

**State Defendants' Response to Plaintiff-Intervenors'
and TXNAACP Motion for Preliminary Injunction**

Exhibit AH

Senator Alvarado, Senate Special Committee on Congressional Redistricting, Video
Recording July 25th, 2025: 23:27-27:57

TRANSCRIPTION OF VIDEOTAPE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON CONGRESSIONAL
REDISTRICTING, SPECIAL
Friday, July 25, 2025

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 4 hours, 20 seconds recording transcription, as
3 follows:

4 THE CHAIR: (Gavel struck) The Senate
5 Special Committee on Congressional Redistricting will
6 come to order. The Clerk will call the roll.

7 THE CLERK: Senator King.

8 SENATOR KING: Here.

9 THE CLERK: Senator Creighton.

10

11 THE CLERK: Senator Alvarado.

12 SENATOR ALVARADO: Here.

13 THE CLERK: Senator Hinojosa.

14 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Present.

15 THE CLERK: Senator Hughes?

16 (Silence.)

17 THE CLERK: Senator Miles.

18 SENATOR MILES: Here.

19 THE CLERK: Senator Parker.

20 SENATOR PARKER: Here.

21 THE CLERK: Senator Paxton.

22 SENATOR PAXTON: Present.

23 THE CLERK: Senator Sparks.

24 SENATOR SPARKS: Here.

25 THE CHAIR: Being eight present, a

1 quorum has been established.

2 First, I want to welcome everyone to our
3 first regional hearing of this Senate Select Committee
4 on Congressional Redistricting. My name is Phil King.
5 I am grateful to Lt. Governor Dan Patrick for the
6 opportunity to chair this important committee.

7 I also want to introduce our Vice Chair,
8 Senator Brandon Creighton, and our members, Senator Chuy
9 Hinojosa, Senator Boris Miles, Senator Brian Hughes,
10 Senator Carol Alvarado, Senator Angela Paxton, Senator
11 Kevin Sparks, and Senator Tan Parker.

12 And members, I will give each of you a
13 few minutes to speak here in a bit before we start
14 public testimony.

15 As posted, we will focus on the South
16 Texas and Central Texas region today, including Bexar
17 County and Travis County and the Rio Grande Valley
18 regions. If you are interested in another part of the
19 state, you're still certainly welcome to participate
20 here today.

21 This is the first of four scheduled
22 regional hearings. Please note that the registration
23 for this hearing -- not to watch it online but to
24 testify -- has closed, and the Registration will close
25 12 hours in advance of the upcoming hearings.

1 Those dates and focus areas are posted
2 on the committee website, but will include Saturday with
3 a focus on North Texas and the DFW region, Monday, East
4 Texas, including Harris County, Greater Harris County
5 region, and Tuesday, West Texas, including the El Paso
6 and Panhandle regions. There will be additional public
7 hearings if and when a bill is considered by the
8 committee.

9 Please note that we will still be
10 working off of the 2020 census data, as is required in
11 redistricting. And when we think about it, hearings
12 actually on that data and on the demographics within it
13 date back to 2019, when the Senate and the House also
14 began to have regional hearings. And then hearings, of
15 course, began in 2021. Those were generally virtual at
16 the time, and then again in 2023.

17 And of course, the House is having
18 hearings as -- during this special as well. So, there's
19 a lot of public hearings that have been held on the
20 census data and the demographics, and there will be a
21 lot held during this special session, both in the
22 Senate, both virtual as well as in-person here at the
23 Capitol when we begin to get -- if we begin to consider
24 a bill, which I anticipate we will. But, again,
25 everyone is welcome here today, regardless of if your

1 testimony focuses on South Central, South and Central
2 Texas, or another region.

3 Please bear with us throughout these
4 regional hearings as we collect public testimony via
5 this video conference. And I know that sometimes,
6 particularly 'till we get in a rhythm, there may be some
7 technical difficulties that can come up. We'll just
8 work through those.

9 Also note that members may have to walk
10 in and out periodically throughout the meeting. So, if
11 you haven't spent a lot of time watching Senate
12 committees before, if we're going to be here for six or
13 eight or 10 hours -- however long it takes -- just like
14 you, we need to get up and take a quick break at times
15 or grab a cup of coffee.

16 So, please know that if anyone walks out
17 and they walk into the back: one, they still have staff
18 here monitoring. They also can hear all the testimony
19 and have monitors in the back. So, just because they
20 walk out, please don't take that as any indication of a
21 lack of interest on their part.

22 I do also want to point out that there
23 are other options for members of the public to provide
24 input if they are unable to testify today or at the
25 future hearings or just didn't make the registration

1 cutoff for today.

2 You are welcome to register for another
3 regional hearing and provide testimony at that time.
4 The other three hearings are still open for registration
5 and again will be until 12 hours before the hearing
6 begins and again later there will, of course, be
7 hearings here at the Capitol.

8 You are also able to submit written
9 comments at any time throughout the special session in
10 the public input portal that can be found on the
11 committee website. The portal will remain available
12 throughout the redistricting process.

13 Submitted comments -- and you can also
14 add attachments to those, and you can frankly provide
15 your own map or anything else you wish to -- but those
16 submitted comments are shared with the senators and are
17 posted on the committee's website for public viewing.

18 So, please take advantage of that
19 portal. We've already had some people using it. This
20 hearing is also live-streamed and will be archived for
21 public viewing on the Senate's website indefinitely.
22 Members, before we get started and get into more detail
23 on why we are specifically here today, I would like to
24 lay out for consideration the committee rules for the
25 89th legislature.

1 The committee rules are identical to
2 what the redistricting committee passed in 2021 and
3 again in 2023, with updated references and in the name
4 of this committee. We dropped off a physical copy of
5 the rules to your office on Tuesday and sent it via
6 email and a copy is also available currently in the
7 committee drop box.

8 Are there any questions regarding the
9 committee rules? I think they're pretty boilerplate.

10 (Silence.)

11 THE CHAIR: If not, Senator Creighton
12 moves adoption. Is there objection?

13 (Silence.)

14 THE CHAIR: Hearing none, the committee
15 rule...

16 (Indicating gesture.)

17 THE CHAIR: Oh, I'm sorry. Senator
18 Alvarado, yes, as well.

19 SENATOR ALVARADO: Registering my "no"
20 vote.

21 THE CHAIR: All right. Why don't we go
22 ahead and just take a public vote on that? The clerk
23 will call the roll.

24 THE CLERK: Senator Alvarado.

25 SENATOR ALVARADO: No.

1 THE CLERK: Senator Hinojosa.

2 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Nay.

3 THE CLERK: Senator Hughes.

4 SENATOR HUGHES: Yes.

5 THE CLERK: Senator Miles.

6 SENATOR MILES: No.

7 THE CLERK: Senator Parker.

8 SENATOR PARKER: Yes.

9 THE CLERK: Senator Paxton.

10 SENATOR PAXTON: Aye.

11 THE CLERK: Senator Sparks.

12 SENATOR SPARKS: Yes.

13 THE CLERK: Senator Creighton.

14 VICE CHAIR: Aye.

15 THE CLERK: Senator King.

16 SENATOR KING: Aye.

17 THE CHAIR: I first recognize that
18 Senator Hughes is with us -- and there being six "ayes"
19 and three "nays," the rules are adopted. Thank you,
20 members. And Senator Alvarado. I'm sorry. Please,
21 anyone speak up if I'm not seeing them today.

22 Why are we here today? The Governor has
23 added the subject of congressional redistricting to the
24 special session call, and we are here today in response
25 to that charge.

1 The legislature will be looking at all
2 the issues Governor Abbott has placed on the call,
3 including, of course, as we are here today,
4 congressional redistricting.

5 I cannot speak to what the outcomes will
6 be with redistricting, but I do know that hearing from
7 Texans is a critical part of that process. We want to
8 hear from Texans in all parts of the state about your
9 local communities and what you believe we should take
10 into consideration as we take up this issue of
11 congressional redistricting.

12 I believe these regional hearings
13 provide meaningful opportunities for input and
14 discussion about communities of interest and other
15 matters critical to the subject of redistricting. My
16 hope is that this online format will allow for more
17 people to participate without having to travel to a
18 hearing. For example, if we were today in Dallas/Fort
19 Worth, people having to drive from counties far away
20 from Dallas/Fort Worth. I hope that this format will
21 avoid that need for travel, need for childcare, need to
22 miss a full day of work, the expenses of travel, et
23 cetera.

24 In other words, I hope this proves to be
25 more convenient to the public, and I hope it provides

1 more input than we would otherwise had.

2 I want to thank everybody here today,
3 online and in person, for your participation. Please
4 note that since we are on a video conference, we are
5 unable to hear in-person testimony today in-the-building
6 testimony as stated in the posting for this hearing.
7 Again, there will be opportunity for in-person testimony
8 in the future if and when a bill, a map is heard. And
9 there is always the opportunity to submit written
10 comments at any time through the online portal.

11 Just some quick logistics. I'd like to
12 give everybody a brief overview of the process for
13 today's video conference testimony. Everyone that
14 registered to testify -- and we have over 100 -- and has
15 signed onto the video conference link should be in the
16 Zoom waiting room.

17 You cannot view the hearing from the
18 waiting room, so you should continue to view the
19 livestream that's available on the Senate website via
20 the link that is visible in the waiting room so you will
21 know when you have been called to testify.

22 For those in the waiting room, please
23 make sure your screen name matches the name you used to
24 register. When we begin public testimony, I will call
25 the witnesses in small groups. When I call your name,

1 committee staff will admit you from the waiting room
2 into the video conference.

3 Until your name is called, you will
4 remain in the waiting room and you will have to watch
5 the livestream in a separate browser to follow along
6 with the hearing. Again, this can be found on the
7 Senate website, and a link to that website is visible in
8 the waiting room. If you need to step away from the
9 hearing, for any reason, you may leave the waiting room
10 and rejoin when you are able, as long as the hearing, of
11 course, is still underway.

12 When your name is called and it is your
13 turn to testify, turn off your video, but keep yourself
14 muted until I recognize you to speak. The mute unmute
15 button can be found at the bottom of your screen.

16 Remember, when you're called on to
17 testify, you should mute or close your live stream
18 player. If you leave the live stream going, there will
19 be an echo. It's kind of like you've probably seen
20 before. Someone's being interviewed on a radio news
21 show and they still have the radio on in the background,
22 so you're hearing it twice. The same thing would
23 happen.

24 So, when you're actually testifying with
25 the committee, just mute or turn off your live stream so

1 that you're not hearing that -- that echo.

2 Once recognized, you may unmute your
3 microphone. Your audio and your video will be heard and
4 seen by both the committee members and the public. Once
5 I call your name, you will have an opportunity to
6 provide your testimony to the committee.

7 The committee members are certainly
8 available to ask questions. So, please be aware they
9 may ask questions. I will have you state your name and
10 whether you're testifying on behalf of just yourself or
11 an organization, or yourself and an organization.

12 So, everyone has an opportunity to
13 participate, and that is very important to the senators
14 sitting here. I asked the witnesses to limit their
15 testimony to two minutes. That seems very short, but
16 two and three minutes is very common for us to use
17 during the hearing processes for all our committees.

18 And, of course, the senators can ask you
19 questions, and that time will not be counted against
20 your time. Although I don't want to cut anyone off, we
21 want to be mindful that other witnesses are still
22 waiting. So, let's all try, if we can, today to be very
23 concise because we really want to hear from everybody
24 and we want to do it in an efficient manner. There will
25 be a timer on the top-right corner of your screen so

1 that you can see how much time you have left.

2 And, and if you run over, I'll just ask
3 you to politely stop at that point. If a witness before
4 you has input similar to yours, there's nothing wrong
5 with just referencing their testimony and saying that
6 you agree if that's what you wish to do. We're also
7 glad to hear from you as well.

8 Again, Senators will have the
9 opportunity to ask questions which will not count
10 against your allotted time. When you're finished with
11 your testimony, you will be released from the video
12 conference and of course, can continue to watch the rest
13 of the hearing on the live stream. The live stream
14 link, again, can be found on the Senate's website.

15 Also note that if you are having
16 technical difficulties with your video or audio,
17 committee staff will -- you may be breaking up or
18 something of that nature -- the committee staff will
19 move you back into the waiting room and give you an
20 opportunity to troubleshoot the issue, and we can call
21 you back in the room with the next round of witnesses.

22 If you need technical assistance, you
23 can contact Zoom Customer Support. You can visit:
24 Zoom.US/join, or call Zoom customer service at
25 1-800-799-9666. 1-800-799-9666.

1 You can also call our committee office
2 at 512-463-0030, 512-463-0030, if you're having issues,
3 and we'll try to help you get worked through that.

4 Someone suggested that if you're having
5 a lot of trouble, just find the youngest child in your
6 home or office, and they'll be able to figure it out for
7 you. That's the way it is at my house anyway.

8 Members, if there are no questions, I
9 would like to give an opportunity for each of you to
10 address the public, and then we'll jump right into
11 public testimony. Senator Creighton.

12 SENATOR CREIGHTON: Thank you,
13 Mr. Chairman. I'm thankful for the Lieutenant Governor
14 appointing me to the Senate Special Committee on
15 Congressional Redistricting. I'm looking forward to
16 serving as your vice chair and with all the members on
17 this dais and very capable members that I respect very
18 much.

19 I'm very thankful that every member of
20 the public will have their opportunity to testify
21 through the process, and I'm eager to get started.
22 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Senator
24 Hinojosa.

25 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you,

1 Mr. Chairman.

2 And I've been on the redistricting
3 committee numerous times, I guess, and regular sessions
4 and special sessions.

5 For me, this work that we will be doing
6 is very important. But I must point out that we just
7 did redistricting in 2021, and those districts are now
8 being challenged in a federal court in El Paso. My
9 opinion and my take is that this special session where
10 they place on the call redistricting issues are not
11 necessary, are not needed, for the simple reason that
12 when we drew this district in 2021, they were supposed
13 to be race blind.

14 In addition to that, it just took, as a
15 factor, the common interest of communities. But the
16 reality is that if you look at what's happening here, we
17 have a letter from the Department of Justice singling
18 out four congressional districts. The congressional
19 districts are all minority coalitions or majority
20 minority, and they are represented by minority -- either
21 African American or Hispanic congressional
22 representatives -- and they're being targeted that they
23 are unconstitutional.

24 And, from my perspective, they are being
25 targeted for simple reason that they want to do away

1 with minority representation and it's a race-based type
2 of targeting is unconstitutional.

3 One more point, Mr. Chairman and
4 members, and I think that this is very important: That
5 is that the letter from the Department of Justice did
6 not say that coalition districts, which are made up of
7 Hispanics or African Americans are unconstitutional.

8 The issue, really, was whether Article 2
9 of the Voting Rights Act applied to coalition districts.
10 That is where you have the Hispanics and African
11 Americans get together to create a majority district.
12 There was nothing in that opinion, Petteway v. Galveston
13 where there was any mention of minority coalition
14 districts being unconstitutional as stated in the DOJ
15 letter.

16 For those reasons, I think this
17 redistricting committee hearings are not needed, but
18 we're moving forward based on the Department of Justice
19 letter. To me it is unconstitutional to target minority
20 districts and based on race. Thank you. Mr. Chairman
21 and members.

22 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Senator Miles.

23 SENATOR MILES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
24 First of all, I want to apologize to all of those that
25 have suffered, not only the floods of Kerrville, but all

1 of those citizens across the state of Harris County, the
2 City of Harris County, all the way down to the
3 Panhandle. Because instead of focusing on flood
4 mitigation, disaster recovery, we're here talking about
5 redistricting maps that we haven't even seen yet.

6 Second, I want to apologize to all of
7 you who are going to be watching us on computers from
8 your public library because it's the only way you can
9 have your voices heard. I know that myself and Senator
10 Alvarado requested there be a personal testimony option
11 so that we could hear from the widest swath of people,
12 especially those that may not own computers and be
13 fortunate enough to have broadband Internet access.
14 Mr. Chairman, I quite frankly, think it's irresponsible
15 to ignore that there is a digital divide in the State of
16 Texas now for the reason that we're here today, to
17 further gerrymander Texas more than it's already been
18 gerrymandered.

19 Mr. Chairman, we cannot pretend that
20 this mandate from President Trump is not about race.
21 The DOJ letter is a hit list, and we all know that. It
22 is a hit list targeting opportunity districts in the
23 State's congressional districts with strong black and
24 brown representation. This is voter suppression. This
25 is not about census or population changes or constituent

1 or the Constitution at all.

2 This diminishes, dilutes, and destroys
3 the votes of black and brown as more important than we
4 could be attacking and addressing. This body should
5 focus on, instead of punishing, the racist agenda and
6 pushing the racist agenda of the sitting president,
7 Donald J. Trump.

8 All regular session, members, we heard
9 bill after bill, debate after debate, of how DEI
10 programs were no longer needed and how far we've come.
11 And yet, on July 25, 2025, just a couple of months
12 later, we are here in this hearing in a mid decade
13 redistricting, and it's all about race. Black and brown
14 folks can't even vote in the State of Texas in peace.

15 You know, I've often said, members from
16 the Senate floor, our strength of Texas is in our
17 diversity. And until we embrace it, we will not be as
18 strong as we possibly can be. It's not redistricting.
19 This is not about redistricting. As I said before, this
20 is rigged districting. It is quite frankly
21 disrespectful to every black and brown citizen of this
22 State, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman.

23 (Clapping in the audience.)

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Senator. And I
25 know there's a lot of emotion in this, and interest.

1 But we would prefer people not clap or something during
2 a hearing. And that's just true in any hearing. But
3 we're so glad you're here today. Senator Hughes.

4 SENATOR HUGHES: Thank you,
5 Mr. Chairman, and I'm glad to be on this committee.
6 Thank you for taking the helm. You have a lot of
7 experience, maybe as much as anybody in the legislature,
8 if not more, with the law and appropriate fair
9 processes. And so, I'm looking forward to the testimony
10 at each of the hearings and also all the public input we
11 receive. And, and once the process of looking at maps
12 begins, I'm looking forward to participating in that,
13 and I'm glad to be on your committee. Thank you.

14 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Senator
15 Alvarado.

16 SENATOR ALVARADO: Thank you,
17 Mr. Chairman. Let me again return to the question that
18 I asked when we were on the Senate floor: Why are we
19 here? And I know you, y' all have answered this in
20 different forms and different platforms. We're here
21 because the Governor put this on the call.

22 Well, you know, usually when things are
23 put on the call for special session, it's something left
24 over from the regular session, maybe a bill that needed
25 to be tweaked, maybe just something that needed to be

1 amended on a bill.

2 But we didn't have anything to do with
3 redistricting in the regular session. Nobody said a
4 word about the congressional maps, the congressional
5 lines. Why are we undertaking the highly-unusual
6 process of redistricting five years early without a
7 court order, without a law that was passed in the
8 regular session, or new census data that requires us to
9 do so?

10 The current congressional map was drawn
11 in 2021 following the 2020 census. That's the way it
12 goes. The census is done, and then we do redistricting.
13 The census gave Texas, not one, but two new
14 congressional districts.

15 Due to explosive population growth, 95
16 percent came from minority communities, communities of
17 color, with the majority of that 95 percent being
18 Latino. So, we contributed to that growth. But that
19 growth did not translate into increased representation.
20 Instead, the number of Latino majority districts -- it
21 was reduced from 8 to 7.

22 So, just to be clear, again, we were
23 responsible for the growth, but then our representation
24 was reduced. While White Texans, just 40 percent of the
25 population growth, control 74 percent of Texas's

1 districts. That's 28 out of 38.

2 This map is already being challenged in
3 court for diluting minority voting power and now based
4 solely on a letter from the DOJ which is riddled with
5 errors, and that is putting it lightly.

6 The Governor has called a special
7 session to make that map even worse. The DOJ letter may
8 makes claims that certain majority/minority districts
9 were drawn based on impermissible racial reasons and
10 must be dismantled. But since 2021, state leaders have
11 insisted they did not consider race when they drew the
12 map. We heard this on the floor time and time again,
13 over and over.

14 In fact, if you combine the number of
15 times that it was said that the maps were legal, they
16 were constitutional, and that they were race blind, 34
17 times, and y' all voted for these maps. Nobody had
18 concerns about those maps, and nobody has said anything
19 since then. And Adam Kincaid -- and I talked a little
20 bit about him on the floor the other day -- he is the
21 Virginia, non-Texan Virginia resident who drew the
22 current map.

23 He testified, in court, last month, as
24 recent as last month, that the maps were drawn "race
25 blind." So, I can't help but ask the question: Did he

1 commit perjury?

2 The DOJ letter makes claims at certain
3 majority-minority districts must be dismantled based on
4 a complete misstatement of the Petteway case. And I'm
5 glad that Senator Hinojosa referenced that. It's
6 unclear whether this is an intentional misstatement to
7 provide a pretext.

8 Regardless, the DOJ falsely concludes
9 those districts are unconstitutionally drawn. In
10 addition, the DOJ letter includes Congressional District
11 29, something I happen to know a lot about, a district I
12 am very familiar with because I was a very young college
13 student advocating for this district to be a Latino
14 opportunity District.

15 I also worked in Congress as a staffer
16 for this Congressional District. It has always been a
17 Latino opportunity district or Latino majority district
18 since it was created in 1991. It has never been a
19 majority/minority district. And now the DOJ itself is
20 demanding that race be used to dismantle districts
21 precisely based on their racial composition. This is an
22 intentional racial discrimination, pure and simple.

23 The Supreme Court has said, "dismantling
24 districts based on race, especially when they elect
25 minority preferred candidates, violates the

1 Constitution."

2 I don't know about y' all, but I don't
3 want to be involved in anything that is
4 unconstitutional. We are being asked to reverse
5 engineer the racial composition of legally-drawn
6 Congressional Districts 9, 18, 29 and 33, and target
7 them for elimination. This is not compliance with the
8 Voting Rights Act. In fact, it's a clear violation of
9 it.

10 Let's not kid ourselves here. This is
11 not just about partisanship. It's about undermining the
12 minority voting strength yet again. This legislature
13 must not be complicit in this unconstitutional and
14 racially discriminatory scheme. Thank you,
15 Mr. Chairman.

16 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Senator. Senator
17 Paxton.

18 SENATOR PAXTON: Thank you,
19 Mr. Chairman, and Committee members. I also just
20 appreciate the opportunity to serve on the committee. I
21 appreciate the Lieutenant Governor appointing me, and I
22 look forward to working with all of you. I look forward
23 to hearing the public input that we'll hear today, and
24 then, of course, working through the process as the
25 committee continues to do the work on this important

1 matter. Thank you.

2 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Senator Sparks,
3 I guess, would be next.

4 SENATOR SPARKS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman
5 and members. Yeah, I too, this my first opportunity to
6 actually be a part of the redistricting process. I look
7 forward to that, and I'm thankful for the confidence the
8 Lieutenant Governor put me on this committee. So, thank
9 you.

10 THE CHAIR: Senator Parker.

11 SENATOR PARKER: Well, thank you,
12 Chairman King, for your leadership. I'm very grateful
13 to the Lieutenant Governor for putting me on the
14 committee. I look forward to the conversation and the
15 process and to hearing the feedback from the people of
16 Texas, and working with each of my colleagues here on
17 the dais. So, again, thank you for your leadership,
18 Chairman King, and look forward to working with
19 everyone.

20 THE CHAIR: Thanks, Senator Parker. I
21 think we can now, if anyone -- does anyone have any
22 other...?

23 SENATOR ALVARADO: Yes, sir.

24 THE CHAIR: Senator Alvarado.

25 SENATOR ALVARADO: Thank you. I do have

1 a question for you.

2 Mr. Chairman, I sent a letter earlier
3 this week asking for some legal experts to testify. And
4 thank you for accommodating that. I appreciate you and
5 your team helping to coordinate that.

6 I did want to follow up on a specific
7 individual that I asked about. Will Mr. Harmeet
8 [sic] -- I'm sorry, Ms. Harmeet, Dhillon, the DOJ
9 attorney who wrote the July 7 letter be called to
10 testify in front of the committee at today's hearing or
11 any of the following hearings?

12 THE CHAIR: Thank you. And, yes, we're
13 happy -- for any of the members -- if you have anyone
14 specific that you would like to have testify, we'll --
15 if they want to register, we'll be happy to accommodate
16 and put them up early.

17 She has not. I have not invited her. I
18 do not know her and have not had any Contact with the
19 DOJ before or since that letter was issued. And I have
20 not issued a specific invitation to her. Frankly, I'm
21 not sure how to approach that. My only -- the only
22 thing I know about the DOJ letters, I read it just as
23 you did. I do not know any of the -- I haven't seen any
24 of the facts or data that purports to support it. And
25 though I've read the litigation team, the attorney for

1 the Office of the Attorney General of Texas, I read
2 their response to the Court that was written and that
3 was filed in response to that letter.

4 And, of course, I read the Court's
5 order, and I have not had any other role and have no
6 other knowledge of that. And, at this time, I don't
7 have any intention to invite her to testify. I think
8 that's -- that's something that's before the courts and
9 something that needs to remain there.

10 SENATOR ALVARADO: Well, respectfully, I
11 would disagree with that. Because that is what sparked
12 this whole thing. Well, one of the things that sparked
13 this whole reason why we're here -- and I think it's
14 important that we be able to ask questions of the person
15 that wrote that letter that then triggered Governor
16 Abbott to calling -- putting this on the call for
17 special session. So, I want to just make that request.

18 The second question is: Senator Miles
19 and I, and he references earlier, sent you a letter
20 asking whether or not in-person testimony would be
21 allowed. And I just want to ask again, will we be able
22 to hear from these constituents in person?

23 THE CHAIR: We certainly will have
24 public hearings, in person hearings, if a bill is taken
25 up or considered by this committee, which I expect one

1 will be at some point.

