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The Capitol Report

**Outgoing lawmaker notes narrowing partisan divide**

Sometimes, it’s more interesting to note what elected officials say on the way out than when they’re in office, constantly electioneering, posturing and pleasing all sorts of people.

So, let’s take note of the reflections of low-key Republican state Assemblyman Ed Brooks of Reedsburg.

Brooks is passing on a re-election bid because of health issues. He announced his retirement May 14 due to his ongoing battle with leukemia.

The 75-year-old Brooks, who was elected to the Assembly in 2008, said recently rapport between lawmakers on either side of the aisle has improved since the passage in 2011 of the divisive Act 10. He remembers the time as one when "things were pretty strange."

"I think the cold is thawing. We're realizing we can work across the aisle," he said.

In his absence, Brooks said he hopes lawmakers will address transportation funding and access to broadband.

He said efficiency in transportation funding is important, but that at some point, more funding will be needed.

"Eventually it gets to where you can't squeeze any more moisture out of a sponge, and I think we have to probably make some adjustments," said Brooks, who served on the Transportation Committee this session.

For Brooks, that would mean considering modest increases in the gas tax and registration fees, as well as keeping tolling on the table.

As to his health, Brooks is receiving chemotherapy as he fights the leukemia he battled into remission last year.

Brooks told reporters his doctor in mid-April detected a low platelet count ­— an indicator of the blood cancer — and soon after performed a bone marrow biopsy.

He said chemotherapy is part of a broader care regimen designed to improve quality of life.

"We feel good," the Reedsburg Republican said. "It's good to feel good when you're sick. As our health stabilizes, we'll know a lot better ... what options we have available."

He said he wanted to run for re-election but elected not to because of the health news, and that the late timing of his announcement was not intentional.

In his retirement, Brooks said he plans to first focus on his health, as well as be involved in local government and spend time with his family, particularly his grandchildren.

As of mid-May, Brooks was the 14th member of the Assembly to decide against seeking re-election this fall. Seven members have announced plans to retire without seeking another office; five are running for another office; one, Democrat Cory Mason has already won the office of Racine mayor and resigned; and one, Republican Keith Ripp of Lodi, joined Gov. Scott Walker’s administration.

Tony Kurtz, an organic farmer who spent 20 years in the Army, announced he's running as a Republican for the 50th Assembly District being vacated by Brooks.

Kurtz, who serves on the state's Organic Advisory Board and was member of the Farm Service Agency State Committee, was a helicopter pilot in the Army.

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

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