

SPEAKER OF THE **TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

At the conclusion of the last legislative session there were numerous efforts to unseat Speaker Tom Craddick. An ongoing running battle with Democrats and the steady erosion of Republicans from the ranks of the faithful began to severely diminish the Speaker's ability to govern the House. The culmination of these events occurred at the conclusion of the 2007 legislative session with a stream of members requesting that the Speaker step down, his refusal and a walkout of a large number of members.

The 18 month interim did nothing to strengthen the Speaker's position. Despite his, and the Republican party's best efforts, a nationwide Democratic trend and a number of competitive down ballot races saw the Republican majority in the House shrink to 76 members. This 76-74 Republican Democratic split (the narrowest margin in Texas history) would make it almost impossible for Tom Craddick to remain speaker unless he was able to bring some of the disenfranchised Republicans back into the fold.

Since the 2008 election an ongoing effort to accomplish this goal was undertaken. The results were the opposite of what an incumbent speaker needed. Several more key Republicans left and several announced a run for Speaker as well. At the height there were 13 House members who were officially running for Speaker.

On the Democratic side, 64 Democrats coalesced and agreed to support a single Republican. Who that person was, remained to be seen, but the offer was there. The anti Craddick Republicans, whose numbers swelled to approximately 14 (its difficult to reach a firm number so this is an estimation) met several times to try to reach a consensus candidate. Most of this seems to have occurred Saturday January 3rd and Sunday January 4th. Early Sunday reports surfaced that Joe Straus, III, Republican from San Antonio was accumulating votes and appeared to have enough to be elected Speaker. This would lead one to believe that the Democrats had found a Republican they could support and the anti Craddick Republicans had reached a consensus candidate.

Sunday afternoon Speaker Craddick officially withdrew from the race for Speaker and Representative John Smithee, Republican from Lubbock announced his candidacy.

At noon on Monday, Representative Straus held a press conference in the Capitol rotunda to announce and produce a list of House members who were supporting his run for Speaker. The list contained at least 92 names at the time and would seem to indicate that he has the votes necessary to be elected Speaker. At approximately 5:00 pm on Monday January 5, John Smithee withdrew his name from consideration as Speaker.

DISCLAIMER

This report is gleaned from a variety of discussions with some of the principals, various press reports and some guesswork but it seems to fit the events as they unfolded. Regardless of how it occurred we will have a new Speaker within the Texas House. This indicates the possibly of different committees with different responsibilities, different committee members and certainly some different committee chairman.

Representative Joe Straus, III is a Republican from San Antonio. He was first elected to the House in 2005 filling the seat of current Railroad Commissioner Elizabeth Ames Jones. During the last legislative session he was the Vice-Chair of the Economic Development committee. He also served on the Local and Consent Calendar Committee and the Regulated Industry Committee.