2 And those will be conducted in the
3 normal manner for any bill being considered by any
4 Senate committee. And, of course, public testimony is
5 always allowed at those.

6 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. Thank you,
7 Mr. Chairman. And just one last thing. I don't recall
8 if this was -- if we talked about this offline or before
9 or after the meeting started, but yesterday the House
10 Redistricting Committee limited the testimony to five
11 hours. And that was, I think, problematic for, for
12 many. So, I just wanted to reconfirm. You did say that
13 that will not happen here. We're going to continue
14 until everyone who signed up has the opportunity to
15 speak. Is that correct?

16 THE CHAIR: Yes. And, again, one of the
17 reasons that I thought it would be good to use virtual
18 testimony is because I thought it would be easier for
19 people to participate from all around the state. And I
20 thought we could probably hear more witnesses in that
21 way.

22 Like I said, we've got a little over 100
23 that have registered today. I would really like us to
24 work all the way through that. I will say to anyone
25 that's online, if you signed up, and maybe it's 3:00 or

1 4:00 o'clock and you haven't been called yet and you've
2 got to go pick up kids or something like that, know that
3 you can register for tomorrow's hearing up until 10:00
4 p.m. tonight.

5 And so, if for some reason you have to
6 leave and we haven't gotten to you yet today, please
7 know that you can sign up until 10:00 o'clock tonight
8 for Saturday's hearing. And, frankly, if you'll call
9 our office and let us know what happened, we'll try to
10 move you up to the front of the line for Saturday.

11 But I want us to get through everyone
12 today. And if that means we go pretty late, we'll go
13 pretty late. But I'd also like us to be as expeditious
14 and efficient as possible. Because I know people have
15 other things to do wherever they're at, and I would like
16 to -- I'm hoping, if we have 100 witnesses and it's two
17 minutes a piece -- and the math is pretty simple, and I
18 know that we'll have a lot of questions -- but I'm
19 hoping we can finish up here tonight by, at the latest
20 6:00 or 7:00 o'clock.

21 SENATOR ALVARADO: Thank you,
22 Mr. Chairman.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any...

24 SENATOR MILES: Mr. Chairman...

25 THE CHAIR: Senator Miles.

1 SENATOR MILES: Mr. Chairman, I'm not --
2 I'm a little confused. Because the rules that y' all
3 just voted in, that my colleagues and I voted "no"
4 against that were brought in, and I read Rule Number 16,
5 I read it as -- as if it's to say that Ms. Dhillon could
6 be subpoenaed by this committee. Did I read that wrong?

7 THE CHAIR: Yes, the committee --

8 SENATOR MILES: Did I read that wrong?

9 THE CHAIR: -- the committee has the
10 power to propel [sic] -- to compel the attendance and
11 testimony of witnesses at committee meetings by a record
12 vote of not less than two thirds of its members.

13 SENATOR MILES: And that's the rules y'
14 all just voted in?

15 THE CHAIR: Yes, sir. That is the
16 committee rules.

17 SENATOR MILES: So, respectfully, you
18 stated that it would be a little awkward. Awkward, if
19 we just subpoena her? I mean, that's what we just voted
20 on to do, y' all just voted on to do.

21 THE CHAIR: Well, it would take a motion
22 and a two-thirds vote to subpoena any witness to
23 testify.

24 SENATOR MILES: But we just voted a rule
25 in that says we can subpoena. We have the subpoena

1 power. You just did that just five minutes ago.

2 THE CHAIR: Yes, we do. But, unless I'm
3 reading the rule wrong, the committee shall have the
4 power to compel the attendance and testimony of
5 witnesses at committee meetings by a record vote of not
6 less than two-thirds of its members as provided in
7 Senate Rule 11.20(a).

8 SENATOR MILES: Respectfully, then, is
9 it okay if I make a motion from the dais for this -- for
10 this body --

11 THE CHAIR: We...

12 SENATOR MILES: -- this committee to
13 subpoena Ms. Dhillon?

14 THE CHAIR: Yes, certainly. We would
15 certainly, if you wish to make that motion --

16 SENATOR MILES: Yeah.

17 THE CHAIR: -- you can bring it up at
18 this time.

19 SENATOR ALVARADO: And I'll second it if
20 you need a second.

21 THE CHAIR: You second. Let's --

22 UNIDENTIFIED SENATOR: Can we get some
23 discussion on that before we -- I understand -- I
24 didn't want to interrupt you. I have a question.
25 Before we vote, I just have a question. I don't

1 interrupt. I'll wait to be recognized. I'm sorry.

2 THE CHAIR: Just that -- Just...

3 UNIDENTIFIED SENATOR: Is it -- is this
4 appropriate time, Mr. Chairman, to?

5 THE CHAIR: All right. So, we've had
6 them -- we've had a -- so could you formally state your
7 motion?

8 SENATOR MILES: My motion is that we,
9 this body, this committee, subpoena, issued a subpoena
10 for Ms. Dhillon to appear before this body.

11 THE CHAIR: Ms. Dhillon being the -- the
12 signer of the DOJ letter --

13 SENATOR MILES: Correct, sir.

14 THE CHAIR: -- that was discussed
15 previously --

16 SENATOR MILES: Yes, sir.

17 THE CHAIR: -- in the case, that's the
18 motion before the committee, and a second?

19 MS. ALVARADO: I second it.

20 THE CHAIR: And we have a second. Is
21 there any discussion on that motion, Senator Hughes?

22 SENATOR HUGHES: Mr. Chairman, thank
23 you. And I -- and I have a question. I don't know the
24 answer to this -- but it might be relevant for us to
25 know -- I do know that the Committee on State affairs

1 has used this subpoena power recently.

2 The power is there. It's important.

3 And it's important that we have that as a tool. This is
4 a question -- and maybe legislative counsel or somebody
5 can tell us -- I don't know if our Subpoena power
6 extends beyond Texas. At least in the case of state
7 affairs, we've -- and it may. I just don't know the
8 answer. It may. But I just want to throw that out
9 there as we have this discussion.

10 SENATOR MILES: And we won't know unless
11 we subpoena her.

12 SENATOR HUGHES: What I mean is that
13 it's probably -- it's probably in the law. It's
14 probably in the rules or in statute. I just don't know
15 off the top of my head whether we have subpoena power
16 for folks beyond Texas. We may. I generally don't
17 know, and someone may know. That's all I wanted to --
18 that I wanted to point out. Thanks.

19 (Indicating gesture.)

20 THE CHAIR: Senator Hinojosa.

21 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you,
22 Mr. Chairman. I -- maybe a better way to do it, I'm
23 just suggesting, is send an invitation. Give her a time
24 limit, and then if she refuses to respond, then...

25 SENATOR MILES: Well, that's what we

1 requested earlier.

2 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Okay.

3 SENATOR MILES: That was our first
4 request that wasn't followed through with. So, at this
5 time, I'm asking that we make please subpoena. Because
6 we did, Senator Hinojosa, asked for an invitation to be
7 sent to her.

8 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Have we sent that
9 invitation?

10 SENATOR MILES: Mr. Chairman?

11 THE CHAIR: I'm -- I'm sorry?

12 SENATOR MILES: He's wanting to know if
13 you sent the invitation for her to appear.

14 THE CHAIR: So, we certainly discussed
15 that. I -- what I would like to do with regard to the
16 motion is...

17 SENATOR MILES: No. Senator Hinojosa
18 was asking if you sent an invitation for her to appear
19 per our request earlier.

20 THE CHAIR: I have not sent one. That
21 is correct. And I would prefer not to send one.
22 Because I think, again, we're stepping into the
23 litigation that's going forward, and I just think we're
24 confusing two different issues. We're here today simply
25 gathering, taking public input, on the topic of

1 congressional redistricting, not specifically on the DOJ
2 letter.

3 And that, as I understand, is a matter
4 that's currently before the court. And so, I would be
5 very reluctant to invite her.

6 There is a -- I would also would ask
7 that -- I don't want to call the question on the motion
8 because I would like the opportunity to consult with
9 parliamentarian because there is some suggestion on our
10 rules that we cannot do this -- at least not where we're
11 at today.

12 So, with your permission, if you would
13 not mind withdrawing that motion, and then give us time
14 to consult with the parliamentarian with regard to the
15 subpoena power and of the committee. What's been
16 pointed out to me is that.

17 SENATOR MILES: Well, why don't we table
18 this motion for us to discuss --

19 THE CHAIR: Yeah.

20 SENATOR MILES: -- maybe on a break?

21 THE CHAIR: What I believe I'm reading
22 is the fact that we don't have any power to --

23 SENATOR MILES: Where you reading from,
24 sir?

25 THE CHAIR: -- issue a subpoena. And

1 so, if you wouldn't mind not...

2 SENATOR PAXTON: Mr. Chairman, where are
3 you reading from?

4 SENATOR MILES: Where you reading from?

5 THE CHAIR: All right. In SR5 that we
6 passed on Monday, in Rule 2, Subsection F, states
7 [reading] the committee may not consider or take formal
8 action on a specific bill, resolution, or other
9 nonprocedural matter during a regional hearing, except
10 for the adoption of permanent rules and at an initial
11 meeting held in the Capitol.

12 So, your motion could be made at a
13 future time, but not during the regional hearings, which
14 we're conducting over the next four days.

15 SENATOR PAXTON: Okay.

16 SENATOR MILES: Future times as...? Can
17 speak to what the future time may be?

18 THE CHAIR: Yeah. And I need to consult
19 with the parliamentarian, but I think that probably...

20 SENATOR MILES: So, why don't we just
21 table this motion until we get all that worked out --

22 THE CHAIR: That's what -- that's...

23 SENATOR MILES: -- respectfully?

24 THE CHAIR: That would be my request.

25 SENATOR MILES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 SENATOR ALVARADO: Mr. Chairman, and
2 that -- that is fine. I'm -- I'm agreeable to that.
3 How about in the meantime? Can we take up what Senator
4 Hinojosa suggested that we send --

5 SENATOR HINOJOSA: A letter.

6 SENATOR ALVARADO: -- a letter
7 invitation asking her to appear in the meantime while we
8 try to figure out the subpoena part? And I know Senator
9 Hughes asked about inviting someone that was out of
10 state. Is that right? Didn't the State affairs
11 committee invite the CEO of BlackRock, Mr. Larry Fink.

12 SENATOR CREIGHTON: So, we so we -- the
13 way State affairs did it, once the decision was made in
14 the right setting, invitations were issued, and then for
15 those folks who said -- who didn't want to come that
16 way -- then the threat of subpoena was there. So,
17 whether we have the authority to subpoena someone out of
18 State, I said, "I don't..." that's what I said, "don't
19 know the answer to." But that's -- that was our
20 experience over in State affairs.

21 SENATOR MILES: So, to move it along,
22 why don't we...

23 THE CHAIR: I think I can clean it up
24 here real quickly.

25 SENATOR MILES: Yeah.

1 THE CHAIR: I think I am fine with
2 sending an invitation.

3 SENATOR MILES: Thank you.

4 THE CHAIR: I do wish to consult legal
5 counsel about that.

6 SENATOR MILES: Okay.

7 THE CHAIR: Because I am concerned
8 that -- that we do have the cases Senator Hinojosa
9 referenced going on in El Paso. They are in the post
10 trial briefing stage. This letter was written. There
11 was a -- that generated a motion by the -- by the
12 plaintiffs to reopen for additional testimony.

13 The court, the AG's Office, the
14 litigation team, filed a response to that, which I have
15 referenced. And then the court issued an order on that.
16 So, right now, this letter is now, as I see it, a part
17 of that litigation. And so we, before I issued an
18 invitation, I would want to consult with legal counsel.

19 SENATOR MILES: All right. So, I'm
20 confused. You said that you would go ahead and issue
21 the invitation, and then as we're doing that...

22 THE CHAIR: I said, I think -- I said,
23 "I think I'm fine with, with issuing an invitation."

24 SENATOR MILES: Okay.

25 THE CHAIR: But I want to consult with

1 legal counsel.

2 SENATOR MILES: On the subpoena?

3 THE CHAIR: At the same time, I don't
4 want -- I don't want us to get drug in or to get that
5 lawsuit drugged in, drug into what we're doing here
6 today.

7 And so, I just want to talk to legal
8 counsel about that. But I think issuing an invitation,
9 if that's what the committee desires, I think that's
10 something we could do.

11 SENATOR MILES: Thank you, sir. So,
12 we're going to issue an invitation, and then you're
13 going to consult with...?

14 THE CHAIR: I'm going to consult with
15 legal counsel. And, unless there's a really good reason
16 for not doing that, then I'll come back to the committee
17 and ask the committee if that's what you wish me to do.
18 And if you do, then I'll -- we'd be would be happy to
19 issue that invitation.

20 (Indicating gesture.)

21 THE CHAIR: Senator Alvarado.

22 SENATOR ALVARADO: Mr. Chairman, do you
23 have legal representation now?

24 THE CHAIR: I -- I hope I will by the
25 end of the weekend. We...

1 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay.

2 THE CHAIR: I've interviewed some firms,
3 and -- and some individual attorneys -- and we have, in
4 some cases, run into conflicts. It's a very small
5 universe of people that do redistricting law. I am
6 talking with someone right now. And I hope by the end
7 of the weekend to have -- to be able to say that I have
8 counsel for the committee chair.

9 SENATOR ALVARADO: Well, I wish we were
10 doing this -- that we could follow through with the
11 subpoena. And I'm going to remind everybody that the
12 DOJ letter does include a deadline for the proposed maps
13 by August 7th. So, time is of the essence. This is the
14 letter that this individual that we're trying to hear
15 from wrote.

16 So, I think we have to keep that in
17 mind. If we're going to send an invitation, I think
18 there has to be a very quick turnaround for that person
19 to respond, Ms. Dhillon, and then followed by a
20 subpoena if that is not answered. But, again, I mean,
21 we're talking about August 7th. That's right around the
22 corner.

23 THE CHAIR: It is. I'm not sure what
24 happens after August 7th.

25 SENATOR ALVARADO: Well, we don't know.

1 Because we haven't been able to talk to this person.

2 THE CHAIR: Okay. Well, again, I want
3 to move on to the witnesses, if we can. I think we've
4 established that we cannot do a subpoena at this point
5 in the process. I said that I was certainly open to a
6 letter --

7 SENATOR MILES: Thank you.

8 THE CHAIR: -- of invitation, if that's
9 what the committee desires. But I want to consult with
10 legal counsel in advance of that, and I should be able
11 to do that pretty quickly.

12 SENATOR MILES: So, we look forward to
13 the letter of invitation going out.

14 THE CHAIR: We'll try to get there.

15 SENATOR MILES: Mr. Chairman, that's --
16 I think we're getting a play on words here.

17 THE CHAIR: Well, I, I, I -- I, again, I
18 want to say, I don't have any objection to issuing an
19 invitation. I think that's fine.

20 SENATOR MILES: But can we -- we will
21 issue an invitation?

22 THE CHAIR: I just want to make sure.
23 Because that's now gotten all pulled into the
24 litigation, and there's been an order, a court order
25 regarding that or in response to it.

1 There's been filings and a motion to
2 reopen and the trial. And I just would like to talk to
3 the legal counsel before...

4 SENATOR MILES: Issuing a Subpoena or
5 issuing a letter?

6 THE CHAIR: Issuing a letter would be
7 my -- I think would be the first step, don't you? It's
8 hard to speak to someone if you hadn't invited them
9 first.

10 SENATOR MILES: So you want to -- I'm
11 confused, sir. I just want clarification. I'm not
12 trying to belabor this. You need to talk to legal
13 counsel to just issue an invitation?

14 THE CHAIR: So...

15 SENATOR MILES: "Yes" or "no?"

16 THE CHAIR: I said I think it's
17 reasonable to issue an invitation --

18 SENATOR MILES: So...

19 THE CHAIR: -- and I agree that that's
20 reasonable.

21 SENATOR MILES: Okay.

22 THE CHAIR: And I'm happy to do it --

23 SENATOR MILES: All right.

24 THE CHAIR: --if that's what the
25 committee wishes.

1 SENATOR MILES: That's what...

2 SENATOR ALVARADO: Sure. Do we need a
3 motion?

4 SENATOR MILES: Do we need a motion?

5 THE CHAIR: Not just yet.

6 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay.

7 THE CHAIR: But I want to talk to legal
8 counsel first simply because when that letter was
9 written, it generated a lot of activity in the lawsuit
10 that Senator Hinojosa referenced in El Paso before the
11 three-judge panel.

12 And I just want to make sure that having
13 testimony from that invited witness would not create
14 collateral issues that we're not thinking of here right
15 now.

16 SENATOR MILES: Right.

17 THE CHAIR: But the general concept of
18 inviting the -- I believe it was the director of the
19 Civil Rights Division -- to come and testify, I have no
20 objection to that at all --

21 SENATOR MILES: All right.

22 THE CHAIR: -- and -- if that's what the
23 committee wishes -- but I just want to talk to counsel
24 first. And I will do that very expeditiously.

25 SENATOR MILES: And, in summation,

1 Mr. Chairman, keep in mind, that letter is what got us
2 right here today.

3 THE CHAIR: I understand.

4 SENATOR MILES: Okay.

5 SENATOR ALVARADO: Mr. Chairman, a
6 clarification though, I -- I'm trying to understand how
7 the El Paso issue, how that would have relevance on us
8 issuing a simple invitation. Because the judge already
9 ruled on that and denied to reopen the case.

10 THE CHAIR: At this time, if I remember
11 the way it was written, "at this time."

12 SENATOR ALVARADO: So, how...

13 THE CHAIR: And so, I -- I think you're
14 probably right. I just -- allow me the courtesy --

15 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay.

16 THE CHAIR: -- of checking with counsel
17 to make sure there's not something we're not thinking of
18 in -- at 11:00 a.m. on Friday morning.

19 SENATOR ALVARADO: And how long do you
20 think that will take? Again, I'm just -- I'm concerned
21 about the August 7 deadline that Ms. Dhillon put on us.

22 THE CHAIR: Okay. Well, I don't feel
23 any pressure from that deadline. I feel like we're
24 following up on the charge. The charge did not mention
25 a August 7th deadline.

1 We're going to operate under the 30-day
2 special session and all the time frames that are within
3 it. And, hmm -- but I'm thinking I'll be able to answer
4 you by tomorrow, if that's okay.

5 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay.

6 THE CHAIR: Yeah.

7 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. And, in the
8 meantime, we're gonna table the motion? Is that right?

9 SENATOR MILES: Yes.

10 THE CHAIR: Yeah, I think -- did you --
11 I believe the motion was --

12 SENATOR MILES: Tabled.

13 THE CHAIR: -- withdrawn.

14 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay.

15 SENATOR MILES: No. We're tabling it.

16 THE CHAIR: Okay.

17 SENATOR ALVARADO: Yeah. Thank you.

18 SENATOR MILES: Thank you, sir.

19 THE CHAIR: All right. Everybody good?

20 (Silence.)

21 THE CHAIR: Anything else?

22 (Silence.)

23 THE CHAIR: Okay.

24 SENATOR MILES: Sorry about that,
25 Mr. Chairman.

1 THE CHAIR: No, no. That's a good
2 discussion, and I'm glad we had it.

3 Let me go ahead, and I'm going call
4 three witnesses, and we will take them in the order that
5 I call. So, we now are open for public testimony.

6 As a reminder, the public testimony will
7 be limited to two minutes. The Chair calls -- and think
8 of this as being moved into the bullpen -- The Chair
9 calls Sylvia Garcia, Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia, Ellen
10 Katz and Gary Bledsoe. Now, Congresswoman Garcia will
11 be the first to testify. And then after that we will go
12 to Ellen Katz, and then to Mr. Bledsoe.

13 Again, just as a reminder, Ms. Katz and
14 Mr. Bledsoe, if you would keep your -- you'll be muted
15 at this point, and you'll need to unmute when you're
16 formally called to testify. So with that,
17 Congresswoman, are you with us?

18 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Hello.

19 THE CHAIR: Hey. Good morning. Thank
20 you. I hope there wasn't any difficulty in getting
21 online there, and although we...

22 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: No. There
23 wasn't. Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry. I just didn't hear
24 you call my name.

25 THE CHAIR: Well, that's fine. Can you

1 hear me okay now?

2 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Yes, sir. I can.

3 Thank you.

4 THE CHAIR: All right. And everyone
5 knows who you are. But, just for the record, would you
6 please state your name and your title and who you're
7 representing today, yourself or an organization?

8 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: I am Sylvia
9 Garcia. I'm a congresswoman in District 29, one of the
10 district said as cited in the DOJ letter. And I'm here
11 testifying in my own behalf, and it's good to -- to see
12 everybody.

13 I remember sitting in that -- those very
14 chairs when I was on the Special Select Committee on
15 Redistricting back in 2013 through 2014. So, good to be
16 home again.

17 THE CHAIR: Well, welcome, and we're
18 happy to hear your testimony. I did listen to your
19 testimony in the House Committee yesterday as well.

20 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Well, then you'll
21 see that there was a familiar ring. And I'll be ready
22 to start whenever you suggest.

23 THE CHAIR: Proceed, please.

24 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Thank you. Thank
25 you, Mr. Chairman and to the Vice Chair and to all my

1 colleagues, many of them former colleagues.

2 It's good to be in the Senate, even
3 though it's by video. I would have preferred to be
4 there in person as I was yesterday in the House hearing.
5 And I'm going to answer the question that my senator
6 asks is like, "why are we here?"

7 Senator Alvarado, you're absolutely
8 right. We should not be here today. We should be
9 working on legislation to support families in the Hill
10 Country after the devastating flooding, to provide
11 resources for families who lost everything, for new
12 warning systems to prevent future tragedies, and doing
13 what is best for the safety and well being of Texans.

14 Instead, we are today playing political
15 games to appease the felon in the White House in his
16 lust to keep power. We are pretending that the Governor
17 did not approve the very maps, the very maps he is now
18 insisting must be changed. This political theater will
19 hurt communities in my district, and it's just plain
20 shameful.

21 And what do -- why don't we even have a
22 map? Where are the maps? Why are we proceeding on a
23 hearing when we don't even have maps to comment on? Are
24 we committing today that once maps are in place, are put
25 on the table, that we're going to have future hearings

1 so that those districts impacted can have a say?

2 Well, I'm waiting for that answer, but
3 here we are. So, let me tell you about the 29th
4 District, which I'm honored to represent. Our shared
5 values and culture far outnumber our differences. We're
6 a community that values faith, family, hard work, and
7 service. From Lindale to Alding to Pasadena to Galinda
8 Park to Jacinto City or South Houston, we are community,
9 and we stick together. Ripping up the 29th District
10 will silence the voice of these communities, and it
11 would be a travesty.

12 The population growth in Texas is
13 because of the Latino population growth, plain and
14 simple. Ask any demographer. The Voting Rights Act
15 protects districts like the 29th with common interests,
16 priorities, and background.

17 Given this, I urge you to reject this
18 partisan gerrymandering of Texas, reject the map from the
19 felon in the White House, and do what's right for
20 Texans. Texans want a map that they put together. We
21 don't need a politician from the White House putting our
22 map together. Thank you. And I yield back.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, are
24 there any questions?

25 SENATOR ALVARADO: Yes.

1 THE CHAIR: Senator Alvarado.

2 SENATOR ALVARADO: Congresswoman, can
3 you hear me?

4 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Yes, I can.
5 Thank you.

6 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. Thank you for
7 your testimony. You and I have a lot of history with
8 the 29th Congressional District. As I said, I was a
9 student at U of H (University of Houston), and I
10 attended hearings and participated in advocating for
11 that Latino Opportunity District.

12 And then, if I recall, you ran for that
13 office back in the first race for the Congressional
14 District 29. Is that correct?

15 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: I did. I came
16 out third. And I always tell everybody, "I didn't win
17 the gold, but I did get the -- did get the bronze."

18 SENATOR ALVARADO: You got there
19 eventually. It has -- would you say that the 29th
20 District is a coalition district or a Latino-majority
21 district?

22 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Well, it's a
23 Latino-majority district, but it's also, I would say, a
24 coalition district. Because it does have a fairly -- I
25 think it's about 20 to -- close to 25 percent African

1 American population. It's got a little around five
2 percent mostly Vietnamese community population.

3 And so, you know, it's not race-based in
4 the old sense of the word. You know, remember, it is an
5 opportunity. And, obviously, I sought that opportunity
6 in '92, and I didn't win. We didn't get a Latino in
7 that seat until I won seven years ago. So, I think it's
8 important to make note of that only because it doesn't
9 always assure that a district will go to the community
10 that's given the opportunity, you know.

11 And I think we need to underscore that.
12 Because that's all they are. It's not based on race.
13 It's based on just putting the minorities together.
14 And, you know, and -- and Senator Miles, you're
15 absolutely correct. Those districts that are listed in
16 that letter, they're all minority urban districts, pure
17 and simple.

18 Some -- someone can argue that, "no,
19 we're not talking about race." Well, but if you just
20 targeted four districts that are minority urban
21 districts, what can anyone conclude from that?

22 SENATOR ALVARADO: Uh-huh. And I want
23 to also point out that the 18th Congressional District
24 has been without a representative for quite some time.
25 I know there were other vacancies in Congress, and those

1 elections have already been held. Is that correct?

2 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Yes. Yes, ma'am.

3 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. Thank you.

4 THE CHAIR: Anyone else?

5 (Silence.)

6 THE CHAIR: Congresswoman, thank you
7 again for being here with us today.

8 CONGRESSWOMAN GARCIA: Thank you,
9 Mr. Chairman, and best of luck to y' all.

10 THE CHAIR: Thank you. The Chair calls
11 Ellen Katz. Ms. Katz, are you with us? There you are.

12 ELLEN KATZ: Yes, sir. Yeah. Hi.

13 THE CHAIR: We can hear you fine. And,
14 again, I watched your testimony yesterday as well. So,
15 please proceed, and if you would, just -- I know you
16 know the drill -- but tell us your name, who you
17 represent, and -- and please limit your testimony to two
18 minutes.

