

**State Defendants' Response to Gonzales Plaintiffs'  
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**Exhibit K**

Texas House Democrats Flee to Block GOP Congressional Map  
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REDISTRICTING TEXAS 2025

## Texas House Democrats flee the state in bid to block GOP's proposed congressional map

The lawmakers' absence means the lower chamber won't have enough members present to function, stalling passage of a draft map Democrats have condemned as a political power grab.

BY KAYLA GUO AND ELEANOR KLIBANOFF AUG. 3, 2025 UPDATED: 9 PM CENTRAL

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Texas House Democratic Caucus Chair Gene Wu speaks during a press conference alongside dozens of fellow Texas lawmakers and Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker in Carol Stream, Ill., on Sunday, Aug. 3, 2025. Jamie Ketter Davis for The Texas Tribune

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ST. CHARLES, ILLINOIS — Texas Democratic lawmakers fled the state Sunday in a bid to block passage of a new congressional map designed to give the GOP five additional seats in the U.S. House next year, raising the stakes in what's poised to be a national fight over redistricting ahead of next year's midterm election.

The maneuver, undertaken by most of the Texas House's 62 Democrats, deprives the Republican-controlled chamber of a quorum — the number of lawmakers needed to function under House rules — ahead of a scheduled Monday vote on the draft map. The 150-member House can only conduct business if at least 100 members are present, meaning the absence of 51 or more Democrats can bring the Legislature's

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"This is not a decision we make lightly, but it is one we make with absolute moral clarity," state Rep. Gene Wu, chair of the House Democratic Caucus, said in a statement, in which he accused Gov. Greg Abbott of "using an intentionally racist map to steal the voices of millions of Black and Latino Texans, all to execute a corrupt political deal."

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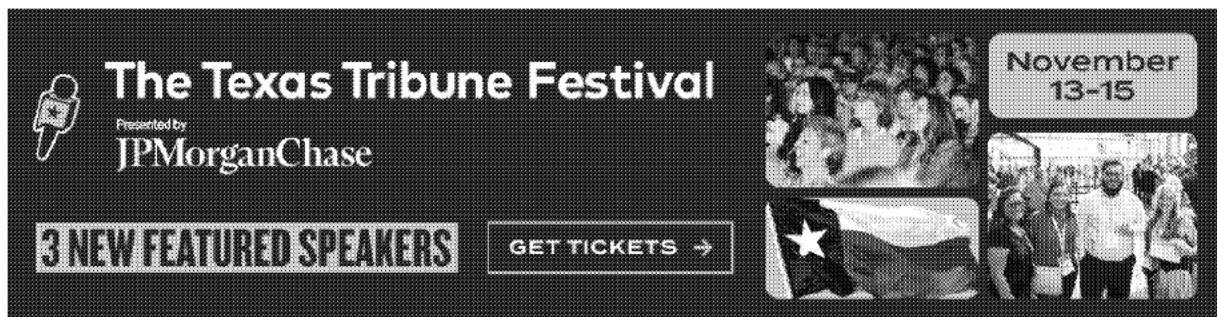
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Most House Democrats left Texas Sunday afternoon en route to the Chicago area. Some also headed to New York to meet with Gov. Kathy Hochul, who has condemned Texas' mid-decade redistricting effort and entertained the idea of retaliating with new maps in her state. A third contingent of lawmakers departed for Boston to attend the National Conference of State Legislatures' annual legislative summit, alongside some Senate Democrats, according to a source familiar with the senators' plans.

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It was not immediately clear how many Senate Democrats had left the state, and the caucus did not indicate any plans to deny quorum in the upper chamber.

There are just over two weeks left of the Texas Legislature's special session, during which Abbott has also asked lawmakers to take up measures responding to the deadly July 4 Hill Country floods, stiffer regulations for consumable hemp, and contentious GOP priorities such as cracking down on abortion pills and the bathrooms transgender people can use. The prospects for those items, along with the new redistricting maps, were immediately thrown in doubt by the Democrats' departure.

