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House GOP chief of staff makes plan to leave position

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SPRINGFIELD — Many of Matthew M. O'Shea's colleagues know him for his patience, diplomacy and work ethic — three qualities that will serve him well when he leaves his position as Illinois House Republican chief of staff to venture into the world of lobbying.

O'Shea, 39, served as chief of staff starting in 2008. He started with the House Republicans as special counsel in 2004, then worked as deputy chief of staff and ethics officer before being promoted.

When O'Shea resigns Sept. 15, he plans to start his own business as an attorney, consultant and lobbyist. House Republican Minority Leader Thomas H. Cross III chose deputy chief of staff Scott Reimers to replace O'Shea.

Raised in west suburban Oak Park, O'Shea calls himself a "Cook County kid." He graduated from Illinois State University in 1994 with a focus on criminal studies. His introduction to state government came during his senior year when he interned with state Treasurer Dan Rutherford, then a state representative.

"It ended up being an offer I couldn't refuse," O'Shea said of the internship.

"It sounded like an opportunity to be in the mix."

O'Shea said he was instantly hooked.

"I think it was the fast pace and that every day was a different day," O'Shea said, explaining why he became interested in a government role."

After a year interning with Rutherford, O'Shea took a job with state Rep. James B. Durkin and now-former Sen. Thomas J. Walsh, both Republican legislators from Western Springs. Durkin and O'Shea both graduated from Fenwick High School in Oak Park,



Matthew M. O'Shea

Durkin said, and "to me, that goes a long way."

"You won't find anyone in the capital or in state government who will ever question his ethics or integrity," Durkin said. "No one will ever say Matt had a mean streak to him and he leaves government with his reputation untarnished."

Durkin said O'Shea is adept at navigating delicate situations.

"In his position, he has to put up with a lot of personalities," Durkin said.

"Sometimes individuals in the House and also in the government are unreasonable in their expectations, but Matt has been able, with amazing skill, to keep his cool, act professionally and get results."

Durkin said he encouraged O'Shea to go to law school and O'Shea graduated from The

John Marshall Law School in 2000, attending at night while working with the House Republicans.

After law school, O'Shea served as administrator for the village of Forest Park until 2004, also serving a brief term in the Illinois Senate to fill the seat vacated by Walsh in 2002.

Andrew G. Freiheit, ethics officer and legal counsel for the House Republicans, said O'Shea's work ethic is "intense."

"He'll get up at six in the morning, go running with a few legislators, then go change into a suit and be at work until 10 at night," Freiheit said.

"I think it will be a definite loss for leader Cross, but Matt is never one to shy from a challenge."

O'Shea said he is proud to have helped minority leader Cross navigate the state budget process earlier this spring.

"We came out of an intense political battle in 2010, but leader Cross and Speaker (Michael J.) Madigan came together to work together on a budget, where some would have said they just came out of a tough political fight, but they've taken the gloves off and are working on policy, on a budget," O'Shea said.

"We haven't really seen the House Republicans and Democrats work together on a budget like that in years."

Though he said he'll miss the "special and unique opportunities" he saw as chief of staff, O'Shea said he looks forward to new opportunities.

"This is obviously not an easy decision, but personally and professionally, I think it's just time to take on a new challenge," O'Shea said, adding that he wants to spend more time with his family.

"I look at that whole big picture and think I'm still going to be involved, but in another way."