



Lawyer to challenge Sweeney for Senate

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A Wenonah attorney defied Republican Party leaders in the tri-county area by announcing he will run against well-entrenched Democrat Stephen Sweeney for state Senate in the 3rd District this November.

Mark Cimino, known for taking his own initiative in the political world, said Thursday he would be reaching out to the party leadership but felt it was not necessary before throwing his name in the mix.

"This isn't about representing the Republican Party," said Cimino, 39. "It's about representing the residents of the district who have not received the representation that they deserve from Mr. Sweeney. It's going to be Cimino versus Sweeney, a battle all the way to the finish."

Sweeney, serving in Trenton since 2001, and also the Gloucester County freeholder director, said he welcomed the competition.

"Somebody has to run against me," Sweeney said. "I look forward to a spirited campaign."

Cimino said Sweeney "pretends to be a friend of the hard-working people."

"Sweeney has betrayed the trust of the people he has promised to represent," Cimino added.

Sweeney responded: "Nobody can challenge my record of supporting the working people." The incumbent serves as treasurer for Ironworkers Local 399 in Westville.

His efforts to cut benefits to stateworkers was "an honest discussion" to save taxpayer dollars, Sweeney said.

Former Salem County Freeholder Sue Bestwick was considered a candidate to challenge Sweeney. She resigned abruptly from the Salem County board earlier this year, indicating a possible run.

On Thursday, Bestwick said she had not made a decision.

"As far as I'm concerned, we have a lot of good candidates and I'm excited a lot of people in the Republican Party are stepping up," Bestwick said.

Gloucester County GOP Chairwoman Loran Oglesby said that just because Cimino made the announcement, it did not mean automatic support.

"He has to go through the process like everybody else," Oglesby said.

The chairwoman said she welcomed Cimino to submit a resume and be interviewed by party leaders.

Cimino said he did not have running mates to run on his ticket for state Assembly. Sweeney is running with fellow incumbents John Burzichelli and Douglas Fisher.

Last year, when county Republicans had trouble filling a slate for freeholder and sheriff, Cimino called a special meeting to find some candidates.

His efforts were thwarted by Oglesby, who announced her slate on the eve of the meeting.

In Gloucester County, the 3rd District represents Clayton, East Greenwich, Elk, Greenwich, Harrison, Logan, Mantua, National Park, Paulsboro, South Harrison, Swedesboro, Wenonah, West Deptford and Woolwich.

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