

TOP STORY

State Sen. Chris Brown will not seek reelection

Michelle Brunetti Post
Feb 18, 2021



State Sen. Chris Brown, R-Atlantic, addresses the crowd in October during the groundbreaking ceremony for a new Stockton University building in Atlantic City that will feature apartment-style living quarters.

Susan Allen / Stockton University/

Michelle Brunetti Post

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State Sen. Chris Brown, R-Atlantic, will not seek reelection, he said Thursday.

Former Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian, who previously planned to run for Assembly in the 2nd District, will instead seek to replace Brown.

Brown, 56, who was expected to have a good shot at winning a second term, has been in the state Legislature for 10 years, including six as an assemblyman.

“This chapter in my life was a page-turner, particularly the story about our successful fight to defeat North Jersey casinos, which saved our industry and thousands of local jobs,” Brown said. “I’m grateful for those who helped me write all of the pages in this chapter.”

He said he has been realizing lately how short life is. His father died at 58, when Brown was 22. And Brown was activated to serve in Iraq at 26, when he was a third-year law student.

“Knowing the pages in the Book of Life turn quickly, I believe each chapter should be an adventure,” Brown said. “While this chapter of serving as a legislator is coming to an end, I am looking forward to the next chapter, which I’m sure will lead to another adventure for my family and me. I don’t know what that adventure will be, but I’m excited to find out.”



GOP former Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian to run for Assembly in 2nd District

The unexpected opening means this year's 2nd Legislative District race will be hard fought and expensive, predicted John Froonjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

"I would be surprised if Assemblyman (Vince) Mazzeo did not run. He has shown in the past he was interested in the Senate seat in 2017, and had been rumored to be considering it this time," Froonjian said of the Democrat.

That would mean both the state Senate and an Assembly seat would be open and candidates on both sides would line up to compete, Froonjian said.

Mazzeo, D-Atlantic, said Thursday he will make a decision soon.

“I’m certainly interested. I have a family and close friends to talk to, as well as staff members who have been with me,” Mazzeo said. “I’ll make a decision sooner rather than later. I’ve been 18 years in public office and have learned to be a little more patient with my decision making.”



For emerging adults, pandemic serves up unique challenges

Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson said no Democrat wanted to run against Brown.

“I will miss him. He served this area extraordinarily well,” Levinson said, citing Brown’s quiet demeanor and the respect everyone had for him. “We were lucky to have him as long as we did.”

Levinson said Atlantic County Republicans have a deep bench. Many in the GOP will make good candidates, he said, including announced Assembly candidate John Risley, a county commissioner, Guardian; Commissioner Amy Gatto; former Assemblyman Vince Polistina; former Brigantine Mayor Phil Guenther; former Egg Harbor Township Mayor James “Sonny” McCullough; and Atlantic County GOP Chairman Keith Davis.

Former Republican Assemblyman and Atlantic County Freeholder Ken LeFevre, of Brigantine, said Thursday he is considering getting into the primary in the Senate race.

“A lot of people are encouraging me, and I’m not ready to say no,” LeFevre said.

He was in the Assembly from 1995 to 2002 and has been doing a lot of lobbying work since, he said.

“Today is about Chris Brown and his legacy of service — over 10 years of dedication to his community,” Davis said Thursday. “It wasn’t an easy decision for him to make, but it was the right one for him and his family.”

Davis cited Brown’s work successfully opposing North Jersey casinos as his legacy.



Camden may have to close some schools, superintendent says

“That would have brought further damage to Atlantic City and our region,” Davis said. “He stood up to the Democrats in the Legislature and said, ‘No way.’”

U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd, said he has worked with Brown on many issues over the years, even when they were in different parties. Van Drew switched from Democrat to Republican in 2019.

“Chris and I have never been partisan that way,” Van Drew said. “The theme of Chris Brown is in some ways similar to me: Do not underserve South Jersey. In his case, do not underserve Atlantic County.”

He cited their work together combating North Jersey casinos and on restoring service to the Atlantic City Rail Line. The line was shut down for eight months, from September 2018 to May 2019, as NJ Transit installed safety equipment on all its lines — far longer than NJ Transit originally promised.

Brown said he believes it is important to allow others to serve.

“I believe by choosing not to seek re-election, my children are learning not only is there honor and integrity in getting involved in public service, but there is also honor and integrity in gracefully stepping aside to allow others to serve the public,” he said.

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Full Text of Senator Brown's Statement

State Senator Chris Brown issued the following statement Thursday:

“I will not seek re-election to the State Senate.

It’s been an honor and a privilege to serve our Atlantic County families as their representative in the Legislature. These ten years have gone by in the blink of an eye.

At a very young age, I learned life goes by much too quickly, and tomorrow is promised to no one. Knowing the pages in the Book of Life turn quickly, I believe each chapter should be an adventure. While this chapter of serving as a legislator is coming to an end, I am looking forward to the next chapter which I’m sure will lead to another adventure for my family and me. I don’t know what that adventure will be, but I’m excited to find out.

While holding elective office is something I do, it’s not who I am. Having held many titles such as U.S. Army major, judge, prosecutor, assemblyman, and senator, the titles husband and father remain the most important to me, which is why I am deeply thankful for the love and support of my wife, Christine, and my children, Matt, Danny, and Mallory, who made many sacrifices during my time in the Legislature, and without whom I would have never been

able to serve. I believe by choosing not to seek re-election, my children are learning not only is there honor and integrity in getting involved in public service, but there is also honor and integrity in gracefully stepping aside to allow others to serve the public.

I appreciate the counsel from friends who reminded me how hard I worked to earn my seat in the first place, who pointed to the polling data showing a clear path to re-election, and who encouraged me to run again while I'm at the top of my game. I never intended elective office to be a career for me, and while I have always taken the position seriously, I never took myself seriously. To run just for the sake of holding onto a title would mean putting my ego ahead of the needs of the families of Atlantic County. That's not what I believe in. It is healthy for our democracy and better for those we represent to open opportunities for others to serve in office. New candidates can bring fresh ideas while energizing more voters to participate in the process.

This chapter in my life was a page turner, particularly the story about our successful fight to defeat North Jersey casinos, which saved our industry and thousands of local jobs. I'm grateful for those who helped me write all of the pages in this chapter:

The families of the Atlantic County Republican party who believed and trusted in me to nominate me as an advocate for all of our families;

Independent and Democrat families who voted for me because they also had faith I would do what's right for all Atlantic County families, regardless of party affiliation;

my colleagues in the Legislature, who joined with me on bills and issues to help Atlantic County;

talk show radio hosts and journalist friends, who graciously provided a platform for me, as a public servant, to answer the public's questions; and

the many churches, civic groups, and local organizations whose members and volunteers I got to know during my term, who do their part every day to make Atlantic County a great place to live, raise a family, and retire in.

Although my time in elected public service will come to an end, I look forward to continuing serving in other ways. I'm grateful and blessed for the opportunity to do my best to serve the families of Atlantic County, and, in my own way, by working with everyone, I hope they feel I helped make their lives better.

Thank you and God bless."

Michelle Brunetti Post

Staff Writer

In my first job after college got paid to read the New York Times and summarize articles for an early online data base. First reporting job was with The Daily Record in Parsippany. I have also worked in nonprofits, and have been with The Press since 1990.