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Sean Lenggell



## 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 Energy and Commerce Committee is emerging as one of the top prizes of the new Congress, and a collection of powerful House GOP members already are angling for the post.

Florida Rep. Cliff Stearns said in an 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.

Minority Leader John A. Boehner of 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, potentially creating a lively three-way race for the position.

“I think Mr. Barton has done a good job ...[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 the waiver is.”

Both parties are expected to decide on their leadership ranks soon after returning to the Capitol on Monday.

Mr. Stearns, who said he only would seek the chairmanship if Mr. Barton 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 candidates, including Daniel Webster, a fellow Floridian who last week defeated freshman Democratic Rep. Alan Grayson, one of the most liberal members of Congress.

Capturing command of the Energy and Commerce Committee was crucial for expected Republican attempts to scale back, replace or repeal the Democrats' massive overhaul of the health care system.

And with Republicans heading the panel beginning in January, the new majority will be able to squelch the Democrats' controversial “cap-and-trade” 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

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 chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee should be somebody who understands how to create jobs and has actually done it in his life.”

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 Uptoned 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



Rep. Cliff Stearns of Florida (Associated Press)

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 2005.

Mr. Shimkus is considered a long-shot 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 chance.

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.