

Brownback picks Jacob LaTurner as new state treasurer

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Body

Sen. Jacob LaTurner of Pittsburg will be the new state treasurer, replacing Ron Estes, who won the 4th District congressional special election last week.

In picking LaTurner, Gov. Sam Brownback chose someone who has been a reliably conservative vote in the Legislature. This session, LaTurner has sided with the governor on taxes and Medicaid.

LaTurner's departure could alter the dynamics of the Senate, depending on who replaces him. Republican leaders in LaTurner's district will gather in the coming days to choose his successor.

LaTurner will also be among the youngest statewide officials in Kansas at 29.

"What I commit to Kansans is I'm going to surround myself with wonderful people and work very hard and Kansans are going to be able to receive quality services," LaTurner said.

LaTurner called the position "humbling and exciting." He said he plans to run for a full term in 2018.

The state treasurer manages a college savings program, runs an effort to return unclaimed property and provides general administrative oversight of state finances. The position typically attracts little controversy.

While the state treasurer is elected, the governor has the power to appoint a new treasurer if the position is vacated.

"I know Jake to be a fine man, a skilled public servant and a fiercely loyal Kansan," Brownback said.

In the Senate, LaTurner championed a property tax lid that limits the ability of city and county governments to raise spending by more than inflation without a vote.

LaTurner has said the policy gives voters a greater say in local spending, but it is opposed by many local and county governments, who view the requirements as burdensome.

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Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka, questioned LaTurner's qualifications for the office. LaTurner does customer service consulting work.

"Jake LaTurner has been a rubberstamp for Sam Brownback ever since he was in the Senate," Hensley said.

But former state treasurer and current U.S. representative Lynn Jenkins offered her support.

"I have known him for more than a decade and hired him as a staffer during my first term in Congress. I have always been a big fan of Jake and know he will continue to be an outstanding public servant to the people of Kansas," Jenkins said in a statement.

This fall, LaTurner faced a re-election challenge, beating Democrat Lynn Grant 56.1 percent to 43.8 percent.

In that race, Democrats accused Brownback of political favoritism in a decision to allow a \$25 million widening of a highway in LaTurner's district to proceed despite delays of other projects. The project was initially delayed as well, but Brownback gave the go-ahead after LaTurner urged the governor to reconsider.

The governor's office has said that Brownback gave his word that the project would be a priority.

Estes offers resignation

In last week's special election, Estes won the U.S. House seat last held by Mike Pompeo, who left to become CIA director. Estes, a Republican, beat Democrat James Thompson.

Estes submitted his letter of resignation to Brownback on Friday. His resignation will coincide with his swearing-in to the U.S. House, which is scheduled for April 25.

He wrote that during his time in office, he had traveled to every Kansas county, returned \$113 million in unclaimed property and grown the college savings program.

"It's been an enormous honor serving the people of Kansas as state treasurer," Estes said.

Estes was first elected treasurer in 2010.

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