

Tampa Bay Times

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William March: Doug Belden announces re-election campaign for 2020

The Hillsborough tax collector says his health is improved and he still has goals he wants to accomplish.



Tax Collector Doug Belden is announcing his 2020 re-election campaign, saying his improved health and goals he still wishes to accomplish caused him to change his previous decision not to run for a sixth full term.

“I have decided to run for Tax Collector one more time,” Belden said in a statement to the *Times*. “My health has significantly improved, and I feel that I can continue to make a difference in our community.”

Belden, a Republican, said he expects to file campaign papers soon, joining Democratic State Attorney

Andrew Warren, who has filed for re-election to a second term.

An early campaign start is sometimes a strategy to stave off challengers, but local political insiders say they're not aware of any likely challengers to either Belden or Warren.

“For both of them it’s probably prudent to get started as soon as they’ve made the decision to run, to scare off any possible opponents,” said local GOP political consultant April Schiff, who has worked for Belden in the past.

Republican County Commissioner Sandra Murman has also filed for clerk of court in 2020.

Murman began a 2018 campaign for a new commissioner’s seat, which would have extended her term limit. But she then withdrew and switched \$177,098 in campaign contributions from that race into the clerk’s race. She has raised \$193,008 in all.

Belden, 64, was first elected in a 1998 special election and has been re-elected since, often with support from prominent Democrats and unions.

Belden raised \$208,306 for his 2016 campaign and \$121,770 in 2012 but ended up running unopposed and refunding more than 90 percent of the contributions in both years.

He said during his 2016 campaign that this term would be his last. Over the last eight years he’s had several surgeries for back problems and an arterial problem in one leg. But he said physical therapy and exercise have significantly improved his back, and he now has normal blood flow in his leg.

“I’ve had many challenges in my life,” Belden said. “This is just another one and I’m confident I can beat it.”