19 ELLEN KATZ: Okay. Thank you. My name
20 is Ellen Katz. I'm a law professor and Associate Dean
21 at the University of Michigan Law School. I'm speaking
22 here on my own in my personal capacity, not on behalf of
23 the school. I'd like to thank the committee for the
24 opportunity to be here and to Senator Alvarado for the
25 invitation.

1 I'll be discussing what you've already
2 been discussing, which is the July 7th letter from the
3 Justice Department, the formal notice it gave the State
4 of Texas of serious concerns about these four districts
5 that it calls "coalition districts."

6 "Coalition districts" which it doesn't
7 define, but are generally districts in which the
8 combined population of two minority groups constitutes a
9 majority of the district. I'm going to make three, I
10 hope, quick points today.

11 First, the letter asserts that the
12 districts violate the Voting Rights Act. They don't.
13 There's a recent judicial decision that you've already
14 mentioned that holds that the effects based prong of the
15 Voting Rights Act -- that's Section 2 of the Voting
16 Rights Act -- doesn't require Texas to draw these
17 districts, but there's no authority whatsoever.

18 There's no claim that the very existence
19 of these districts violates the Voting Rights Act. The
20 second claim the letter makes is that the districts are
21 unconstitutional. And here, the gist of that claim, is
22 that the districts were drawn or otherwise reflect
23 impermissible race-based considerations.

24 They don't -- again, Attorney General
25 Paxton's letter on July 11, it cites the sworn testimony

1 from the prior litigation -- of an ongoing litigation
2 that race was not considered whatsoever in drawing these
3 four districts. They can't be unconstitutional, racial
4 gerrymanders, or otherwise involved unconstitutional
5 discrimination for that reason.

6 And my last point is -- and I want to
7 say is, what I think, is the most important one -- and
8 that is what this letter is instructing Texas to do.
9 We're Texas, and to do, it would be illegal. The letter
10 targets what it understands to be effective coalition
11 districts, and then it calls on Texas to alter their
12 racial composition to render them ineffective.

13 The Supreme Court has made clear that
14 dismantling districts in this manner is constitutionally
15 problematic. And were Texas to do what this letter
16 instructs, it would not only be injecting race-based
17 considerations into what it says was a race-neutral
18 process. But, in so doing, it would be intentionally
19 drawing district lines to destroy effective coalition
20 districts. It amounts to intentional race-based
21 discrimination, and I urge Texas to refuse to take such
22 action.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
24 questions?

25 (Indicating gesture.)

1 THE CHAIR: Senator Hinojosa.

2 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you,
3 Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for your
4 testimony. I do have a couple of questions as it
5 relates to the Voting Rights Act and the Petteway v.
6 Galveston City case by the 5th Circuit.

7 And, as I understand, the ruling just
8 applied to Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, and it
9 only dealt with an issue of whether or not coalition
10 districts could make a claim that the voters were being
11 diluted by redistricting. Is that your understanding of
12 the case?

13 ELLEN KATZ: Yes. I think that's
14 exactly right. The claim, the holding of the court in
15 overruling circuit precedent, was that Section 2 of the
16 Voting Rights Act, the "effects-based" or what we call
17 the "results-based prong" of that provision, does not
18 require Texas to draw in the other states within the
19 jurisdiction, within the 5th Circuit, to draw coalition
20 districts in the first instance.

21 They don't. There's no obligation to do
22 so. That's all it holds. It doesn't hold that
23 coalition districts independently, the ones that exist,
24 violate the Voting Rights Act. That's a -- that's an
25 astounding proposition.

1 The mere fact that there's a district in
2 which there are two minority groups with a population
3 that -- that is a majority, that's just -- there's
4 nothing problematic about that.

5 And, in fact, there are hundreds and
6 possibly thousands of such districts throughout the
7 country in which jurisdictions, applying neutral,
8 traditional districting principles, draw districts and
9 the resulting districts have populations of this sort.

10 The VRA has never -- never prohibited
11 that. And the DOJ letter is flatly incorrect in
12 suggesting and stating otherwise.

13 SENATOR HINOJOSA: And in the ruling
14 itself, anywhere in the body of the ruling. Did the 5th
15 Circuit declare coalition district as unconstitutional?

16 ELLEN KATZ: Yeah. No. It didn't reach
17 that question at all. I mean, and it didn't read the
18 question whether the failure to maintain a previous
19 coalition district would be unconstitutional. My
20 understanding is the district judge didn't rule on those
21 issues because he initially found a violation of the
22 Voting Rights Act.

23 And so, that's the issue that went up,
24 and that's the issue that the Court found or held didn't
25 require the drawing of the districts.

1 Which, again, is a very different
2 question than whether the districts themselves are
3 independently a violation of the statute.

4 SENATOR HINOJOSA: And the Court did not
5 address the issue of violations of the 14th Amendment or
6 15th Amendment of the Constitution as I understand --

7 ELLEN KATZ: It did not.

8 SENATOR HINOJOSA: -- the opinion.

9 ELLEN KATZ: It did not. I mean, and
10 it's worth enough -- if the committee's interested -- we
11 can spend some time on what the DOJ letter is saying
12 about constitutional violations and why these four
13 districts are, in its view, unconstitutional.

14 These are -- I mean, they are not. They
15 are unequivocally not. The claims the DOJ are making
16 are simply, simply wrong.

17 SENATOR HINOJOSA: And the ruling,
18 pretty narrow, narrow just to the claim on the dilution
19 of the vote under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act,
20 and that's as narrow as it was.

21 ELLEN KATZ: Yes.

22 THE CHAIR: And as I read the letter
23 from the DOJ, it seems to me that they have completely
24 misrepresented and distorted the opinion and are now
25 targeting only minority coalitions, and even minority

1 majority congressional districts.

2 Those, in your opinion, are those
3 blatantly illegal under the Constitution?

4 ELLEN KATZ: I just want to say two
5 things: No. They're not. The letter's assertion that
6 these districts are unconstitutional is, in my view,
7 fair, flatly wrong. The letter is strange in that one
8 would think -- the claims are not even close. It's not
9 like, "oh, we could have a debate about this; they are
10 not unconstitutional."

11 And one of the critical reasons is the
12 attorney general of the State's letter confirming that
13 no race was -- that race was not taken into account in
14 the drawing of these specific four districts.

15 The letter, nevertheless, the DOJ
16 letter, nevertheless, relies on the mere racial
17 composition of these districts, looks at their
18 composition, and says, "oh, there must be something
19 wrong." "They're unconstitutional." And, in fact,
20 calls them unconstitutional racial gerrymanders. They
21 can't be unconstitutional racial gerrymanders for the
22 very reason Attorney General Paxton said they were not
23 drawn based on race.

24 And, racial gerrymandered definition,
25 definitionally, it requires that the jurisdiction

1 allowed race to predominate over traditional districting
2 principles. That didn't happen here. These districts
3 cannot be unconstitutional in that sense.

4 SENATOR HINOJOSA: One more question,
5 and that is: The DOJ letter actually targeted
6 Congressional District 9, 18, 29, and 33, which all
7 those congressional districts are either minority
8 coalition districts or majority minority districts. Is
9 that targeting of those congressional districts
10 unconstitutional?

11 ELLEN KATZ: I think it is. And I think
12 your word "targeting" is exactly right. And it's why I
13 think that for Texas to do what the Department of
14 Justice is presently insisting that it does would be, to
15 itself, violate the Constitution to inject race into
16 what has, on the State's representation, been a race-
17 neutral process.

18 And to dismantle effective coalition
19 districts, coalition majority-minority coalition
20 districts, in which, precisely because they are
21 effective coalition districts, the letter -- I mean, and
22 we talked about this a bit yesterday at the hearing
23 yesterday -- the Supreme Court has told -- has said,
24 "don't do this." And this is the Bartlett v.
25 Strickland letter.

1 And we can get a little bit into the
2 weeds talk decision, and we can get in the weeds talking
3 about the difference between crossover districts and
4 coalition districts. But the, the gist of that opinion,
5 or on the relevant point of that opinion, was the
6 Supreme Court, in talking about, what the Voting Rights
7 Act requires of jurisdictions, also said the
8 following -- and I'm just going to read the Court's
9 words.

10 They said [reading] whatever Section 2
11 might require, if there were a showing that a state
12 intentionally drew district lines in order to destroy an
13 otherwise effective -- and they're talking about
14 crossover districts, and you can sub in coalition
15 districts here -- that would raise serious
16 constitutional questions.

17 And that's precisely what the DOJ letter
18 is asking, or instructing, rather, instructing Texas to
19 do, to do what Bartlett said, "don't do." It targets
20 what it understands to be an operational coalition
21 district, and it calls on Texas to alter its racial
22 composition so as to destroy them, to dismantle them and
23 make them ineffective as coalition districts. And the
24 Supreme Court has signaled that that is unconstitutional
25 behavior.

1 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you, Mrs. Katz,
2 for your testimony.

3 THE CHAIR: Senator Miles.

4 SENATOR MILES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
5 Attorney Katz, I want to thank you for making this plain
6 and clear. Having three partially or wholly in my
7 district of these congressional districts that are
8 targeted by DOJ, you made it -- in the Supreme Court
9 case of Bartland and Strickland -- and you've made it
10 very simple to understand and how it applies to this
11 particular incident. So, I want to thank you for that,
12 ma'am.

13 ELLEN KATZ: Thank you.

14 SENATOR MILES: Thank you.

15 (Indicating gesture.)

16 THE CHAIR: Senator Alvarado.

17 SENATOR ALVARADO: Thank you,
18 Mr. Chairman. Ms. Katz, we appreciate you attending
19 both hearings, both in the House and here. You
20 mentioned the Bartlett/Strickland court case. And, you
21 know, I said this earlier, that I don't want to be a
22 part of anything that is unconstitutional.

23 And we have, you know, court cases. We
24 have the Supreme Court telling us there's precedence for
25 this being unconstitutional.

1 So, with that, and let's look back to
2 what took place in the 2021 redistricting process, where
3 it was said many times -- whether it was in hearings or
4 on the Senate floor -- that the maps were legal,
5 constitutional, and in compliance with the voter -- with
6 the Voting Rights Act.

7 Even if the DOJ letter were correct, the
8 State claimed here and at the trial, which was very
9 recent, that the current maps were drawn without regard
10 to race and the maps were adopted in 2021, changed the
11 districts listed in the DOJ letter substantially.

12 What significance does that have?

13 ELLEN KATZ: I think it's entirely
14 dispositive. There cannot be the violations that the
15 letter is suggesting if the state drew these districts
16 without consideration of race.

17 The Constitution requires intentional,
18 race-based, intentional discrimination to be a
19 violation, it requires that. The State has insisted
20 that's not what it has done. There's no evidence, at
21 least with regard to these four districts, that race was
22 considered in any way when they were drawn. We have
23 sworn testimony on that effect. They can't be
24 unconstitutional or race-based unconstitutional conduct
25 for that reason.

1 And the same for the Voting Rights Act.
2 It can't. I mean, the intentional discrimination will
3 also violate the Voting Rights Act. It cannot be the
4 case here because of the way the districts were drawn.

5 SENATOR ALVARADO: Do you have any idea
6 why the DOJ would send such a letter and target those
7 particular congressional districts?

8 ELLEN KATZ: Yeah, that's not something
9 I can speak to. I have only read the letter. Like you,
10 I read that letter. If my students wrote that letter, I
11 would give them a bad grade. Because it's a bad
12 assessment of what the Voting Rights Act requires. It's
13 a bad assessment of what the Constitution requires. The
14 facts that we know make the claims that, the conclusions
15 it's asserting, to be wrong. It's not close. It's not.

16 There's not like, oh, we can have a
17 debate about that. There is -- given the
18 representations from the State, the legal claims that
19 the letter makes simply do not hold up. And, instead, I
20 think, forces us to look at what the letter is, in fact,
21 instructing Texas to do. Whatever its intent, what the
22 letter is instructing Texas to do, is to dismantle these
23 districts that were drawn as Texas has said, in a race-
24 neutral manner. And to do precisely what the Supreme
25 Court in Bartlett v. Strickland said, that raises a huge

1 constitutional problem. And that was not what they were
2 talking about in Bartlett. That was not what they were
3 talking about in the 5th Circuit of the Petteway case.
4 It's something else entirely.

5 SENATOR ALVARADO: Well, and you hit
6 some core points, is that, you know, I wish the
7 leadership in this State -- and we have, you know, an
8 Attorney General, and we have many lawyers in this
9 building that should have nipped this in the bud and
10 said, "stop, we're not going any further because what
11 you're asking us to do is unconstitutional" -- but yet,
12 here we are. Thank you.

13 SENATOR MILES: Mr. Chairman, one
14 question, just one question.

15 THE CHAIR: Senator Miles.

16 SENATOR MILES: Ms. Katz, you stated
17 that doing a map now would be illegal. Can you expound
18 on that one more time for us?

19 ELLEN KATZ: So, I think I have to say
20 something more precise than that. Leaving aside doing
21 the map for any other reason, doing them -- redrawing
22 these districts for the reasons the DOJ letter
23 instructs -- would be, in my view, illegal. So, that's
24 the claim I want to make.

25 THE CHAIR: Okay. Members, any other

1 questions?

2 (Silence.)

3 THE CHAIR: Just one quick one,
4 Ms. Katz, were you -- did you provide testimony in the
5 El Paso case?

6 ELLEN KATZ: I did not.

7 THE CHAIR: Were you part of the
8 plaintiff's team or one of the plaintiff's attorneys?

9 ELLEN KATZ: No. No.

10 THE CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

11 ELLEN KATZ: No anyone.

12 THE CHAIR: There's no other
13 questions members?

14 (Silence.)

15 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here
16 with us today, ma'am.

17 ELLEN KATZ: Thank you.

18 THE CHAIR: The Chair calls Gary
19 Bledsoe. And, Mr. Bledsoe, you've testified many times
20 before. I see you're here with us on the screen. Would
21 you please state, just for the record, your name, title
22 and the organization that you represent?

23 GARY BLEDSOE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
24 My name is Gary Bledsoe. I'm president of the Texas
25 NAACP. And great idea to bring Dr. Katz onto our team.

1 THE CHAIR: Well, welcome, and please
2 proceed with your testimony. And we would ask you to
3 keep it to two minutes.

4 GARY BLEDSOE: Thank you. To the Chair,
5 Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee in the
6 legislature, the highly unusual mid-decade
7 redistricting, like every other one before it, reminds
8 us of the long unbroken history of efforts to silence
9 and diminish the political powers of black Texans.

10 We need to remember that this is not
11 just about political parties. It is about the
12 systematic efforts to restrict the influence of people
13 of color in this state. At this nation's founding, the
14 Constitution enshrined the three-fifths compromise,
15 counting black people as only three-fifths of a human
16 being for the purpose of legislative representation.

17 And while our bodies were counted to
18 inflate the power of slaveholding states, we had no
19 vote, no real voice, and absolutely no ability to shape
20 who represented us, even at the subhuman level. That
21 compromise dehumanized my ancestors, turning them into
22 tools to strengthen the political interests of those who
23 would keep them in chains and set the foundation for
24 centuries of racially-discriminatory laws and practices.

25 With this mid-decade redistricting,

1 Texas is moving back to that era and that system. The
2 DOJ letter to Governor Abbott specifically targets three
3 of the four African American opportunity districts where
4 African American voters are able to elect their
5 candidates of choice directly and one Latino district
6 where Latinos are able to elect their candidates of
7 choice directly.

8 Importantly, the 4th African American
9 District may have been added for the hearing in
10 Arlington next week. So, it seems as though there may
11 be an effort to wipe out the slate in terms of African
12 American representation in Congress and reinstitute the
13 three-fifths compromise. The 9th, 18th and 30th are not
14 just any districts. These are opportunities, each
15 protected under the law as confirmed by both the DC
16 Circuit and panels right here in Texas, as well as being
17 admitted to by the State of Texas even in the current
18 litigation.

19 The 29th is also a protected seat and
20 was originally drawn by the court, as was the 30th, 9th
21 and 30th. I have two minutes. I'll jump to the latter
22 part of my testimony. Some important things for you to
23 note:

24 Senator Huffman testified under oath
25 that the map was drawn blind to race. Number two. The

1 map was drawn by individuals from the Governor's own
2 political party who initially foreclosed attempts to
3 form an already input in the process. Then after they
4 provided limited opportunity, they did not respond to
5 what they heard.

6 Number three, Senator Huffman said that
7 the Attorney General of Texas reviewed the map and
8 ensured the map did not violate the Voting Rights Act of
9 the Constitution before they went forward with the map
10 in question.

11 Fourth, whites are 40 percent of the
12 Texas population, but controls 73 percent of its current
13 congressional districts. And if they succeed in
14 eliminating five districts that are now targeting the
15 four in the letter, and one more, whites will control 87
16 percent of our districts.

17 Since 1980, Texas would have lost seats
18 if the state only used its white population growth to
19 determine the number of seats in which it was
20 entitled -- to which it was entitled. Texas had 24
21 seats at the time, and has 38 now.

22 And all 14 new seats can safely be said
23 to be due to Latino, African American, and Asian
24 population increases. The message from history from the
25 three-fifths rule to the present day is that counting

1 bodies alone does not mean granting people power or
2 voice.

3 Our current process risks repeating
4 those old sins by drawing lines that pack, split, and
5 silence communities of color. I'm not here to call
6 anyone a racist, but the actions we are viewing are
7 racially discriminatory. At the critical moment we face
8 now, I urge you to reject any plan that diminishes
9 opportunity for our communities to participate in the
10 political process.

11 You can stand with Jefferson Davis or
12 you can stand with Abraham Lincoln. The choice is
13 yours. Please reject this idea of engaging in mid
14 decade redistricting now, honor the legacy of the Voting
15 Rights Act, and let the court decision from El Paso come
16 forward. Do draw maps in the future that recognize the
17 true value and agency of every Texan. Thank you.

18 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
19 questions? Senator Miles.

20 SENATOR MILES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
21 Mr. Bledsoe, I want to thank you for your testimony here
22 today and all of your testimonies and work that you've
23 put in, in the past, for the great citizens of the State
24 of Texas.

25 GARY BLEDSOE: Thank you, sir.

1 SENATOR MILES: I've just got one
2 question: Can you recall of any victories that the
3 State of Texas has had in courtrooms as it relates to
4 redistricting in the history of Texas in the past?

5 GARY BLEDSOE: Well, Senator, that's a
6 great question. Let me give you a little history on
7 that because I think it's very important. Number one,
8 our State has a real history of discriminating against
9 black and brown voters, and that that occurred even when
10 we had Democratic control. Congresswoman Eddie Bernice
11 Johnson famously testified to that during the last
12 decade. But what we what we have seen is that there's
13 always been a continuation and a history. In Texas, the
14 white Texans went to the United States Supreme Court
15 five times in 26 years, from Nixon v. Herndon to Turi v.
16 Adams, to try to prevent African Americans from being
17 able to vote in Texas. That last case was only in 1953.
18 So, it's really, in many ways, not that long ago.

19 But what we have seen is, ever since the
20 Voting Rights Act was adopted in 1965, after every
21 decade's redistricting, people of color have challenged
22 the efforts by the Texas legislature to redistrict. And
23 every single time, African Americans and our Latinos,
24 have been found to be victorious, and the state has been
25 held to have discriminated against African Americans and

1 our Latinos.

2 And I must say that that includes
3 panels, like in recent years, that are majority
4 Republican panels. So, it's not a partisan issue. That
5 just seems to be a predisposition to discriminate
6 against African Americans and Latinos. And so, that's
7 occurring even to the present day. I don't know what
8 this court will hold now, where the case is now pending.

9 But, indeed, the last decade, the map
10 was found to have discriminated against African
11 Americans, Latinos, as well as in every single other
12 decade. At some point, we hope, that the legislature
13 is, hopefully, going to do right towards Latinos and
14 African Americans so we don't have to go to court to
15 vindicate our rights.

16 But this has gone beyond the pale,
17 Senator. Because when you already control 73 percent of
18 the of the seats, and you want to move that to 87
19 percent? I think yesterday Dr. Valenzuela called that
20 apartheid, and I would probably agree with her.

21 SENATOR MILES: Thank you for that
22 answer, Mr. Bledsoe. One more thing. You're familiar
23 with "jingle factors?"

24 GARY BLEDSOE: Yes, sir. I am.

25 SENATOR MILES: Can you explain to this

1 body how those jingle factors would apply to sitting
2 district, I mean, Congressional District 18 and 9 --

3 GARY BLEDSOE: Well...

4 SENATOR MILES: -- and explain what
5 "jingle factors" are to my colleagues.

6 GARY BLEDSOE: Well, the "Gingles
7 factors" are when you're trying to create a Section 2
8 district. There are Gingles prongs that you have to
9 meet. And one of those is about whether or not you have
10 numerosity, whether you can get 50.1 percent of the
11 citizen voting age population in the district that would
12 be of one particular group. Previously, the rule was if
13 you could show various requirements in the 5th Circuit
14 that you could put black and brown together.

15 So, that was the issue that was put
16 together in the Petteway case. So, you're looking for
17 50.1, but then you're looking for cohesion. And so, you
18 have to show that they can vote together. And, thirdly,
19 that if they vote together that they would have some
20 success, some electoral success.

21 But you must also show that white voters
22 are polarized and white voters have, traditionally,
23 frustrated those voters from being able to elect their
24 candidate of choice. What occurred in Petteway was the
25 40-plus years of precedent, you know, that we had in the

1 5th Circuit by great litigators like Jose Garza and
2 Rolando Rios that brought those issues forth where you
3 could put black and brown together -- if you could show
4 various socioeconomic commonalities and political
5 cohesion between the groups -- that they could be joined
6 together.

7 And that's occurred until even recent
8 years with litigation in Baytown and other places where
9 that continued to be the rule. And, in fact, in the
10 case now pending before the panel in El Paso, that
11 three- judge panel had ruled prior to Petteway that that
12 was a law in Texas, and they had refused to dismiss
13 claims that many of us had made in reference to -- in
14 reference to coalition districts.

15 Because until that decision, Petteway
16 last year, that was a law in the circuit. But in terms
17 of -- the Supreme Court has not acted upon that issue,
18 but there are a number of circuits that actually still
19 hold that black and brown can be joined together for
20 purposes of creating a district or requiring a district
21 be created under Section 2.

22 And so, we're hoping that at some point
23 the Supreme Court does entertain that issue, and that
24 when they entertain that issue, they'll resolve it in
25 the affirmative way and say what we think the law is

1 that you should be able to join black and brown
2 together.

3 You know, we attempted even, the last
4 time, to join black, brown and Asian together in Fort
5 Bend County, and we won that initially. We ended up
6 losing it, and the court gave us an encouraging comment
7 in the opinion about the need to continue with the
8 electoral outcomes in the Asian community before we
9 could join all three. But anyway, that has not been
10 decided by the Supreme Court that you can't join more
11 than one group together. That's only now law in the 5th
12 Circuit.

13 SENATOR MILES: And, lastly, the ugly
14 truth of the matter is the State of Texas has
15 systematically and historically tried to depress African
16 American and Latino vote in the history of Texas, the
17 ugly truth. Is that correct?

18 GARY BLEDSOE: There's a 100 truth to
19 what you're saying. I mean, we didn't have a Latino in
20 Congress despite the large Latino population in this
21 state until Henry B. Gonzalez. That was what? The late
22 50s, early 60s, sometime in that. But the great, the
23 lion, Henry B. Gonzalez was elected, and the
24 incomparable Barbara Jordan was there in 1973.

25 But that was after the legendary case,

1 the important case, White versus Regester, that brought
2 us to have the type of single member districts that
3 allows many of you now to be there in the Texas
4 legislature. So, that was 1972, you know, when great
5 lawyers like Dave Richards, George Corville, and others,
6 brought that case forth and required that.

7 So, Texas has continued to fight, you
8 know, that it's just like taking teeth from a chicken.
9 It's really kind of hard. You've got to fight every
10 session. You know, Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson,
11 when -- as state senator, she had to go to court and
12 vindicate the rights of African Americans. They did the
13 same thing with the 29th in the 1990s. So, minorities
14 have had to go to court to get the district tree
15 created, or whether they're -- and so, even when the
16 legislature created some, they didn't create them in
17 ways that really empower the African American community.

18 So, that's why people like Eddie Bernice
19 Johnson, Sheila Jackson Lee, and others, went to court
20 to vindicate their rights to fully establish those
21 districts and make them into true Section 2 districts.
22 And so, it took a fight for those things, and so that
23 fight continues.

24 SENATOR MILES: And, lastly, do you view
25 this letter from the DOJ as another ugly attempt to

1 suppress and to downtrod black and brown votes, the
2 letter that's gotten us here today? Is that just
3 another ugly attempt to do the same thing that Texas has
4 been doing historically?

5 GARY BLEDSOE: There's zero question
6 about that. It is actually an incredible letter. I
7 think we heard Professor Katz, and she really kind of
8 nailed it. This letter is basically saying that you
9 can't have a district that black and brown people
10 together constitute a majority. So, you have all these
11 other districts around Texas where maybe you have, you
12 know, black and white, or brown and white, or what have
13 you; or you have some -- some combination. So -- but
14 that letter chose to focus on -- on districts where
15 minorities are able to elect their candidate of choice.

16 And so, you -- we don't need to get into
17 all the Gingles issues and things of that nature.
18 Because the courts have made it very clear that without
19 regard to current statistical numbers, the 9th, 18th and
20 30th are protected African American opportunity seats,
21 and the same thing with the 29th and the 33rd was
22 court-created.

