

The Quorum Report

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CRADDICK PLEDGES COMMITMENT TO REFORM THIS SPRING

Says reform and accountability will not be overlooked in the House.

Rumors that **Speaker of the House Tom Craddick** would be satisfied to pass a simple property tax swap in the upcoming special session appear to be highly overrated, judging from his strongly worded speech today at the *Texas Public Policy Foundation's Fourth Annual Policy Orientation* in Austin.

Craddick led off the two-day conference this afternoon, and he came out swinging, sticking firmly to support of many of the education reform measures of the failed *House Bill 2*. He told the group at the *Austin Capitol Marriott* that his constituents – and members of the House, for that matter – want to see more accountability for the current dollars in education, rather than throwing more money at public schools.

Craddick spoke strongly in favor of many of the reforms that were rolled out in House Bill 2, including November school board election dates. Voters have the right to choose their school board members on predictable election dates rather than an odd Saturday in March with voting in the back of a school gymnasium, Craddick said.

Craddick also continues to support voter approval for tax increases tied to tax enrichment. If voters choose to spend the money, that's fine, but they should have a voice, Craddick said. He also expressed support for the governor's mandate to put 65 percent into the classroom, although he had no preference on the definition of instructional expenditures. It's important to have more transparency and accountability in education, Craddick said.

Craddick told the group he heard, during a meeting this morning to talk about reform proposals for the special session, that school districts were not required to be accountable to the state for performance in bilingual education. It's impossible to know, or demand, performance in the bilingual education area, Craddick said.

"It's wrong and we need to change it," said Craddick, who later added, "If I ran my business like the state runs its schools, I'd be broke.... If we don't start looking at reforms, we might as well put our heads in the sand."

Craddick said he would like to address three key areas this special session: more efficiency and transparency in the system; incentive pay for teachers, based upon performance; and getting parents more involved in the educational system.

Only three years ago, the state cut \$10 billion from its budget, Craddick said. It's likely to enter this session with a deficit, given the impact of the hurricanes. It will be critical to keep a lid on spending during the special session or face an emergency expenditure bill before the regular session, especially if new revenue is non-recurring.

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