



Blagojevich names power agency head

Monday, April 14, 2008 6:12 PM CDT

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SPRINGFIELD -- Gov. Rod Blagojevich Monday appointed a University of Illinois at Chicago energy expert to lead the new state agency aimed at curbing energy costs.

Mark Pruitt was tapped to lead the Illinois Power Agency, which is charged with trying to ease rising electricity costs. The job was created last year out of the turmoil resulting from sharp increases in Ameren and ComEd electric rates.

Pruitt said Monday the market can change often. But the agency's job is to try to stabilize costs for Illinois customers as much as possible so they don't see rapidly rising power bills.

"There are always going to be ups and downs," Pruitt said.

The Illinois Power Agency was created last year at the same time lawmakers approved a \$1 billion payout from energy companies to Ameren and ComEd customers.

Because a key deadline for the agency is coming up in August, some were left wondering when Blagojevich would pick someone. Pruitt starts Monday and will make \$100,000 a year, but will still need to be confirmed by the Illinois Senate.

A key consumer group has already shown support for the pick.

"We think it's an encouraging appointment," said David Kolata, director of the Citizens Utility Board.

Through his current job, Pruitt helps some state agencies and local governments with their energy costs, and he previously worked for Nicor, which provides natural gas service in northern Illinois.

State Sen. Gary Forby, D-Benton, said he didn't know an appointment was imminent and doesn't know anything about Pruitt. But Forby said he was encouraged that a decision has been made.

"I've been getting a lot of phone calls recently wondering what's going on," Forby said.

The power agency will first oversee Ameren and ComEd buying power in spring of next year. The energy market could change significantly between now and then.

"It's going to be an enormously challenging job," Kolata said. "There's no doubt about that."

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