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SWEENEY BEGINS BID FOR 3RD TERM

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U.S. Rep. John Sweeney, R-Clifton Park, began his re-election campaign Monday without a Democratic opponent and is facing a Green Party candidate who lives outside the 20th Congressional District in Albany. Sweeney, who gained national attention for fighting for George W. Bush in Florida during the presidential election vote recount in 2000 and pushing for aid to the state following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, is running for a third term.

Sweeney's new 20th Congressional District mirrors his old 22nd District, except for the addition of Delaware and Otsego counties.

``Vice President Cheney is very happy I represent these counties and the contiguous counties," Sweeney said about his district, which also includes Saratoga, Columbia, Greene, Warren, Washington, parts of Rensselaer, Dutchess and Schoharie counties.

Sweeney announced his re-election campaign in Saratoga Springs, Glens Falls and Delhi, Delaware County. He promised to bring more tax dollars home as a result of his seat on the House Appropriations Committee.

With Sweeney's high national profile and his continued presence in district issues, such as protecting family dairy farms and ensuring that constituents have a voice in the dredging of PCBs from the Hudson River, it's hard for opponents to battle him in the conservative, Republican-dominated district that runs from near Pennsylvania to south of the Canadian border.

Sweeney, a Republican, also is anticipated to get the Conservative and Independent endorsements.

``You need to raise a lot of money and you need to commit a lot of time," said Saratoga County Democratic Chairman Larry Bulman, who added the Democrats still might field a candidate because the start of the petitioning period has been pushed back to June 18 by redistricting.

Steve Trimm of Albany is running against Sweeney on the Green Party line. Trimm could not be reached for comment Monday.

``There is no residency requirement for Congress. Sweeney lived in Cohoes," Mark Dunlea, first vice chair of the New York Greens, said, comparing Trimm's status to Sweeney's initial campaign in 1998.

Sweeney dismissed Dunlea's comments as ``cheap political" shots and said he is very confident about his record and the public's awareness about what he is doing in Washington.

``This campaign offers me an opportunity to get out there to showcase my record and make some points that I have success on issues that are important to them," Sweeney said.

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