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WETHERSFIELD COMMUNITY

# State Investigates Complaint Against PAC Led By Wethersfield Democrat

By **BY CHRISTOPHER HOFFMAN**  
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**WETHERSFIELD —** The state Elections Enforcement Commission is investigating a complaint filed by a local Republican against a political action committee controlled by Democratic state Rep. Russell Morin of Wethersfield.

**GOP Councilwoman Donna Hemmann** charged that Morin's Pro-Progressive Energetic Political Action Committee failed to report \$1,000 in donations.

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"There are rules that have to be followed," Hemmann said Thursday. "I think that's important. Stuff like this, if you don't question it and look into it, then it becomes precedent and nobody pays attention to it."

Morin acknowledged the discrepancy Thursday and called it an honest mistake. He said he had the filing amended to list the donations immediately after learning of the problem.

"There was no intention to withhold anything," Morin said. "We addressed it as soon as we were made aware of it."

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The Pro-Progressive PAC didn't list two \$500 distributions it made to the Wethersfield Democratic town committee in 2013, according to Hemmann's complaint. The filing covered activity between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, 2013.

The town committee's records, however, listed the donations, which it received on Oct. 21 and Nov. 5, shortly before Wethersfield's municipal elections.

Joshua Foley, a spokesman for the Elections Enforcement Commission, said the agency discussed the complaint in an executive session earlier this month. The case is ongoing, he said.

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Morin said he first learned of the possible campaign finance law violation in May when Hemmann filed her complaint. He said he contacted the treasurer of his PAC, who acknowledged that she had forgotten to include the two payments.

On June 6, the Pro-Progressive PAC filed an amended report that included the payments, he said and state records confirm.

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"I take this stuff very seriously," Morin said. "As soon as we found out, we rectified

it."

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Hemann's complaint also questioned that PAC's claim that it had spent just \$25 on an Oct. 23, 2013, fundraiser and asked the commission to investigate.

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Morin said he and three other lawmakers held a joint fundraiser, splitting a \$100 charge for hors d'oeuvres at a Hartford restaurant that then made money from a cash bar.

Morin is running for re-election next month against GOP Councilman Michael Hurley.

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Hemann filed the complaint in May, but did not publicize it until this month. Asked why she waited to make her complaint public, Hemmann she was waiting to see what the elections commission did.

"We just need to make sure that people understand what's going on," she said.

Hemann and Hurley say the complaint highlights a larger issue. Morin is a state

union employee and unions account for most of the donations to his PAC, they said. That raises conflict of interest issues when local officials vote on contracts after benefiting from his contributions to the town committee, they said.

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"He's a union representative channeling money through the unions to political parties for elections," Hurley said. "It seems like a conflict."

Morin denied that he had any conflict, noting that so-called "leadership" PACs such as Pro-Progressive are legal and common among lawmakers in both parties. He dismissed the complaint and GOP charges as politically motivated.

"Its about while they try to attack my record, they're not making any progress," Morin said. "So they decided to do this. When this concludes, it's going to be shown to be a nonissue."

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