

Campaign shots

Written by Tricia Johnson, Correspondent

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Dittmar and Garrett swap shots over Trump

The 5th District congressional race between Jane Dittmar, Democratic former Albemarle County supervisor, and Tom Garrett, Republican state senator, took a confrontational turn this week with a heated exchange of press releases. In one release, Dittmar's campaign manager, Tom Vandever, referred to a particular inaction of Garrett's as "cowardly and dishonorable."

On Aug. 1 Dittmar's campaign issued a press release calling on Garrett to "make his feelings known" about controversial statements made by presidential candidate Donald Trump in response to a speech made by Khizr Khan at the Democratic National Convention last week.

Khizr Khan and his wife, Ghazala Khan, are residents of the 5th District, according to a press release from Dittmar's campaign. The 5th District, which includes Fluvanna, stretches from Fauquier County to the North Carolina border and is the largest in the state.

Khan spoke of the death of his son, Humayun Khan, a Muslim U.S. Army captain killed in 2004 in Iraq, and berated Donald Trump, asking if he had read the U.S. Constitution or visited Arlington National Cemetery. "If it was up to Donald Trump, [my son] would never have been in America," Khan said. "He vows to build walls and ban us [Muslims] from this country."

Trump replied by calling Humayun Khan a hero who "made the ultimate sacrifice to keep our country safe" and pointed his finger at "the real problem," which he said was the "radical Islamic terrorists who killed him." But some of his additional comments roused national ire when he questioned whether Ghazala Khan was silent onstage because she was not allowed to speak. He also said that he too had made sacrifices.

In the Aug. 1 release, Dittmar said, "Sen. John McCain, who knows a great deal about

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sacrifice, said that he hopes voters understand that Mr. Trump's remarks don't represent the view of Republican candidates. I sincerely hope that Sen. Garrett is one of those candidates." In the release, Dittmar "called upon Tom Garrett to make his feelings known about the Trump comments."

This press release was followed by another from Dittmar's campaign on Aug. 2, noting that 24 hours had lapsed since the campaign's first release with no response from Garrett's campaign, and in which Vandever was quoted as saying, "Sen. Garrett wants the constituents of the 5th District to depend on him, but he continues to shirk his duty to defend the parents of a fallen American hero who live in the very district he's running to represent... For Tom Garrett to aid and abet Donald Trump's despicable attacks on the Khan family is both cowardly and dishonorable, and hardly the actions of someone who claims to support our veterans."

Garrett's campaign manager Zach Werrell responded in a press release issued late in the evening of Aug. 2. "Tom Garrett has expressed nothing but respect and admiration for Capt. Khan and the Khan family, and offered nothing but his sincere condolences for their heroic son's death," the press release read.

"This pathetic attempt by Jane Dittmar and her campaign to put Donald Trump's words in Tom Garrett's mouth, not to mention calling a decorated veteran a coward, dishonors all of those who serve now, have served in the past, and will ever serve in the future," the release continued. "Unlike Jane Dittmar or her campaign, Tom Garrett will never invoke [fallen soldiers'] names to score political points."

Werrell called on Dittmar to apologize for her campaign's "incendiary rhetoric" and to fire Vandever. "I sincerely hope those words were [Vandever's] own and not approved by Ms. Dittmar, nor anyone else in their campaign," read the release.