

Candidate Is Spending Big ... to Be Next Mayor of Yelm

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YELM A retired businessman who studies the teachings of a purported ancient warrior spirit here is spending \$50,000 on a small-town campaign for mayor, drawing criticism and calls for broader campaign-disclosure laws from his opponent.

Steve Klein, a retired airline sales manager, is running against contractor Ron Harding.

Both campaigns are reaching out with newspaper ads, campaign signs and fliers. But Klein's also includes flashy flourishes such as full-color photos, promotional pens and a 14-minute DVD.

Klein declined to discuss his campaign finances in detail with The Olympian newspaper, but said he's spent less than \$50,000 for "a very professional campaign."

"I think it's private, and I'd rather keep it that way," Klein said of his spending.

State law allows such secrecy through a campaign-reporting exemption for jurisdictions with fewer than 5,000 voters. Yelm has less than 2,000.

Klein is a student at the Ramtha School of Enlightenment, where Yelm resident JZ Knight claims to channel a 35,000-year-old warrior spirit named Ramtha to offer students spiritual instruction.

A recent Harding campaign ad questions whether Klein's war chest is coming from the school, which offers lessons and workshops that range from \$250 to \$1,000.

Klein said Knight and others affiliated with the school have been donors, as have people without Ramtha ties. He said his membership in Knight's organization is largely irrelevant.

"Why don't we ask my opponent: Can he be a member of the Lions Club, of his church, and still rule the city? Of course he can," Klein said.

Harding wants the Legislature to reconsider the small-town exemption. He'd expected to spend no more than \$1,500 on his campaign, but says he'll need 10 times that just to compete.

"If people really knew the dollar amounts that were spent, they would want to know why," Harding said.