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LYONS HANDING OFF NATIVITY TRADITION AS HE EXITS LEGISLATURE

By Chris Triunfo

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, DEC. 20, 2018.....Rep. Jim Lyons hosted his final nativity ceremony at the State House on Thursday, but the man who for eight years has been one of the most vocal critics of Democratic leadership on Beacon Hill spoke very little and instead let his guests to do the talking.

The Andover Republican, who leaves office in January after losing his re-election bid to Democrat Tram Nguyen, was joined by Gov. Charlie Baker and Reps. Peter Durant, Shaunna O'Connell, David DeCoste, Marc Lombardo and William Crocker for what has become a Christmastime tradition for some at the State House.

Baker, who provided opening remarks, spoke briefly about the importance and significance of faith.

"I've had this job now for four years and I've spent a lot of time with a lot of people in some difficult circumstances," the governor said. "Almost always, whether I'm with a group of fifty, five hundred, five or two, someone will talk about there being light in the darkness, and they'll talk about the importance of faith. That's exactly what this and so many other religious traditions across this great pluralistic country of ours are all about."

Lyons and his fellow representatives speak, instead opening the floor to local religious leaders, who read from the bible and led prayers.

A day earlier, Lyons made headlines when he announced he will run for chairman of the Massachusetts Republican Party after Rep. Geoff Diehl quietly announced he would not seek the post. Durant and MassGOP Treasurer Brent Andersen are also seeking the post.

"I decided given the circumstances, that I'm going to take a run at it and see how it goes," Lyons said Wednesday. He also expressed a desire to see unity within the state GOP.

"I think it's real important that we leverage the fact that we have a popular governor who's doing a great job and it's important that as Republicans we can all work together," Lyons told the News Service.

In 2016, Lyons had trouble getting the first nativity scene going. Originally planned to sit on the State House lawn, the Bureau of the State House rejected the plan, finally approving a display and event inside the building instead. Since then, members of the Massachusetts Family Institute, which co-hosts the event with Lyons, have gathered in the Great Hall for the annual tradition.

The Family Institute describes itself as a group that is dedicated to "affirming the Judeo-Christian values of families in Massachusetts." Most recently, the group helped run the unsuccessful campaign to repeal a two-year-old state law protecting transgender people in public accommodations.

As the ceremony ended, Lyons signaled that while this may be the end of his time as a state representative, the nativity display will keep going without him.

"Please be sure to come back next year, with at least one more person, is that okay?" he asked attendants with a grin.

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Rep. Jim Lyons of Andover (right) hosted his final nativity scene ceremony as a member of the House on Thursday. [Photo: Chris Triunfo/SHNS]