

Hein mum on possible Congressional run



Hein

By James Nani

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NY_Middletown_THR KINGSTON - Ulster County Executive Mike Hein says he's "100 percent committed" to being the best county executive now and continuing that if he wins a third term for county executive.

But the 50-year-old Democrat from the Town of Hurley says he won't answer his opponent Terry Bernardo's accusations that he's looking to run for the 19th Congressional District seat in the House of Representatives next year. If he did run - and won, Hein would have to vacate the office of county executive in mid-term.

Republican Rep. Chris Gibson has said he won't run again for the Congressional seat in 2016. The district runs through all or parts of 11 counties, extending from Montgomery to the north and down to Ulster and Sullivan.

Hein's name has been bandied about as a possible contender by Beltway media outlets like Roll Call, Politico and The Hill. Bernardo points to Hein's campaign manager's Washington D.C. phone number as evidence.

"I commit today that if elected Ulster County Executive I will serve the full, four-year term. Mike should tell us what his plans are as well," said Bernardo, a 50-year-old Republican from Accord.

But Hein said Bernardo is scrambling to make the congressional question a campaign issue.

"This type of speculation has existed for over five years," Hein said. "My focus is being the best county executive I can be for the people of Ulster County, the same as it has always been."

Still, Hein wouldn't unequivocally rule out a run.

"Just like the last five years, I don't speculate on the future," Hein said.

Two Republican contenders have emerged in the 19th: John Heaney, a Dutchess County heating oil executive, and John Faso, from Kinderhook, who was the minority leader of the state Assembly from 1998-2002 and took on Eliot Spitzer in 2006 for governor. Democrat John Patrick Kehoe, whose Yellowcake Music business is in Woodstock, has also filed to run.

Gerald Benjamin, head of the Benjamin Center for Public Policy Initiatives at SUNY New Paltz, said if Hein is looking to run he wouldn't have to give up his job as county executive, so long as he wins that post in November. He said Hein would be a strong candidate for Congress because he's well known in the more Democratic southern end of the district.

Tom Schimmerling, chair of the Delaware County Democratic Committee, said talk in Democratic circles has turned to Hein, though he's heard nothing definitive himself.

"The only person I've heard is interested is Mike Hein," Schimmerling said. "I think he would be a terrific candidate. It sounds like he's fairly serious from what I understand."

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