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The Times-Picayune

Judge dismisses libel lawsuit Candidate claimed TP ruined his chances

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St. Tammany bureau

A lawsuit filed against The Times-Picayune by a Ponchatoula lawyer who claimed the newspaper intentionally ruined his bid for public office has been dismissed in Tangipahoa Parish.

Arden Wells, who ran for the state's 6th Senate District seat in 2005, claimed the newspaper and reporter Meghan Gordon published "false and defamatory statements" about him in an effort to help a rival candidate, Diane Winston, whom the newspaper had endorsed in the June 4, 2005, race.

Wells finished sixth of out seven candidates. He garnered 258 votes, about 1 percent of the total. He sued May 26, 2006, in 21st Judicial District Court, claiming several articles in the newspaper thwarted his candidacy.

He claimed, for example, a headline in a story about Winston was written with the intent to discredit him. The newspaper corrected the inaccurate headline, "Winston is only candidate to call north shore home," the day after the article was published.

Wells and Times-Picayune attorney Lori Mince filed a joint motion to dismiss the suit, which specified that each side would pay its own legal fees. A judge appointed by the court granted the order Friday.

"The Times-Picayune feels strongly about its right to report on candidates seeking public office, and it is pleased that Mr. Wells has dismissed the case," Mince said.