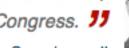
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Republicans

Four vie for House energy-commerce gavel

Texan seeks term-limit waiver to retake panel's chairmanship

By Sean Lengell

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The chairmanship of the House En- the waiver is." ergy and Commerce Committee is emerging as one of the top prizes of the on their leadership ranks soon after renew Congress, and a collection of powerful House GOP members already are angling for the post.

interview Tuesday he was definitely in the race, provided that the panel's current ranking Republican, Rep. Joe L. Barton of Texas, does not obtain from the House Steering Committee a waiver of term-limit rules to reclaim the gavel he had before the Republicans lost their House majority in 2007.

GOP Reps. Fred Upton of Michigan, a 12-term incumbent, and John Shimkus of Illinois, now in his seventh term, also are vying to head the influential committee.

Ohio, who heads the steering committee, has had a tense relationship with Mr. Barton and is widely speculated to be ready to deny the Texan's request, health care system. poten- tially creating a lively three-way race for the position.

"I think Mr. Barton has done a goodjob ...[but] if he does not get a waiver, then I want to offer my hat to the leadership," Mr. Stearns told The Washington Times on Tuesday.

Mr. Stearns said he has received "nothing but encouragement" from House Republican leaders to run for the chairmanship.

"When I talk to the steering com-

mittee, they all seem very supportive and a sense it's a good idea" to run, he said. "They're just waiting to see what

Both parties are expected to decide turning to the Capitol on Monday.

Mr. Stearns, who said he only would seek the chairmanship if Mr. Barton Florida Rep. Cliff Stearns said in an isn't granted a term-limit waiver, is in a position to make a strong case for the post. He raised \$850,000 this past election cycle for the National Republican Congressional Committee, the fundraising arm of House Republicans. And he doled out money to the campaigns of other House Republican a fellow Floridian who last week defeated freshman Democratic Rep. Alan Grayson, one of the most liberal actually done it in his life." members of Congress.

Capturing command of the Energy Minority Leader John A. Boehner of and Commerce Committee was crucial for expected Republican attempts to scale back, replace or repeal the Democrats' massive overhaul of the

> And with Republicans heading the panel beginning in January, the new majority will be able to squelch the Democrats controversial "cap-andtrade" proposal, which is designed to reduce fossil-fuel use and curb carbon emissions.

> Mr. Stearns vows to focus significant attention to commerce and economic-related issues if chosen to lead the committee, touting his experience owning a chain of motels



Rep. Cliff Stearns of Florida (Associated Press)

and restaurants.

"I understand what it is to meet a payroll; I understand what it is to invest money and risk. I've lost money and made money," he said. "The chaircandidates, including Daniel Webster, man of the Energy and Commerce Committee should be somebody who understands how to create jobs and has 2005.

> Mr. Stearns' solid conservative credentials and seniority, including 18 years on the committee, make him a strong candidate to lead the panel. He isn't a lock for the post, however, as many consider Mr. Upton to be the leading candidate.

> An Uptonled committee would return control of the panel to a lawmaker from Michigan after Democratic Rep. John D. Dingell was ousted as chairman by his party two years ago in favor of the more liberal Rep. Henry A. Waxman of California. Mr. Upton, as chairman, likely would fight vigorously against proposals to strengthen regulation of carbon emissions in order to protect the state's vital automotive industr

Mr. Upton likely would face opposition from some conservatives colleagues upset with several of his past votes, including his support of the \$700 billion Wall Street bailout in 2008 and his vote against extending the Bush administration's tax cuts in

Mr. Shimkus is considered a longshot for the chairmanship, particularly since his seniority lags that of Mr. Upton and Mr. Stearns. But some steering committee members may view him as a suitable compromise candidate if Mr. Barton isn't granted a waiver.

In other congressional leadership developments, 2008 GOP presidential candidate Rep. Ron Paul has endorsed fellow Texan Rep. Jeb Hensarling for House Republican Conference chairman, saying he has "a unique opportunity to guide the conference to support concrete legislation that reduces the size and scope of the federal government."

Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann, a favorite of the "tea party" m-

-ovement, also is running for GOP conference chairman, though her candidacy is considered to only have an outside

In the race for House Democratic whip, outgoing House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer of Maryland has the support of 50 House Democrats, compared with only 12 for current Whip James E. Clyburn of South Carolina, according to the National Journal.