

INSIGHTS

Looking Ahead With Erin Chancellor

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By: [Daniel J. Pope](#)

In this episode of the Environmental Law Monitor, host [Daniel Pope](#) is joined by Erin Chancellor, the interim executive director of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

Can you tell us a little bit about what the transition from the EPA to TCEQ has been like for you? What's new about your role?

I was pretty busy in legal, but it really pales in comparison to the executive office. I think it was really helpful coming from legal just because the Office of Legal Services pretty much has a hand in every issue that comes up at the agency. So, from a subject matter perspective, I'm familiar with most of the issues.

That's what has made the transition a little easier. But I guess the most surprising change has been the need to kind of recalibrate your mindset from more of an advisory posture to really a decision-making position. It is an odd thing that I haven't had to do before coming from a bunch of roles my entire career. I have really been either supporting offices or just policy advising. That's been an interesting and surprising part of the transition for me.

What are some of the standout differences working for the state government and working for the federal government at Region Six?

I started my legal career in state government, and I'm definitely a fan of state government. I've enjoyed my time working for the state, and I was a little hesitant to go to the federal government only because I hadn't really experienced a lot of cooperative federalism, which is a term that has gotten overused a little bit, but for a lot of times it just felt like TCEQ didn't necessarily have a seat at the table in some other administration.

And then in the last EPA administration, all the regional administrators had state experience and a lot of who they were hiring at headquarters also had state environmental government experience. I found that really reassuring, and that was part of why I was open to going to the federal government. But as far as differences, besides the obvious one, it would be that the pay is very different.

Could you describe the sunset review process?

The agency is undergoing a sunset review during this current 88th legislative session in Texas. It's a two-year process with a pretty significant public participation component. The day after

the 87th session ended, our TCEQ sunset team got to work. The first thing we did was work on what ended up being a 684-page sunset self-evaluation and evaluation report, which is called the SEER.

We finished that in September 2021. and it includes things like information on programs, different funding sources, and it also laid out 17 major issues that we identified as an agency. It's scheduled every 12 years for every agency, but it can happen sooner if the legislature decides you should be up a little sooner. Our time spent will have been 12 years by the end of the session, so we stayed on the normal track this time.

Are we going to see a TCEQ website facelift? Any new procedures that are being rolled out? What are your thoughts on the transparency issue?

There are certain things that we can start working on. And there's some things that we would likely wait on until we see what the final version says. We actually had four exceptional items, and one of those was for the website particularly to increase access to public records.

As you can imagine, it would be easier on us and the public if we had more of these records publicly accessible but it costs money. Unfortunately, you can't just scan documents all day. It costs quite a bit of money to get all these records on the agency website and to make sure they're accessible. A lot of them have to be redacted, and there's lots of confidential information. All that costs money. One of our exceptional item requests was to increase access to public records. In the request was 7 million for the budget for the biennium. Another request was about the website usability enhancements, and this is actually directly from the sunset staff reports.

Have questions about what you have heard on this podcast? Contact [Daniel Pope](#).

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