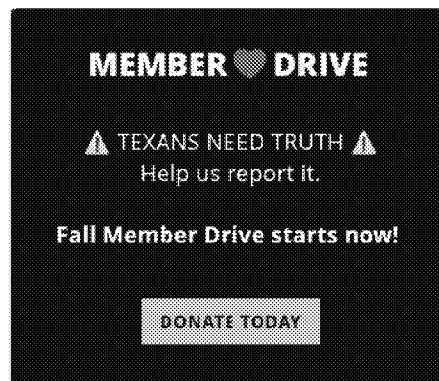




Texas House Democrats go through security screening at Signature Aviation in Austin prior to boarding a flight to Chicago on Aug. 3, 2025. The lawmakers left the state in a bid to deny the quorum needed in the House to redraw the state's congressional maps.  Bob Daemmrich for The Texas Tribune

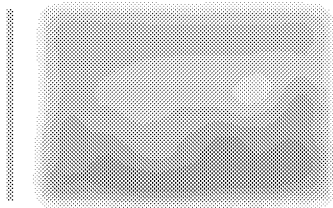
In his statement, Wu said, "As of today, this corrupt special session is over."

At a news conference alongside Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker Sunday night, however, Wu was noncommittal about Democrats' long-term plans, telling reporters he wasn't sure what the caucus' next steps would be.



"We're still taking this day by day," he said.

Abbott, meanwhile, sent a letter to each of the departed members late Sunday informing them that he would attempt to have them removed from office if they do not return to Austin. The governor cited a nonbinding 2021 legal opinion from Attorney General Ken Paxton, who said it would be up to a court to decide whether a lawmaker who had left the state to deny quorum had forfeited their office. If a court were to decide that the legislators had vacated their offices, Abbott would be permitted to fill those seats with appointees of his choosing, Paxton's opinion stated.



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Democrats have excoriated the mid-decade redistricting plan — which was demanded by President Donald Trump ahead of a potentially difficult midterm election for Republicans — as a political power grab that would unconstitutionally suppress the votes of people of color.

But locked out of power in the Legislature, Democrats have few tools at their disposal to fight the effort, even as they promised to delay the map's adoption and to use that extra time to educate Texans on what they framed as an attack on democracy.

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Preventing a quorum was the nuclear option, coming just before the map was set to reach the House floor. Republicans advanced the redistricting plan out of a House committee Saturday morning and later scheduled it for a floor vote Monday. Democrats could skip town long enough to run out the clock on the current session — which began July 21 and can last up to 30 days — but Abbott can continue calling lawmakers back for subsequent sessions.

Texas House rules adopted by Republicans in 2023, after Democrats decamped in 2021 to block new voting restrictions, impose a threat of arrest and a \$500-per-day fine on each lawmaker who absconds from the state. House rules also prohibit lawmakers from using their campaign funds to pay the fines, making the decampment a potentially expensive move. But Democrats have been raising money in recent weeks in anticipation of the quorum break, and those involved in the fundraising say they have found a way to circumvent the campaign restrictions.

At Sunday's news conference, Wu acknowledged the financial and personal strain legislators would face by staying in Illinois for a prolonged period. He noted that, as part-time lawmakers, they earn only \$600 a month.

"We're all away from our families that we've already been away from for six months," he said, referring to the 140-day legislative session that ended in early June. "We've been away from our jobs. We've not earned a lot of income this entire year. ... This is not a decision that we take lightly."

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Among those fundraising to support Democrats is Powered by People, a political group launched by former U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke in 2019. The group raised over \$600,000 in 2021, the last time Democrats deprived the House of a quorum, to help cover the costs associated with staying out of state, and an O'Rourke spokesperson confirmed the group is again supporting this year's effort.

National Democrats have offered their support, with U.S. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-New York, visiting Austin last week to strategize with state Democrats and vowing to stand with them in trying to block the new map. Democratic National Committee chair Ken Martin said in a statement that the party would fight alongside Texas Democrats, as well as take aim at Republican-held seats nationwide in 2026.

