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## Readington candidate failed to file finance reports

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**BY JENNIFER WEISS**  
**Star-Ledger Staff**

James Hunter, the Readington candidate who lost the general election to write-in candidate Julia Allen, has not filed two required campaign finance reports, according to the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission.

The state agency confirmed Hunter's 11-day pre-election filing and 20-day post-election filing of contributions and expenditures had not yet been turned in. One was due by Oct. 28, the other by Nov. 28.

Hunter did turn in a 29-day pre-election filing, dated Oct. 21. On that form, the total amount of money deposited to his account is listed as \$4,575. The total expenditure listed is \$225.

But Hunter's campaign, which included glossy mailings, letters and automated phone calls to Readington residents, cost thousands, not hundreds, of dollars.

In a telephone interview yesterday Hunter said he thought all of his reports had been filed.

"I'm just curious, if they're not there, why they're not there," Hunter said. "That doesn't make any sense. I don't know. I'm sure if anyone's going to complain, it's going to be Julia (Allen)."

And complain Allen has. The township committeewoman, who retained the seat she lost to Hunter in the primary by waging an aggressive write-in campaign, said she filed a number of complaints about Hunter with the Election Law Enforcement Commission.

"He doesn't want to report where his money came from," Allen said. "We're quite sure where it came from."

Allen said she believes his money came from Thor Solberg and his supporters. Solberg is co-owner, with his sisters, of the Solberg Airport. The township has long tried to limit expansion of the facility in order to preserve the site.

Thor Solberg has said he did not contribute to Hunter's campaign.

The township committee held a public meeting on the airport's future Jan. 17, after negotiations begun this summer between the township and the Solbergs broke down. The committee discussed the airport in closed session at its meeting Monday, and will likely discuss it privately again, at a meeting this coming Monday, Allen said.

Allen believes Lawrence Berger of Morristown, a business partner and legal adviser of the Solbergs who took part in negotiations, funded Hunter.

"In all conversations ... he as much as says it's his money and threatens to continue spending the money to get us out of office, and by us I mean us collectively," Allen said.

Berger could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Allen, who served with Township Committeeman Frank Gatti on the negotiating committee, has logged 27 years on the township's open space committee. In those years, she has ardently supported land preservation and opposed expansion of the airport.

The write-in campaign she waged cost more than \$70,000, according to her own financial filings. Hunter said that number seemed high for a municipal race with a township committee seat as its prize.

"What is she trying to protect? This is a little, local election," Hunter said. "I wasn't going to be spending the crazy dollars she was spending for a \$5,000-a-year position."

Based on her own expenditures, Allen guessed Hunter spent between \$40,000 and \$50,000 on his campaign.

Hunter said he did not know how much he spent and did not wish to give a ballpark figure.

"I remember glancing at all the reports, but I don't know," he said. He said he hired professionals to take care of parts of his campaign, including the filing of his financial reports.

Hunter did say that he spent about \$6,000 of his own money on the general election.

"A lot" of the money he raised came from local residents, none of whom was Thor Solberg, Hunter said. Hunter also said he did not receive any money from Berger. "I don't even know that guy," Hunter said.

Chris Obudho, a consultant for Hunter's campaign, said he personally knew of \$5,000 that was spent during the general election on letter-style mailings and automated phone calls to residents.

Obudho is also a public relations consultant for Solberg Airport. "He just happens to be another client of mine in the same community," Obudho said.

Frederick Herrmann, executive director of the state Election Law Enforcement Commission, said candidates for office are required to file a long form with the agency -- the type of form Hunter turned in as his 29-day pre-election filing -- if they cross a threshold of \$3,500 at any point during their campaign.

The agency's review staff investigates candidates who do not file the required reports. The maximum penalty last year for a candidate who did not file was \$6,000 for the first offense and \$12,000 for the second and each subsequent offense, Herrmann said.

"I think a lot of candidates would certainly be concerned that they got a fine from the Election Law Enforcement Commission," Herrmann said. "You don't want to be violating the law if you can avoid it."

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