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HERALD-LEADER

GOP ad links Dembo to Epstein associate, lacks accuracy

BY JOHN CHEVES
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A new attack ad says Democratic congressional candidate Zach Dembo benefitted from a \$500,000 political donation from Reid Hoffman, a wealthy friend of the late child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, while Dembo ducked a question on releasing the “Epstein files.” “Billionaire Reid Hoffman

vacationed on Epstein’s pedophile island after Epstein’s conviction. So why did he funnel half a million dollars into a dark money PAC for Zach Dembo?” the ad’s narrator asks. The ad then cuts to a WLEX/Channel 18 interview with Dembo from July 2025 as he announced his candidacy. “We asked Dembo, does he believe the Epstein files should be released?” a WLEX reporter says.

“I’m a little bit unclear right now, based on the conflicting reports, as to whether the Epstein files exist or not,” replies Dembo, a former federal prosecutor. “Ducking the question while victims demand answers,” the narrator says over images of children cowering and covering their faces. “That’s disgusting, Zach Dembo.” The new ad is paid for by the Congressional Leadership Fund,

or CLF, a Super PAC that works with House Speaker Mike Johnson to elect Republicans to Congress. The ad alters Dembo’s quote in the WLEX interview and does not include context surrounding the degree to which both parties are tied to associates of Epstein. The CLF, the same Super PAC which paid for the ad, accepted a \$5 million donation in April from Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick. Lawmakers have

scrutinized Lutnick for his own ties to Epstein, including his visit to Epstein’s private island and his appearances in the Epstein files. Lutnick has not been accused of wrongdoing. He described his interactions with Epstein, his neighbor in New York, as “meaningless and inconsequential” during a closed-door meeting with the House Oversight Committee in May. Further muddying the GOP’s attack in this instance, Republican President Donald Trump has endorsed Dembo’s Republican opponent, Ralph Alvarado, and financially helped Alvarado through his MAGA Inc. PAC. Trump was a friend of Epstein

SEE ATTACK AD, 3A



Zach Dembo, left, debated Ralph Alvarado at the FOX 56 studios in Lexington on Oct. 22.

Alvarado shifts from Trump on key issues in debate

BY JOHN CHEVES
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The candidates for Central Kentucky’s 6th Congressional District held their only debate of the campaign Thursday night, and the surprise of the evening was Republican Ralph Alvarado putting some daylight between himself and Republican President Donald Trump. Facing what’s expected to be a close contest Nov. 3 with Democrat Zach Dembo, Alvarado said he thinks the Iran war

needs to end. Alvarado also favors the repeal of Trump tariffs that are hurting Kentucky industries, like bourbon. Until Thursday, Alvarado — who proudly accepted Trump’s endorsement earlier this year — had kept his public statements supportive of Trump on the Iran war and the U.S. trade war, which relies on steep tariffs. But Trump’s approval ratings hit record lows this week, with only one-third of Americans supporting his job perform-

ance. Voters are particularly upset about energy prices and inflation on Trump’s watch. Pressed on the continuing Iran war during the hourlong televised debate at the FOX 56 studios in Lexington, Alvarado said he would “break” with Trump on this issue. “I think we need to end the war in Iran, is what we need to do right now,” Alvarado said. “And I’m not sure what his (Trump’s) position is, if it’s changed, but I think after it started, I think it’s time for us to end it. It’s run its course, and

we need to be able to clear away from that right now.” Trump has said he’s temporarily pausing attacks on Iran until after the midterm elections, although Iran and its regional allies are still engaged in hostilities in the Strait of Hormuz and elsewhere in the region. A surprised-looking Dembo said this was an entirely new position for his GOP opponent. “He has never once been out against the Iran war,” Dembo said. “The only statement he ever put out against it was on Feb. 28, saying he fully applauded it.” Likewise, asked if he supports Trump’s tariffs when retaliation costs Kentucky

SEE DEBATE, 12A

Lexington commission rejects 10-story student apartments

BY JESSE FRAGA
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After backlash from neighbors, Lexington officials on Thursday rejected a Chicago developer’s request to rezone land that would have made way for a luxury student apartment building downtown. The commission voted 5-0 with one abstention to deny a zone change from mostly residential property to a business on the corner of East High Street, Stone Avenue and Hagerman Court. The denial followed around two hours of public comment from residents who urged the commission to reject the project. Dozens of neighbors also opposed the project at a public feedback meeting hosted by its developer, Up Campus Student Living, on Sept. 30. The request for a zone change came amid increased property turnover into off-campus student housing. The zone change considered properties at 224, 226, 228 and 230 East High Street, 102 Hagerman Court and 209, 210, 211, 217 and 219 Stone Avenue. The proposed change would have allowed the Chicago-based developer to build a 10-story, 225-unit building with three town houses, for a total of 751 beds. Plans showed an interior parking garage with fewer than 200 parking spaces. It would have required demolishing homes where around 50 people currently live. Up Campus’ request to rezone the land considered the student apartment building “a multi-family building,” according to the Planning Commission’s meeting agenda. But the apartment building is targeted to University of Kentucky students, though open to anyone, according to Branden Gross, Up Campus’ Lexington-based attorney. Robin Michler, the commission’s secretary and voting member, said the development would take away from historic

SEE APARTMENTS, 8A

KY Supreme Court upholds murder conviction in Pike case

BY TAYLOR SIX
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The murder conviction and 25-year prison sentence of a Lexington man was upheld by the Kentucky Supreme Court Thursday, despite arguments from the man that his assault on an elderly woman didn’t immediately cause her death. The state’s highest court

upheld the conviction and sentence of David Joel Williams, who was convicted for the burglary and murder of 82-year-old Hilda Mae Pike in February 2024. Pike died in 2018 — two years after Williams allegedly entered Pike’s home to rob and violently attack her. During his trial, Williams’ attorneys argued he shouldn’t be convicted of murder, because it did not immedi-

ately cause Pike’s death, which the defense attributed solely to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. But prosecutors argued the nearly 20 stab wounds caused by Williams worsened Pike’s COPD and hastened her death, making him guilty of murder. Six justices upheld Williams’ conviction, but one justice, Kelly Thompson, said he would have overturned the murder

conviction based on unreliable expert testimony. Williams had three arguments as to why his conviction should be overturned: Pike’s doctor was an inadmissible witness, there was not enough evidence to convict him of murder and his absence from a pretrial hearing was grounds for reversal. Williams said Pike’s doctor was not qualified to speak on whether her injuries made her prior condition worse, leading to her death. The majority of the court disagreed.

SEE CONVICTION, 2A



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