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Judge Rules Candidate Can Stay In Race

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Congressional aspirant JoAnn Saunders can stay in the Sept. 28 runoff election even though she failed to file a financial disclosure statement on time, a circuit judge says.

Judge William C. Gridley ruled Wednesday that her opponent in the Democratic runoff failed to prove he would suffer irreparable damage if Mrs. Saunders' name went on the ballot.

Miller Newton, clerk of the Pasco County Court, filed the

suit after learning that Mrs. Saunders had submitted her financial disclosure statement eight weeks after she swore she had filed it.

Newton said he would appeal or seek another hearing.

Mrs. Saunders, who led a field of five in the Democratic primary, charged that Newton was engaging in "cheap mud-slinging tactics" to try to get her out of the runoff. The winner will face Republican incumbent Rep. Richard Kelley.

But Newton replied, "This is

not mud-slinging. The difference is that we have put this in legal terms by filing the suit. I feel that strongly about it."

Florida law makes disclosure of certain personal finances a requirement to qualify as a candidate for public office. The Orlando candidate swore in a signed declaration to the state Elections Division in Tallahassee July 19 that she had filed the statement.

Mary Singleton, director of the Elections Division, said she

had witnessed Mrs. Saunders' signature but said her staff did not discover until last week that the statement had not been filed.

"I do believe the lady just made a mistake and we're partly to blame," Mrs. Singleton said Tuesday.

Mrs. Saunders was notified and mailed the statement in this past weekend. A spokesman in her Orlando office said it had been inadvertently placed in campaign files in-

stead of being mailed to the elections office.

Newton also charged that Mrs. Saunders had misrepresented her financial status when filing as a candidate and avoided paying the filing fee for the Sept. 7 primary.

She gained a place on the ballot by filing a petition she said was signed by more than 11,000 people. This is an alternative way of qualifying for major political office, although it is rarely used.

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<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=godPAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=ngUEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=7120,4135223&dq=miller-newton+election&hl=en>