

OPINION

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Texas 82nd legislative session begins

By D.A. SHARPE

With all of the fanfare expected for Texas legislative representatives and senators, the 82nd biennial session came to order Tuesday at noon. The Texas Constitution requires them to meet on the second Tuesday in January in odd-numbered years for 140 business days. Members of the Texas Legislature are paid \$600 a month taxable stipend for their service, and the ethics laws make gifts to them while in session almost impossible.

On the first day of the session, the halls are filled with citizens and officials from across the state who have interests of concern in the Legislature. Wise County Judge Bill McElhane and Wise County Commissioner Kevin Burns were present, advocating for the county.

District 61 Rep. Phil King welcomed constituents into his offices, together with his competent and helpful staff. District 30 Sen. Craig Estes delayed his morning staff meeting to invite me into his office for a visit. It was a day when many citizens and political friends crossed paths in a spirit of passion and unity for the work of our great state of Texas. The comforting thing was to see the engraving in the woodwork above the Speaker's podium, boldly proclaiming,



Photo submitted by D.A. Sharpe

TAKING THE OATH — State Rep. Phil King, who represents Wise and Parker counties, takes the oath of office at the beginning of the 82nd Texas Legislature Tuesday.

"In God We Trust."

The very shape and direction of the Texas Legislature in its House of Representatives took place this day with the election of the Speaker of the House. The Speaker is elected from among all the members of the House, regardless of party affiliation.

The Speaker appoints all the chairmen of the various committees of the House, all of which do not have to be of the Speaker's political



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party. The Speaker controls the agenda regarding what legislative business comes to the floor of the House for a vote by the entire membership. The Speaker is the most powerful and influential member of the Texas House of Representatives,

which is the case in most state legislatures. The Senate opens with less initial attention, as its leader is the elected Lt. Governor David Dewhurst. No election is needed to

open the Senate session.

In the House of Representatives, after preliminary invocation, singing of the national anthem, pledges of allegiance to the American and Texas flags, the primary business of the day was swearing in the members and electing the Speaker of the House. One-term incumbent Speaker Joe Straus (District 121) was reelected to a second term by a vote of 133 for, 15 against, two abstentions and one absent. No other nominations were made on the floor.

The Speaker elected is almost always from the political party with the majority members. However, a real horse race can easily develop within the majority party, which was the case in this year's legislative session. Incumbent Speaker Joe Straus, elected by a narrow margin last session, faced others who thought they could offer leadership. He had his share of criticism, even from within his own party. However, he seemed to overcome those

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factors.

This year, the Republican Party has 101 members, and the Democratic Party has 49 members. It was a foregone conclusion that the Republican Party members could cause the Speaker selection to be one chosen by a solid majority. They could achieve a consensus in its Monday afternoon caucus.

Two fellow Republicans offered themselves as challengers to incumbent Speaker Joe Straus in Monday's Republican Caucus. They were Warren Chisum of Pampa (District 88) and Kenneth Paxton of League City (District 70). The caucus is a closed executive session. The public and media may not be present to observe. The vote in the cau-

cus, after little less than an hour, was to bind together on Tuesday's vote to support Straus. The caucus vote was 70 to 30 to do that.

All of the apparent competition about issues melted away for the opening session. An overt spirit of unity and positive expectations was displayed. The Speaker nomination was made with a nominating speech, followed by five seconding speeches from House members, both Democrats and Republicans.

A 20-member Escort Committee ushered in the elected Speaker, who addressed those present with a strongly motivating speech

about unity and achievement of purposes expected before the Texas House for this session.



STRAUS

Unprecedented third-term Texas Governor Rick Perry addressed the Legislature and congratulated the Speaker upon his election.

Republican Party of Texas Chairman Steve Munisteri issued this statement: "I congratulate Speaker Joe Straus on his election and look forward to working with him, as well as our entire Republican leadership, to ensure the passage of bills consistent with the principles of our party. I ask for all members of our party now to unite

behind the duly elected Speaker, and to work with our representatives in passing legislation consistent with our party platform."

It was an occasion of celebration and rejoicing, an event that citizens should be proud to witness as we see our elected legislators begin their work.

■
Sharpe is a resident of Aurora and former chairman for the Wise County Republican Party. He serves on various boards including the Texas State Board of Examiners of Dietitians and Wise County Early Voting Ballot Board. He is also an admiral in the Texas Navy, a member of the City of Aurora Historical Commission and Wise County Heritage Society.