



## A well respected man

Much-liked Rep. Kelby Woodard is leaving office after this term to launch Catholic school for poor kids

BY KEVIN FEATHERLY  
Special to Capitol Report

A popular rising star in his caucus, Rep. Kelby Woodard, R-Belle Plaine, is leaving the Legislature after this term to launch a new Catholic high school for impoverished students in Dallas.

Woodard was first elected to the House — by 37 votes — in 2010. A close ally and friend of Minority Leader Kurt Daudt, he quickly has made himself a respected key member of his caucus, holding positions as assistant minority leader and minority lead on Education Finance.

He is leaving office after being named the Dallas high school's president-elect in April. He continues to perform constituent services for his district, but Woodard has spent much of his time this summer on the road preparing for the school's launch.

His new Christo Rey Dallas College Preparatory School will open to a freshman class of 150 students in August 2015. It will add about 125 students each year until next year's freshmen become seniors, Woodard says.

Woodard, who graduated from both high school and college in Texas, says that the move will mean that both he and his wife, Donna, will be closer to their families. The couple moved to Minnesota in 1999 after his former employer, Target Corp., transferred Woodard here.

"Obviously serving in the Legislature is not something you do lightly, and it is not something you give up lightly," Woodard says. "I was presented with an opportunity I can't pass up. It allows me to put my words into action."

Anne Marie Hansen, director of admissions and communications for the Christo Rey Jesuit High School in Minneapolis, says Woodard attended two introductory "Lunch & Learn" events at that school — one in 2011, the other in February. They clearly made an impression, she says.

"He liked the model and the mission of the school during those visits, and that was what kind of inspired him to apply for the position in Dallas," she says.

Woodard comes from a business background, and has no previous experience as an educator. But that is no disadvantage in the Christo Rey chain, where Woodard says most other presidents also emerged from the business community.

In addition to his former job as a sup-

### The Woodard File

**Name:** Kelby Woodard

**Age:** 44

**Job:** Outgoing District 20A Rep. (R-Belle Plaine); incoming president, Christo Rey Dallas College Preparatory School, Dallas, Texas.

**Committees:** GOP lead, Education Finance; Commerce and Consumer Protection Finance and Policy; Rules and Legislative Administration; Ways and Means; alternate on Ethics committee.

**Education:** Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas; B.S., criminal justice, University of North Texas; M.B.A., international business, University of Dallas.

**Family:** Married to wife, Donna; five kids, ages 3 to 18.

**Hobbies/interests:** Woodard: "My family. I've got five kids. It's constant athletics, plays, whatever it is. I don't have time for golf; I don't have time for anything else. And I don't really need anything else."

PHOTOS: KEVIN FEATHERLY

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## Woodard

Continued from page 17

ply chain assets director for Target, Woodard previously launched two startups. Trade Innovations, Inc., where he was founder and CEO, is a global supply chain management consultancy. TRG Direct, his more recent startup, is a supply chain management software developer. He sold it in late 2013.

Woodard says Christo Rey hired him after a lengthy interview process.

"They've obviously been following my political career when it comes to education reform and the things we've been working on in Minnesota," he says. "And they thought that, combined with the business background, was something that they would be very interested in talking about."

Woodard's will be the 30th U.S. Christo Rey school in the United States. The schools focus on disadvantaged kids, many from the inner city, who test two grade levels behind their peers. Woodard says they cram the equivalent of six academic years into four high school terms.

His school will charge an average tuition of \$100 a month, while receiving contributions and scholarship grants from private and corporate donors, he says. However, students through work-study pay 60 to 70 percent of tuition costs.

Students get assigned to professional organizations like legal, accounting and architectural firms, and the money earned goes toward their tuition. That business exposure is the key ingredient in the model, Woodard says. It helps kids visualize careers that they might not otherwise ever imagine.

"We like to say that they aren't going to be defined by their ZIP codes and by their environment," Woodard says. "We put them in an environment where we show them success and they are part of that success."

### Business background

According his campaign website (still active at [www.kelbywoodard.com](http://www.kelbywoodard.com)), Woodard worked at the U.S. Customs Service before taking his job as director of supply chain assets protection at Target. Another online bio from a business training website describes him as an expert on cargo theft and global supply chain security, and indicates that Woodard has regularly advised key congressional staffers on such issues.

Nothing in his business career points toward secondary education. However, after squeaking out his 2010 victory over DFL incumbent Rep. David Bly, Woodard quickly made education a top priority.

Within a month of taking office, he revived a long-simmering education debate by introducing a vouchers bill. It would have provided money for private schooling to parents whose children attended underperforming public schools.

Language from that bill got rolled into the 2011 education omnibus finance bill, which passed the GOP-controlled Legislature. But DFL Gov. Mark Dayton vetoed it.

Woodard also has supported tying teacher's salaries to performance and

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—Kelby Woodard

was a sharp critic of DFLers' handling of the school-funding shift. A fiscal conservative who opposes any tax increases, Woodard pushed for "zero-based budgeting," in which the Legislature would determine how much revenue the state had to work with, and pay bills according to its main priorities.

In addition to Education Finance,

"I think he is not only well respected and trusted within the caucus, but, outside of the caucus, he has a way of communicating that really connects with people, maybe more than most."

—House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt

Woodard has been a member of the Commerce and Consumer Protection Finance and Policy Committee, the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee and Ways and Means. He is also an alternate on the Ethics Committee.

Though his tenure has been short, Woodard managed to make many friends at the Capitol, both inside his own caucus and among Democrats. Daudt chalks that up to Woodard's calm and respectful demeanor.

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nects with people, maybe more than most."

Such was the tightness of Woodard's friendship with Daudt that Woodard sometimes took the helm at GOP press conferences when Daudt was unavailable.

"Frankly, we kind of hit it off right away and got to be really good friends," Daudt says. "He doesn't just automati-

cally assume anything. He kind of thinks through things, and people respect the way that he does that."

Keith Downey, an Edina GOP representative during Woodard's first term, agrees. Now the state Republican Party chair, Downey says Woodard showed a firm grasp of the issues and was dedicated to policy change rather than scrambling for political position.

"I'm disappointed he is leaving the state and taking all his talents with him," Downey says. "Kelby is a great guy."

Asked whether he worries that Woodard's resignation puts a GOP legislative seat up for grabs, Daudt says no.

Recent redistricting actually made the new District 20A safer Republican territory by moving blue-leaning Northfield off to another district, the minority leader says.

Banker and former Scott County Commissioner Bob Vogel is the GOP's endorsee for the open seat. The former campaign treasure for outgoing Rep. Mary Liz Holberg, R-Lakeville, will square off against DFLer Thomas Lofgren. The Swedish-born Lofgren is a New Market Township computer programmer.

### Compassionate conservatism

Woodard understands that some on the left might find it hard to believe a conservative Republican from Greater Minnesota would leave office to help a bunch of poor, inner-city Texans. But he says that's only because they don't understand conservatism.

The Christo Rey education model represents a "boot-strap mentality" and is a "pathway for empowerment."

"I think people who understand conservative ideals and conservative values, this fits very well with that," he says. "It primarily is based on the building of character and your spiritual nature into a full human being, a full person."

That approach, Woodard says, meshes well with conservatism, which holds that society should provide people with the opportunity and tools to succeed.

"This is not parachuting in and fixing everybody's problem," he says. "It is providing them with the set of problem-solving skills that they need their entire life. Because regardless of what economic income they are in, we all have to face problems."

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