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Former Senate ed chair hopes to help Florida voucher schools in new post

By Jessica Bakeman



Former GOP state Sen. John Legg, who opted not to run for reelection last year after his district was redrawn to include a prominent Republican colleague, was appointed this week to the board of Step Up for Students. | AP Photo/Steve Cannon

TALLAHASSEE — The immediate past chair of the Senate education committee has joined the board of a nonprofit charged with administering Florida’s controversial voucher programs.

Former GOP state Sen. John Legg, who opted not to run for reelection last year after his district was redrawn to include a prominent Republican colleague, was appointed this week to the board of Step Up for Students.

The group is the primary organization authorized by the Legislature to dole out tax credit-funded scholarships that cover private school tuition for poor students. It also administers vouchers for students with disabilities.

Legg said he hopes to use his experience running a Pasco County charter school to help private schools whose students use the tax credit scholarships.

“What I could bring to the board is just practical experience working in schools,” he told POLITICO Florida on Thursday. “I’d like to bring a little bit of innovation.”

Legg initially resisted leaving the Legislature, briefly suggesting he would mount a primary run against future Senate president Wilton Simpson in the new district before backing down. He said he doesn’t have an immediate plan to run for office again but might in the future.

“As I get further away it becomes less excitable to come back,” he said. “I’ll probably be back in another form but probably not in the next couple of years.”

He said his potential future political ambitions had “no bearing” on his decision to sit on the nonprofit’s board.

Legg said Step Up for Students founder and chair John Kirtley and president Doug Tuthill asked him to consider taking on the volunteer position. Kirtley, a Tampa venture capitalist, helped create the tax credit scholarship program and has promoted it nationally. He is also vice chair of the American Federation for Children, where he served with now-U.S. education secretary Betsy DeVos.

“John is committed to serving disadvantaged youth and will be a wonderful addition to our organization,” Tuthill said in a post on the organization’s blog.

Another politician serves on the board: Democrat Al Lawson, who served in the Legislature for nearly three decades before eventually being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.