

Oliverson Declares for Speaker

Announces New Paradigm for Texas House Speaker

Thursday, March 21, 2024

HOUSTON TX– Texas State Representative Tom Oliverson held a press conference this morning and offered the following remarks:

“The dysfunction in the Texas House during 2023 highlights a need for change at the Capitol. Two weeks ago, Republican voters across Texas sent a strong and unmistakable signal that Texas needs a new paradigm. Ineffective leadership in the House brought about the first. The frustration of the voters underscores the second.

“For these reasons, I am announcing my candidacy for Speaker of the Texas House today for the 89th Session.

“I’ve been listening to voters across the state as well as the grumblings of my colleagues and I understand the need for a new paradigm in the Texas House. Here is my vision.

“The Texas House is a collegial body. But there is a difference between collegiality and capitulation. The majority must not be held captive by the tyranny of the minority. I believe the majority party should hold all committee chairs.

“The people elect us to come to Austin to address the issues that matter to their community. They do not send us here to attend a frat party. They expect us to work. The House should be organized quickly and efficiently and get on about the people’s business. Committee chairs should be appointed, organizational meetings held, and the Speaker should refer bills and committees should be holding hearings soon after.

“The House has developed a practice of delay during the first 60 days. That must change. The Governor will undoubtedly declare emergency items early, and once he does, the House should work at the same speed that we use in a special session – and these items should be on a calendar for floor votes immediately.

“While we have many fine attorneys in the House, you shouldn’t have to be one to pass a bill. House rules have been weaponized to selectively punish individual members. Our parliamentarians have played an outsized role in the legislative process. When members question their rulings, they chafe, and the people’s business is left undone.

“In a new paradigm, the Speaker should be nominated in caucus and elected on the floor with 76 votes of the majority party. The backroom deals of the past undermined collegiality and drove a wedge between members. This practice started much of the dysfunction that was on display last session.

“Members are elected to represent their district. They should never forget that. Too often members have been compelled to follow leadership instead of their district. In other cases, leadership misses the opportunity to protect members from incorrect assumptions about certain issues and their districts.

“Districts have issues of a proprietary nature – local bills that have no statewide impact. With few exceptions these bills should be advanced and adopted by the full chamber. Delaying or outright killing local bills has been used as punishment for members or used to extort support for other legislation. This practice must stop.

“When I think about how a Speaker should measure their success, I believe it can be summed up in the success of the members in carrying out the will of the voters. If the members have a good Session, then the Speaker has a good Session. That means that every member should have the opportunity for success, whether in the majority or the minority.

“Back to the nomination process. The House Republican Caucus should follow their bylaws and hold a meeting on December 1 and hold successive votes until they achieve the requisite number of votes to nominate a member. I am fully committed to that process. If I am nominated, I will go to the floor in January and work to achieve 76 votes of Republican members. If the caucus nominates another member, I will work to ensure their election on the floor.

“To anticipate questions folks are sure to have, I’ll address the two elephants in the room. First, the impeachment vote – I think the secretive way in which this was handled, surprising members in the waning days of a regular session and giving them less than 72 hours to decide was a colossal failure of leadership. Second, the school choice vote – I think leadership missed the opportunity to protect members by allowing that bill to fail.

“The speaker’s race is largely conducted in one-on-one conversations with members. It is not conducted in public like other political campaigns. This contest will be a little different. There needs to be a level of transparency because the conduct of the Texas House has lost the faith and confidence of the voters. I believe the new paradigm can change that.

“I filed my declaration of candidacy with the Texas Ethics Commission this morning and I begin my campaign today. I look forward to visiting with my colleagues and earning their support.

“Thank you.”