

Ear to the Ground: Seats Up for Grabs

Politically connected Democrats need to be dusting off their resumes, should their party win the White House in November, because the incoming president will be making three new appointments to the TVA board.

It is becoming apparent to insiders that the Democrats who control the U.S. Senate will not confirm two re-appointments to the TVA board made by President Bush. Knoxville PR executive Susan Williams and Bishop William Graves of Memphis were re-appointed by Bush, but have had to leave the board given the Senate's failure to confirm them. When U.S. Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker went to the well recently to castigate the Democrats for not confirming the appointments, it was a signal that behind-the-scenes negotiations were going nowhere.

As a former state Republican Party chair, Williams was not a surprise. Graves, however, as the first African American in history to serve on the TVA board, was less so. Although generally a Democrat, he volunteered to be a co-chair of the Bush re-election effort in Shelby County – it got him on the board, but it also seems to be keeping him from re-appointment.

Skila Harris, a Democrat whose term on the Board ended in May, choose to not remain until the President appoints a replacement. And three days after her resignation, President Bush nominated Michael B. Bemis of Madison, MS to replace Harris. It seems unlikely that the Senate will act on this appointment either.

The TVA board was changed from three full-time directors to a nine-person corporate-style board that took over in 2006 and they serve part-time.