

LEGISLATURE | SPECIAL SESSION

Why dozens of Democrats left Texas, how Republicans want to punish them

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Associated Press

» AUSTIN

Dozens of Democratic state lawmakers in Texas have scattered to points across the country in a last-ditch effort to prevent Republicans from adopting U.S. House maps that President Donald Trump wants in place before the 2026 midterm elections.

By leaving the state, Democrats are beyond the reach of Texas law enforcement, and they can effectively block any votes by ensuring the 150-member House does not have the quorum required to do business.

The effect was immediate: The Republican-controlled state House did not have the required quorum for a scheduled vote on the new district maps Monday afternoon. The House planned to try again Tuesday, even with no expectation that Democrats will return.

Gov. Greg Abbott and fellow Republicans are threatening to try to remove the Democrats from office, levy daily fines and even have the lawmakers

arrested if they don't come back to the Capitol. Abbott ordered Texas Department of Public Safety troopers to track down the lawmakers and bring them to the Capitol.

The Democratic response to the threats? "Come and take it."

Here are some things to know about the scene unfolding in Texas.

WHY THE DEMOCRATS TOOK OFF

Trump wants to redraw the Texas congressional map in hopes of adding five more GOP seats in Texas in the midterm elections to boost his party's chance of preserving its slim U.S. House majority. Republicans currently hold 25 of the state's 38 seats.

As the minority party in the state House and Senate, Democrats simply do not have the votes to stop the plan under normal legislative procedures. The maps were passed by a committee last week and swiftly scheduled for a floor vote.

Sizing up their limited power and options, Democrats chose to deny the quorum as their only

chance to put the brakes on Trump's plan and to rally national support.

WHERE THEY WENT

Many went to Illinois and New York.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker welcomed a group of Democrats who landed Sunday in Chicago. Pritzker, a potential 2028 presidential contender who has been one of Trump's most outspoken critics during Trump's second term, had been in quiet talks with Texas Democrats for weeks about offering support if they chose to leave the state.

Last week, the governor hosted several Texas Democrats in Illinois to publicly oppose the redistricting effort. California Gov. Gavin Newsom held a similar event in his own state.

While hosting Texas Democrats who left the state in Albany, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said the fight over congressional lines in Texas has implications nationally.

"I have a news flash for Republicans in Texas: This is no longer the Wild West," Hochul said. "We're not going to tolerate our

democracy being stolen in a modern-day stagecoach heist by a bunch of law-breaking cowboys."

REPUBLICANS ARE TRYING TO PUNISH THEM

Abbott, a Republican, quickly warned Democrats that he will seek to remove them from office if they don't return by Monday afternoon. He cited a non-binding 2021 legal opinion issued by Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton. It suggested a court could determine that legislators had forfeited their offices in a quorum break.

Abbott also suggested the lawmakers may have committed felonies by raising money to help pay for fines.

A lawmaker refusing to show up is a civil violation of legislative rules, and they can be fined \$500 for every day they aren't at the Capitol. In 2021, the Texas Supreme Court held that House leaders had the authority to "physically compel the attendance" of missing member but no Democrats were forcibly brought back to the state after warrants were served

that year in a similar quorum break.

Republican House Speaker Dustin Burrows has promised that "all options will be on the table." Minutes after the House failed to reach a quorum, Republicans approved a proposal for Burrows to issue civil arrest warrants for the missing Democrats, even though it was unclear whether those could or would be enforced beyond Texas.

Abbott seemed determined to at least try to locate the Democrats by issuing an order to state troopers to find and arrest them and return them to the House.

"To those who are absent, return now," Burrows said. "Come back and fulfill your duty."

WHO'S PAYING FOR QUORUM BREAK

It's unclear how Democrats will pay for an extended absence.

Democrats who left the state have been fundraising off the walkout, though they haven't said how they intended to use the money raised. Democratic Rep. Trey Martinez-Fischer

described the move as a "mixed bag," and said that he thought some members were paying out of their pocket.

Pritzker said Sunday evening that he had not yet given money to the lawmakers to cover fines, emphasizing that he's been focused on assisting them with logistics and support for traveling to Illinois.

"I continue to support the endeavor that they've undertaken here, others have already done some of that," Pritzker said about financial support coming from others.

LEAVING THE STATE HAS NOT WORKED BEFORE

Texas Democrats have fled the state before in attempts to thwart the Republican majority.

They twice denied the GOP a quorum in 2003 to stop Republican efforts to redraw voting maps, at one point leaving for Oklahoma and later for New Mexico. In 2021, Democrats left the state in the final days of the session over an elections bill and new voting restrictions. They stayed away for 38 days.

VOTE

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Dustin Burrows said from the chamber floor, later telling reporters that includes fines.

Democrats' revolt and Abbott's threats intensified a fight over congressional maps that began in Texas but now includes Democratic governors who have pitched redrawing their district maps in retaliation — even if their options are limited. The dispute also reflects Trump's aggressive view of presidential power and his grip on the Republican Party nationally, while testing the longstanding balance of powers between the federal government and individual states.

California Democrats are considering new political maps that could slash five Republican-held House seats in the liberal-leaning state while bolstering Democratic incumbents in other battleground districts.

The impasse centers on Trump's effort to get five more GOP-leaning congressional seats in Texas, at Democrats' expense, before the midterms. That would bolster his party's chances of preserving its U.S. House majority, something Republicans were unable to do in the 2018 midterms during Trump's first presidency. Republicans currently hold 25 of Texas' 38 seats. That's nearly a 2-to-1 advantage and already a wider partisan gap than the 2024 presidential results: Trump won 56.1 percent of Texas ballots, while Democrat Kamala Harris received 42.5 percent.

