Lucas receives Riley Institute Wilkins Legislative Leadership Award

House Speaker Jay Lucas of Hartsville and former Spartanburg Mayor William "Bill" Barnet III were recognized with The Riley Institute’s Wilkins Leadership Awards on Jan. 13. From left are former Gov. and former U.S. Secretary of Education Dick Riley, Barnet, Lucas and former U.S. Ambassador and former S.C. House Speaker David Wilkins.

COLUMBIA, S.C. -- The Riley Institute at Furman University honored Hartsville native and state House Speaker Jay Lucas for his legislative impact Jan. 13 with its Award for Excellence in Legislative Leadership during the 10th Annual Wilkins Leadership Awards Dinner. The event was held at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

Bill Barnet, former mayor of Spartanburg and CEO of Barnet Development Corp, received the institute's Award for Excellence in Civic Leadership.

The Award for Excellence in Legislative Leadership is presented to a member of the South Carolina House or Senate who best exemplifies the highest principals of leadership, integrity, compassion, vision and courage, according to the institute. Recipients demonstrate the ability to collaborate with fellow legislators, regardless of party affiliation, to effect positive change in South Carolina.

The civic leadership award is given to a community leader who demonstrates a long-standing and exemplary commitment to working to improve the lives of South Carolinians.

Former Rep. Mike Baxley, also a former circuit judge and Hartsville resident, retired in the late 90s from the House District 65 seat. Lucas won election to the seat in 1998.

"Jay’s choice as the legislative leader recipient is a true recognition of his unique ability to reach across the aisle, build coalitions among diverse groups and lead our General Assembly and state through a turbulent time," Baxley said. "We are most fortunate that a person of his high caliber, extreme intellect, yet humble approach is willing to make the personal and family sacrifices required to step forward. South Carolina is a legislatively-controlled state, and his leadership will have tremendous impact immediately and for generations to come."
Lucas was elected speaker pro tempore in 2010 and as speaker in December. In his short tenure as speaker, Lucas appointed new ad hoc committees to deal with top issues including transportation and road infrastructure, ethics and campaign finance reform, and providing more equitable funding for poor schools as mandated by a 2014 South Carolina Supreme Court ruling.

During his 16 years as a state representative, Lucas served as co-chairman of the South Carolina House Rural Caucus and as ex officio member of the operations and management committee. He has been named the legislator of the year by Paul’s Foundation, South Carolina Recreation, Parks and Tourism, South Carolina Solicitors’ Association, Farm Bureau and the South Carolina State Firefighters’ Association. He recently received the Jimmy Newsom Signature Award from the Darlington County Teachers Forum.

Currently a partner at the law firm of Lucas, Warr & White, Lucas served as financial director for the city of Bennettsville from 1982-84 and as county administrator for Fairfield County from 1984-86. From 1990-94, Lucas worked as the attorney for Darlington County, and later he served as city judge for Hartsville from 1995-96.

Lucas earned a Bachelor of Arts from the University of South Carolina, where he graduated magna cum laude. He also earned a Master of Public Administration and a Juris Doctor from USC.

The Riley Institute at Furman, founded in 1999, is named after Richard W. Riley, a former U.S. Secretary of Education, 1979–1987. He serves on the board of trustees at Furman and as advisory board chair of the Riley Institute.


The Riley Institutes described its purpose as “aimed toward outcomes that empower students, community members, (Furman) University, the state and the region,” with primary focus on education policy, diversity and critical issues. More information is available at the institute’s website, www.rileyinstitute.org.

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