

Senator Duncan Discusses Issues for the 81st Legislature

Jan. 8, 2009

"Good day. This is Robert Duncan, your Senator for the 28th District in West Texas.

There are a number of issues that I think will be facing the Legislature. The first and most important issue always is the budget. Fortunately this session, and I think as a result of many of the measures we implemented in previous sessions, Texas enjoys a surplus when most states are suffering greatly with deficits. One of the reasons that we have a surplus is that we have budgeted wisely over the past. Another reason is the fact that we have a fairly aggressive economy right now in Texas. However, we are seeing signs that the economy is cooling off. Although we have a surplus, I think the biggest challenge this session is going to be to have discipline in our spending because we do know, and our experience teaches us going back to 2003 when we had a deficit, that these economic cycles eventually catch up in Texas. So, we are going to have to be very careful. A lot of people will enter this session expecting to spend the surplus. There will likely be a collision of hope and reality when we match budget requirements with available revenue.

Texas Tech should have a very good session. Over the years, we have incrementally built Texas Tech into a national research institution. The State of Texas now is poised to recognize additional universities other than the University of Texas and A&M as national research institutions. Because of the great work that Texas Tech has done and the legislative support they have had over the past few years, we expect Texas Tech will lead the pack with regard to being designated by the State of Texas as a national research institution. To get that done, we will work on legislation this session to create an additional funding source similar to the Permanent University Fund for emerging institutions like Tech to ensure that they can attain

and maintain national research university status. Again, Texas Tech is there. We need to solidify that for the University and I think this will be a very exciting session along those lines.

The legislative process is always about change and leadership changes. We will have a new Speaker this session, Joe Straus from San Antonio. Speaker Straus, I think, will be a very strong Speaker for the State of Texas. I think that we will see changes in certain leadership positions. I am very confident that our West Texas delegation will fare very well with the realignment and change in leadership in the House. When you look at our House members that represent the West Texas area, you start with Warren Chisum, who is a senior member and has been Chairman of Appropriations; David Swinford, who has been Chairman of State Affairs; John Smithee, Chairman of Insurance; Carl Isett, who now Chairs the Sunset Commission; Delwin Jones is the senior member of our delegation and has made many contributions over the years; and then our new guys, Joe Heflin from Crosbyton and Drew Darby from San Angelo. All of these people are very talented members and I am sure the new Speaker will put these folks in key leadership positions, as they always have been. So, I am very confident that West Texas will do well with the new alignment and leadership in the House. I am looking forward to working with them. This will be a very interesting and important session for West Texas. We hope that our constituents pay very close attention to what is going on and we look forward to hearing from them when they have matters of concern or interest."