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GOP House works out its growing pains

AUSTIN (AP) — As the Texas House works out the growing pains of a new Republican leadership and Democrats cope with being the minority, the Texas Senate has emerged this legislative session as the steady hand amid chaos.

The 31 members of the Senate — a few veteran leaders in particular — are being looked to, in the opinion of many ordinary Texans, lobbyists and lawmakers in the lower body, to save the day.

A prime example is the next state budget, due to be taken up by the Senate this week.

The 150-member House engaged in days of divisive, heated debate over a two-year spending plan that cuts spending to social services, education and elsewhere.

The Senate Finance Committee also dealt with a \$9.9 billion shortfall when drafting its 2004-05 budget bill by chopping spending, but its deliberations were absent of the partisan bickering that has plagued the House.

"That's the reason our forefathers created two bodies," said Sen. John Whitmire, D-Houston.

It's not the first time one body has looked to the other for balance, the legislative veteran said.

"The Senate, by definition, is a more deliberate body. There are just 31 of us," he said. "I don't think its quite as political over here."

For years, it was the Texas House that had a reputation of a tradition of bipartisanship.

But this session, the cooperative spirit showcased prominently in the presidential campaign of

former GOP Gov. George W. Bush has given way to politicking, public and private maneuvering and as much time spent time-stalling parliamentary procedure as making laws.

Republican Speaker Tom Craddick has brushed off suggestions of a self-destructing House saying the road bumps have been put up by Democrats. He said Thursday that he believed in the chamber's budget and that the Senate plan approached tax bills requiring overspending, would study the bill when passed.

Once the budget bill clears the Senate, both sides must work out differences between their plans or come up with a compromise to send to Gov. Rick Perry, Republican House in fact and other agreements.

Among the most ugly was House debate on a bill limiting lawsuits Republicans say is needed to minimize frivolous lawsuits threatening business and doctors.

On March 1, Gen. John Van Aiken explaining a weight will take effect if have been mixed within the weight ment students w reason and neces theless an action some time.

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Sen. Bill Ratliff, R-Mo Pleasant, has been shepherding that task. He's broken the complex bill down and allowed weeks of testimony.

"This is a disappointing day for the Texas Bill of Rights. Hopefully the Senate will take another look at it."

— Rep. Jim Dunnam, Waco on tort reform

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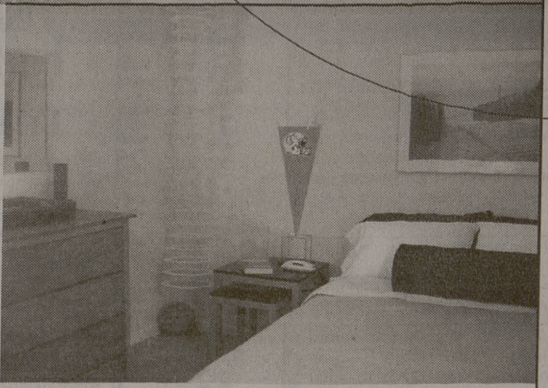
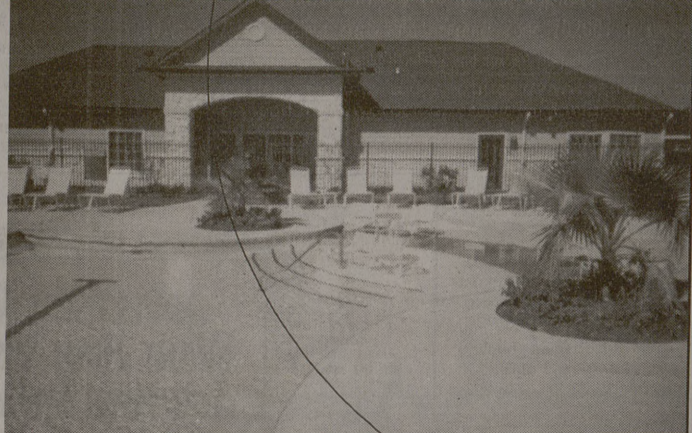
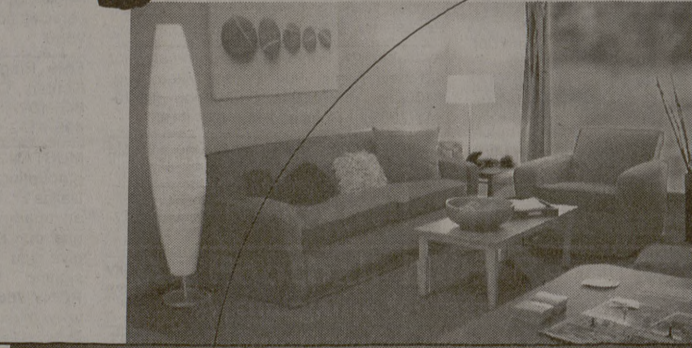
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