

ELECTION 2007

Middletown supervisor race heats up

By CHRIS ENGLISH COURIER TIMES

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Middletown's Democratic supervisor candidates say the Republicans are ducking debates and resorting to lies and distortions instead of a hard focus on the issues. One GOP candidate denied that charge.

Republicans Russ Kavana and George Leonhauser refused a debate the Democrats proposed for the township municipal center that would have been open to all residents and aired over the cable television government access channel, said Democratic incumbent Robert McMonagle.

The only debate held during the campaign was at the Villages of Flowers Mill agerestricted housing development. It wasn't televised and was open only to development residents, McMonagle added. Flowers Mill resident Phil Schieber, who organized the debate, confirmed McMonagle's contention about the closed-to-the-public debate not being televised.

The Republicans also have ventured down the low road with false and sensational campaign literature, McMonagle said. According to McMonagle, one of the worst examples was a pamphlet circulated in the township that stated McMonagle served time in Bucks County prison for a DUI conviction.

"Criminals belong in jail, not in our township government," the pamphlet said.

The Republicans said everything in their campaign literature was researched.

McMonagle admitted the DUI offense, but denied he served any jail time.

"I have never been to Bucks County prison, not even to visit," he said. "I did receive a driving under the influence charge, but as a first offense. I was ordered to attend classes in a shopping center; it was not punishable by prison. I do not know if it is now, because I never made that mistake again, and that was 20 years ago."

A prison official said records indicate McMonagle completed a sentence from Aug. 7 to Aug. 9, 1990, for the offense, but the record didn't indicate how the sentence was served.

Another Republican campaign pamphlet paints McMonagle as a friend to sexual predators by pointing out he voted no on a township ordinance that restricts where people convicted of sexual offenses against minors can live in Middletown.

McMonagle said he wants to protect children, but voted against the ordinance because he had doubts about its legality and effectiveness.

"It restricted sex offenders to 17 streets, and has not done one thing to protect children — no one knows who is moving in," he said. "I wanted something with teeth, not empty political posturing."

That doesn't wash, Kavana said.

"It hasn't been overturned by any court," he said of the township's sexual offender ordinance.

"To me, he's protecting predators and not our kids. It's an absolute disgrace."

McMonagle said the Republicans were sent letters suggesting several dates for a televised debate at the township building but the invitation was refused.

"These election pamphlets are typical 11th-hour stuff," he said. "They do it at the last minute and never in a forum where they will have to answer for it. Chuck Thompson (McMonagle's running mate) and I have put forth ideas on how to enhance Middletown. We want to continue to improve intersections to keep traffic moving, do more to connect greenways and protect open space and other things. What Kavana and Leonhauser have offered is hate and smear."

Kavana denied that contention, saying he would have agreed to a televised debate at the township building if it had been approved by the board of supervisors. A township ordinance designed to prevent politics from mixing into township affairs said political events at the township building must be approved.

"I would debate that guy [McMonagle] anyplace in the world," Kavana said. He added that the

Republicans researched everything that went into the election pamphlets, which state that they were paid for by the Middletown Republican Committee.

The Courier Times was unsuccessful in attempts to reach the committee's chairman, Frank Farmer, for comment. Bucks County Republican Chairman Harry Fawkes said he wasn't familiar with the debate or campaign literature issues in Middletown and declined to comment.

Leonhauser didn't return several phone messages left by the Courier Times seeking comment.

Thompson said the Republicans' refusal of debate invitations was regrettable.

"I don't think it was fair to the residents of Middletown Township," he said. "We wanted to do something where anyone could attend or watch on television. It absolutely shortchanged voters. I feel the township has been doing a great job in so many ways, on things like preserving open space and the noise ordinance. Robert has been spearheading all of that and I want to help him and the township continue to move forward."

Kavana was a Democratic township supervisor from 1987 to 1995 but switched parties early this year over what he called differences with the township Democratic organization.

Leonhauser was a township cop for 25 years and is now a management assistant working on security and discipline issues for Bucks County Technical High School in Bristol Township.

Kavana previously said his experience as a supervisor would be valuable in a second stint on the board. In campaign literature, Kavana and Leonhauser said they stand for lower property taxes and strong financial controls, the best equipment for emergency services personnel and protecting open space, among other things.

McMonagle was first elected in 2001 and is running for a second six-year term. Republican Supervisor John J. Kelly III, elected the same year as McMonagle, chose not to run for a second term.