

# Presiding Officers of the Texas Legislature 1846-2016

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**55th Speaker of the House of Representatives**



**Robert Emmett Morse**

Robert Emmett Morse, who represented Houston in the house of representatives for a total of 18 years, served as presiding officer of the house in the 46th Legislature, in 1939. That legislature was known for an impasse that developed between the house of representatives and senate with regard to the financing of a statewide pension system promised by W. Lee (Pappy) O'Daniel in his successful gubernatorial campaign of 1938. The deadlock was never resolved, and O'Daniel refused to call a special session to consider the matter. The 1939 legislature did succeed in establishing a system of state soil conservation districts to deal with the problem of erosion. It also enacted a measure providing for the acquisition of lands to be incorporated in the state's first national park. Having purchased additional lands to go with tracts that the state already owned, Texas in 1943 deeded over 700,000 acres in Brewster County to the United States government, leading to the establishment of Big Bend National Park.

Morse was born in Houston on April 8, 1896. Educated in the public schools there, he joined the army in World War I and served for two years as a first lieutenant in the infantry. Afterwards, he returned to Houston and became a real estate developer. He was secretary of the Houston Real Estate Board from 1919 to 1923 and secretary of the statewide Texas Association of Real Estate Boards from 1923 to 1926.

Elected to nine consecutive terms as state representative, Morse began his house career in the 40th Legislature of 1927. In the 41st Legislature, he chaired the committee on commerce and manufactures, and in the 42nd Legislature, he chaired the committee on state affairs. In his seventh term, in the 46th Legislature, he was elected speaker and then concluded his house career with two more terms as state representative in the 47th and 48th Legislatures.

A graduate of the Sommerville Law School (later Dixie University) in Dallas, Morse was admitted to the bar in 1939 while still a legislator. After leaving political office, he maintained a residence and law practice in Austin. He served as general counsel for the Wholesale Liquor Dealers Association. Morse died in Austin on August 19, 1957.