23 And, clearly, the African American
24 community and the 33rd has been able to directly,
25 without coalition -- though there is a coalition

1 there -- if you peel out the numbers from the coalition,
2 the African American community would still be able to
3 elect their candidate in the 33rd.

4 SENATOR MILES: It's pretty open and
5 obvious and blatant, wouldn't you say? Pretty open and
6 obvious and blatant, wouldn't you say?

7 GARY BLEDSOE: It's clear. I mean, it
8 couldn't -- I mean, you don't have to be the sharpest
9 tool in the drawer to understand what this is. This is
10 an act of racial discrimination and bias. And it's
11 saying that we need to go out and where -- and you find.
12 It's like creating an amoeba to go out and find black
13 and brown districts and go out and eat them up and
14 eliminate them.

15 And, so that's what that says. We found
16 this district, these districts that we just don't like,
17 because black and brown people join together. And so,
18 they're going to destroy them. It's completely illegal,
19 and it is race-based. And so, they're inviting this
20 legislature to engage in an overt act of discrimination.
21 So, if the legislature does what's requested in that
22 letter, they have engaged in intentional
23 discrimination --

24 SENATOR MILES: Gary, I want to thank
25 you for all...

1 GARY BLEDSOE: -- and intentional
2 gerrymander.

3 SENATOR MILES: I want to thank you for
4 all the hard work you've done for this Great State of
5 Texas for both black, brown, and everybody included in
6 this State. Thank you, my brother.

7 GARY BLEDSOE: Thank you, Senator. I
8 Appreciate it. I Always say the same for you, and I
9 look forward to continuing to work with you.

10 THE CHAIR: All right. The Chair
11 recognizes Senator Hinojosa.

12 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you.
13 Mr. Chairman. Just a point of clarification: On the
14 issue dealing with minority coalition districts, the
15 ruling by the 5th Circuit pretty much was narrow in
16 point that under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, a
17 minority coalition district could not make a claim of
18 voter violation on redistricting. Is that ruling
19 applied only to the 5th Circuit jurisdiction or is that
20 nationwide?

21 GARY BLEDSOE: That only applies in the
22 5th Circuit? I think there's a split in the circuits.
23 I think before that decision there were more circuits
24 that held that you could join black and brown together.
25 But now I think, with that, I think it's, apparently,

1 evenly split. I haven't looked at it lately, but I
2 think it's something like two and two, or something
3 along those lines.

4 Not every circuit has addressed that
5 issue for different reasons, but I think that there are
6 as maybe at least one other circuit where this newfound
7 5th Circuit law is the law, but that's only the law from
8 that opinion as to this circuit.

9 So -- and again, you have to draw the
10 distinction, Senator. Because they were talking about
11 whether you mandated to draw it under Section 2 by
12 joining black and brown together. But the two big
13 issues they did not address were about, you know,
14 naturally-occurring districts and talked about in
15 Bartlett, that we have a right to have black and brown
16 naturally occurring districts, just like any other.

17 And, number two, even if not naturally
18 occurring, if it's a district that has been a
19 functioning coalition district that was properly created
20 in the past, can you dismantle that?

21 And those decisions were not up before
22 the 5th Circuit. And so, those things are still
23 pending. And that's exactly what they're trying to do.
24 Though, again, I'm going to say 9, 18, 29 and 30 are
25 absolutely African American/Latino opportunity seats and

1 are not coalition seats.

2 SENATOR HINOJOSA: And one last
3 question: The 5th Circuit opinion in the Petteway v.
4 Galveston County case, they did not address any claims
5 dealing with the 14th Amendment or the 15th Amendment?

6 GARY BLEDSOE: They did not. They did
7 not. They did not. It was only a Section 2 case. It
8 was not about the 14th Amendment or the 15th Amendment.
9 And I'm glad you said the 15th, Senator, because I think
10 some of the courts don't like it when we raise 15th
11 nowadays and maybe dismiss those out of hand. But I
12 think it is the 14th and 15th. And so, where that came
13 from in the letter from DOJ about these being
14 unconstitutional, I don't know. But those -- those
15 districts are absolutely constitutional.

16 And you can look at the opinions that
17 are already in the the books that have upheld those,
18 upheld them. And even the State's expert in the 2011
19 round acknowledged that those districts were protected
20 opportunity seats. And even, if you recall, on the
21 Senate floor during debate and discussion, there was
22 some acknowledgment by State leaders. Even I remember
23 the interchange, I think, between -- I think it was
24 Senator Miles and Senator Huffman, where she pretty much
25 acknowledged that on the floor. So, I think everybody

1 knows those are protected seats.

2 SENATOR MILES: Thank you very much,
3 Mr. Bledsoe, for the testimony.

4 THE CHAIR: Members, Any other
5 questions?

6 SENATOR ALVARADO: I'm on?

7 THE CHAIR: Senator Alvarado.

8 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. Mr. Bledsoe,
9 thank you for joining us. What was the process the
10 State said it used to draw the previous maps?

11 GARY BLEDSOE: Well, what -- the sworn
12 testimony from Senator Huffman was that the -- obviously
13 the -- there was a group that was secured. That's
14 already been testified to by Congresswoman Garcia, I
15 think. And that that group, I think, drew up the map,
16 and at point -- some point, they were in consultation
17 with the Senate leaders on that.

18 And that once they had come up with a
19 map, that map was reviewed by a team, put together by
20 the Attorney General of Texas, and that group did a
21 review to make sure that the map was constitutional.

22 So, you had Attorney General Paxton that
23 was responsible for reviewing the map -- and I think she
24 even said that many times on the Senate floor -- where
25 you guys were asking her questions. And she continued

1 to say that there's this -- this lawyer that she sends
2 questions to, and while you were discussing things on
3 the floor, they would get information back.

4 Well, it turns out, in that litigation,
5 it was the Attorney General's Office that was actually
6 doing that. So I -- you would have to believe in the
7 DOJ letter that somehow, if it's drawn race, race blind,
8 and if it's reviewed by Attorney General Paxton, that
9 somehow they decided to put in illegal maps that would
10 advance African American and Latino interests. And I
11 think that kind of begs this heart kind of -- it is a
12 bridge too far for me to -- for me to cross.

13 SENATOR ALVARADO: So, the Attorney
14 General weighs in. The committee had lawyers. There
15 was this group. There were a lot of lawyers that
16 weighed in on the 2021 maps, correct?

17 GARY BLEDSOE: That is true. They had a
18 private law firm. I think he had different
19 representation in the Senate and in the House. And I
20 think that the representation during court was, well,
21 the minority can actually get there, get a lawyer, too.

22 So, we were interested in that. I
23 forget which one of the -- was it a Senator or Rep. that
24 testified to that, "well, you guys could have had a
25 lawyer as well," from the Attorney General's Office.

1 But no. They -- there were private law
2 firms involved in the drafting and the consulting and
3 all that. And even the Attorney General was involved in
4 that process at that stage. And I think even, Senator,
5 there was apparently a law firm that was on site when
6 the congressional map was debated on the House floor.

7 In fact, I think Congresswoman Jasmine
8 Crockett talked about how she had to get their
9 permission before her amendment could go forward and be
10 discussed on the floor.

11 SENATOR ALVARADO: It seems like if
12 the -- if these maps back in 2021 were not legal, were
13 not in compliance with the Voting Rights Act, they were
14 not constitutional -- that the Attorney General, or
15 somebody in his office being the lawyer for the State,
16 would have said something. Do you agree?

17 GARY BLEDSOE: That's absolutely true.
18 You know, in our opinion, they were unconstitutional,
19 but not because they did too much for black and brown.
20 It's because they did too little for black and brown.
21 So, they were also unconstitutional for another reason.
22 And, I think -- I'm not a gambler, Senator -- but if
23 there was any stretch of the imagination that they gave
24 unfair advantage to black or brown, they would
25 absolutely have spoken up.

1 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. There were
2 plenty of opportunities for all of these lawyers to say
3 otherwise. Is there a map in the Houston area you have
4 supported or in the Dallas and Fort Worth area?

5 THE CHAIR: If I could just interrupt
6 just a second? And I want to make sure, Senator, you
7 get to ask every question you wish to ask, and -- but I
8 would just want to remind us all that we don't have any
9 map before us today. Today is simply about gathering
10 information from the public.

11 And although we're delighted to have
12 expert witnesses here, the main purpose of the hearing
13 is to gather from the general public. We've got a lot
14 of people in the queue that I know are waiting. We will
15 have, I promise, ample time, if there's a map before the
16 committee, to go into great detail over that map with
17 all the experts that anyone wishes to bring.

18 And so, it might be better to wait for
19 those kind of detailed questions to a different day.
20 But I'll let you proceed at your discretion.

21 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. Again, it's
22 not my choice to be here. Nobody on our side asked to
23 be put in this situation. So, anyway, back to my
24 question: Is there a map in the Houston area you have
25 supported, or in the Dallas and Fort Worth area?

1 GARY BLEDSOE: There absolutely is. And
2 I will say with one, with one caveat, because of the
3 rules that were adopted in the Senate the last time, and
4 the -- the rules that were allowed, you really could not
5 put forth a map that had opportunity districts.

6 Because with the growth in the Latino
7 population, there should have been at least one new
8 Latino congressional seat, if not two. But the -- the
9 way things manifest themselves, you -- the obstacles
10 were too great, and you could not tender maps that
11 provided for that. That being said, there is a map in
12 the Houston area that I think was agreed to by
13 Congresswoman Garcia, Congresswoman Jackson Lee, and
14 Congressman Green, C2131, I think. And that was
15 something, I think, that Senator Miles's office might
16 have been involved in helping to -- to draw C2131
17 because it was all -- it was so little need to change
18 those three districts that traditional redistricting
19 principles would say, "you make those modest changes"
20 because they were all three near perfect size.

21 And so, you just give some from the 9th
22 and 18th to the 29th that needed a little population.
23 And so, that's what, what we did. And they -- and so
24 that was the one in the Houston area because it adhered
25 to traditional redistricting principles.

1 And C2177 in the Dallas Fort Worth area,
2 but only as to Congressional District 30, the changes
3 there to 33 are not changes that we support or propose,
4 but in terms of -- because Congressional District 30
5 should be a majority African American district, but the
6 State decided to diminish it by two and a half points or
7 so in terms of the African American population. But so
8 that C2177, that was tendered on the House side, but it
9 was not adopted. It was tendered by Congresswoman
10 Jasmine Crockett when she was in the State House.

11 So we -- we support those two, but we --
12 we say there needs to be at least one Latino opportunity
13 district, and maybe two. Dallas/Fort Worth had the
14 largest growth of any metropolitan area in the United
15 States of America. And the Houston area was only about
16 50,000 behind.

17 So, there's tremendous growth in both
18 those areas. And the huge growth that Texas received
19 was 50 percent Latino. And so, I think that the Latino
20 community definitely deserves additional representation.

21 SENATOR ALVARADO: Is there anything
22 inconsistent with the position taken by Governor Abbott
23 in the recent trial with what President Trump is saying
24 today?

25 GARY BLEDSOE: After they can't both be

1 telling the truth. You know, they were race-based or
2 they were race-blind. You can't be race-based and race-
3 blind, right? And so -- so one of them has got to be as
4 to fundamental untruth.

5 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay.

6 GARY BLEDSOE: They can't be -- they
7 can't be -- they can't be both true. They were race-
8 based or race-blind.

9 I would like to say just, Senator, for
10 the record, you know, even Chief Justice Roberts, I
11 think in the Milligan case, he talked about how you need
12 to look at race, but you don't -- race shouldn't
13 dominate, but you want to avoid discriminating against
14 African Americans and Latinos. And, in fact, the
15 legislature is advised of that in the 2021 manual put
16 out by the legislature counsel, though I know -- I think
17 Senator Huffman said that they didn't really desire to
18 follow legislature counsel's direction --

19 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay.

20 GARY BLEDSOE: -- on that issue.

21 SENATOR ALVARADO: I'm interested in
22 what you have to say about the three-fifths rule. Can
23 you explain that to us?

24 GARY BLEDSOE: Well, that's when you use
25 bodies that have no political power to get more

1 districts. And so, when my ancestors were enslaved here
2 in Texas, you know, up in Falls County area, or what
3 have you, where my folks were enslaved, they were
4 counted for numbers, but they had no political power.

5 And so, Texas was able to get additional
6 seats. That was a big issue in Congress at the time.
7 And there was a big debate about whether to continue
8 that. Because what happened was that the three-fifths
9 rule gave disproportionate power to the Southern States,
10 and that helped lead to, no doubt, the Civil War.

11 But the -- so, you can say you have a
12 million slaves, and even though they have no vote, you
13 can count them as 600,000 people for purposes of getting
14 new districts. So, you have all these new districts.
15 So, that gives white Texans greater power than what they
16 would have otherwise, as a multiplier, as to their power
17 simply because of their being able to use people who
18 were enslaved.

19 And I think that parallel exists today.
20 You know, you have such a large immigrant population, an
21 immigrant population that one can honestly argue was
22 really kind of invited by business to come here and to
23 be part of our State. And so, that population is used
24 to drive up the numbers of seats that Texas is permitted
25 to have under the Constitution, but they can't vote and

1 things of that nature.

2 But what happens here is that you get
3 the marginalization, you know, people can't vote. But
4 what makes matters worse now, when they can vote -- as
5 they're still trying to do the same thing as before --
6 to draw districts where African American/Latinos would
7 have no influence, not be able to elect their candidates
8 of choice. That's exactly what the DOJ letter says.

9 SENATOR ALVARADO: Uh-huh.

10 GARY BLEDSOE: It's upset that black and
11 brown can get together and elect their candidate of
12 choice, but that's what the three-fifths rule is, that
13 you simply use people for numbers but disregard them
14 otherwise. And I feel that that's what's actually
15 happening, as has happened in our State. And if we
16 adopt what the President's recommending here and go to
17 87 percent of the districts being controlled by white
18 voters, I don't think we can even argue that point at
19 that time.

20 SENATOR ALVARADO: Okay. One last
21 question: This process of mid decade redistricting,
22 will it potentially put some Republican seats at risk?

23 GARY BLEDSOE: There's no doubt. I
24 think we saw what happened in 2018, Senator, with the
25 changeover to Congressional District 7 and Congressional

1 District 32. Those were considered to be safe seats for
2 a decade, but that didn't work. And so, this time what
3 occurred was, instead of just using the suburban
4 areas -- which are now diverse -- and so, because of
5 whether it's financial gains or whether it's just people
6 moving in from the outside who chose to go to the
7 suburban areas, our suburban areas now are very diverse.

8 And so, that's why you have a
9 Congressional District 7 and Congressional District 32,
10 that can upset what had thought to be an effective
11 racially gerrymandered map. And I think that's the
12 concern that many have here. You know, the New York
13 Times reported that many of the members of the
14 Republican delegation who met with President Trump on
15 this were not in favor of it -- and they were unnamed
16 sources for the New York Times article -- but I think
17 they can see what happened.

18 Because what happened this time is they
19 went about as far as you can, in my mind, although I
20 think one of the witnesses said they could go further.
21 But when you start doing things like Congressional
22 District 13, going like over 400 miles from one point in
23 the district to another, including 38 counties, where
24 you now add the rural areas, and you -- you cut up
25 the -- you cut up the minority areas, and you pack them

1 into a limited number of districts, and then you crack
2 out the rest of the minority community in the urban
3 areas, and you extended all the way to rural areas now
4 so that those rural districts can then control the vote
5 along with the sympathetic voters from the suburban and
6 urban areas.

7 And so, that's the ploy that's taken
8 here. But, you know, it can definitely backfire like it
9 did last time. And I think what that's what those
10 lawmakers understand. Because they -- even the current
11 one that's there, could backfire at some point where
12 they've only taken 73 percent of the districts.

13 But if you take 87 percent, I think
14 that's going to be quite volatile. But the only problem
15 with that from our viewpoint is we still want to have
16 black and brown opportunity districts, which you'll
17 probably end up with, is a whole lot of potentially
18 Democratic districts because they're trying to grab too
19 much.

20 And so you have to stretch the white
21 voters so much and so thin. And you can't do that,
22 Senator, without involving yourself in racial
23 gerrymandering. They're going to have to use race as
24 the means to draw a new district. So, it's going to be
25 a textbook example of racial gerrymandering.

1 SENATOR ALVARADO: Thank you, sir.

2 THE CHAIR: Senator Hinojosa.

3 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you,
4 Mr. Chairman. Just one question, Mr. Bledsoe. What --
5 could you just -- what is the difference between an
6 "opportunity district" and a "coalition district?"

7 GARY BLEDSOE: An "opportunity district"
8 is where your group can elect a candidate of choice
9 without having to go to another group for coalition.
10 So, for example, if the African American voters -- even
11 though they may have a coalition with Latino voters or
12 Asian voters -- if you look at the African American vote
13 and if they're able to elect their candidate of choice,
14 then that would be an African American opportunity
15 district. Now, for the first creation of such a
16 district, you've got that 50.1 percent numerosity
17 requirement there.

18 But districts have continued to function
19 that way, and the courts have ruled that they continue
20 to be, even if they drop below the 50.1 percent because
21 they continue to function in that way. A coalition
22 district is when you need to join with another group
23 that would be needed in order to get the majority.

24 So, those seats, you could have black
25 and brown, brown and Asian. You could have whatever

1 minorities to have a minority coalition seat in whatever
2 combination that could do, as they were doing in
3 Galveston, where, you know, that lawsuit brought by, I
4 think, three NAACP units and a LULAC chapter, along with
5 an incumbent commissioner, challenged that.

6 But you -- but they had a coalition, and
7 they were able to get the candidate of choice over time.
8 And so, that's a coalition district. Now, either one --
9 neither one had the ability to do it on their own, but
10 where they can do it together. And you have that other
11 district that we saw Professor Katz talk about, that's a
12 crossover district, but that's where you have
13 sympathetic or in line, in sync, white voters, and you
14 have to add them to the quotient. So, when you add
15 white voters, it becomes a crossover district. And
16 that's the one that was talked about in Bartlett. And
17 they said, "well, there's not a constitutional right to
18 preserve, to create a crossover district."

19 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Let me just stop you
20 there and get back to the opportunity district. I
21 understand the other two, crossover and the minority
22 coalition districts. The opportunity districts, do they
23 combine? Does it have to be 51 percent or 50 percent
24 plus minority?

25 GARY BLEDSOE: For the initial creation

1 under Gingles, that is the requirement, 50.1 CVAP.

2 SENATOR HINOJOSA: And that would be an
3 opportunity district?

4 GARY BLEDSOE: That would be an
5 opportunity, for the initial creation, but what I've
6 said, the courts have held the districts that have
7 fallen below that and still function that manner are
8 still opportunity districts -- even if they drop
9 below -- as long as they continue to function as they
10 were prescribed to function.

11 SENATOR HINOJOSA: And that would be
12 without any type of coalition with another minority
13 group?

14 GARY BLEDSOE: Right. And it doesn't
15 mean you can't have a coalition, but the question is
16 whether you could, without the coalition, elect your
17 candidate of choice.

18 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Got it. Thank you
19 very much, Mr. Bledsoe.

20 GARY BLEDSOE: Thank you, Senator.

21 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Bledsoe. I
22 appreciate you being here today.

23 GARY BLEDSOE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 THE CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen, I know
25 it's noon, and we still have a lot of people in the

1 queue. I'm going to continue to call people up in
2 groups, and then if you'll just, once you're kind of
3 moved over into the waiting area, I'll call you one at a
4 time.

5 The next group is Mendi Tackett, Mendi
6 Tackett, Craig Nazor, Ricardo Villarreal, Ernesto Moran,
7 and Emily Amps. Mendi Tackett, Craig Nazor, Ricardo
8 Villarreal, Ernesto Moran, and Emily Amps.

9 And, Ms. Tackett, will go with you
10 first. And I think we're going to go with Ms. Tackett
11 first, Mr. Moran.

12 Ms. Tackett, are you with us? I'll give
13 you a separate second to connect there. Yeap. Okay.
14 So -- okay. All right. Ms. Tackett's audio is in the
15 process connecting. So, Emily Amps, why don't we go
16 ahead and start with you. And, again, please keep your
17 testimony to two minutes.

18 If you would state your name, who you
19 represent, and whether -- if you're testifying on behalf
20 of someone other than yourself.

21 MS. EMILY AMPS: Sure. Thank you.
22 Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my name is Emily
23 Amps, and I'm the director of Politics and Policy at the
24 Texas AFL-CIO, the State's labor federation with over
25 250,000 affiliated members across the State, and I'm

1 here to testify on their behalf and also for myself.

2 Texans, including many of our members,
3 your constituents, are facing serious challenges right
4 now. We have the highest rate in number of uninsured.
5 Wages aren't going up, even though prices are. Workers
6 are dying in the heat of the summer because they have no
7 state or federal protections to ensure they're given a
8 break or some water.

9 And right now, first responders and
10 volunteers are cleaning up and rebuilding communities
11 after a tragic weather event that took the lives of over
12 100 of our neighbors, including many young Texans. But
13 here we are talking about redrawing congressional map,
14 something no Texan asked for, spurred by political
15 pressure, and aimed at dismantling communities of color
16 and [distorted audio] candidate of their choice. And
17 bowing to this pressure would further silence Texans,
18 including workers, adding to the many voices already
19 muted by the current district lines.

20 And what makes Texas so special? It's
21 the people who build our State, who teach the next
22 generation, who keep our State government running. It's
23 the vibrant border communities of the Rio Grande Valley,
24 El Paso, Laredo, the beaches in the coastal Bend, the
25 Piney Woods of East Texas, the weirdness of Austin, the

1 history of San Antonio, and industries in DFW and the
2 Gulf Coast, the oil fields of West Texas. These
3 communities are all unique, and their differences are
4 not limited to just geography. These communities have
5 unique needs and challenges, and they need unique
6 representation in Washington D.C.

7 However, already many of these
8 communities have been severed and neighborhoods divided.
9 For example, fast growing suburban communities like mine
10 in Buda, Texas, in Congressional District 21 has been
11 sliced and diced and put into a district with rural
12 communities that have little in common with my
13 community.

14 And now you've been asked to double down
15 and divide communities even more. So, I urge you, as
16 you move forward, please remember that your actions
17 during this special session will have a real impact on
18 real people and there are real issues that need to be
19 addressed.

20 And also, remember that you do not have
21 to draw a map. And if the 4th of July tragedies taught
22 us anything, this is a time when Texans need to come
23 together, not be further divided. So, please don't
24 forget that. Thank you.

25 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any

1 questions?

2 (Silence.)

3 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being with us
4 here today. The Chair calls Ernesto Moran. Thank you,
5 and welcome. If you would, please tell us, just for the
6 record, your name, whether you representing yourself or
7 an organization.

8 MR. ERNESTO MORAN: Yes, my name is
9 Ernesto Moran. I'm here just representing myself. I'm
10 a native US-born citizen and a resident of Texas for
11 more than 30 years. I want to acknowledge that I am
12 testifying from land and ceded and shared by the
13 Tuacani, Kickapoo, Wichita, Comanche, and Germanos
14 nations.

15 Without even getting into how revolting
16 it is to be doing this when 135 people lost their lives
17 in Texas floods, this is not about doing what's best for
18 Texans.

19 The justification is flimsy at best.
20 But, if we're being honest, it's hollow. The Department
21 of Justice cites race-based considerations and says they
22 have to be rectified. But Attorney General Ken Paxton,
23 just weeks ago, argued the very opposite, under oath, in
24 open court.

25 He said, "there was no racial

1 gerrymandering in the maps as they are currently drawn."
2 But let's not kid ourselves and insult each other's
3 intelligence. Okay? We know this is about one person
4 and his desire to ram through the rest of his agenda in
5 the second half of his term as president, not to mention
6 protect himself from possible consequences of his
7 actions thus far in his time in office.

8 He even came out and said so. This is
9 solely about preserving power that is slipping away. We
10 saw the same thing already happen on the Tarrant County
11 Commissioner's Court, which just approved a mid decade
12 redistricting map. And all it's going to do is cost
13 taxpayers millions of dollars in lawsuits.

14 And if you go through with this, you
15 will put into motion a nationwide domino effect that you
16 have no control over. Governors in California and New
17 Jersey have already indicated as much.

18 In the words of a great American, your
19 poll tax and Jim Crow and greed have got to go. All you
20 fascists are bound to lose. I say peace be to you if
21 you're willing to fight for it. Thank you.

22 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
23 questions?

24 (Silence.)

25 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here

1 with us today.

2 Craig. The Chair calls Craig Nazor.

3 MR. CRAIG NAZOR: Can you hear me?

4 THE CHAIR: I certainly can. If you
5 would please just state, for the record, your name and
6 your title, and if you're representing any organization
7 here today.

8 MR. CRAIG NAZOR: Hello, my name is
9 Craig Nazor of the Sierra Club. We support the Sierra
10 Club comments submitted by Dr. Cyrus Reed outlining the
11 negative effects that gerrymandering has on
12 environmental advocacy.

13 Here's how political redistricting
14 worked for me. One morning in 1995, at the local HEB, a
15 tall-lanky man approached me and said, "hello, my name
16 is Lloyd Doggett, and I represent you in the US
17 Congress." "Do you have any questions for me?"

18 From then on, about twice a year,
19 Congressman Doggett was at that HEB for me to talk to.
20 In 2003, this legislature redrew District 10 into the
21 shape of a python that swallowed an elephant with a head
22 west of Austin and the tail just north of Houston,
23 represented by Michael McCall.

24 I never met Congressman McCall, although
25 I many times tried to make appointments with him. I

1 never spoke to him, although I called his office
2 frequently. He lives in Westlake Hills, yet he never
3 appeared at any public events in Austin where I could
4 meet him or ask him any questions or get any answers.

