on, I've been elected six times to the school board and been president five times. What I've done in the ways of working for the community pretty much speak for themselves."

Hatfield said he wasn't trying to send a negative message but merely the truth.

"This is all factual," Hatfield told the Courier and Press Wednesday. "He talks about his career as a Deputy Sheriff ev-

ery place he goes and on Facebook. He's not telling the whole story. It's never been discussed."

Last week, Duckworth sent out a mailer stating he was "ready on day one to lead the fight to end the opioid crisis." He referenced his experience with the sheriff's department for 17 years.

He called for stricter penalties for drug dealers and treating opioid addiction. He also discussed the idea of supporting longer jail sentences to help get drugs off the streets and directly working with law enforcement to develop strategies to deal with the crisis.

Duckworth is distributing a letter to residents referencing Hatfield's campaign endorsements from corporate entities, local union groups, building associations and Wayne Kinney, the devel-

oper who was recently approved to build a 350-unit apartment complex at U.S. 41 and Hillsdale Road. His concern is that Hatfield is taking campaign money from special interest groups.

"I will always work with businesses to create an environment for economic growth," Duckworth stated in the letter Tuesday. "However, local zoning and permit laws PROTECT communities like Darmstadt, St. Wendel and McCutchanville from over expansion and development."

Hatfield said his campaign contributions are from individuals and companies he's known throughout his career.

"They know I'm a pro-growth candidate," he said Wednesday. "They want our community to grow, and they know that I can make that happen. I also have the endorsement from the Fraternal Order of Police, the very men and women that he (Duckworth) served with — and they endorsed me."

Duckworth said he plans to stay positive for the remaining part of his campaign.

"I've discussed my qualifications and my experience," he said. "I've not gotten down in the weeds about my opponent and really refrain from that. Frankly, people are tired of that. If you can't get elected on what you've done, and you try to get elected on what somebody else has done — I think that's a slippery slope."