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Armstrong seen as tenacious campaigner against cancer

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By Corrie MacLaggan
AUSTIN, Tex. | Wed Feb 16, 2011 9:42pm EST

(Reuters) - Four years ago, cyclist and Texas native Lance Armstrong, wearing a yellow tie, spent a long day lobbying state politicians on a major cancer research proposal. When a hearing at the Texas Capitol stretched into the evening, the famous

missing his stepsister's wedding rehearsal dinner.

"That was so indicative of his total commitment to whatever endeavor he undertakes," said state Sen. Jane Nelson, who worked closely with him on the successful initiative.

After Armstrong's retirement on Wednesday from cycling to focus on his campaign against cancer, those who have worked with him expect the champion cyclist to be as tenacious in that fight as he was climbing the Alps during the Tour de France.

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Now a 39-year-old father of five, Armstrong at age 25 was diagnosed with testicular cancer that had spread to his abdomen, lungs and brain. He underwent aggressive treatment, recovered and went on to win every Tour de France from 1999 to 2005.

Since his battle with cancer, Armstrong has compiled an impressive resume of public works. He served six years on the U.S. President's Cancer Panel, testified before Congress, and hosted two forums on cancer during the 2008 presidential election.

Livestrong, his Austin-based foundation known for its yellow bracelets, started a global campaign in 2008 that held a summit in Dublin in 2009 and co-sponsored the World Cancer Congress in Shenzhen, China, in 2010.

"We've come a long way ... but we have a long way to go," Armstrong said in a statement on Wednesday. "Cancer is now the world's leading cause of death and for 28 million of us, survivorship is a daily fact of life."

Armstrong's agenda for this year includes serving as co-chairman of a California campaign to use money from a cigarette tax to invest in cancer treatment and prevention. He also plans to continue pushing for a statewide ban in Texas on smoking in indoor workplaces from his home base in Austin.

In Texas in 2007, Armstrong, Gov. Rick Perry and others worked to create the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, which is distributing up to \$3 billion for cancer research over 10 years.

For Armstrong, it was a yearlong crash course in politics including lobbying the Texas Legislature to put the measure on the statewide ballot. He then hit the campaign trail on a bus dubbed "Survivor One," touring Texas to urge voters to approve government bonds to fund the research.

"He got frustrated, which we all do when we're trying to work on a project. It was a tremendous crusade," said state Rep. Jim Keffer, another lawmaker who worked with Armstrong.

The proposal hit a number of obstacles, and Armstrong showed up at the state Capitol to personally coax it through behind the scenes, not just to stand in front of television cameras at press conferences, Nelson said.

"There were many times ... it didn't look like that bill was going to make it, and he was relentless and he really did work," said Nelson, chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services.

Armstrong's political work has fueled speculation that he may one day run for public office, something that at least so far, he has said he is not planning to do. Armstrong has declined to say publicly whether he leans toward the Republican conservative end of the U.S. political spectrum or Democratic liberal side.

"I think he's probably going to be a lot more comfortable being the advocate than being the politician," Keffer said.

(Editing by [Greg McCune](#))

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