Pritzker's involvement began at a dinner in late June hosted by Oklahoma Democrats, where he discussed the possibility of helping Texas Democrats fight back against the redistricting plan with state party chair Kendall Scudder, according to a source familiar with the Illinois governor's thinking. Pritzker and his team are helping Texas Democratic lawmakers find lodging and meeting spaces, but the governor, a potential 2028 presidential candidate and billionaire, is not providing direct financial support, the source said.

Paxton wrote on social media Sunday that Democrats "who try and run away like cowards should be found, arrested, and brought back to the Capitol immediately."

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Other Republicans called for House Speaker Dustin Burrows to take aggressive action against members who were not present when the chamber gavels in Monday at 3 p.m.

Rep. Jared Patterson, R-Frisco, posted on X that he doubted all the Democrats participating in the quorum break had actually left the state, and said Burrows, R-Lubbock, should send the House sergeant-at-arms or state law enforcement after anyone who wasn't on the floor Monday. He also suggested that Abbott — who controls the agenda for special sessions — allow lawmakers to redraw the lines of state House districts to penalize absent Democrats. Rep. Jeff Leach, R-Plano, added

participating in the quorum break had actually left the state; and said that if, as Lubbock, should send the House sergeant-at-arms or state law enforcement after anyone who wasn't on the floor Monday. He also suggested that Abbott — who controls the agenda for special sessions — allow lawmakers to redraw the lines of state House districts to penalize absent Democrats. Rep. Jeff Leach, R-Plano, added that any participating Democrats who serve as House committee vice chairs should be stripped of their positions.

On social media, the speaker said if the House lacked a quorum Monday, "all options will be on the table." He did not elaborate on what those options might be, and his spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment. A spokesperson for Abbott did not respond to a request for comment.


"We're going to do everything we can to protect every single one of them," Pritzker said Sunday.

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Trump's political operatives had pressured state leaders to draw Republicans up to five new seats in Texas to help buffer the GOP's slim majority in the U.S. House against potential losses in a midterm election next year expected to favor Democrats. The first draft of the map was unveiled Wednesday, targeting Democratic members around Austin, Dallas, Houston and South Texas.

While federal law permits redistricting for partisan gain, the Voting Rights Act prohibits diluting the votes of people of color. Democrats argued that the proposed map unconstitutionally packed voters of color into some districts while spreading them throughout others to reduce their ability to elect their preferred candidates.

U.S. Rep. Marc Veasey of Fort Worth, whose seat would be partially dismantled under the new lines, noted at a committee hearing Friday that his district was drawn by a federal court "to ensure that communities of color, Black and brown Texans, could finally have a voice in Congress."

"Now, that voice is again under threat," he said. "This is a map that was drawn behind closed doors — as we've heard here today — to dismantle representation and weaken our power in turn."

*Disclosure: National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) has been a financial supporter of The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization that is funded in part by donations from members, foundations and corporate sponsors. Financial supporters play no role in the Tribune's journalism. Find a complete list of them [here](#).*

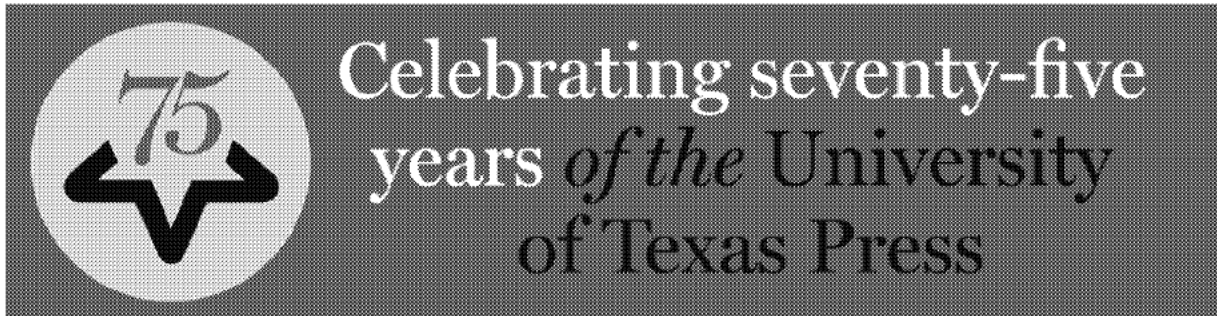
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*Gabby Birenbaum contributed to this report.*

