CSI President Dr. Jerry Beck to retire, Curtis Eaton named to interim position

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TWIN FALLS - College of Southern Idaho President Gerald Beck announces that he has chosen to step down from the college presidency as of July 1. He will begin a six-month sabbatical at that time and will formally retire Dec. 31, 2013. The CSI Board of Trustees has voted to appoint former CSI Foundation Executive Director Curtis H. Eaton to be CSI’s Interim President beginning July 1.

Dr. Beck began his CSI career in 1975 as a certified technical instructor, teaching small engine repair. He went on to become the Coordinator of CSI’s Trade and Industrial Division where he developed many industry partnerships including the General Motors Auto Service Education (ASEP) Program. Later, as Dean of Continuing Education, he created the Arts on Tour program along with a yearly program that brought nationally known speakers to Twin Falls, including former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, astronomer and author Carl Sagan, and U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett. Prior to being named President in 2005, Beck was CSI’s Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer.

“I’m very proud of what we have accomplished at CSI during the time I’ve been here,” Beck said of his 38-year career. Highlights include CSI’s steady growth and making classes available to more students by way of telecommunications as well as the classes and services available in off campus centers in Burley, Gooding, and Hailey. “One of the things I’m proudest of is how responsive CSI has been to Southern Idaho’s businesses and industries all the way from recruitment to employee training. CSI’s board, staff, and faculty are all to be commended for rising to meet the challenges and opportunities we have been given.”

Beck said he had hoped CSI’s enrollment would reach the 10,000 mark by the time he retired, but said he is very proud of the way the campus, its programs and student body have grown. “I am proud of the development of our North Campus that includes the beautiful new Health Sciences and Human Services building as well as the progress being made on our Advanced Technology and Innovation Center that will be completed next year.”

Beck listed other achievements, including maintaining a winning and respected Athletics program that has accumulated four more national championships during his tenure, having one of the nation’s top-performing community college Foundations, and maintaining a debt-free institution with programs that attract students from throughout the state and region. “In spite of the economic conditions we have experienced the past five years, CSI has been able to grow new programs, facilities, and workforce development. This puts us in an enviable position in the state of Idaho,” he said.

Beck says his retirement date was undetermined until recently. His decision to do so was accelerated by surgery in May in which four of his neck vertebrae were fused to help correct some longstanding nerve issues. Though ‘overwhelmingly successful,’ he says it will still be another three months before he regains a functional range of motion to his left arm and shoulder. After that, he anticipates another surgical procedure on his shoulder to further correct the problem. “The College of Southern Idaho needs steady, reliable leadership and I am simply not able to provide that right now,” he said. “Turning over the presidency at this time is in the college’s best interest. I am confident that the board will select someone who will carry on CSI’s best traditions.”

(more on page 2)
Chairman Scholes says Curtis Eaton is ‘widely respected and uniquely qualified to become the interim president. Eaton earned his bachelor's degree from Stanford University, his master's degree from Johns Hopkins University and his Juris Doctorate from the University of Idaho. He joined the college in 2001 as the Executive Director of the CSI Foundation after a 30-year legal and banking career that included two years as an Assistant Idaho Attorney General, six years with the local law firm Stephan, Slavin, Eaton, and Stephan, and almost twenty years as President and Vice Chairman of the Board of the Twin Falls Bank and Trust Company and First Security Bank in Twin Falls. He served eight years on the Idaho State Board of Education, including a year as its Chairman. In addition to his work with the CSI Foundation, Eaton was also CSI’s Vice President of Student Services, Institutional Planning, and Grant Development. Since his retirement in 2012, he has been Special Assistant to the President.

Eaton and the board have mutually agreed that he will not be a candidate for the presidency following the interim period. “The board will conduct a thorough, nationwide search to come up with candidates for the position,” said Scholes. A representative from the Association of Community College Trustees will visit with the board in early July to review the best practices in selecting a new president. At that time, a selection committee will be assembled under the leadership of former CSI board member Alan Frost. Two current CSI board members, Jan Mittleider and Laird Stone, will oversee the committee’s work as non-voting liaisons.

Of his appointment, Eaton says the most important thing he can do as Interim President is to pave the way for the next president and his or her long, successful tenure. “We mustn’t slow down,” he said of CSI’s current academic and economic development momentum. “CSI has a reputation for providing top grade instruction at a great value. We must retain students through a combination of rigorous instruction and support services. We must also build upon our history of sound business practices and careful stewardship of funds.”

President Beck said he plans to attend to a few of the most immediate needs of his office between now and the end of the month but that he is able to work only for short periods and will not be keeping regular office hours.