

Are Baldone, Edwards at odds over PSC campaign?

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Damon Baldone's announced run for Louisiana Public Service Commission, District 2, will come without the support of the governor who appointed him as interim commissioner.

The Houma lawyer and businessman, appointed to serve into the autumn as a short-term replacement for former Commissioner Scott Angelle, R-Breaux Bridge, signed up last week to seek the remainder of Angelle's term, which runs through 2018.

Angelle gave up the PSC seat May 22 after he was appointed by President Trump as director of the federal Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement in Washington, D.C.

After a short search, Gov. John Bel Edwards on June 1 appointed Baldone, with whom he served a term in the Louisiana House of Representatives, to replace Angelle, ostensibly until a new commissioner wins election either in the Oct. 14 special election voting or in the Nov. 18 General Election, should a runoff be needed.

Edwards wanted interim only

At the time, Edwards spokesman Richard Carbo said the governor was seeking a short-term replacement for Angelle with the agreement that the interim commissioner would not seek the office permanently.

But Baldone qualified July 12 for the permanent seat along with former State Rep. Lenar Whitney, R-Houma, and Dr. Craig Greene, R-Baton Rouge, a political newcomer. Baldone qualified as a Republican, although he served as a Democrat during his 12 years in the Louisiana House of Representatives and was appointed by a Democratic governor.

In fact, Baldone said within a week of his appointment that he would seek election in the autumn and suggested then that Edwards had never placed any conditions on him accepting the District 2 interim job, other than to "look out for the people of Louisiana."

The governor said Monday "clearly there was some miscommunication."

Baldone shifts party loyalty

Baldone is no stranger to controversy. Two years ago, he sought to register both as a Democrat and a Republican, even taking his contention to court — the effort failed — that he should be able to register in both parties.

The case was not heard.

In registering for the autumn election last week, Baldone made no unusual political party requests, the Secretary of State's office confirmed. He simply paid his \$900 registration fee and declared himself a Republican.

On Monday, Baldone said he opted to run as a Republican because, he said, it jibed with his "conservative" political stances.

Carbo said Monday that Baldone has met with Edwards since the controversy, but he said he did not know what the two discussed.

Baldone said in that meeting that Edwards took responsibility for the confusion that arose concerning Baldone's intention to run in the autumn election.

Carbo said the governor would remain neutral in the race, which involves only the Republicans.

Whitney: 2 others are 'RINOs'

The PSC is an independent regulatory agency that seeks to assure "safe, reliable and reasonably priced services" by public utilities and motor carriers in Louisiana. There are five members: District 2 includes all or part of East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberia, Iberville, Lafayette, Lafourche, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne, West Baton Rouge and West Feliciana parishes.

Whitney, who owned a dance studio in Houma for many years, replaced Baldone in the state House of Representatives, serving a single term. Tanner Magee, a Houma attorney, defeated her for re-election.

She is a national committeewoman for the Republican Party.

At a Republican gathering in Lafayette last week, she told about 150 people at a luncheon that she had qualified as a Republican and referred to the two other candidates as "RINOs" — Republicans In Name Only.

Contenders shrug off remark

Baldone appeared to shrug off Whitney's characterization.

He said the two are former neighbors and are friends.

Greene's campaign manager, Lionel Rainey, scoffed at the suggestion that the doctor is not a committed Republican. Greene's political campaign is his first, Rainey said.

In addition to earning his medical degree from LSU, Greene earned a master's in business administration from Yale and serves in the U.S. Navy Reserves, his campaign site said.