A Democratic state House candidate who narrowly lost his East Tennessee race last week has filed a $750,000 libel lawsuit against Republican state Rep. Stacey Campfield.

Roger Byrge alleges in the lawsuit field in Jacksboro this week that Campfield, of Knoxville, falsely wrote on his blog that he had been arrested several times on drug charges.
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According to the lawsuit, Campfield's blog "caused damage to the plaintiff's reputation, damage to his standing in his community, personal humiliation, and great distress."

Campfield said he has not seen the lawsuit. When told about the amount of the damages sought by Byrge, Campfield said: "Good luck."

In the Oct. 12 blog post, Campfield said more attention needed to be paid to the race for the open seat in House District 36.

"Word is a ... mail piece has gone out exposing Byrge's multiple separate drug arrests," Campfield wrote on the blog. "Including arrests for possession and drug dealing. (I hear the mug shots are gold)."

The parts of the post mentioning Byrge are no longer on Campfield's blog, but a printout of the original text is filed as an exhibit in the lawsuit.

Campfield said Thursday that he was only repeating what he had heard from others.

"I don't think it ever presents anything as fact," he said. "I know a little bit about the First Amendment, and I just don't see him having a basis for damages."

Byrge lost the race to Republican Chad Faulkner. The district represents Campbell and Union counties.

Byrge, 49, is a Campbell County sheriff's deputy. He declined to comment through House Democratic Caucus political director Keith Talley, who condemned the blog post.

"This is an obvious example of Republicans doing anything or saying anything to get elected," Talley said. "These kind of smear tactics may have cost Mr. Byrge the race."

It's not the first time the District 36 race has raised questions about libel.

State Democrats were forced to pull an attack ad against Faulkner the week before the election after the Republican threatened a libel lawsuit. The spot stated that a lawsuit against Faulkner, a Knox County sheriff's deputy, had cost taxpayers $1.2 million, but Faulkner said the lawsuit was dismissed with no cost to taxpayers.

A revised version of the ad said Faulkner caused a $1.2 million lawsuit, but it did not mention

how the litigation turned out.