



By Robert Osborne

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In less than a month, the Texas Legislature will begin its 140-day session.

The leadership of the Senate and House will be assigning committee chairmen shortly after the session begins. We already know that Lt. Governor Dan Patrick has named Sen. Craig Estes (R-Wichita Falls) as Chairman of the Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee, which handles oil and gas issues in the Senate. Estes, who has served as Vice Chairman of the committee, replaces Troy Fraser (R-Horseshoe Bay) as chairman.

The Speaker of the House Joe Strauss (R-San Antonio) generally waits until everyone is sworn in on January 10 to name committee chairmen.

We do know that Sunset Review of the Railroad Commission will be back again. The Sunset Advisory Committee has voted out a bill that would reauthorize the RRC for 12 years.

Appropriation of funds always draws high interest, and it will again in 2017. Tax revenues are expected to decline because of the downturn in the oil and gas industry. The Speaker has asked legislators to look at the possibility of tapping the \$10.4 billion Rainy Day Fund to address unfunded liabilities or retiring state debt.

We also expect such controversial bills as unitization, allocation of production from multiple tracts, eminent domain, and use of funds from the Texas Emission Reduction Plan (TERP) to reduce air emissions from mobile sources in response to federal changes in ozone standards.

Hand on to your hats, because it will be a fast and bumpy ride.