



WAYNE CHRISTIAN

Texas Railroad Commissioner

AFTER SEVEN TERMS REPRESENTING Center, Texas, and the surrounding area in the Texas House of Representatives, former state lawmaker Wayne Christian saw an opportunity to guide a regulatory agency that his experience in the legislature had taught him was critically important to the Lone Star State. In 2016, Christian made the decision to throw his hat into the ring for the open seat at the Railroad Commission of Texas, winning the election by strong margin to become Texas' new energy regulator.

"I felt it was my responsibility to leverage the policy expertise and contacts I have accumulated over the years toward a greater purpose," he says. "Texas has a tremendous opportunity to make our nation energy secure. I wanted to play a role in ensuring our state maintains a fair and predictable regulatory environment, allowing us to take full advantage of the natural resources God has provided us."

Christian says he is particularly drawn to make that happen thanks to his talent as a popularizer. Some people have a knack for turning jargon into plain talk, and Christian feels he is one such translator.

"One of my strengths is the ability to condense complex information and present it to the general public in a way people can understand," he explains. "I hope to use this position at the Railroad Commission to communicate the important role hydrocarbons play in our society, and combat many of the falsehoods that have been perpetuated by radical environmentalist groups. Texans need to know that the producers in our state are overwhelmingly responsible and that the Railroad Commission is there to protect them from bad actors."

As he articulates the importance of the Railroad Commission, Christian first cites the importance of oil and gas. The industry has a long history in Texas, and there is no reason to believe that will change, he reasons.

"In 2016, there were 15 oil fields and eight gas fields discovered in Texas, including the largest oil and gas deposit in U.S. history, containing 20 billion barrels of oil and 16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas worth an estimated \$900 billion," he says. "Texas has the opportunity to use these resources to make the United States energy secure for the first time in 50 years. For far too long, OPEC has caused market instability for the oil and natural gas industry. As the preeminent oil and natural gas regulatory

body in the state, the Railroad Commission is ready to do its part to help Texas and the United States secure its energy future."

That bright energy future appears to be emerging from an extended swoon that many attribute to the one-two punches of oversupply and overregulation. Christian mentions indicators that the industry may not have to endure those blows for much longer.

"The Texas energy sector is on the cusp of a major recovery," he foretells. "In fact, the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas concluded that the oil and gas outlook improved dramatically at the end of 2016, with activity within the oil and gas industry continuing to rise."

With Texas' own Rick Perry selected by President Donald Trump to lead the U.S. Department of Energy, and Oklahoma's Attorney General Scott Pruitt taking the helm at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Christian is optimistic about the new federal regulators that are descending on Washington, D.C. "For the first time in almost a decade, we have a pro-business presidential administration, hopefully allowing Texas to be more autonomous in its decision-making and bringing more power back to our state and the Railroad Commission."

Since arriving at the Railroad Commission at the start of 2017, Christian notes how impressed he has been by the staff's diligence and expertise. As the owner of a small financial planning firm, Christian says he knows an outfit's success depends on its staff. Fortunately, he finds the agency's personnel to be tremendous.

"The caliber of employees here at the commission is top-notch," he says. "Our commission is successful not from just the efforts of three elected commissioners in Austin, but because of the hundreds of quality professionals in our headquarters and 12 district offices across the state."

However, he does warn that quality is threatened by a new sort of attrition. "Unfortunately, in recent years, we have begun to lose qualified employees—not just to the free market (that is inevitable)—but to other agencies due to salary parity," Christian says. "We currently have around 140 vacancies, this means roughly 20 percent of our positions are unfilled. It is imperative that the commission fills these positions and is funded properly enough to retain experienced employees with institutional knowledge. That has been, and will continue to be a major project for our office, as we discuss our budgetary challenges with members of the legislature."