



Craddick faces scrutiny over S.A. reception

Records show no sign he paid for 2001 event as required under law.

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AUSTIN — Republican stalwarts pulled together a small San Antonio reception in 2001 to support Rep. Tom Craddick's quest to become speaker of the Texas House, but records give no indication he paid for the event — a possible violation of state law.

The law that governs the speaker's race requires candidates to make all campaign expenditures from campaign funds, with the exception that other individuals can spend up to \$100 on correspondence to "aid or defeat" a candidate.

Craddick spent money from his speaker's campaign account on several meals at San Antonio restaurants in 2001 and 2002, but did not report any expenditure for the Nov. 13, 2001, event at the Plaza Club, according to his speaker campaign reports at the Texas Ethics Commission.

A spokesman for the Republican from Midland declined com-

ment Monday, citing a Travis County inquiry into how Republicans spent funds in the 2002 elections. Those elections brought a GOP majority to the 150-member House, which elected Craddick as speaker in January 2003.

The invitation to greet Craddick in San Antonio, posted last week by the Quorum Report — an Austin-based online political newsletter — is signed by San Antonio businessmen Red McCombs, George Hixon and Jim Leininger, as well as lawyer Tom Loeffler.

"It is our belief that the members of the (2003 Legislature) will select" Craddick as speaker, their letter states.

"The changing political landscape, his years of service in the House of Representatives and initial base of support make this projected outcome quite clear. We have asked Tom to join us for a private reception where he will outline his current thoughts on the speaker's race and the various ways we may support his efforts."

San Antonio lawyer W. James Jonas III, Loeffler's law partner, said Monday he organized the event and composed the invitation, but took care not to spend more than \$100.

Jonas said he assumed the cost of the event was picked up by Craddick, in keeping with the law.

"I'm not sure I ever got a bill" from the club, he said.

A club official declined to specify the cost of the event, but said receptions can cost from \$150 to \$1,500, with club members charged on their monthly accounts.

State law requires a speaker candidate to report any "contribution of services and other things of value other than money." Violations are a misdemeanor.

Fewer than 10 guests showed up that Tuesday evening, Jonas said, possibly because the Spurs were hosting the Houston Rockets around the same hour.

Also, Rep. Pete Laney, D-Hale Center, was still speaker, with

plans to seek another term.

Jonas, who later gave \$1,000 to Craddick's speaker campaign, said he recalled no money being raised for Craddick at the club.

"At the time, we thought it would be a good time to bring city leaders together to visit with a very senior member of the state House," he said.

Gregg Cox, a Travis County assistant district attorney, said investigators have been aware of the Plaza Club invitation, but there is uncertainty whether the matter would fall under the jurisdiction of Travis County rather than Bexar County, where the reception took place.

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CRADDICK

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