

## Judge: Re-open Qualifying in the 5th Congressional District

No last minute switching of political parties. That was the message handed down in scathing language by State District Judge Allen Edwards earlier today, as he ordered that the qualification period be re-opened for 5th congressional district congressional candidates.

Judge Edwards' ruling used harsh language in concluding that incumbent Cong. Rodney Alexander's last minute switch from Democrat to Republican was illegal. "Mr. Alexander has attempted to subvert the electoral process for his own personal gain. His action deprived voters of the right to vote for a Democratic candidate," the judge said.

No date was set by the judge for requalification. Judge Edwards said the new dates should not be set until all appeals are concluded. However sources in both Democratic and Republican camps are saying no appeal could well take place.

"We got about all we could reasonably ask for," said one key democrat on the inside of party discussions. It's probably unrealistic to think the Supreme Court would uphold a ruling kicking out Alexander all together. So we look on this as a huge victory for us. Now it's time to find a really good democratic candidate."

Don't look for Cong. Alexander to appeal either. He still feels he can win a solid re-election, and who knows what a Democratic majority on the state Supreme Court may do. And he probably has lost one vote on the high court. Alexander has repeatedly stated that Justice Chet Traylor, who is elected from the same 5th District, urged the Congressman to switch parties and run as a Republican. The Democrats, with good reason, would ask Traylor to recuse himself from any ruling on the issue costing Alexander what might be a much needed vote in his behalf.

So look for qualifications to re-open within the next 10 days. And the Democrats are on the phone as we speak looking for a strong candidate. A number are weighing the race. Sen. Robb Marionneaux lives in the southern part of the district outside of Baton Rouge and was one of the attorneys pressing the case against Alexander. He's interested. So is Sen. Noble Ellington from Winnfield (my old senatorial district) and Rep. Bryant Hammett from Ferriday (my old hometown). There is also serious talk to recruit a business man or woman; a fresh face with few political ties and some of their own money to spend.

The state Democratic party also feels there is a great opportunity to raise a lot of money out-of-state from Democratic groups who were disturbed about Alexander's last minute switch. "A number of folks and groups around the country should be willing to 'send a message' that democrats won't roll over and play dead when this kind of disloyalty takes place," a local party official said.

And Alexander may have trouble in his own party. Jock Scott says he is in the race to stay, and is surprised at the calls from Republicans he has been receiving. Lee Fletcher,

who lost to Alexander two years ago in a close race, is also receiving a number of calls to consider a re-run. Fletcher is saying nothing official, but folks close to him feel Alexander is in a real dogfight. "Lee almost won last time. Lee has stayed in touch with his organization and knows the district well. I can tell you he is giving it a close look."

A lot will happen in the next three days. Look for the battle lines to be drawn and the horses that will run to be decided and public by the first of next week. It would be an understatement to say: "Stay tuned. Much more to come."