5 He didn't represent me because he didn't
6 have to. By your design he knew that he could
7 completely ignore me and still be re elected.

8 When this is done for political or
9 racial reasons, this makes people angry. As we
10 witnessed at the House hearing yesterday, there is
11 really no clear distinction between racial or political
12 gerrymandering. One simply covers for the other.

13 Either one can leave people dealing with
14 deadly environmental issues without a voice. Now you
15 want to double down again without a census in the middle
16 of the decade? Why? Because a president who never won
17 the popular vote at any election is demanding it,
18 further polarizing our already highly-polarized nation.
19 And because of this, Texas is not the representative
20 democracy it has always claimed to be. Sad.

21 THE CHAIR: Thank you, sir. Members,
22 any questions?

23 (Silence.)

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here
25 with us today. The Chair calls Mendi Tackett.

1 MS. MENDI TACKETT: Can you hear me?

2 THE CHAIR: We certainly can. Thank
3 you. You were able to get on.

4 MS. MENDI TACKETT: Okay.

5 THE CHAIR: Please --

6 MS. MENDI TACKETT: Thank you.

7 THE CHAIR: -- just for the record, if
8 you would, state your name and if you represent any
9 organization, any title that you wish to state, and
10 please hold your testimony to two minutes.

11 MS. MENDI TACKETT: All right. Thank
12 you very much. I'm Mendi Tackett. I'm here today
13 testifying on my own behalf. I'm up in Tarrant County,
14 but I can't make tomorrow's meeting. So, I decided to
15 do that today. I'm going to reiterate what others have
16 already said, "Texans do not want this." "Trump wants
17 this."

18 Mid decade redistricting is a blatant
19 power grab, and it undermines fair representation and
20 rigs the rules to erase the voices of black and brown
21 communities in order to keep politicians who support
22 white Christian nationalism in power.

23 This is no different than what we have
24 been fighting up here in Tarrant County. The County
25 Commissioners here in Tarrant County, just like our

1 Tarrant County Commissioners, were afraid that they
2 might lose power here. Trump and national-level
3 Republicans are afraid that they might lose some power.

4 So, they're turning to states like Texas
5 to try to ensure that they have enough Republican seats.
6 And y' all are going to squash black and brown voices in
7 order to do that. There's really no polite way to say
8 this. Republicans, we see you. We see you for who you
9 are, and we see you for what you're doing. You're
10 shameless, power hungry bootlickers, and you're only
11 serving Trump, not the people of Texas. Thank you very
12 much.

13 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
14 questions?

15 (Silence.)

16 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Chair calls
17 Ricardo Villarreal.

18 MR. RICARDO VILLARREAL: Good afternoon.
19 My name is Ricardo Villarreal. I'm an Army veteran, and
20 represent veterans in the State of Texas through the
21 nonprofit organization Common Defense. I was also a
22 candidate who ran for Congressional District 21 in 2022.
23 So, I'm keenly aware of the expected outcomes through
24 the creation of gerrymandered maps.

25 Today, I'd like to discuss the topic of

1 "redlining." Redlining was a discriminatory practice
2 denying or limiting financial services to residents of
3 neighborhoods based on their race or ethnicity. This
4 practice was particularly directed towards black and
5 other minority communities, hindering their ability to
6 build wealth and perpetuating racial segregation.

7 Redlining emerged in the 1930s with the
8 establishment of the Homeowners Loan Corporation, which
9 created residential security maps that graded
10 neighborhoods based on perceived risk and desirability
11 for lending. These maps categorized neighborhoods with
12 best and good areas associated with white communities,
13 declining and hazardous areas primarily populated by
14 black, Latino, and other minority residents, regardless
15 of their economic status. Although redlining was
16 outlawed in 1968, its legacy continues to impact
17 communities today.

18 The effects of past discrimination are
19 still evident in disparities in wealth, health, and
20 access to opportunities between historically redlined
21 areas and neighborhoods. Even to this day, redlining
22 has made it easier to gerrymander districts along racial
23 lines as historic discrimination has helped --has shaped
24 residential patterns.

25 Redlining and gerrymandering, while

1 distinct practices, both contribute to systemic
2 inequality and have lasting negative impacts on
3 communities and political representation. The reality
4 is that partisan gerrymandering is this century's
5 equivalent to racial discriminatory redlining. I ask
6 that you reconsider the redistricting of new
7 congressional maps and allow courts to settle the
8 validity of the 2021 maps or their remedy. Thank you
9 for allowing me to provide testimony and input.

10 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
11 questions?

12 (Silence.)

13 THE CHAIR: Thank you. And all the
14 witnesses are doing great on their two minute time.
15 Thank you.

16 The next group will call up will be
17 Kathleen Thomas, Denisce Palacios, Savant Moore,
18 Kiersten Zundel, and Alfredo Arellano.

19 Let me say that again: Kathleen Thomas,
20 Denisce Palacios, Savant Moore, Kiersten Zundel, and
21 Alfredo Arellano.

22 Kathleen Thomas, are you there with us?
23 If you could unmute your mic.

24 (Silence.)

25 THE CHAIR: Okay. Let's go ahead and go

1 to Savant Moore. Mr. Moore? Savant Moore.

2 MR. SAVANT MOORE: Yes, sir.

3 THE CHAIR: There. Glad to see you.

4 Please, just for the record, tell us your name and if
5 you're representing any organization and any title you
6 would like us to know of. And please hold your
7 testimony to two minutes. Thank you.

8 MR. SAVANT MOORE: My name is Savant
9 Moore, a resident of the historic Fifth Ward in Houston,
10 Texas, a trustee in HISD, and a proud constituent of
11 Congressional District 18. I came to speak truth, not
12 just for myself, but for generations who were counted
13 out, cut out, and redlined out of decisions made in
14 rooms like this.

15 THE CHAIR: This district, CD18, was
16 born from the struggle drawn in 1972 as a direct Result
17 of the Voting Rights Act. It gave black Houstonians a
18 voice in Congress when the system tried to keep us
19 invisible. That voice became Barbara Jordan, Mickey
20 Leland, Craig Washington, Sheila Jackson Lee, Erica Lee,
21 Carter, Sylvester Turner. It became a movement, and
22 it's still speaking. So, why are we here again? We're
23 not here because of new data. We're not here because
24 the courts asked for it.

25 We're here because some people are

1 uncomfortable with the strength of our leadership, with
2 the fact that communities like mine still have the power
3 to send someone to Washington who looks like us and
4 fights like us. This isn't about compliance. It's
5 about control. It's not a coincidence that the same
6 communities you've already stripped of local control and
7 education are the ones now being targeted for
8 redistricting. Let me be clear. We reject any map
9 changes of CD18 until all litigation is resolved and the
10 2030 census is complete.

11 Because if this body truly believes in
12 Democracy, you will protect the districts that were
13 created to correct generations of injustice, not erase
14 them. We're not just fighting for fairness. We're
15 fighting for memory, dignity, and power. But not on our
16 watch, because we deserve more. God bless you, and God
17 bless Texas.

18 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, Any
19 questions?

20 (Silence.)

21 THE CHAIR: Thank you, sir, for being
22 here. Let's go with Kathleen. Chair calls Kathleen
23 Thomas. Kathleen, are you there with us?

24 (Silence.)

25 THE CHAIR: Kathleen, you might try to

1 turn your video on and unmute yourself because we show
2 you're there with us.

3 MS. KATHLEEN THOMAS: Can you hear me
4 now?

5 THE CHAIR: Yes. There you are. Thank
6 you.

7 MS. KATHLEEN THOMAS: Okay.

8 THE CHAIR: Sorry for that.

9 MS. KATHLEEN THOMAS: I had the wrong
10 cord plugged in.

11 THE CHAIR: That's all right. Would you
12 please, just for the record, tell us your name, if
13 you're representing any organization, and if there's any
14 title you would like us to be aware of, and please try
15 to hold your testimony to two minutes.

16 MS. KATHLEEN THOMAS: I'm Kathleen
17 Thomas, representing myself. I live in the Hays County
18 part of CD21, and my roots in Texas go back to before
19 Texas was Texas. When my fifth great grandfather fought
20 in the Revolutionary War and then the Texas War for
21 Independence, he was fighting against despotic rulers
22 and this descendant of his doesn't want his service to
23 have been in vain.

24 In the unprecedented 2003 redistricting
25 by what was a new Republican majority in the Texas

1 legislature, then U.S. House Majority Leader Delay
2 argued that our Congressional delegation should reflect
3 the percentage of votes that President Bush received
4 from Texans.

5 I was here for all of those hearings
6 with my two year old daughter [distorted audio]. Under
7 Delay's formula, Republicans are already grossly
8 overrepresented in Congress. If aligned with how Texans
9 voted in the latest presidential election, that
10 delegation would have 21 Republican seats and 17
11 Democratic ones. Instead, 28 districts were drawn to
12 benefit mostly white Republicans, ignoring the majority
13 of growth that came from people of color. And now you
14 want more?

15 The current maps are already in a
16 lawsuit, and I have no faith that this would be any more
17 fair. If Republicans want to have more elected, come up
18 with better policies, policies that actually help people
19 instead of hurting them, rather than cheating us out of
20 the representation we've clearly shown we want by our
21 Presidential voting.

22 Instead, if you do this highly-unpopular
23 President's bidding in his desperation to destroy our
24 constitutional government and turn us into a
25 dictatorship with no balance of power, you will be held

1 responsible. If only Republicans can win and they
2 continue to refuse to show any moral courage, we're
3 doomed.

4 Absolute power corrupts absolutely, and
5 we're seeing this here and now. For those of us who
6 claim to be Christian, Micah 6:8 is a scripture we'd all
7 do well to follow. "Do justice, love mercy, and walk
8 humbly with our God." Thank you.

9 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
10 questions?

11 (Silence.)

12 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being with
13 here with us today. Chair calls Denisce Palacios.

14 MS. DENISCE PALACIOS: Good morning. My
15 name is Denisce Palacios, and I'm the Texas State Lead
16 for Climate Cabinet testifying on the revised
17 redistricting plan.

18 I would like to note that these hearings
19 and public testimony on the nonissue of redistricting
20 have come before any kind of disaster prevention,
21 disaster relief, or recovery legislation while Texans
22 are still sorting through the rubble of our most recent
23 climate catastrophe.

24 I was born and raised in the Rio Grande
25 Valley, and I have lived here my whole life. Ahead of

1 the creation of these maps, I asked that the legislature
2 consider that the culture and the experiences of people
3 here in the Rio Grande Valley are vastly different than
4 those of folks outside of the checkpoints.

5 Cuero cattle ranchers and sixth
6 generation families in East Texas face very different
7 issues than binational first and second generation
8 families in Brownsville with a deeply personal
9 relationship to the Mexico border.

10 And yet, prior to 2021, we were in the
11 same Congressional District 34. As a former
12 congressional and district staffer, I know firsthand
13 that stretched out gerrymandered congressional districts
14 make it extremely difficult for members to visit and
15 consult with their constituents. They strain district
16 staff resources, and they further weaken civic
17 engagement.

18 Should we continue this process, a
19 congressional member split across the State could have
20 to decide between visiting a community hit by a
21 hurricane or cattle ranchers hit by the epidemic of
22 screw worms since these two communities are eight hours
23 away from each other.

24 Texans deserve proper representation and
25 attentive representatives that have the ability to meet

1 with all of their constituents. But our Governor
2 prefers to entertain the whims of the president looking
3 to squeeze out five partisan seats, instead of
4 prioritizing the needs of Texans devastated by floods
5 only an hour away from the Capitol.

6 I ask that this committee take the time
7 to create a fair process truly inclusive of all Texans
8 with citizen input, review, and approval. Because
9 legislators shouldn't be selecting their voters. Voters
10 elect their legislators.

11 I will conclude by saying that I hope
12 that you will soon return to focusing on what truly
13 matters in this moment, supporting Texans whose lives
14 have been devastated by the floods and tackling the
15 climate crisis that caused this disaster. And I also
16 commend you for providing Zoom access today, and I look
17 forward to the provision of online testimonies for
18 future bills and hearings. Thank you so much for your
19 time.

20 THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.
21 Members, are there any questions?

22 (Silence.)

23 THE CHAIR: All right. Thank you again
24 for being here. And chair calls Kiersten Zundel.
25 Kiersten Zundel.

1 MS. KIERSTEN ZUNDEL: Yeap.

2 THE CHAIR: There you are.

3 MS. KIERSTEN ZUNDEL: Can you hear me?

4 THE CHAIR: Great.

5 MS. KIERSTEN ZUNDEL: Okay.

6 THE CHAIR: We sure can. Welcome. And
7 again -- you've probably heard -- just state your name
8 and if you're representing anyone, and please try to
9 hold your testimony to about two minutes.

10 MS. KIERSTEN ZUNDEL: Okay. My name is
11 Kiersten Zundal. I live in Travis County in
12 Congressional District 35, and I'm testifying on my own
13 behalf. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,
14 thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

15 I'm not here just to oppose a map, but
16 to call out a betrayal of our democracy, our
17 communities, and the people who make this State run.

18 Across Texas, people are struggling,
19 working multiple jobs, caring for families, surviving
20 floods. And, through it all, we're told to just keep
21 going. But instead of drawing maps that represent us,
22 this government draws lines that silence us. This
23 redistricting push ordered by Trump and carried out by
24 Texas Republicans isn't about fairness.

25 It's about fear, fear of a multiracial

1 working class majority that's growing stronger. Fear of
2 a public that's tired of being shut out while
3 billionaires and lobbyists call the shots.

4 Texas is nearly 60 percent people of
5 color, yet these maps dilute their power to protect a
6 shrinking political elite. Who benefits? Not the
7 workers, not the teachers, not the people still waiting
8 for flood relief, but corporate landlords and oil
9 billionaires.

10 Angela Davis reminds us, "the idea of
11 freedom is inconceivable without the power to reshape
12 society, and that power lies with the multiracial
13 working class, not the politicians and corporations
14 rigging the system." Noam Chomsky exposed how this
15 rigging works, a manufactured consent that turns stolen
16 land, stolen labor, and stolen votes into policy, these
17 hearings, these maps, their tactics.

18 Representation should serve the people,
19 not protect the powerful. You may not fear today's
20 testimony or tomorrow or yesterday, but you should fear
21 the movement that's coming. Because this is not your
22 State to rule. This is your State to build. Thank you.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
24 questions?

25 (Silence.)

1 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here.

2 Chair calls Alfredo Arellano.

3 MR. ALFREDO ARELLANO: Yes. My name is
4 Alfredo Arellano. I am representing myself. I'm
5 currently a resident of Maverick County. I'm 24 years
6 old, and I understand the importance of politics. With
7 that being said, I would like to emphasize and stress
8 I'm in strong support of redrawing the Congressional
9 District maps because it is time that Hispanic
10 Republicans, in particular, have the representation that
11 I feel they desperately deserve, need, and wanted.

12 When we look at the results of the last
13 presidential election, we saw that, based off exit
14 polls, President Trump won about 55 percent of the
15 Latino vote. Senator Cruz won about 52 percent of the
16 Latino vote. But yet, when we look at the maps and how
17 many congressional Republicans that are Hispanic
18 represent Hispanic districts, it is significantly low,
19 particularly in the Valley area, because there's a lot
20 of people that are talking right now that this is going
21 to dilute the minority vote, the Hispanic vote, that
22 Hispanics don't want this. Nobody wanted this. Nobody
23 asked me until right now.

24 And I think it's time that we draw the
25 maps to look like us. Because, under the Voting Rights

1 Act, we actually saw that we can go ahead and make
2 minority conservative districts, especially if there is
3 a specific area of Hispanic individuals that tend to
4 vote the same, which in this case would be Republican.
5 Because a lot of people say that Hispanics vote
6 Democrat. My county is the exact opposite of that.
7 We're 58,000 in population. Our CVAP is 94.1 percent.
8 And the top three Federal Republicans, Tony Gonzalez,
9 Ted Cruz, and Donald Trump won 57 percent of the vote
10 here in 94.1 percent Hispanic Maverick County.

11 And so, that's why I believe that we
12 need to redraw the maps to look like us. And that is
13 what we are doing as Hispanics. We are shifting more in
14 wanting to vote for the more conservative candidate.
15 Even with the Democrats that are elected, they tend to
16 be Blue Dog and conservative Democrats. And so, that's
17 why redrawing the maps is very important.

18 And, you know, like I said, in our
19 county, for our congressional race, the only candidate,
20 out of all the parties that we have, the two political
21 parties, Tony Gonzalez, the Republican, was the only
22 candidate that won all 16 of our precincts.

23 And, again, we're 94.1 percent Hispanic.
24 So I urge this -- the Texas Senate and the Texas
25 House -- to go ahead and redraw the maps to look like

1 our communities, not just create Hispanic majority
2 districts, but Hispanic conservative districts. So,
3 thank you to the Texas Senate Committee for your time
4 and God bless.

5 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
6 questions?

7 (Silence.)

8 THE CHAIR: Sir, thank you for being
9 here today. I'm going to call up, the next list would
10 be Heidi Bray, John Sheppard, Josh Robbins, Sheryl
11 O'Briant, and Ryan Cook.

12 Let me say that again. Heidi Bray, John
13 Sheppard Josh Robins, Sheryl O'Briant, and Ryan Cook.
14 Mr. Shepard.

15 MR. JOHN SHEPPARD: Good morning or
16 afternoon. I appreciate the time to testify. My name
17 is John Sheppard. I live in Representative Lloyd
18 Doggett's district, probably the most redistricted man
19 in Congress.

20 THE CHAIR: Okay. Are you representing
21 an organization today or just yourself?

22 MR. JOHN SHEPPARD: On behalf of myself
23 and the people of South Austin and Central Texas.

24 THE CHAIR: All right.

25 MR. JOHN SHEPPARD: I won't take the

1 full two minutes. I just wanted to express my -- my
2 dismay and disappointment at the expense and time being
3 wasted on such an unnecessary action. The census is the
4 time to redistrict the State. And, in between the
5 partisan gerrymandering helps no one other than those
6 that it unrightfully helps. And I wish that we would
7 devote more time to the necessary problems that, that
8 need to be addressed, flood control being foremost among
9 them.

10 I wish that this would be reconsidered
11 by the Governor as a special charge and that you guys
12 wouldn't have to be there wasting your time. But, more
13 importantly, like I mentioned, the expense of carrying
14 on a special session for reasons that aren't really
15 important to the majority of Texans. But the
16 gerrymandering that's occurred in the past has allowed
17 it to wear a small minority has taken over the control
18 of the State to the detriment of the majority's wills.
19 I appreciate the time to testify. And, again, I hope
20 you guys can wrap this up quick and get to work on
21 things that are really important.

22 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Sheppard.
23 Members, are there any questions?

24 (Silence.)

25 THE CHAIR: Thank you again for being

1 here. Heidi Bray. Chair calls Heidi Bray.

2 MS. HEIDI BRAY: Here I am. Hold on one
3 second. Getting my start -- starting my video. Can you
4 see me?

5 THE CHAIR: We can see you.

6 MS. HEIDI BRAY: Hello to the Senate
7 committee. Thank you for hearing my voice today. Yet
8 none of us should be talking at all about redistricting.
9 We should be...

10 THE CHAIR: Ms. Bray, forgive me for
11 interrupting, but just to make sure we've got the record
12 correct, are you representing yourself or an
13 organization today?

14 MS. HEIDI BRAY: Myself.

15 THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Please
16 proceed. I'm sorry for interrupting you.

17 MS. HEIDI BRAY: That's okay. Sorry for
18 jumping in.

19 Yet none of us should be talking at all
20 about redistricting. We should be talking about the
21 disastrous flooding that has cost 139 people's lives and
22 \$18 billion -- it makes me cry every time I have to say
23 this -- and damages and economic loss.

24 Texas just received \$11 billion in
25 reimbursements from the Federal government for our

1 border's penny. The legislature did not appropriate or
2 count on this money.

3 So, why not give these funds to all
4 those who are affected by the horrific disaster. Greg
5 Abbott has millions appropriated in the most recent
6 budget bill for discretionary use. Which means he is
7 deciding not to spend that on flood warning systems.
8 That is what we should be also talking about today.

9 What he and all the Republicans are
10 doing is kneeling to -- I feel, my personal opinion -- A
11 king and a felon. You are following orders to pick up
12 five seats through redistricting. Does that not sound
13 exactly like the phone call that the felon made to the
14 Georgia Secretary of State Board to find 11,780 more
15 votes. At least the Georgia Secretary stood strong for
16 democracy. Abbott -- and it seems like all of you -- no
17 longer stand for our democracy.

18 You stand for this phallus fascist
19 regime, a regime that only knows how to win, is by
20 cheating now. You could not wait 10, a normal 10 years,
21 period, for before you begin gerrymandering as you did
22 in 2021. At least then you let all districts have a
23 voice.

24 Now, you're only letting Austin, Dallas,
25 and Houston have one, and rushing through it in 30 days.

1 Not allowing the 1.4 million in the Rio Grande or in the
2 San Antonio area, Jefferson County. They are not being
3 represented. You want to pass a map that we haven't
4 seen yet. My main question is: Why has there not been
5 a map shown? Thank you.

6 THE CHAIR: Well, thank you for being
7 here. Members, are there any questions?

8 (Silence.)

9 THE CHAIR: Thank you, again, for being
10 here.

11 MS. HEIDI BRAY: Thank you.

12 THE CHAIR: Josh Robins, Chair calls
13 Josh Robins.

14 MR. JOSH ROBINS: Hello, can you hear
15 me?

16 THE CHAIR: Yes. If you would, just
17 please state your name, sir, and if you're representing
18 any organization or just -- or representing yourself.

19 MR. JOSH ROBINS: My name is Josh
20 Robins, and I'm just representing myself. I'm going to
21 keep it short. Because I, honestly, don't think I have
22 anything to say here that anyone else has not said,
23 especially Ms. Alvarado, who I applaud for her -- her
24 words this morning.

25 I will share my story that I live in

1 Austin, and I -- but I grew up in Cleburne and -- which
2 is up in Johnson County south of Fort Worth -- and when
3 I moved down here to Austin, I was very excited to not
4 live in a place that was so rigid and not to -- not to
5 sound partisan here -- but very conservative, not
6 necessarily in the political sense.

7 I got all the way down here, a
8 three-hour drive, moved into my new apartment, and found
9 that I was being represented by a representative in
10 Cleburne, Texas. So, I'm all for redistricting, but
11 maybe not in the way that this agenda item is calling
12 for.

13 That's all I've got to say. Thank you.
14 I hope you all will do the right thing and drop this
15 thing, and get back to working on things that serve the
16 citizens of Texas, not just Donald Trump. Thank you.

17 THE CHAIR: Members, any question?

18 (Silence.)

19 THE CHAIR: Okay. Next, the Chair will
20 call Ryan Cook.

21 MR. RYAN COOK: Hello. Can you hear me?

22 THE CHAIR: We can barely hear you.

23 Mr. Cook, we can barely hear you.

24 MR. RYAN COOK: Oh, can you hear me?

25 THE CHAIR: Yes. That's better. Thank

1 you.

2 MR. RYAN COOK: Okay. Good afternoon --
3 Or, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Do you need me to state my
4 name and all that?

5 THE CHAIR: Yes. Please state your name
6 and your position on the legislation, and if you
7 represent yourself, please indicate so.

8 MR. RYAN COOK: Yes, sir. My name is
9 Ryan Cook, and I'm just representing myself today. So,
10 may I begin?

11 THE CHAIR: You can begin.

12 MR. RYAN COOK: Okay. Good afternoon,
13 Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, and members of the
14 committee. My name is Ryan Cook, and I serve as a
15 Republican precinct chair in Nacogdoches County. Thank
16 you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you
17 today.

18 I'm here to raise a concern About
19 Congressional District 17, which is current -- which
20 currently includes Nacogdoches County. With today's
21 hearing focused on Central Texas, I felt it was the
22 right time to share my perspective on a district that,
23 quite frankly, does not reflect our community's
24 geography or identity.

25 I support the redistricting plan and

1 appreciate the work this committee is doing to create a
2 new map for our State. I offer this recommendation as a
3 good faith suggestion to improve the current map that we
4 have.

5 As it stands, District 17 stretches from
6 Nacogdoches to Waco, and then all the way down to Round
7 Rock in Williamson County. That's a span of 211 miles
8 and a four-hour drive.

9 I have great respect for Congressman
10 Pete Sessions who works hard to serve as constituents,
11 but it's unreasonable to expect effective representation
12 in a district that covers such a broad and disconnected
13 region.

14 The district also fails the basic
15 redistricting principle of compactness. Stretching
16 across vastly different parts of our State, from the
17 Piney Woods of East Texas to the suburbs of Austin, this
18 district lacks geographic cohesion.

19 It simply doesn't make sense for
20 Nacogdoches, a deeply-rooted East Texas community,
21 culturally, economically and historically to be placed
22 in the same Congressional District as part of Austin's
23 outer metro. An East Texas county should be in an East
24 Texas district.

25 Furthermore, I want to emphasize

1 historical precedent. For three decades, Nacogdoches
2 County was part of Texas's first District. That
3 alignment made sense. By placing Nacogdoches back in
4 the first District, we would not only ensure more
5 consistent representation with our neighboring East
6 Texas counties, but we would also contribute to a
7 cleaner, more logical map.

8 This change would reduce the burden on
9 our congressmen, better reflect our regional identity,
10 and strengthen the integrity of the map overall. Thank
11 you everyone --

12 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you.

13 MR. RYAN COOK: -- for your time and --

14 THE VICE CHAIR: THAT would be your
15 time.

16 MR. RYAN COOK: -- consideration. I
17 appreciate your work.

18 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you very much,
19 sir. Members, any questions for Mr. Cook?

