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Legislators gavel out with bipartisan tones

Dem leader praises outgoing GOP rep, parties split Bethell honor

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Rep. Brian Weber, R-Dodge City, with his wife and child by his side, announced to those gathered in the Kansas House Thursday, that he had decided to resign after three sessions to focus on his business and family.

By [Andy Marso](#)

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Rep. Brian Weber, R-Dodge City, held his infant daughter in one arm while he placed his other hand over his heart and led the House in the pledge of allegiance one last time in 2013.

Then he stepped down from the podium and accepted a hearty handshake from House Minority Leader Paul Davis, D-Lawrence.

Minutes later House Speaker Ray Merrick, R-Stilwell, adjourned the House sine die, but not before a session marked by conservative majorities passing bills over the objections of Democrats ended with tones of bipartisan goodwill in the House.

Much of that centered on Weber, who decided to resign after three sessions to focus on his business and family.

Even those who frequently disagreed with him on policy issues expressed disappointment.

"I have a great deal of respect for Brian Weber," Davis said after the final gavel. "He came to the Capitol for all the right reasons. He's a straightforward, honest person trying to do the right

things for Kansas. I'm really sad he's not going to be around here next session. We need more like him in the Legislature."

At 30 years old, Weber is believed to be the youngest legislator ever to chair a budget committee (the Social Services Budget Committee) and was praised by members on both sides of the aisle for his open leadership approach and willingness to listen.

He said his responsibilities as a husband and father, as well as his burgeoning heating and cooling business in southwest Kansas, led him to conclude that he should put a promising political career on hold.

"I found myself in a position in which I was trying to do too many things," Weber said. "At the risk of not doing all of them well, I decided to stop."

Still, with his wife and child by his side, Weber choked up as he addressed his soon-to-be former House colleagues, calling it "a hard day, but a good day."

"I certainly tried to conduct myself in a way that I was respectful of everyone," Weber said. "If I ever wasn't, I apologize for that."

Weber added that he would like to depart with words of wisdom like Rep. Bob Grant, D-Frontenac, who is retiring after two decades of House service, but said he didn't have the experience.

He did drop one gem before stepping down though.

"Before you criticize someone, first walk a mile in their shoes," Weber said. "That way, when you do criticize them, you'll be a mile away and you'll have their shoes."

Weber's replacement, 66-year-old former Bucklin mayor Bud Estes, was sworn in Thursday, calling it "almost a dream, actually."

"I know I've got a real challenge ahead trying to fill in for Rep. Weber," Estes said. "He's highly respected in our area and everyone thinks great things of him."

House Majority Leader Jene Vickrey, R-Louisburg, added to the bipartisan tone of the day by honoring one legislator from each party with a Statesman award named for Rep. Bob Bethell, R-Alden, who died in a car accident after the adjournment of the 2012 session.

Vickrey presented the award to Rep. Arlen Siegfried, R-Olathe, and Rep. Jan Pauls, D-Hutchinson, who together lead a weekly Christian prayer group open to all legislators.

"We pray for each other," Vickrey said. "That's always just helpful that we remember each other and remember we are here to do a job for the state of Kansas, and you are great examples of what we should do here."

In presenting Siegfried with a plaque, Vickrey quoted Luke 2:52, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man," while looking up at his predecessor as majority leader.

"So this says we recognize you as a man of great stature and you're also kind of tall," Vickrey said.

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