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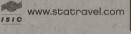
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Monday, April 21, 2003

Craddick's leadership taking shape

By April Castro THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — Just three months into his leadership term, Texas House Speaker Tom Craddick has commanded the chamber through two of the most contentious debates the legislature has seen in years.

The Republican has solidified his grip on the membership with his highly competitive, win-at-all-costs style, even luring a few wellplaced Democrats to his team along the way.

Craddick's first battle as speaker was over a bill that combined medical malpractice and a measure to limit civil litigation in Texas.

Craddick and Gov. Rick Perry campaigned on lawsuit reform. Several other legislators, including Democrats, campaigned on medical malpractice reform.

It became clear early on it was a battle Craddick wasn't going to lose.

While Democrats made last-ditch efforts to block consideration of the bill with political maneuvers and objections, Craddick tipped the scales, making his wishes plainly known to members and casting his own deciding vote on more than one occasion.

Historically, the House speaker doesn't vote and more than one vote on the same

issue is widely considered unprecedented. After the divisive fiasco of tort reform, many Capitol insiders thought the proverbial wheels had surely fallen off the House, and wondered how they could move forward.

But, with the House divided down the aisle, Craddick brushed off the chasm, saying he learned long ago that there's "always another tomorrow, always another bill."

The people of Texas have made a change in the leadership and their philosophy.

> — Tom Craddcik Texas house speaker

This time, it would be a state budget that slashed \$9.9 billion in spending, including programs and services for Texans, as a result of a revenue shortfall. Craddick, Perry and Lt. Gov. David

Dewhurst vowed that the massive shortfall would be overcome with cuts to spending. After three days of debate, the bill's most

severe state cuts were more than 275,000 chil-

dren from the Children's Health Insum Program, 17,000 low-income preg women from Medicaid and 56,000 eld and disabled people left without home car

THE BATTALIO

Lawmakers filed almost 500 an ments to the budget bill. But, in the only those amendments approved by Republican leadership were passed. We had no say," said Rep. Jim Dunna

a Waco Democrat.

As Democrats fought to restore some cuts, Craddick called them "obstructionis

'They're the ones, in my opin who have made the House partis Craddick said.

'The people of Texas have made a cha in the leadership and their philosophy.'

With the legislature's end approach Craddick still has a full plate in front of "The session's really winding dow

Craddick said. But, it seems the two most difficultis are behind him.

"Tort reform debate was more grue as far as, just time consuming and one after the other," Craddick recalled Thurs "It's harder voting on things that affect constituents more closely, from the bu aspect. But we've got a lot of more vote

Family shares memory of Air Force pilot

AMARILLO, Texas (AP) — Laughing and crying, the family of Air Force Capt. Eric Bruce Das of Amarillo gathered to share fond recollections of a man who made them proud.

On April 7, Das, 30, was piloting an F-15E Strike Eagle on a bombing mission near Tikrit, Iraq, when his plane went down. On Thursday night, the family was notified that he had been killed in action.

The pilot's mother, Rosie Das, described him as someone who planned get-togethers and campouts in Palo Duro Canyon.

"I don't know how many nights there would be a group of guys around this table, playing cards," she said. "He would get the little details together. He was definitely a leader.'

On Friday, parents Bruce and Rosie Das, their daughters, Elisa, Melody and son-in-law Stephen Neumann joined Eric's wife, Air Force 1st Lt. Nicole Das, at the table where they enjoyed many meals together.

Nikki Das served in Operation Iraqi Freedom, as an intelligence officer in Qatar. She and Eric were married Oct. 20, 2001, in Amarillo and lived in Goldsboro, N.C.

"Eric and my brother flew in the same squadron up in Alaska," she said in Sunday's Amarillo Globe-News. "And I met Eric when my brother introduced us and 'Amarillo by Morning' came up on the jukebox. Eric asked my brother if he could dance with me. That was in August of '99. We did not start dating until after the turn of the millennium. That was our first kiss, on the turn of the millennium. We were pretty much inseparable after that.'

Eric Das graduated from Amarillo High School in 1991, attend-

ed the Air Force Academy and graduated in 1995.

Bruce Das, his father, said Eric was born in the Nether while the family served there as missionaries. Eric and his fall enjoyed camping and hunting together.

Rosie Das remembered a prayer meeting a week ago wh group of beefy guys prayed for Eric's safe homecoming. The flowed, she said, as many remembered how he had spiritually at

"Big guys, all sitting around in the living room, 20 of themeing and praying for Eric," she said. "That's just a small, little may of how Eric's life has been.'

Doug Hall, a childhood friend, said Eric taught him a valu lesson when they were just kids, one that has stuck with him the decades. Hall remembered one day the two boys headed to favorite ball field and trampled a neighbor's bushes

That guy came out there and said, 'Did y'all stomp through bushes?' I went, 'It wasn't us, it wasn't us.' And Eric was, 'Yeah, did it, and what can we do to make it right?' ... You have to resp a person a lot for something like that," Hall said.

Melody Neumann, his older sister, said the death carries important message for all Americans.

Freedom isn't free. We live in this great country because of p ple like Eric and like Nikki who give up their lives, and they don to be together," she said between sobs. "They live with day jobs. ... We have hope for our children because of people like

The Das family will have a memorial service for Eric at 2p Thursday at First Presbyterian Church in Amarillo.

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Cyclones, nea comeback in in the second In the first er, the Aggies for seven hom Cyclones jun Erica Martin knocking a Jo In the bo

Aggies began rage, led by man Adrian Martin drivin as they each 1 ond inning, increasing he for the year a ead to 5-1. Although t