20 (Silence.)

21 THE VICE CHAIR: With no further
22 questions, thank you, Mr. Cook, for your testimony.

23 Next, members, we have an entirely new
24 panel, and first the chair will call Carol Philipson,
25 Monique Stallings, Antonio Holverstott, Amy Liebert,

1 also George Patrin.

2 MR. ANTONIO HOLVERSTOTT: Hello.

3 THE CHAIR: Please state your name, sir,
4 and you have one minute to testify -- two minutes,
5 Excuse me, sir. Two minutes.

6 MR. ANTONIO HOLVERSTOTT: Thank you.
7 Hello. My name is Antonio Holverstott, and I am
8 speaking on behalf of myself. I want to say that
9 partisan gerrymandering and other forms of
10 gerrymandering have been and are a plague upon local,
11 state, and federal politics. Partisan and other forms
12 of gerrymandering have led and does lead to
13 sociopolitical political marginalization, ostracization,
14 violence, and repression of other political viewpoints
15 and groups that can help bring reform, and parson and
16 other forms of gerrymandering contribute to electoral
17 authoritarianism. Thank you.

18 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you for your
19 testimony. Members, any questions?

20 (Silence.)

21 THE VICE CHAIR: If not, we will
22 proceed.

23 AUDIO REPLAY: (Previous audio being
24 replayed)... lead to sociopolitical political
25 marginalization, ostracization, violence, and repression

1 of other political viewpoints and groups that can help
2 bring reform...

3 THE VICE CHAIR: Yes, please, for this
4 panel, could you please mute for any background noise.
5 Thank you very much.

6 Carol Philipson.

7 (Audio replaying in the background,
8 audio stopped.)

9 Monique Stallings.

10 THE VICE CHAIR: Yes, please, for this
11 panel, please mute.

12 THE CLERK: Carol, we're going to place
13 back in the waiting room.

14 THE VICE CHAIR: Ms. Philpson, we are
15 going to place you back in the waiting room.

16 MS. CAROL PHILPSON: Hello. Can you
17 hear me? Hello.

18 THE VICE CHAIR: Yes, Ms. Philipson, we
19 can hear you.

20 (Simultaneous cross-talk.)

21 THE VICE CHAIR: We're going to place
22 you -- Ms. Philpson, unfortunately, your background
23 noise is preventing us from hearing your testimony at
24 this time. We're going to place you back in the waiting
25 room, and we'll call you again on the next panel.

1 Please be sure to mute any background noise.

2 And, for future witnesses that are in
3 the waiting room, please address this as well, for
4 expediency with the committee and for those that are
5 waiting to testify.

6 Ms. Stallings, please proceed with your
7 testimony. Thank you. Please unmute and then proceed
8 with your testimony, Ms. Stallings.

9 (Silence.)

10 THE VICE CHAIR: George Patrin, if you
11 can hear us, please proceed with your testimony.

12 MR. GEORGE PATRIN: Yes, thank you to
13 the special committee on Congressional redistricting for
14 this opportunity. I'm a colonel retired army, Dr.
15 George Patrin. I spent over 23 years in the military
16 representing health care for military families, and I'm
17 now on retirement.

18 I represent all citizens to try to
19 improve health care processes. I represent myself first
20 and foremost. Secondly, those who live at my residence
21 in the ZIP code 78218, Bexar County, Northeast San
22 Antonio, my wife and my mother in law.

23 I am an independent. I've always been
24 so for 50-plus years of voting. This means I have
25 always voted for the best person possible for the

1 position or office under consideration. I have never
2 voted along strict party lines. I represent myself
3 first, until now, of those who live at my residence in
4 ZIP code 78218, Bexar County, Northeast San Antonio. My
5 wife [distorted audio]. I'm hearing an echo. Is there
6 a reason for that?

7 THE VICE CHAIR: It should be good now,
8 Mr. Patrin. Please proceed.

9 MR. GEORGE PATRIN: Oh, okay. Thank
10 you. [Distorted audio] ...years of voting. This means
11 I have always -- I'm still hearing myself talk. I've
12 got everything muted.

13 THE VICE CHAIR: For anyone else waiting
14 to testify, please mute for background noise.
15 [Distorted audio background echo]. Ms. Stallings, that
16 continues to be you. Please continue to mute.

17 MR. GEORGE PATRIN: Okay. It looks
18 good. Again, I've always been an independent, and they
19 haven't voted party lines. But I cannot, in good
20 conscience, vote for any Republican running today under
21 the current circumstances. The current Republican Party
22 doesn't represent any of my interests or values. None.
23 And that includes this current issue.

24 Texas is already a severely
25 gerrymandered State and does not need it to be done

1 again at five years out in this power grab to get even
2 more conservatives in office. I really appreciate the
3 three senators, Alvarado, Miles, and Hinojosa, who spoke
4 earlier in introducing themselves to be clearer on their
5 concerns on this.

6 I've been educated by this session. So,
7 thank you, Committee, for allowing those of us citizens,
8 who you work for, to be able to be -- to find out what
9 it means to be race blind and the three-fifths rule.
10 We're already severely gerrymandered. I'm not in favor
11 of a new special redistricting plan at the present time.
12 Unless, like my -- like the prior witnesses -- we make
13 it so that it really represents the people of the
14 geographic area. As a white-privileged male, I am
15 embarrassed to be in that category, because I see people
16 I've represented in retirement not being represented to
17 be able to get their needs met.

18 So Republicans currently representing me
19 in the House and Senate do not represent me. When I
20 write to them or call them, I get no response at all,
21 and they continue to vote 180 degrees the opposite from
22 the way I feel and what I'd like to see happen.

23 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Patrin.
24 Your time is expired. I appreciate your testimony.
25 It's very much appreciated. Members, any questions?

1 (Silence.)

2 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you, sir.

3 Monique Stallings, please proceed with your testimony.

4 Thank you.

5 (Silence.)

6 THE VICE CHAIR: Amy Liebert, please

7 proceed with your testimony. Thank you.

8 MS. AMY LIEBERT: Hello, can you hear

9 me?

10 THE VICE CHAIR: I can. Thank you.

11 MS. AMY LIEBERT: Okay. Hi, my name is

12 Amy Liebert. I'm representing myself. Thank you

13 chairs, senators, and members of the committee.

14 I'm here not as a political operative or

15 legal expert, but as a concerned citizen and proud Texan

16 to express my strong opposition to redistricting efforts

17 and the special session that aims to gerrymander our

18 districts even further for political gain.

19 The United States Constitution

20 guarantees each citizen the right to vote and to equal

21 representation. The 14th and 15th Amendments make clear

22 that this right cannot be denied or diluted. But when

23 political leaders manipulate maps to protect their power

24 instead of reflect the people, that right is violated.

25 Senate Bill 1 passed in 2021 made it

1 harder for Texans to vote by banning drive thru and 24
2 hour voting methods that supported participants
3 participation by working families, the elderly, and
4 communities of color.

5 Now, instead of expanding access and
6 fairness, we are trying to redraw maps that further
7 suppress the popular will. Texas has 38 congressional
8 seats. Republicans hold 25 of them. Democrats hold 12.
9 And yet 46.5 percent of Texan voters identified as
10 Democrats compared to the 38 percent as Republicans.

11 This is not fair representative
12 representation. It's political engineering, and it's
13 wrong. As the late Carl Sagan wisely said, "in a
14 democracy, disagreements are welcome, but they must be
15 honest disagreements." This process is not honest. It
16 is designed to silence disagreements by distorting the
17 people's voice.

18 In the words of James Madison, "the
19 people are the only legitimate fountain of power." And
20 if we believe that to be true, then let us ensure our
21 redistricting process honors that power, not diminishes
22 it. Thank you for allowing me to speak and be part of
23 this democratic process. Thank you.

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Liebert.
25 Ms. Stallings, we'll proceed with you if you're able to

1 unmute. There you go. And please proceed. Thank you
2 very much.

3 MS. MONIQUE STALLINGS: Thank you. My
4 name is Monique Stallings, and I am with the Bexar
5 County Democratic Party, but today I'm representing
6 myself. And I'm here today, basically, to speak on,
7 basically, reiterating what everyone has been saying
8 about the redistricting as well as the gerrymandering.

9 And I want to start with a scripture
10 from Ecclesiastic verse 7, it says the time -- there is
11 a time to speak, and there's a time to be quiet. And
12 right now, I am speaking among other people in reference
13 to this redistricting.

14 Since the foundation of these United
15 States, there has always been a thing dealing with
16 racial bias. Regardless of what the President of this
17 United States is saying, regardless of what other
18 leaders are saying, it is not so.

19 I have a degree in psychology, a BS in
20 psychology, as well as a graduate certificate in our
21 healthcare management, and I say this to say this:

22 Statistics are always being done, and
23 based on statistics that now the population is the
24 Latino community, they are the majority nationwide.
25 Then it is the black African American multicultural

1 race, which is the next. Then we have the Anglos and
2 the Europeans. And we know that they are the minority.

3 Yet, and I'm not being racial about
4 this, but we have to bring equality, and we have to be
5 honest that they are the minority, but yet, they are the
6 ones that are ruling everything.

7 And it's a time that this has to change.
8 So, by the President of this United States that has
9 brought this to Texas, it has also brought up the cries
10 and the tears of everyone in this Texas state to start
11 speaking up and to take the law that states that -- I'm
12 sorry -- that the 15th amendment to the United States
13 Constitution prohibits racial voting discrimination.
14 But yet, we have had this, and we see this time and time
15 and time again.

16 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you,
17 Ms. Stallings. That would be your timeframe on the
18 clock.

19 MS. MONIQUE STALLINGS: I'm sorry.

20 THE VICE CHAIR: I appreciate your
21 testimony --

22 MS. MONIQUE STALLINGS: Thank you for
23 your time in listening to what I had to say.

24 THE VICE CHAIR: -- and your time today.
25 Thank you, Miss. Members, any questions for

1 Ms. Stallings?

2 (Silence.)

3 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you. At this
4 time, we will call Carol Philipson. Rachel Preston.
5 Chair calls Ashley Jones, Teresa Hall, Norma Laird, and
6 Whitney Rowlett. Thank you.

7 MS. CAROL PHILPSON: Is that what I need
8 to press?

9 UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: If you want to
10 turn on your video...

11 THE VICE CHAIR: At this time,
12 Ms. Philipson, you can begin.

13 MS. CAROL PHILPSON: It's not working.

14 UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: They may have
15 control of it from their side.

16 MS. CAROL PHILPSON: Hello.

17 THE VICE CHAIR: Yes, Ms. Philipson, we
18 can hear your -- we can hear you now. Go ahead.

19 MS. CAROL PHILPSON: Oh, good. Okay.

20 All right, my name is Carol Philipson, and I'm

21 representing myself, and I live in Austin, Texas.

22 Please do not redistrict. How can this be done when the

23 2021 redistricting plan is -- oh, okay. My name is

24 Carol Philipson. I'm representing myself. Okay. Good.

25 All right. Thank you. All right.

1 THE VICE CHAIR: Ms. Laird, if you would
2 proceed while Ms. Philipson works out her connection
3 difficulties.

4 MS. CAROL PHILPSON: Okay. Is that
5 better? [Muted]...

6 MS. NORMA LAIRD: Hi, my name is Norma
7 Laird, and I'd like to take a second to introduce
8 myself. My father was an Air Force retiree, and he
9 retired to Austin, Texas. He taught at the University
10 of -- actually the St. Edwards University, and I grew up
11 in Travis Heights. I went to UT. I got my Master's at
12 Texas State. I love Lady Bird Johnson and wildflowers.

13 I'm currently a retired teacher. I'm a
14 mother, I'm a grandmother, and I have concerns about
15 Central Texas. The Uvalde shootings really made me
16 cognizant of the need to really look at, you know,
17 having stronger control over firearms.

18 It's important to me that we have a
19 strong FEMA to handle things like our flood situation.
20 The Austin Airport is in real need of air comptrollers,
21 and we need to strengthen that system. We need to
22 strengthen FEMA. We need -- these are concerns of
23 Central Texas.

24 In other words, every community has
25 needs that are near and dear to their heart. You know,

1 as a teacher, special needs students, you know, there's
2 a huge need for federal support. I need representatives
3 who stand for what is near and dear to my heart.

4 You know, the environment, beautiful
5 Central Texas, safe skies, FEMA, education, the
6 environment, and being physically responsible, not
7 throwing our country into trillions of dollars of debt.

8 And I'm concerned about that. I'm the
9 ninth out of nine kids. I have worked since I was 14
10 years old. I paid my way through school. You know,
11 every community and every person needs to be able to
12 strengthen their community, and we should be able to do
13 that through our representatives. Cutting up the
14 district...

15 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you for your
16 testimony. That would be the end of your time.

17 MS. NORMA LAIRD: Cutting up the
18 districts...

19 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

20 MS. NORMA LAIRD: Okay. Thank you.

21 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you so much.

22 Ashley Jones, please unmute and provide your testimony.
23 Thank you.

24 MS. ASHLY JONES: Hello, I'm Ashley
25 Jones. I am a Texan who's testifying on behalf of

1 myself. Good morning. Thank you for taking the time to
2 hear me. I want to begin by stating that I think that
3 this is a gross misuse of time, attention, and the
4 public trust that's been placed in this body.

5 The fact that Texans are facing real
6 challenges right now, flood recovery being one of the
7 most urgent, I would much rather see my elected
8 representatives focusing on rebuilding communities than
9 spending your time and energy granting political favors
10 to President Trump.

11 You know, at the beginning of these
12 hearings, Senator Hinojoso rightly pointed out that
13 redistricting was already completed in 2021. There's
14 been no new census, no new demographic data. So,
15 there's really no justification for redistricting now.
16 The only clear explanation for why we're sitting here,
17 why we're having this conversation, is a partisan one.

18 This process appears to be designed to
19 entrench power even further by disenfranchising minority
20 voters. We've heard so many people speaking before this
21 body today saying the same thing. I've heard almost no
22 one who wants this to happen.

23 I think there was maybe one person who
24 testified in support out of everyone who you've heard so
25 far. This is not only unethical. It's

1 unconstitutional. The current maps are already being
2 challenged in court, and I feel that this process is
3 actually trying to sort of double down on the mistakes
4 that Texas has already made with its redistricting and
5 gerrymandering.

6 I know that many of you, most of whom
7 aren't sitting in your chairs right now, but hopefully
8 you'll hear what I have to say anyway, are ethical
9 public servants, people who care about both our state
10 and our country.

11 So today, I hope that you know I'm
12 appealing not just to your legal duty under the
13 Constitution, but also your conscience, that you know
14 this is the wrong thing to do. A recent poll by Z to A
15 Research found that 63 percent of likely voters -- 41
16 percent of who are Republicans -- believe that redrawing
17 is unnecessary...

18 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Jones.
19 That would be your timeframe.

20 MS. ASHLY JONES: Thank you.

21 THE VICE CHAIR: I appreciate your
22 testimony very much. Members, any questions?

23 (Silence.)

24 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you so much.
25 Whitney Rowlett, please proceed. Please state your name

1 and your position on the legislation and your -- who you
2 represent if anyone other than yourself. Please
3 proceed.

4 MS. WHITNEY ROWLETT: Great. Thank you
5 so much. My name is Whitney Rowlett. I'm representing
6 myself. And thank you to the committee chair, vice
7 chairs, and all the committee members for this
8 opportunity to speak.

9 I live in Representative Lloyd Goggett's
10 district in North Austin, and this is an area that is
11 continually in danger of being redistricted. I have
12 been a member of multiple districts during my tenure in
13 Austin, and every time that we've changed districts,
14 it's been purely for partisan purposes. I am appalled
15 that we're even speaking about this unprecedented
16 redistricting during a time when we should be discussing
17 both disaster recovery and preparation in the face of
18 continued climate change and instability.

19 This is an unprecedented attempt at mid
20 decade redistricting without updated census data,
21 without demographics, without being shown the proposed
22 redistricting map. And all of this is going to be at
23 expense of representation of people of color.

24 Many of my fellow Texans have spoken in
25 a far more eloquent way today on the details of why this

1 particular proposal is so abhorrent.

2 And I, wholeheartedly, support measures
3 that are being taken that are for the benefit an
4 accurate representation of the people of Texas. Voters
5 across the State are being disenfranchised in multiple
6 ways. And this attempt at blatant partisan
7 gerrymandering further exasperates voter access to our
8 opportunities for fair representation. Thank you so
9 much for your time today.

10 THE VICE CHAIR: Thank you. Sorry,
11 forgot to turn my mic back on. But thank you for being
12 here today. Members, are there any questions?

13 (Silence.)

14 THE VICE CHAIR: Seeing none, Chair
15 calls Rachel Preston.

16 MS. RACHEL PRESETON: Thank you. Are
17 you able to hear me?

18 THE VICE CHAIR: We sure can. Thank
19 you. As you know, just please state your name, and if
20 you're representing any organization, and please try to
21 hold it to two minutes. Thank you.

22 MS. RACHEL PRESETON: Yes, sir. Thank
23 you. My name is Rachel Preston. I'm a public school
24 teacher in the Austin area testifying on my own behalf
25 against redistricting efforts. I live in Congressional

1 District 37. I would also like to thank you for the
2 opportunity to testify. Even though I was at the
3 Capitol for 10 or 11 hours yesterday, I was not
4 permitted to testify in person at the House Committee
5 because of the imposed time limit.

6 THE VICE CHAIR: Well, we're glad you're
7 here today.

8 MS. RACHEL PRESETON: I'm here today so
9 you hear me when I say...I'm sorry?

10 THE VICE CHAIR: I said, we're glad
11 you're here today.

12 MS. RACHEL PRESETON: Thank you. I'm
13 here today so you hear me when I say I'm against even
14 exploring redistricting. And I'm outraged that my state
15 is taking these actions to strip legally elected
16 representation from Texans and erase the outcome of fair
17 elections.

18 My vote is my voice. It's the most
19 powerful way I can shape the world around me because
20 it's the only way I can directly affect the policies
21 enacted by my government at all levels. I'm here today
22 because I want Texas to be a place where all voices are
23 heard.

24 I want us to stand up and say that we
25 are not going to change our districts on a whim, we're

1 not going to change our districts to dilute or take away
2 the voice of minorities. Instead of changing the rules
3 to trample on the rights of Texans, I want my government
4 to expand access to the polls to encourage more of us to
5 lift our voices and participate in the process.

6 Because government should empower the
7 people, not disenfranchise and silence them. At a
8 minimum, government should do no harm. But when done
9 right, it makes lives better by working for the people.

10 I'm also here today as someone who grew
11 up proud to be a Texan. I'm proud of all my roots. But
12 I always felt a different kind of pride knowing that my
13 family has lived in this state for eight generations. I
14 want Texas to set a positive example for the rest of the
15 country by taking care of our community. We are in a
16 time of crisis, and we should be focused on helping our
17 neighbors recover, rebuild, and start moving on from the
18 horrible flooding this month.

19 I, therefore, implore you to listen to
20 your constituents. Early redistricting on a political
21 whim of the president is callous, calculated, and a
22 blatant partisan effort to diminish or take away the
23 power of my vote, to silence my voice, and to suppress
24 my rights as a citizen of the United States and resident
25 of Texas.

1 This is tyranny of the worst kind rather
2 than democracy. My neighbors and I, regardless of the
3 color of our skin, regardless of our background, deserve
4 a chance to raise our voices and vote in fairly drawn
5 districts.

6 As your constituent, I respectfully ask
7 you this service. Show the world that we do have
8 integrity and respect for our community by rejecting the
9 changes to our current district maps. Thank you for
10 your time and attention.

11 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
12 questions?

13 (Silence.)

14 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here
15 today.

16 MS. RACHEL PRESETON: Thank you.

17 THE CHAIR: Chair calls...

18 MS. RACHEL PRESETON: Thank you. And
19 thank you to Senator Creighton and Senator Paxton. I've
20 had the pleasure of testifying before you before in the
21 Education Committee.

22 THE CHAIR: Good. Good. Chair calls
23 Teresa Hall. Teresa Hall.

24 MS. TERESA HALL: Hi there. Hi there.
25 Sorry. I had to unmute. Thank you [Zoom froze]...

1 THE CHAIR: It looks like, Ms. Hall,
2 you're having some technical difficulty. I'm going to
3 put you back in the waiting room for just a minute.
4 Your screen froze, and I bet it's an Internet issue.
5 We'll call you back up in just a few minutes.

6 I'm going to go ahead and call the next
7 panel, and I'll include Ms. Hall again so that we can
8 get her back up. The next group will be Danielle
9 McClelland, Idona Griffith, Michelle Venegas Matula,
10 Joan Carney, and Dwain Aidala.

11 I'll say that again: Dwain Aidala, Joan
12 Carney, Michelle Venegas Matula, Idona Griffith, and
13 Danielle McClelland. [Echo feedback] And, if everybody
14 could -- if everybody could please make sure that you're
15 muted. Otherwise, we're gonna hear it in the background
16 here. And Theresa Hall.

17 So, let's go first with Danielle
18 McClelland, [audio replaying echo]. Folks, someone
19 that's in the waiting room with us has their -- doesn't
20 have their system muted. If you would not -- if you
21 would please mute that.

22 All right. Let's go ahead and start
23 with Danielle McClelland. Ms. McClelland, are you
24 there?

25 MS. DANIELLE McCLELLAND: I am. Can you

1 hear me?

2 THE CHAIR: We sure can. And if you
3 would just tell us your name and if you're representing
4 any group...

5 MS. DANIELLE McCLELLAND: Thank you.
6 Hello, my name is Danielle McClelland, and I live in the
7 Claremont neighborhood in Dallas Congressional District
8 32. I'm here to strongly oppose the legislature's
9 attempt to redraw congressional districts mid census.
10 Let's be honest about what this is. It's not about
11 population changes or good governance. It's about
12 power, shifting representation away from communities of
13 color, to protect political interests.

14 It's a deliberate and deeply
15 undemocratic move that echoes Texas's long history of
16 racial gerrymandering.

17 The way districts are drawn determines
18 whether we get leaders who represent our interests or
19 who ignore them. And we are already seeing the
20 consequences when elected officials no longer answer to
21 the people they serve. And that's exactly why
22 redistricting matters.

23 We also know that access to health care
24 is under threat. Dallas County has one of the highest
25 uninsured rates in the nation. The recent federal tax

1 bill passed by the narrowest margin could kick even more
2 Texans off Medicaid. That bill reflects a Congress that
3 does not reflect us.

4 If our communities had real
5 representation, that bill might not have passed. And
6 now this legislature is holding redistricting hearings
7 without even releasing the maps to the public. That is
8 not how a democracy is supposed to function.

9 I'm calling on this committee to do its
10 job on behalf of all Texans, not on behalf of party
11 leaders, lobbyists, or outside influences.

12 You work for the people. We expect a
13 transparent, inclusive, and fair redistricting process.
14 And so, I'm asking for the following: Make sure to hold
15 public hearings after the maps are released, but before
16 they're passed out of committee.

17 Provide at least five days' notice so
18 the public has time to review those maps. Require that
19 lawmakers and whoever drew the map explain how and why
20 the maps were drawn and preserve all records and
21 communications related to redistricting. No deleted
22 files. No hidden conversations.

23 Again, this is your opportunity to break
24 from Texas's discriminatory past and to do what's right
25 for everyone. The public is paying attention and will

1 remember how you choose to handle this process. Thank
2 you for your time.

3 THE CHAIR: Well, thank you. And I
4 noticed you're testifying from your car, which I think
5 is great because I wanted this to be convenient for
6 everybody, so -- and it came across fine. Thank you so
7 much. Members, are there any questions?

8 (Silence.)

9 THE CHAIR: Well, thank you. Let's try
10 Theresa Hall again. Theresa Hall.

11 MS. THERESA HALL: Hi. Can you hear me
12 now?

13 THE CHAIR: We sure can. Welcome,
14 and --

15 MS. THERESA HALL: Thank you.

16 THE CHAIR: -- please proceed.

17 MS. THERESA HALL: Thank you. Sorry
18 about that earlier. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Vice
19 chairs, and members of the committee. My name is Teresa
20 Hall. I'm in Representative Lloyd Doggett's district.
21 I'm a proud resident of Austin, Texas. I'm representing
22 myself.

23 I spent decades working in health care,
24 serving in my community, and advocating for the well
25 being of others. That work was deeply personal and

1 meaningful to me until life took an unexpected turn.

2 After contracting COVID-19, I developed long COVID and
3 Dysautonomia, chronic conditions, that completely
4 changed my daily reality.

5 I went from being a full time health
6 care worker to navigating an exhausting maze of medical
7 appointments, treatments, and limitations. My health
8 challenges have reshaped my life, but they've also made
9 me even more passionate about speaking up, especially
10 when our democracy is under threat.

11 Today I'm here because I am deeply
12 concerned about the push for mid decade redistricting in
13 our state, a move that is clearly designed to serve a
14 national agenda, specifically that of Donald Trump, not
15 the people of Texas. Redistricting is supposed to
16 happen every 10 years after a census. That's the
17 standard and for good reason.

18 It's a process rooted in fairness and
19 population data, not political maneuvering. The redraw
20 of the lines mid decade because the political winds have
21 shifted is not only unethical, it's a direct attack on
22 democratic representation.

23 As someone who has had to fight just to
24 be seen and heard in the healthcare system, I know what
25 it's like to be ignored by those in power. I also know

1 how critical it is for all of us, especially people of
2 marginalized communities, to have our voices count at
3 the ballot box.

4 Mid decade redistricting threats,
5 silences black and brown voters, working class families,
6 people with disabilities, and anyone who doesn't fit
7 neatly into a partisan power map. Texans deserve
8 leaders who focus on what truly matters, public health,
9 education, affordability, and equity, not backroom
10 redistricting games to serve a political figure who no
11 longer holds office.