Speaking Monday on the Fox News show "America's Newsroom," Abbott essentially admitted to the partisan power play, noting the U.S. Supreme Court has determined "there is nothing illegal" about shaping districts to a majority party's advantage. He even acknowledged it as "gerrymandering" before correcting himself to say Texas is "drawing lines."

More than 1,800 miles away from Austin, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul appeared with Texas Democrats and argued their cause is national.

"We're not going to tolerate our democracy

being stolen in a modern-day stagecoach heist by a bunch of law breaking cowboys," Hochul said Monday, flanked by several of the lawmakers who left Texas. "If Republicans are willing to rewrite rules to give themselves an advantage, then they're leaving us with no choice: We must do the same. You have to fight fire with fire."

A DEBATE OVER WHO IS ABUSING POWER

Abbott insisted lawmakers have "absconded" in violation of their sworn duties.

"I believe they have forfeited their seats in the state Legislature because they are not doing the job they were elected to do," he said in the Fox News interview, invoking his state's hallmark machismo to call the Democrats "un-Texan."

"Texans don't run from a fight," he said.

Hours after Monday's halted House session, a gaggle of Democrats — state lawmakers who left and members of Congress whose lines would be redrawn — mocked Abbott as the weak figure in this battle.

"I never thought as a Texan ... that I would see the governor of the proud state of Texas bend a knee to a felon from New York," said U.S. Rep. Julie Johnson, a state legislator before voters sent her to Washington.

Legislators themselves showed no plans to heed Abbott's demands.

"He has no legal mechanism," said state Rep. Jolanda Jones, one of the lawmakers who was in New York on Monday. "Subpoenas from Texas don't work in New York, so he can't come and get us. Subpoenas in Texas don't work in Chicago. ... He's putting up smoke and mirrors."

A refusal by Texas lawmakers to show up is a civil violation of legislative rules. As for his threat to remove the lawmakers, Abbott cited a nonbinding legal opinion issued by Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton amid an partisan quorum dispute in 2021. Paxton suggested a court could determine that a legislator had forfeited their office.

University of Houston law professor David Froomkin cast doubt on that interpretation. He said

it's "baseless" to claim lawmakers abandoned their seats when their absence is clearly tied to current legislative debate.

Still, the Republican response is accelerated compared with the 2021 dispute, when weeks passed before the GOP majority opted for civil arrest warrants. Froomkin said Abbott could be using the mere possibility of legal wrangling over their jobs to intimidate lawmakers into returning.

STATUS OF THE VOTE

Legislators who left the state declined to say how long they'll hold out.

"We recognized when we got on the plane that we're in this for the long haul," said Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, who has served in the Legislature since 2001.

Texas House Democratic Caucus leader Gene Wu said members "will do whatever it takes" but added, "What that looks like, we don't know."

Legislative walkouts often only delay passage of a bill, including in 2021, when many Democrats left Texas for 38 days to protest proposed voting restrictions. Once they returned, Republicans passed that measure.

Lawmakers cannot pass bills in the 150-member House without two-thirds of members present. Democrats hold 62 seats in the majority-Republican chamber, and at least 51 left the state, according to a Democratic aide.

The Texas Supreme Court held in 2021 that House leaders could "physically compel the attendance" of missing members, but no Democrats were forcibly brought back to the state after warrants were served. Republicans answered by adopting \$500 daily fines for lawmakers who don't show.

Abbott, meanwhile, continues to make unsubstantiated claims that some lawmakers have committed felonies by soliciting money to pay for potential fines for leaving Texas during the session.

DISASTER RESPONSE AND 2028 PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS

The lack of a quorum will delay votes on disaster assistance and new warning systems after last month's catastrophic Tex-

as floods that killed at least 136 people. Democrats had called for votes on the flooding response before taking up redistricting and have criticized Republicans for not doing so.

On Fox, Abbott attempted to turn that issue back on Democrats, suggesting their absences would become the reason for a delayed flood response.

Beyond Texas, some Democrats want to leverage the fight.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker,

a potential 2028 presidential contender and outspoken Trump critic, welcomed Texas Democrats to Chicago on Sunday after having been in quiet talks with them for weeks. Pritzker and California Gov. Gavin Newsom, another potential 2028 contender, held public events about the Texas fight before the quorum break.

"This is not just rigging the system in Texas," Pritzker said Sunday. "It's about rigging the system against

the rights of all Americans for years to come."

U.S. Rep. Marc Veasey of Texas urged other Democratic governors to join Pritzker, Newsom and Hochul. Democrats, Veasey said, have too often "shown up to a gun fight with good intentions, no knives." But "that era is over," Veasey declared Monday from Illinois. "We are not going to unilaterally disarm."

The Texas House is scheduled to convene again Tuesday afternoon.

CITY OF LEAGUE CITY, TEXAS

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Notice is hereby given that the City of League City will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, August 26, 2025 at 6:00 PM at Council Chambers located at 200 W. Walker Street, League City, Texas for the purpose of a public hearing for the Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Budget. Copies of the Fiscal Year 2026 Proposed Budget can be found at the office of the City Secretary at 300 W. Walker or the Helen Hall Library located at 100 W. Walker, League City, Texas or online at [www.leaguecitytx.gov](http://www.leaguecitytx.gov).

The following language is required by the State of Texas Budget Law, Section 102.005 of the Local Government Code.

This budget will raise more total property taxes than last year's budget by \$1,001,000 or 2%, and of that amount \$1,001,000 is tax revenue to be raised from new property added to the tax roll this year.

LEAGUE CITY

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