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Beshear names banker to replace Prather on bridges authority

By Stephenie Steitzer • ssteitzer@courier-journal.com • April 23, 2010

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Gov. Steve Beshear on Friday appointed Lexington banker Luther Deaton Jr. to the Louisville-Southern Indiana Bridges Authority.

Deaton, president and chief executive officer of Central Bank, replaces former Transportation Secretary Joe Prather, who was forced to vacate the seat after the state Senate adjourned last week without confirming his appointment. Prather was the authority's chairman.

Beshear said in a statement that Deaton brings financial expertise to the authority and has a history of business interests and economic development experience in the Louisville area.

He also serves as vice chairman of the Kentucky Economic Development Partnership Board, which directs the state's economic development efforts.

"He will be a valuable asset to this team as we bring this critical infrastructure project to fruition," the governor said in a statement.

The authority is responsible for creating a financing plan for the \$4.1 billion Ohio River Bridges Project.

Bridges Coalition Chairman David Nicklies said in a statement that "Luther Deaton is a self-made leader, an excellent choice for the bi-state authority who brings extensive financial and economic development experience to the task."

He said the appointment underscores that the governors of Kentucky and Indiana "continue to work together for progress by recommending a strong team of bi-state authority leaders."

Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, said he expects there to be considerable support for Deaton's appointment.

"Obviously, Luther Deaton is a well-respected member of the banking community in the state," he said.

Williams said he would have preferred the seat to be filled by a Louisville resident but added "that's not disqualifying as far as I'm concerned."

Deaton, a registered Democrat, is a major campaign contributor to Republicans and Democrats.

Campaign finance records show he has given \$1,000 to Williams and \$3,000 to Beshear since 2005.

Deaton said in an interview that the governor told him he wanted a member who would be straightforward, not under the influence of anyone, and would work to find a solution to the financing situation.

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"He felt like he trusted me to do what's right," Deaton said. "I felt an obligation to the people of this state to join the group and try to move it forward."

Prather was the only one of Beshear's roughly 40 appointments to state boards and commissions who didn't receive Senate approval during this year's General Assembly.

Beshear and Prather had riled Williams two years ago when they rescinded a nearly \$11 million expansion of a road project in Williams' district. The expansion had been added in the waning days of Gov. Ernie Fletcher's administration.

Beshear also recommended that Charles Buddeke, currently a member of the authority, be named to serve as its chairman.

He is president of Buddeke Industries, a former executive director of the Louisville and Jefferson County Office of Economic Development, president of the Louisville Area Chamber of Commerce and a board member of the Bridges Coalition.

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