12 We deserve transparency, consistency,
13 and fairness, not moving the goalposts every time the
14 scoreboard changes. I urge you to reject the blatant
15 power grab -- this blatant power grab -- stand with the
16 people, not party politics. Say "no" to mid decade
17 redistricting. Texas deserves better. Thank you for
18 your time.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here,
20 and thank you for your patience in getting --

21 MS. THERESA HALL: Sure.

22 THE CHAIR: -- that worked out.

23 Members, do you have any questions for the witness?

24 (Silence.)

25 THE CHAIR: Seeing none, Chair calls

1 Idona Griffith. Idona Griffith.

2 MS. IDONA GRIFFITH: I'm here.

3 THE CHAIR: There you are.

4 MS. IDONA GRIFFITH: I'm here. There I
5 am.

6 THE CHAIR: Please, if you would please
7 state your name, and if you're representing any
8 organization.

9 MS. IDONA GRIFFITH: Thank you. My name
10 is Idonna Griffith. I live in Austin, Texas, 78750, and
11 I'm representing myself on this issue. I'm a woman, a
12 mother, a retired teacher, and I've been a proud Texan
13 for nearly 75 years. But right now, I'm not very proud.
14 In fact, I'm disgusted and angry and ashamed. Four
15 years ago, this body adopted new congressional maps,
16 which at that time, the majority of the members claimed
17 were drawn fairly and without racial prejudice.

18 I believe that colorblind is the term
19 that was used. Now, the DOJ is claiming that four
20 majority minority districts were racially gerrymandered
21 at that time and that they must be withdrawn so that the
22 Felon-in-Chief can pick up more votes from Texas. This
23 is not what democracy looks like.

24 In fact, this redistricting effort is
25 taking place without even having maps that are visible

1 to the public. The people of this state are not being
2 fully represented in this process. Texans should know
3 that this whole thing is not just about redistricting to
4 gain more seats for a single election. It is about
5 voting rights, and it is an attempt to further dismantle
6 our democracy.

7 And here, in Texas, where we claim to be
8 strong and independent, our Governor is following orders
9 from the Felon-in-Chief with this body meekly complying
10 at a time when the legislative work of this State should
11 be about adequate flood relief and disaster mitigation,
12 this body is playing political games. I am ashamed.
13 Thank you for your time.

14 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here.
15 And it looked like you were outside. Is that right?

16 MS. IDONA GRIFFITH: I am, sir. Our
17 granddaughter turned 16 this week. So, my husband and
18 I -- I took her to lunch, and I'm going to have to
19 explain to her why I bolted from the table.

20 (Laughter.)

21 THE CHAIR: Well, we're just glad you
22 were able to still carry on your day today. Thank you.

23 MS. IDONA GRIFFITH: Thank you, sir.

24 THE CHAIR: Members, any questions?

25 (Silence.)

1 THE CHAIR: Well, thank you. And tell
2 your granddaughter happy birthday. I'd sing, but that'd
3 be a little too much, I think, so...

4 MS. IDONA GRIFFITH: (Laughs) Thank you,
5 sir.

6 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Chair calls Joan
7 Carney. Joan Carney.

8 MS. JOAN CARNEY: Can you hear me?

9 THE CHAIR: We certainly can. Welcome.

10 MS. JOAN CARNEY: GOOD. I am Joan
11 Carney from Lago Vista Hill Country, and I'm
12 representing myself. I'm here, like others, to ask, why
13 are we even here today? Just three weeks ago, floods
14 killed 135 Texans. Instead of redistricting, why aren't
15 we looking for solutions to the floods that left so many
16 families grieving?

17 I was going to talk about some of them,
18 but then I changed my mind. Instead, some serious
19 questions have been raised today about constitutional
20 issues regarding the July 7 DOJ letter and whether what
21 they are asking the Texas legislature to do is
22 unconstitutional.

23 I support Senator Alvarado's request to
24 bring the DOJ letter writer in to explain and to do
25 that, even if a subpoena is necessary. This should be

1 done as quickly as possible given the DOJ deadline of
2 August 7 and its implied threat. We don't even know
3 what that is because the lawyer hasn't said. I thank
4 you for your time.

5 THE CHAIR: Thank you, ma'am. Members,
6 any questions?

7 (Silence.)

8 THE CHAIR: Seeing none. Chair calls
9 Michelle Venegas Matula.

10 MS. MICHELLE VENEGAS MATULA: Hi.

11 THE CHAIR: Hi. How are you?

12 MS. MICHELLE VENEGAS MATULA: Good.

13 Thank you for having me.

14 THE CHAIR: Thanks. And if you just
15 tell us your name for the record and if you're
16 representing any organization today.

17 MS. MICHELLE VENEGAS MATULA: Yeah. So,
18 I'm Michelle Venegas Mutula, and I'm representing myself
19 as well as Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice
20 Ministry, where I serve as the congregational organizer
21 and acting director for the statewide faith rooted
22 network representing Unitarian Universalists and non EU
23 friends across Texas, where we're committed to equity,
24 democracy, and justice for all people.

25 AND protecting democracy and voting

1 rights is an issue that we're very concerned about. So,
2 we strongly oppose using the special session on
3 redistricting. Texas just redrew its maps in 2021, and
4 we're still waiting for the outcome on those maps that
5 were challenged on racial discrimination.

6 Redoing the process now with no public
7 maps, limited notice, and restricted testimony is not
8 normal. In fact, it's morally indefensible.

9 Let's be honest about why we're here.
10 This redistricting session is not about fair
11 representation. It is being pushed by a federal
12 political agenda that wants five more seats in the U.S.
13 house by breaking apart our black, Latino, and Asian
14 communities, a direct attack on the Voting Rights Act
15 and the voices of Texans of color. Politicians should
16 not get to pick their voters.

17 Voters should be the ones picking and
18 choosing our politicians to represent us. And, in the
19 meantime, Texas is still recovering from catastrophic
20 floods, a mass casualty event made worse by years of
21 underfunded emergency preparedness. Even our youth camp
22 is in the same area, and it was just sheer luck that we
23 had wrapped up camp just the week before.

24 Families are deeply grieving and trying
25 their best to rebuild. Yet our leaders are spending tax

1 dollars on political power grabs instead of saving
2 lives. And while this is happening, this the so called
3 Big Beautiful Bill, threatens to cut health care and
4 food assistance for hundreds of thousands of Texans,
5 including in rural areas.

6 Rural hospitals are already on the
7 brink. Even in Washington County where my in laws live,
8 the labor and delivery unit is, again, possibly closing.
9 The birthplace of Texas will have no place for Texans to
10 give birth. So, why aren't we addressing these real
11 crisis?

12 THE CHAIR: All right, I'm gonna need to
13 cut -- cut you off.

14 MS. MICHELLE VENEGAS MATULA: So, we
15 just call for transparency, fair maps, and independent
16 redistricting commission that reflects the dignity and
17 diversity of all Texans.

18 THE CHAIR: All right. Ma'am?

19 MS. MICHELLE VENEGAS MATULA: Thank you
20 so much for your time.

21 THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

22 Members, are there any questions?

23 (Silence.)

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here
25 today. Chair calls Dwayne Aidala.

1 MR. DWAIN AIDALA: Aidala.

2 THE CHAIR: Aidala. Thank you.

3 Welcome. If you just tell us your name and if you're
4 representing any organization.

5 MR. DWAIN AIDALA: Thank you. My name
6 is Dwain Aidala. I'm a resident of San Marcos, Texas,
7 District 21, and speaking for myself.

8 I'm also a United States Marine. I
9 asked to speak today because I believe that the actions
10 under consideration by this committee violate the oaths
11 that both you and I took as elected representatives and
12 as a member of the armed services.

13 I expect, under our Constitution, that
14 I, as a citizen, have the right to choose my elected
15 representatives and not to have those who have been or
16 want to be elected get to choose who can vote for him to
17 elect him or her.

18 I have with me a cap that I wear on
19 national holidays celebrating the history of this
20 country. It identifies me as a Marine Corps veteran.
21 The cap also says, "earned, never given." I believe
22 this body should consider that statement.

23 It appears to me that the action being
24 considered is really close to, quote, stolen, not really
25 elected. I strongly request that you, as elected Texas

1 senators, look to your sworn oaths and not further
2 expand the disenfranchisement of a large portion of
3 Texas citizens. If anything, you should be working to
4 get us back to the intended meaning of one person, one
5 vote.

6 Finally, the Marines -- in the Marines
7 there is a hand to hand combat term of weapon of
8 opportunity. The Texas Republican Party may think that
9 this abnormal redistricting being considered is such a
10 weapon. I would ask and warn you to consider that this
11 action may be turned back against them.

12 The current federal administration's
13 actions over the past seven months, combined with its
14 insulting gerrymandering of an already unfair District
15 map, it has a high probability of turning your recent
16 supporters into enlightened citizens who realize that
17 they are being played instead of being supported. Thank
18 you.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you, sir. Thank you
20 for your service as well. Members, any questions?

21 (Silence.)

22 THE CHAIR: Hearing none. Let me call
23 up the next panel. Alicia Butler, Jane Chamberlain,
24 Santiago Hernandez, Jr., and Lauro Zuniga.

25 Let me say that again: Alicia Butler,

1 Jane Chamberlain, Santiago Hernandez, Jr., Lauro Zuniga.

2 Alicia Butler, do we have you?

3 MS. ALICIA BUTLER: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

4 Can you hear me?

5 THE CHAIR: Yes. Great. Please state
6 your name and if you're representing any organization.

7 MS. ALICIA BUTLER: My name is Alicia
8 Butler, and I'm here on my own behalf. I'm a fifth
9 generation Texan, and a licensed Texas lawyer that I've
10 been for nearly 29 years. And I'm here to speak in
11 opposition to the proposed redistricting that's in
12 direct response to President Trump's publicly reported
13 request that you create five more Republican
14 congressional seats in Texas. Where I live in Austin we
15 have been bounced back and forth over the years between
16 congressional districts in some of the most cynical
17 gerrymandering in the whole United States.

18 And I am absolutely furious that anyone
19 is preparing to try that again to create safe seats for
20 the President's "yes men" by silencing Black and
21 Hispanic voters. And I've been around long enough to
22 know that some of you, and you're the ones that I'm
23 speaking to right now, don't care about unfairly
24 diluting anybody's votes.

25 In fact, that's what the Governor's goal

1 is for this redistricting. As you know, many Texans are
2 outraged by this Congress who just voted to give us a
3 2 -- a \$3.4 trillion deficit and kick 10 million people
4 off of health insurance at President Trump's request.
5 And Governor Abbott has proposed redistricting to make
6 sure that we get more of the same.

7 Governor Abbott and President Trump
8 rightfully fear the pendulum swinging back. And
9 redistricting is a desperate plan to rig this game to
10 adapt the electorate to President Trump's blatantly
11 white supremacist political agenda instead of developing
12 a Republican agenda that serves the will and the benefit
13 of all Texans. It's completely obvious to anybody
14 watching this process that it's nothing more than an
15 effort to hand more power to President Trump and further
16 erode his accountability.

17 So, I'm not going to talk process or
18 data. Because, frankly, I don't think it matters to
19 some of you. I'm going to instead encourage you, as you
20 prepare your votes, to ask yourselves in your heart of
21 hearts, do I want to tie my name and my fate to Jeffrey
22 Epstein's buddy? Do I want to keep carrying water for
23 someone foolish enough to sue Rupert Murdoch, the owner
24 of Fox News?

25 Because we, the people of Texas, will

1 remember if you stuck with the child predators and the
2 white supremacists and the billionaires, or if you stood
3 with the hard working decent people of our State. Thank
4 you.

5 THE CHAIR: Members, any questions?

6 (Silence.)

7 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here.

8 Chair calls Jane Chamberlain. Ms. Chamberlain, are you
9 with us?

10 (Silence.)

11 THE CHAIR: Let's try Santiago Hernandez
12 Jr.

13 (Silence.)

14 THE CHAIR: Mr. Hernandez?

15 (Silence.)

16 THE CHAIR: How about Lauro Zuniga.

17 MR. LAURO ZUNIGA: Yes, hello. Can you
18 hear me?

19 THE CHAIR: We can, please. Thank you
20 for being here. Please proceed.

21 MR. LAURO ZUNIGA: Yeah, of course. My
22 name is Lauro Alberto Zuniga, and I will be representing
23 myself.

24 Hello committee members and fellow
25 Texans, my name is Lauro Alberto Zuniga, and I am a

1 social worker representing myself in Congressional
2 District 34 in the State of Texas.

3 I live in La Paloma, a beautiful
4 predominantly Latino neighborhood, nestled right next to
5 the Rio Grande -- Rio Grande in San Benito, Texas. I
6 come here to voice my concerns about the lack of
7 transparency and rushing of redistricting congressional
8 maps and how it could directly impact my neighborhood
9 and my life.

10 As a gay Latino, many of the issues
11 discussed in Congress impact me directly, both as a
12 person and as a caretaker for my aging parents. For the
13 Texas legislature to engage in mid decade redistricting
14 efforts to appease a destructive President has real
15 consequences for real taxpayers such as myself. I asked
16 the Texas legislature to wait until all litigation is
17 settled and more accurate census data is provided to
18 redraw maps with the assistance of an independent
19 commission.

20 If these illegal maps come to pass, I
21 and many others around our district and state will be
22 feeling the evil effects of course cruel policies for
23 the rest of our lives by never seeing an end to student
24 loan debt, worrying about health care costs with
25 Medicaid being cut, economic uncertainty due to the

1 attacks on our social safety nets, and worse, not having
2 appropriate representation in Congress. All because
3 politicians cannot win fairly and solely on their policy
4 positions.

5 I want real representation in Congress,
6 not an imposed congressperson who votes against my well
7 being. Is cruelty the point of all this? Is the
8 function of government to squash the life out of its
9 citizens? My guess is, yes, considering the
10 deprioritization of relief for flood affected families
11 and the hyperfixation on gerrymandering. Shame on you.
12 However, I believe in a government that prioritizes its
13 most vulnerable and one that is focused on enhancing
14 well being and ensuring all Americans prosper. That's
15 what's at stake with these redistricting efforts, and I
16 hope my fellow Texans continue to raise their voice
17 against this unjust power grab. Thank you for your
18 time.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here.
20 Members, any questions?

21 (Silence.)

22 THE CHAIR: Seeing none. Chair calls --
23 I want to try again Jane Chamberlain.

24 MS. JANE CHAMBERLAIN: Hello.

25 THE CHAIR: There you are. Welcome.

1 MS. JANE CHAMBERLAIN: Can you hear me?

2 Yeah.

3 THE CHAIR: If you would please tell us
4 your name and if you're representing any organization
5 here today.

6 MS. JANE CHAMBERLAIN: My name is Jane
7 Chamberlain, and I'm in District 37. I'm an Austin
8 grandma representing my family.

9 THE CHAIR: Welcome. Please proceed
10 with your testimony.

11 MS. JANE CHAMBERLAIN: Thank you. I've
12 learned a lot from the expert witnesses here today.
13 Thank you so much. I keep hearing the question: Why
14 are we here? And I think the answer is that this
15 country is undergoing an unprecedented and unbelievable
16 assault on our rule of law, our citizens and immigrants,
17 and the very structure of our government.

18 And we're here because the increasingly
19 unpopular leader who's directing this travesty is afraid
20 somebody might be mad at him. We've watched
21 Republicans. Now, this assault on democracy hurts
22 everybody. We've watched Republicans who represent
23 small towns or rural areas fighting to keep control of
24 their public schools, which is the principal community
25 center for a small and scattered population.

1 Some of you resisted heroically the push
2 to exchange that autonomy for a profit based education
3 system until your Governor showed you what happens when
4 you persist.

5 And, if we want Christianity to be in
6 charge of Texas, from now on let's at least use Jesus's
7 crucial update to the old Commandments from Matthew 22,
8 "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,
9 with all thy soul, with all thy mind." "This is the
10 first and great commandment." "And the second is like
11 unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

12 And y' all learned in Sunday school that
13 your neighbor's, not so much the guy who wears your same
14 hat, as those others who are most in need. We've tried
15 to build a consensus of decency and respect for others
16 that, with the rule of law, helped protect our pursuit
17 of happiness.

18 In this special session, I ask you to
19 think deeply about what you could possibly gain from
20 consenting to the loss of this precious legacy. And,
21 please, don't ever forget to love your neighbor. Thank
22 you for your attention.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here.
24 Members, are there any questions for the witness seeing?

25 (Silence.)

1 THE CHAIR: Seeing none --

2 THE CLERK: We need to do them again.

3 THE CHAIR: Let me try Santiago

4 Hernandez, Jr., one more time.

5 MR. SANTIAGO HERNANDEZ, JR.: Yes. I am
6 here.

7 THE CHAIR: There you are. Great.
8 Please tell us your name for the record, and if you're
9 representing any organization, and then begin your
10 testimony.

11 MR. SANTIAGO HERNANDEZ, JR.: Yes, my
12 name is Santiago, Jr., and I'm just representing myself
13 today. Chairman King and members, thank you for the
14 opportunity to testify against the proposed
15 redistricting efforts, which I believe will dilute the
16 voice of communities like mine.

17 As I prepare for these remarks, I kept
18 asking myself, how can I convince them, you know, in two
19 minutes to reconsider this which jeopardizes fair
20 representation? I mean, should I mention that this
21 process is rushed and does not give every text and the
22 opportunity to voice their position?

23 Maybe I can mention that we're still
24 puzzled as to why we need to redistrict our current
25 maps, if there are race blind, and yet, nobody has

1 provided a clear explanation as to why this is
2 necessary, or doesn't know the contradictions and a lot
3 concerns that we have with this process.

4 As people before me have testified and
5 people afterwards will reiterate, we don't need this,
6 and we don't want this. I mean, what more do we, as
7 your constituents, have to say to make it clear that we
8 don't need this, and we don't want this?

9 Like I said, I can't help but feel
10 frustrated that it feels that you all are hearing, but
11 not listening to us. Mr. Chair, while you introduced
12 Senate Resolution 5, you said, and I quote, "well, I'm
13 not sure that there's anything to rectify to begin
14 with." I've watched and re-watched Senate floor debate
15 from July 21. I listened to testimony yesterday in the
16 house committee. Respectfully, Mr. Chair and committee
17 members, much of what I heard feels like there's a
18 struggle to rationalize this decision to start this
19 committee.

20 I'm sure many of you are good-respectful
21 people. I've heard as much during floor debates, and
22 perhaps some of you even agree with me behind closed
23 doors. But intentions and quiet agreement don't matter
24 if, when it comes to voting, you still choose to support
25 maps to help your party and -- despite harming our

1 communities.

2 Mr. Chair, members, some people change
3 their party for the sake of their principles, others
4 their principles for the sake of their party. Who will
5 you decide to? Who will you decide to be? Thank you
6 for your time, and I welcome any questions.

7 THE CHAIR: Thank you, members. Any
8 questions?

9 (Silence.)

10 THE CHAIR: Seeing none. Let me call
11 up -- do we...

12 THE CLERK: We're moving to the next
13 panel.

14 THE CHAIR: Let me call up the next
15 panel. Michelle Vallejo, Jason Hale, Etienne Rosas,
16 Emily Christy, Sarah Searcy. Give everyone a minute to
17 get fired back up. Emily Christy.

18 (Silence.)

19 THE CHAIR: Okay. Mr. Rosas, if you
20 will go ahead and go, and tell us your name and if
21 you're representing any organization, and then begin
22 your testimony, please.

23 MR. ETIENNE ROSAS: Thank you. Chair
24 and members of the committee, my name is Etienne Rosas,
25 and I'm representing myself. I'm a proud Mexican-

1 American from Brownsville, a researcher, a musician, and
2 a candidate for US Congress in District 34. I hold a
3 PhD from RAND and a post doc. from Princeton where I
4 specialized in democratization and institutes...

5 [Background audio echo noise]

6 THE CHAIR: All right. If you'll just
7 mute your live stream there.

8 [Background audio echo noise]

9 THE CHAIR: There you go. Try again.

10 [Background audio echo noise]

11 THE CHAIR: What I'm going to do, sir,
12 is, while you figure that out, we're gonna mute you for
13 a second, and we're going to go on to the next witness,
14 and then I'll come right back to you. Chair calls
15 Emilie Christy.

16 MS. EMILIE CHRISTY: Hi there.

17 THE CHAIR: Hi. How are you?

18 MS. EMILIE CHRISTY: I'm good.

19 THE CHAIR: Please --

20 MS. EMILIE CHRISTY: Good afternoon.

21 THE CHAIR: -- just state your name and
22 if you're representing any organization, and then begin
23 your testimony.

24 MS. EMILIE CHRISTY: Good afternoon. My
25 name is Emilie Christy. I'm representing myself, and

1 thank you for the opportunity to speak. I have lived in
2 Travis County since 2001. I am currently privileged to
3 be able to spend this afternoon on Zoom with you. And
4 yesterday I was in the House for, you know, seven and a
5 half hours or so, fruitlessly, but, you know, there we
6 are.

7 Now, many of my fellow Texans are not
8 able to skip work or find childcare and transportation
9 to gamble on the possibility that you, our elected
10 officials, might listen to our voices and take us into
11 account.

12 I would like to remind the legislature
13 that your actions and inactions, the laws you pass, for
14 example, these currently still undisclosed boundary
15 lines that are being used to further silence our
16 underserved communities, they affect every facet of life
17 for Texans -- education, housing, health.

18 I would also like to remind our
19 representatives, even though this is the Senate, that
20 that word is isn't just a title, even for those people
21 across the hall. It is a job description. You are
22 responsible for representing the people of Texas.

23 This is our state government, and one
24 that shouldn't be run like a corporation where people
25 are exploited for profit and gain. We demand that our

1 government use the resources of this great State for all
2 those who call Texas home.

3 And after the recent flooding in the
4 heart of the Hill Country, it was private citizens who
5 led the way through the devastation with mutual aid,
6 with disaster relief, and grieving. We need lawmakers
7 to prioritize people and communities, not political
8 power plays that divide us. Thank you for your time.

9 THE CHAIR: Thank you. And I'm glad you
10 were able to be with us today. Members, any questions?

11 (Silence.)

12 THE CHAIR: Seeing none. Chair calls
13 Jason Hale.

14 MR. JASON HALE: Can you hear me?

15 THE CHAIR: We certainly can. Go ahead.

16 MR. JASON HALE: Awesome. Thank you
17 Chairman and Vice Chair.

18 Good afternoon to the honorable members
19 of the committee. My name is Jason Hale, and today I am
20 representing myself. I live in the beautiful City of
21 Corpus Christi. I was born and raised here in Texas,
22 and I am a lifelong Texan.

23 I oppose mid decade redistricting for
24 districts 9, 18, 29, 33, and all of the districts in
25 Texas. It is unnecessary. It is a waste of resources.

1 We have more important issues to focus on like disaster
2 recovery and preparedness, and this rushes the
3 redistricting process which limits public participation.

4 In 2021, legislators and citizens put a
5 lot of effort into this plan. The Governor signed it
6 into law, and it was a race neutral process. So, I
7 believe there's no legitimate reason to engage in mid
8 decade redistricting.

9 The DOJ's statement is incorrect, and if
10 we follow it, we may violate the Constitution and the
11 Voting Rights Act, and it may open up all seats for
12 redistricting. If you do choose to redistrict, I
13 request that you provide ample time for meaningful
14 participation. That means maps, hearings, and revisions
15 based on input. I also request that if redistricting
16 happens, that it enhances the representation for people
17 of color, not diminish their voices.

18 In summary, my Texas Senator said it
19 best, "voters should elect their representatives, not
20 representatives cherry picking their voters." I'm
21 asking that you do what Texans want by protecting our
22 rights, rejecting redistricting, and rejecting
23 Washington's bid to control our elections. And that's
24 it. Thanks.

25 THE CHAIR: And thank you for being with

1 us here today. Members, any questions?

2 (Silence.)

3 THE CHAIR: Seeing none, Chair calls
4 Michelle Vallejo.

5 MS. MICHELLE VALLEJO: Good afternoon,
6 Chair and members of the committee, my name is Michelle
7 Vallejo, and I'm here representing myself.

8 I am a small business owner, a nonprofit
9 board member, and mother from the Rio Grande Valley. I
10 was the Democratic nominee for Texas 15th Congressional
11 District in 2022 and 2024 and won over 50 percent of the
12 vote in the RGV both times.

13 I know firsthand how gerrymandering has
14 harmed my community. Texas 15 was redrawn to split our
15 region and dilute Latino voting strength, stripping
16 working class families of real representation.

17 Our district, like much of South Texas,
18 is nearly 90 percent Latino. We are young, bilingual,
19 rooted in family and faith, and we deserve to be fairly
20 represented, not further drawn out of power. Let's be
21 clear, this is not a routine redistricting process as
22 we've heard all day today and yesterday.

23 It's a rushed mid decade power grab
24 being forced through without proper transparency or
25 public input. Most of the people I thought to represent

1 are working right now. They can't be here to testify.

2 But they matter, and they see exactly what's happening.

3 South Texans are not as ignorant as some
4 politicians would like to think we are. We know this is
5 happening under direct pressure from Donald Trump who's
6 terrified of losing control of the House because of his
7 failed, harmful policies and growing unpopularity.

8 He's dodging accountability at every
9 turn, including disturbing ties to Jeffrey Epstein. And
10 now he's trying to rewrite the rules in Texas to protect
11 himself.

12 I'm here today, not as a candidate for
13 office, but as a mother holding my son in my arms
14 because I believe in fighting for the dignity of all
15 Texans and especially for our children. They deserve to
16 grow up in a Texas where their voices count, their
17 communities are valued, and their futures are protected,
18 not sacrificed to partisan fear and political
19 manipulation. Thank you.