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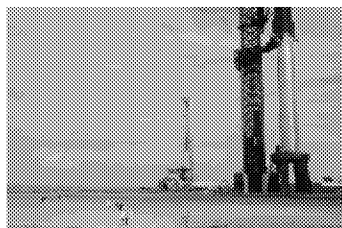
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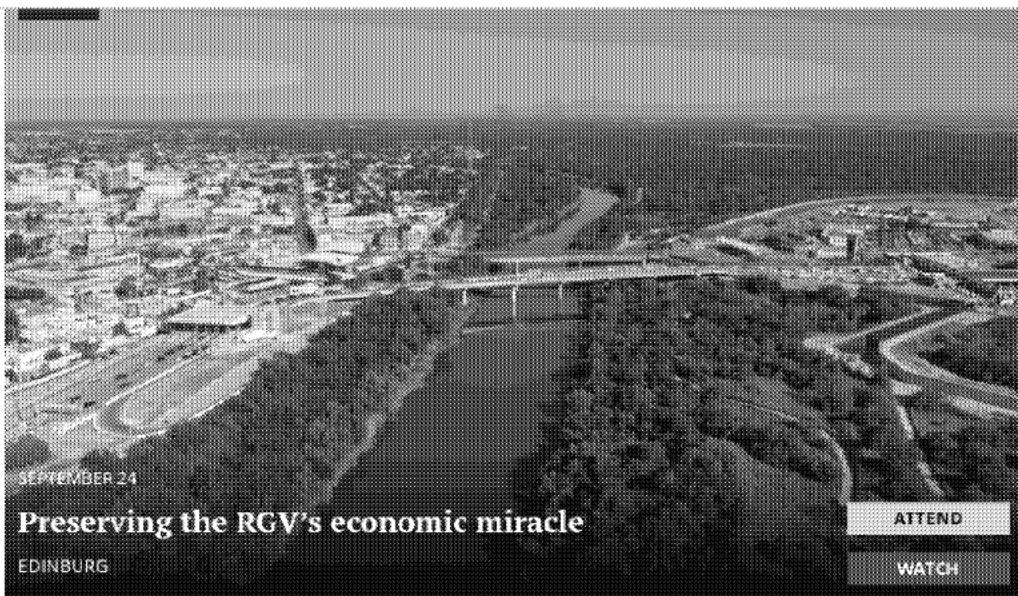
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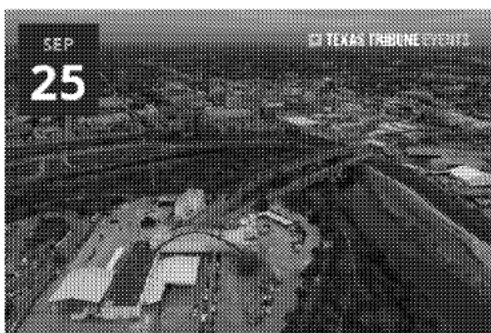
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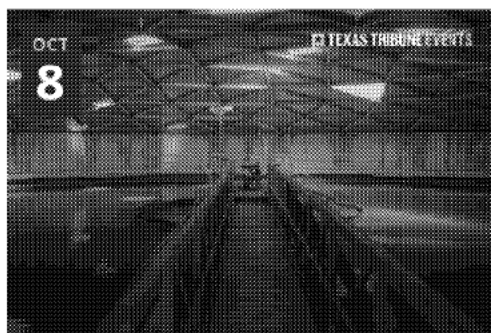
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