



9259

Express-News  
San Antonio, TX  
Circ 252359

DEC 13 2002

# Craddick backs vouchers

## Likely Texas House speaker says pilot program has good chance next year

By Lucy Hood  
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Craddick says tax increase likely not needed/10B

Rep. Tom Craddick, the presumptive speaker of the Texas House, said Thursday he would support a pilot voucher program, and, unlike previous failed attempts, it would have a good chance of passing in a Republican-controlled Legislature.

"We will probably see a run at a pilot program like the one

(President George W.) Bush wanted," he said at a meeting of the San Antonio Express-News Editorial Board.

Craddick, who says he has the votes to be the next speaker of the House, was referring to a voucher program supported by Bush when he was governor of Texas.

It proposed to put state funds into private school vouchers in a select number of school districts. The effort, which typically would allow students of low-performing schools in large urban areas to attend private schools, has been unsuccessful in previous sessions of the Legislature.

Craddick, R-Midland, said he thought a pilot program would have a better chance of passing

in the upcoming Legislature, where Republicans will have a majority in both the House and Senate.

"I don't see a pilot program as negative," he said. "I think it's positive. ... I'm for trying anything in education that might work."

Craddick said he did not want to take funds away from public education. He also said a pilot program is not likely to have a

high price tag, and it would be feasible despite predictions of a \$5 billion shortfall.

"We can find those dollars today," he said.

Voucher opponents, however, questioned how the state would pay for a pilot program without jeopardizing funds for public schools.

"I'd be very reluctant to go

See SCHOOL/10B

## School vouchers called likely to pass

CONTINUED FROM 1B

down that road," said Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, D-San Antonio.

A member of the Senate Education Committee, she said public schools already are financially strapped, and "even a pilot project would delete those precious funds."

She also noted the state currently picks up slightly more than 40 percent of the tab for public education, while local property taxes pay for close to 60 percent.

The Northside School District, the largest in South Texas, also is opposed to a pilot voucher program, district spokesman Pascual Gonzalez said.

"Many districts are already asking the Legislature for additional funds to meet mandates," he said, "so we are opposed to any plan that moves any public money into a voucher system."

Jeff Judson, outgoing president of the pro-voucher Texas Public Policy Foundation, predicted there would be a broader base of support for

*"Many districts are already asking the Legislature for additional funds to meet mandates, so we are opposed to any plan that moves any public money into a voucher system."*

PASCUAL GONZALEZ  
Northside School District  
spokesman

vouchers in the upcoming session than ever before.

"It's become a mainstream idea," he said, "certainly mainstream in the Republican Party."

He also disputed claims that vouchers take money away from public schools. Vouchers frequently target students who do not perform well in school and are more likely to drop out, he said.

lhood@express-news.net