20 SENATOR HINOJOSA: I have a question.

21 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Senator
22 Hinojosa.

23 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you,
24 Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Michelle, for testifying
25 before the Redistricting Committee. But I did have one

1 question, and that is: You were a candidate for
2 Congress in the 15th Congressional District, and you
3 lost that race. And do you feel that it was
4 gerrymandered to the point that -- and we call it the
5 Fajita District, right? -- because it runs all the way
6 from the Valley all the way up to just south of San
7 Antonio.

8 Do you think that that had an impact on
9 the results and outcome of your campaign?

10 MS. MICHELLE VALLEJO: It most
11 definitely did, especially the first cycle when the map
12 was first redrawn to represent the Fajita District,
13 which runs from the border of South Texas and the Rio
14 Grande Valley in McAllen up to Guadalupe County, and it
15 gets a sliver of New Braunfels even. And people were
16 confused. They felt hopeless.

17 They felt robbed of who their true
18 representative is and can be, and we heard this from
19 voters every time we talked to them at the doors, all
20 the public events that we hosted and attended, and this
21 is why -- or this is a very big reason why a lot of
22 Latino voters in Texas don't come out to vote because
23 they feel like their vote doesn't matter.

24 And the redistricting that we experience
25 going into the 2022 election, we saw that, and we're

1 going to continue to see that if these maps are
2 continued to be drawn and belittle the Latino vote.

3 SENATOR HINOJOSA: Thank you for your
4 testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 THE CHAIR: All right. Your son was
6 perfect. What's his name?

7 MS. MICHELLE VALLEJO: He is watching
8 out and taking notes.

9 THE CHAIR: All right. How old is he?

10 MS. MICHELLE VALLEJO: He's six months
11 on Monday.

12 THE CHAIR: Well, congratulations. He
13 did great.

14 MS. MICHELLE VALLEJO: Thank you.

15 THE CHAIR: Bring him back anytime. And
16 you can testify again, too. So...

17 MS. MICHELLE VALLEJO: We'll do. We'll
18 do.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Chair calls --
20 Mr. Rosas, are you still there with us?

21 MR. ETIENNE ROSAS: I'm here. Yes.

22 THE CHAIR: I was trying to get to you.

23 MR. ETIENNE ROSAS: Probably exhorted.

24 THE CHAIR: That's all right. Go ahead.

25 MR. ETIENNE ROSAS: Thank you so much.

1 Thank you, Chair. Thank you members of the committee.

2 Well, my name is Etienne Rosas, and I'm representing
3 myself. I'm a proud Mexican American from Brownsville,
4 Texas, a researcher, a musician, and a candidate for US
5 Congress in District 34.

6 I hold a PhD from RAND Corporation and a
7 post doc from Princeton, where I specialize in
8 democratization and institutional corruption, and I can
9 tell you that what's happening in Texas right now is not
10 democracy. It's a classic case study of Democratic
11 backsliding.

12 This redistricting proposal isn't about
13 fair representation. It's about carving up Latino
14 communities, like my own, to engineer more Republican
15 wins, even where Latinos are a clear majority. Latinos
16 are now 40 percent of the Texas population, but hold
17 just 24 percent of congressional seats.

18 At the national level, we're 20 percent
19 of the people, but only 10 percent of Congress. And
20 that's, shamefully, the highest that it's ever been.

21 But instead of fixing this disparity,
22 these maps aim to drown the voice of Latinos even
23 further, cracking the Rio Grande Valley, splintering
24 districts like my own, and erasing our growing political
25 voice.

1 But this isn't anything new. In 2006,
2 the Supreme Court ruled that Texas violated the Voting
3 Rights Act by dismantling a Latino Opportunity District.
4 And that same playbook is being used again, just with
5 weaker federal oversight.

6 But the consequences here go beyond the
7 maps. When our communities are politically
8 marginalized, it opens the door to gross institutional
9 corruption.

10 Just look at what's happening with
11 SpaceX. Elon Musk came to the South Texas because he
12 knew no one would stop him. He exploited weak
13 regulations, gutted environmental protections, and used
14 our own region as a launchpad, not to reach Mars, but to
15 reach Washington and help Donald Trump get back into the
16 White House.

17 So, this is what Democratic
18 disfigurement into an oligarchy actually looks like, not
19 the tanks in the streets, but zoning boards,
20 redistricting maps, and billionaires buying silence from
21 both parties.

22 And we're not just talking about lines
23 in a map. We're talking about whether families in
24 Harlingen and San Benito and Brownsville McAllen get to
25 participate in American democracy or remain collateral

1 in someone else's power grab.

2 But the world is actually watching.

3 Idea calls us now a backsliding democracy. The
4 Economist calls us flawed. V Dem puts us on the
5 autocratization watch list. And this is an emergency.

6 As Dr. King once said, "so long as I do
7 not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote, I
8 do not possess myself." "I cannot live as a democratic
9 citizen observing the laws I have helped to enact." "I
10 can only submit to the edict of others."

11 So I urge the committee to reject these
12 maps that fragment Latino majority communities, to
13 center public input on those directly affected, and to
14 comply fully with the Voting Rights Act and the
15 Constitution. And, remember, the assaults on democracy
16 anywhere are assaults on democracy everywhere.

17 So, thank you so much for your time, and
18 glad to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to
19 rectify the technical issue as well.

20 THE CHAIR: Well, thank you for being
21 here. Members, any questions?

22 (Silence.)

23 THE CHAIR: Seeing none. Do we have
24 anybody left from that panel?

25 THE CLERK: Yes, that's Sara.

1 THE CHAIR: Chair call Sara Searcy.

2 Sara Searcy, are you with us?

3 MS. SARA SEARCY: Yeah. Can you hear
4 me?

5 THE CHAIR: We sure can. Go ahead.

6 MS. SARA SEARCY: Okay. Thank you. My
7 name is Sara Searcy. I'm a resident of District 37 in
8 Texas, and I'm speaking for myself. As many previous
9 speakers have established, there's no legitimate reason
10 to undertake redistricting at this time. The reason
11 we're all wasting our time here is that President Trump
12 is afraid he won't be able to hold the House in the
13 midterms.

14 So, in typical fashion, he's trying to
15 cheat and lie and bully so he can continue to destroy
16 our country and enrich himself.

17 It is a disgrace, but not a surprise,
18 that Texas's Republican legislators are facilitating yet
19 another corruption of democracy. So, a lot of people
20 have covered details about the redistricting. I want to
21 talk about just who President Trump is, this person
22 whose very fictive water you're carrying.

23 Recently, an episode of the Howard Stern
24 show from 2006 resurfaced. This was because of all the
25 recent revelations about Trump's close friendship with

1 Jeffrey Epstein.

2 In 2006, Trump was 59 or 60 years old,
3 and married to Melania. I'm reading a story. I'm
4 reading an Excerpt from a July 21 story posted on an
5 online publication called The Rap. And I'm going to
6 read the excerpt now.

7 "Do you think you can now be banging 24
8 year olds?" Stern asked in the 2006 interview. "Oh,
9 absolutely," Trump responded, "I have no trouble."
10 Would you do [voices overlapping].

11 THE CHAIR: Ma'am, ma'am, if I could?
12 We're so glad you're here today. But please keep your
13 testimony to the subject of redistricting.

14 MS. SARA SEARCY: This is the subject.
15 This is the subject. President Trump is the reason
16 we're here. It is perfectly legitimate to talk about
17 his character.

18 THE CHAIR: Well, I...

19 MS. SARA SEARCY: If you don't like what
20 you're hearing, then think hard about why you're
21 supporting him. I -- I can close there. That's --
22 that's enough.

23 THE CHAIR: All right. Thank you very
24 much.

25 MS. SARA SEARCY: That's more than

1 enough.

2 THE CHAIR: Members, any questions?

3 (Silence.)

4 THE CHAIR: Thank you. We finished with
5 that panel?

6 THE CLERK: Yes.

7 THE CHAIR: Let me call up the next
8 panel, please. Jennifer Larrew, Cathy Fulton, Jodi
9 Eckberg, Letitia Torres, Jacqueline Baez-Lugo, Carol
10 Philipson.

11 Let me say that again: Jennifer Larrew,
12 Cathy Fulton, Jodi Eckberg, Leticia Torres, Jacqueline
13 Baez-Lugo, and Carol Philipson.

14 MS. JENNIFER LARREW: Hello.

15 THE CHAIR: Jennifer, it looks like --
16 are you Jennifer?

17 MS. JENNIFER LARREW: Yeap.

18 THE CHAIR: All right. Jennifer Larrew,
19 please -- please proceed.

20 MS. JENNIFER LARREW: Hey. Hi. My name
21 is Jennifer Larrew, and I represent myself. I'm a stay
22 at home mom and volunteer advocate from Lakeway in the
23 10th Congressional District.

24 As a Texan, I wish this legislature was
25 focused on the real issues like the flooding and

1 disaster preparedness in my county, not redrawing
2 congressional maps mid decade without new census data.

3 UNIDENTIFIED ZOOM PARTICIPANT: Hello.

4 MS. JENNIFER LARREW: In my community,
5 I'm active in my church, my local moms group, and my
6 son's school. When disasters like winter storm Yuri or
7 the recent flood floods hit, we support each other.
8 These are the people I live beside and rely on.

9 I should share a representative with
10 them, and not with a community in College Station where
11 I've never even been. I have visited Mike McCall's
12 office many times. He's never at the Austin office, and
13 his staff says he spends a lot of time in College
14 Station. He won't even hold a town hall. That's not
15 representation. And I don't want that any new district
16 to experience that.

17 Texas has a long history of
18 gerrymandering communities of color. The districts
19 being targeted in this process are once again minority
20 districts. That's unacceptable. I appreciate the
21 chance to testify in Austin. I didn't get to testify
22 yesterday, but there also should be hearings in places
23 like El Paso, Amarillo, and San Antonio. And this
24 process should take weeks, not rushed in five days. At
25 the very least, wait for the courts to rule on the 2021

1 maps. I urge this committee to be fair and transparent.
2 Transparent. Texas deserves competitive representative
3 districts. Thank you.

4 THE CHAIR: Well, thank you for being
5 here today, and we're glad you were able to get to
6 testify today.

7 MS. JENNIFER LARREW: Thank you.

8 THE CHAIR: Members, any questions?

9 (Silence.)

10 THE CHAIR: Chair calls Cathy Fulton.
11 Cathy Fulton.

12 MS. CATHY FULTON: Okay. Hello. Can
13 you hear me okay?

14 THE CHAIR: We certainly can.

15 MS. CATHY FULTON: Okay. Thank you very
16 much. Hello. And I want to say thank you. My name is
17 Cathy Fulton, and I'm in Port Aransas, Texas.

18 I want to say I oppose this rush mid
19 decade redistricting. In answer to Senator Alvarado's
20 question, the reason all of you are here is because of
21 one man in the white House who wants to gain five seats,
22 five congressional seats for the Republicans. This, by
23 definition, is gerrymandering, and I mean it. Please,
24 and I hope everybody understands. That's what it is.

25 I do not vote along party lines. I vote

1 for a candidate, not a party. In my opinion, these
2 hearings violate our own TOMA laws because the public
3 has not seen any data or maps. So, we can't form an
4 educated opinion.

5 To tell the truth, I am angry that
6 Governor Abbott has allowed the orange man to control
7 our special session when what we really need is to be
8 worrying about Texas problems like, obviously, what's
9 happened in the Hill Country. And water. We still have
10 more issues to do with water.

11 I urge this committee to say "no" to
12 this farce of redistricting, and that all of you should
13 just walk away from this and stop any further hearings.
14 I do appreciate the comments of Senator Alvarado,
15 Senator Hinojosa, and Senator Miles. And I question why
16 others on this committee are being quiet as a mouse.
17 It's almost like this committee was gerrymandered also
18 by the lieutenant Governor. Thank you.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you, ma'am. And may I
20 ask, are you representing an organization today or just
21 yourself?

22 MS. CATHY FULTON: I am representing
23 myself, but believe me, a lot of other people are
24 buzzing in on me right now saying thank you.

25 THE CHAIR: Okay. All right. Thank you

1 for being here with us.

2 Chair calls Leticia Torres. Leticia
3 Torres.

4 MS. LETICIA TORRES: Hi. Good
5 afternoon.

6 THE CHAIR: Hi. How are you? [Voices
7 overlapping] Just please state your name if you're
8 representing any organization. And thank you for being
9 here.

10 MS. LETICIA TORRES: Okay. Thank you.
11 Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairman, and members of the
12 committee, my name is Leticia Torres. I'm representing
13 myself, and I thank you all for the opportunity to
14 testify. Donald Trump didn't elect the Texas
15 legislature. Texans did. So, I have a question for the
16 majority party members, What do you -- what do your CMS
17 stats show? And based on those numbers, whose interests
18 are you fighting for?

19 We're here discussing changes to a map
20 that your own colleague testified, under oath, was draw
21 on race blind. Every motion that was filed, every
22 signature that was signed, it was an affirmation of just
23 that. Yet, now the DOJ is claiming that race was
24 improperly used.

25 So which one was it? If nothing was

1 wrong, why are we here? If something was wrong, is
2 Texas now admitting that it misled the courts? Somebody
3 is lying. Somebody likely committed perjury, and Texans
4 are paying that price.

5 While we sit here today, right now, two
6 people are still missing in the Hill Country. HEB is
7 providing more visible relief than the State. Children
8 are going without food after Governor Abbott vetoed a
9 \$60 million summer meal assistance program.

10 Elderly Texans aren't turning on their
11 AC just to afford their electricity bills. Some public
12 schools in Texas don't have a single guidance counselor.
13 1.7 million Texas may lose health insurance, and 710,000
14 people, right now in Congressional District 18, have no
15 voice in Congress because that seat is vacant. And I
16 don't see Governor Abbott rushing to call a special
17 election so that these people can have representation.

18 God forbid disaster strikes in that
19 region. Who would be fighting for them? Somebody
20 always loses in redistricting. But this is not that.
21 This feels dangerously close to what we saw after the
22 regular session, an obvious collusion between Texas and
23 the current administration, that shows no interest in
24 Texas outside of ensuring that it stays red.

25 This state obsesses over alleged voter

1 fraud, but now we're unnecessarily complicating things
2 for voters. Last night witnesses were turned away
3 before they could testify. That member -- or sorry.
4 Those members who stayed late into the evening to hear
5 these people out were not from the party that are asking
6 for this.

7 I ask that this committee not redistrict
8 in this way, listen to Texans, and give them the
9 accountability and transparency that we deserve. Thank
10 you.

11 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
12 questions?

13 (Silence.)

14 THE CHAIR: Seeing none, the Chair calls
15 Jodi Eckberg. Jodi Eckberg, are you there with us?

16 (Silence.)

17 THE CHAIR: Jodi Eckberg.

18 MS. JODI ECKBERG: Yes, I am. Can you
19 hear me?

20 THE CHAIR: We sure can. Please
21 proceed.

22 MS. JODI ECKBERG: Thank you. And thank
23 you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jodi
24 Eckberg and I am representing myself.

25 I live in the US Congressional District

1 10. I strongly oppose the attempt to redistrict our
2 congressional districts mid census. And I, like others
3 here today, also wish we'd actually be able to see the
4 maps in question.

5 Regardless, this brazen move by the
6 Governor and the DOJ to increase Republican
7 representation in the U.S. House by taking it away from
8 communities of color is shameful, and its blatant racial
9 discrimination.

10 Redrawing legislative maps outside the
11 normal census cycle is not only unnecessary, it's deeply
12 harmful to our democratic process. Mid decade
13 redistricting undermines stability and trust in our
14 elections. It gives those in power the chance to
15 manipulate district lines purely for political gain
16 rather than to reflect the will of the voters.

17 This kind of gerrymandering silences
18 communities, especially communities of color, by
19 diluting their voice -- excuse me -- by diluting their
20 voting power and weakening fair representation.

21 Texans want accountability, not more
22 backroom deals and, frankly, not more bathroom bills
23 either. Voters should choose their leaders, not the
24 other way around.

25 Instead of spending time and taxpayer

1 dollars on rigging maps and terrorizing women, people of
2 color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community, this
3 legislation should focus on the real needs of Texans,
4 education, healthcare, equality for everyone, and
5 upgrading disaster infrastructure with flood warning
6 systems, emergency communications, natural disaster
7 prep, and relief funding for all impacted areas.

8 Redistricting should happen every 10
9 years, fairly, transparently, and based on accurate
10 census data. Anything else threatens the integrity of
11 our democracy and erodes public trust.

12 I am asking this committee to commit to
13 holding a public hearing after the maps have been drawn,
14 but before they pass through committee. And that you
15 give us a minimum of five days, but weeks would be even
16 better, to notice, to review the maps before this
17 hearing.

18 I also want those who draw the maps to
19 explain why they drew them as such and to not hide any
20 communications that they have had regarding drawing the
21 maps. This is an opportunity for Texas legislature to
22 finally get this process right and avoid millions of
23 taxpayer dollars and years of lawsuits. Thank you.

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
25 questions for the witness seeing?

1 (Silence.)

2 THE CHAIR: Seeing none. Chair calls
3 Carol Philipson. Carol Philipson.

4 MS. CAROL PHILIPSON: Hello. Can you
5 hear me?

6 THE CHAIR: We certainly can. Go ahead.

7 MS. CAROL PHILIPSON: Oh, good. Sorry
8 for that problem before. I'm not good with computers,
9 and I actually had two of you up at one time. So, I've
10 got it straightened out now.

11 So, anyway, so my name is Carol
12 Philipson. I'm representing myself. I live in Austin,
13 Texas. Please do not redistrict. How can this be done
14 when the 2021 redistricting plan is still tied up in
15 courts? What is the reason for this urgency? How can
16 this be done when there's no map to draw drawn to show
17 the changes?

18 How can this be done when documents,
19 written communication, emails, texts have not been made
20 public? Your constituents need transparency. What are
21 you hiding? We've all read the US Constitution, more so
22 recently, but do you remember the first Texas
23 Constitution?

24 "All political power is inherent in the
25 people, and all three governments are founded on their

1 authority and instituted for their benefit."

2 Yes, founded on the people's authority
3 and for the benefit of all Texans, not a political
4 party, Republican or Democrat.

5 You were elected to represent the best
6 for all Texans of all colors, but we put our trust in
7 you. Please do not turn your backs on us. Say "no" to
8 redistricting. Thank you so much.

9 THE CHAIR: Thank you. And I'm sorry
10 you had a little trouble earlier.

11 MS. CAROL PHILIPSON: Oh, we got to
12 squared away. Thank you.

13 THE CHAIR: Great. Members, are there
14 any questions?

15 (Silence.)

16 THE CHAIR: Seeing none, Chair calls
17 Jacqueline Baez-Lugo. Are you...

18 MS. JACQUELINE BAEZ-LUGO: Hello.

19 THE CHAIR: Hello. How are you?

20 MS. JACQUELINE BAEZ-LUGO: Oh, fine.

21 Thank you.

22 THE CHAIR: Go ahead and proceed with
23 your testimony.

24 MS. JACQUELINE BAEZ-LUGO: Oh, hi. Good
25 afternoon. My name is Jacqueline Baez-Lugo. I live in

1 Edinburgh, Texas, which is the Rio Grande Valley,
2 Hidalgo County. I'm a proud Republican conservative,
3 and I do support this redistricting because we have many
4 conservative Republicans that live in the valley also,
5 and we don't feel represented by the local Democrat
6 control.

7 The Democrat has been in charge of the
8 Valley for more than 200 years, and it's kind of like a
9 one-party system around here. Even me speaking in favor
10 and talking about the Republicans is going to look like
11 we are some people. But, guess what, we do exist too.
12 And we do believe -- I do believe we live in a country
13 where we have a two-party system, and I believe we
14 should have some kind of good competition affair. We
15 have very good candidates for the Republican party here.
16 They always have a hard time to reach out to the people
17 because their voices have been silenced.

18 So, why can't we have also a fair
19 competition between Republicans and Democrats? What are
20 they afraid of? I can tell you what they are afraid of.
21 The Democrat party system here -- they've been in charge
22 for more than 200 years -- and let me tell you, sir, and
23 I'm pretty sure you know, Hidalgo County is one of the
24 most corrupt counties in the whole state of Texas as far
25 as the elections are concerned.

1 So, yes, give us a chance so we can have
2 a seat at the table. We would like to reach out to the
3 people, too, and tell about us. We do exist. We are
4 Republicans and we are conservative, and we support.
5 And thank you so much for allowing me to speak. I'm
6 very proud to be here supporting my Republican party,
7 and also my conservative friends. Thank you so much.
8 And by the way, I'm Puerto Rican. I'm a Hispanic woman,
9 and I'm a conservative woman, too. And I vote
10 Republican top to bottom. Thank you so much for
11 allowing me to speak. I'm very proud to be here.

12 THE CHAIR: Well, thank you. We're glad
13 that you're here as well. And, by the way, I'm sorry,
14 but you're representing yourself today. Is that
15 correct?

16 MS. JACQUELINE BAEZ-LUGO: Oh, I'm
17 representing myself. I'm a Puerto Rican woman,
18 Republican, conservative, living in Rio Grande Valley.
19 Thank you so much for allowing me to speak.

20 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Members, any
21 questions?

22 (Silence.)

23 THE CHAIR: Seeing none, we're going to
24 call up the next group. Lauren Miller and Haley Landry.
25 Lauren Miller and Haley Landry. Are either of you with

1 us?

2 THE CLERK: Haley is.

3 THE CHAIR: Haley Landry. Would you
4 like to go ahead?

5 (Silence.)

6 THE CHAIR: Haley Landry, would you like
7 to go ahead and testify?

8 MS. HAYLEY LANDREY: Hello. Good
9 afternoon.

10 THE CHAIR: Hi. How are you? If you
11 would just please state your name and if you're
12 representing any organization, and then please proceed
13 with your testimony.

14 MS. HAYLEY LANDREY: Good afternoon,
15 Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Haley
16 Landry, and I live in Fort Bend County District 9.

17 I work in the travel industry, and I'm
18 here today representing myself, but I'm speaking for my
19 neighbors as well. Fort Bend isn't just where I live.
20 It's home to one of the most diverse counties in the
21 country, where you can hear dozens of languages at the
22 grocery store, the churches, mosques and temples all on
23 the same block. And find neighbors who treat each other
24 like family, even if we don't all look or worship the
25 same.

1 I've been tested before. During
2 Hurricane Harvey, neighborhoods across Fort Bend
3 flooded, and I saw firsthand how people didn't wait for
4 government aid to help one another. Strangers became
5 lifelines, delivering food, sharing generators, checking
6 on the elderly. And during the 2021 winter storm, it
7 happened again. Because in Fort Bend, resilience isn't
8 just a word, it's a way of life.

9 But that shared strength is at risk when
10 the community is sliced up on a map, even though the
11 proposed redistricting maps haven't even been released
12 yet. So, this process feels rushed, closed, and unfair.
13 And we've seen it before where maps divide Fort Bend,
14 dilute our voices, and make it harder for our
15 communities to elect leaders who understand us. When we
16 are divided, it's often the minority groups, immigrant
17 voices, and the working class residents that are left
18 behind.

19 Small business owners, recent arrivals,
20 parents working two jobs to keep up with rising costs,
21 these are the people who need their vote to mean
22 something, not to be scattered across districts where no
23 one is truly accountable to them. So, I'm asking you,
24 keep Fort Bend whole. We want fair, nonpartisan maps
25 that respect the reality of who we are. Don't silence

1 our community for political convenience. Let us choose
2 leaders who reflect our values, not have leaders choose
3 their voters.

4 In closing, please draw fair and
5 competitive maps that recognize the richness of Texas's
6 diverse communities. Stop dividing us for political
7 gain. Keep Fort Bend together, and ensure all our
8 voices, not just some, are heard in the elections ahead.
9 Thank you for your time and your service.

10 THE CHAIR: Thank you for being here
11 today. Members, are there any questions for the
12 witness?

13 (Silence.)

14 THE CHAIR: Seeing none, Chair calls
15 Lauren Miller.

16 (Silence.)

17 THE CHAIR: Lauren Miller.

18 (Silence.)

19 THE CHAIR: Okay. I'm sorry, I don't
20 believe she's -- is it?

21 THE CLERK: Yeah, I let her in, but I
22 don't have her.

23 THE CHAIR: Lauren Miller. I'll try one
24 more time.

25 (Silence.)

1 THE CHAIR: All right. Do we have
2 anyone else?

3 (Silence.)

4 THE CHAIR: Why don't you ask him if he
5 wants us to wait a few minutes? Ladies and gentlemen,
6 we're standing at ease for just a moment. We can have
7 her in tomorrow.

8 (Silence.)

9 THE CHAIR: Ladies and gentlemen,
10 there's -- and members -- there is no one else in the
11 waiting room. So, there's no one else still waiting to
12 testify. With that said, is there any other business to
13 come before this committee today?

14 (Silence.)

15 THE CHAIR: There being no further
16 business, the Senate Special Committee on Congressional
17 Redistricting will stand in recess subject to the call
18 of the Chair. Thank you, everyone.

19 (Strikes gavel.)

20 [End of Video Recording File]

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

TRANSCRIPTION OF VIDEOTAPE

I, Vicente Mendoza, the undersigned
Certified Shorthand Reporter in and for the State of
Texas, certify that the foregoing pages are a true and
correct transcription of the videotaped recording to the
best of my ability to understand and decipher the words
and identify the speakers based on information provided.

I further certify that I am neither
attorney nor counsel for, related to, nor employed by
any parties to the action in which this testimony is
taken and, further, that I am not a relative nor
employee of any counsel employed by the parties hereto
or financially interested in the action.

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO under my hand
and seal of office on this 13th day of September, 2025.



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