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Texas Democrats could be fined nearly \$400,000 for fleeing the state

Under Texas House rules, each lawmaker is fined \$500 per day for missing official business.



Democratic Texas Rep. Gene Wu speaks with the media following a press conference with other Texas House Democrats in Warrenville, Illinois, Aug. 4, 2025. | Nam Y. Huh/AP

By LIZ CRAMPTON and ANDREW HOWARD

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Texas Democrats stand to be fined nearly \$400,000 for fleeing the state in a gambit to stop Republican-led redistricting.

And should they stay away during potential successive legislative sessions this year, they'd face more than \$3.2 million in penalties.

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over control of the House next year.

Under [Texas House rules](#), each lawmaker is fined \$500 per day for missing official business without permission. To break quorum, at least 51 Democrats must be absent, meaning at minimum they will be charged a combined \$25,500 per day. On Monday, 57 Democrats skipped session after flying to blue states, bringing the penalties to \$28,500 — although it was unclear how many absences were due to the gerrymandering protest.

Should Democrats refuse to return for the length of the entire special legislative session, which will end on Aug. 19, they could rack up fines totaling at least \$382,500.

And if Republican Gov. Greg Abbott chooses to call additional special sessions to pass the redrawn map at Trump's request — and Democrats remain out of state in defiance — those fines will pile up. If they hold out until Texas' Dec. 8 candidate filing deadline, the penalties would exceed \$3.2 million.

But the fleeing lawmakers said they were not deterred by the fines, nor by [Abbott's threats to arrest them or vacate their offices](#).

"We'll deal with the consequences later," said Texas Rep. John Bucy, who joined his colleagues in decamping to Illinois Sunday. "That's not the important thing right now. It's stopping Donald Trump from stealing the congressional map and winning the midterm elections through cheating."

This marks the first test of whether Republicans in the legislature chose to impose fines on fellow members. Texas lawmakers [added the daily fines to the House rules in 2023](#) to punish future quorum-breakers after Democrats fled the state in opposition to GOP voting restrictions in 2021.

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Texas Democrats believe the fines may be an empty threat and are doubtful Republicans have the authority to order them to pay.

“This is a house rule,” said Andrew Cates, a campaign finance lawyer in Texas. “This is not a law. ... How the hell are they going to collect it? How are they going to enforce it?”

It’s unclear exactly who will pay the fines, and state law prevents the lawmakers from using campaign cash to foot the bill. Texas Democrats [think they found a loophole around the rule](#), though they did not provide any specificity.

In the leadup to the walkout, national Democrats promised to help their Texas counterparts with financial support.

Powered by the People, a political group founded by former Rep. Beto O’Rourke (D-Texas), is one of the top funders paying for expenses incurred by the members, according to the [Texas Tribune](#). Texas Majority PAC, a George Soros-linked group devoted to electing Democrats, has also been working on gathering donors.

“Anything we [as members of Congress] can do legally, we are absolutely going to do it,” Rep. Jasmine Crockett (D-Texas) said from Illinois Monday.

She said Democrats sought guidance on fundraising for the effort.

“When we’re soliciting, we’re trying to make sure that we’re complying with federal laws,” she added. “As soon as we get the full clarification, we’re going to do whatever we can to support them as long as we function within the law.”

Abbott has said any lawmaker who takes money to pay their fines could be charged with bribery, a second-degree felony in Texas.

[That threat](#) seems to rest on an aggressive reading of [Texas’ public bribery statute](#). State law makes it a felony to accept political contributions as part of an “express agreement to take or withhold” official actions.

However, the law also says such a contribution only amounts to a crime if the lawmakers’ decision “would not have been taken or withheld but for the benefit.”

That may be hard to prove when lawmakers had signaled for weeks that they were considering this mass exodus as a last resort to block Texas’ redistricting measure.

And that’s not the only hurdle Abbott would need to clear: The law mandates “direct evidence” of such a purportedly corrupt agreement — not just circumstantial proof. That means Texas prosecutors would need some kind of eyewitness testimony, written or electronic communications or other form of clear proof that the Democrats only agreed to break quorum because of the promise of a financial benefit.

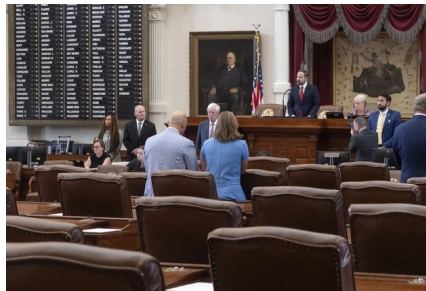
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If high-dollar donors can't pay the bills, the fines will stack up fast for lawmakers, [who only make](#) \$7,200 per year for their legislative work, which is often conducted in addition to another career.

The rising costs underscore the risk Democrats are taking. They are not only navigating the difficult economics, but there are political vulnerabilities, too. While their goal is to stymie the Trump-backed congressional map, they are also halting the legislature's other work in the session, including potential relief efforts after last month's devastating floods.

Other Democrats have quickly capitalized on the Texans who left the state for their own fundraising efforts. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (D-N.Y.) and O'Rourke both sent fundraising emails — split with Powered by People — praising the lawmakers for decamping. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee is also fundraising off the effort, sending an email signed by Crockett, who participated in the 2021 walkout as a state lawmaker.



Texas House Speaker Dustin Burrows announces from the podium that the House falls short of a quorum, Aug. 4, 2025, in Austin, Texas. | Michael Thomas/AP

Texas House Speaker Dustin Burrows called out the price Democrats will have to pay during a speech from the dais on Monday.

"To be absolutely clear, leaving the state does not stop this house from doing its work, it only delays it, and every day this chamber is unable to act, the cost grows," Burrows said. "If you choose to continue down this road, you should know there will be consequences."

Shia Kapos and Kyle Cheney contributed to this report.

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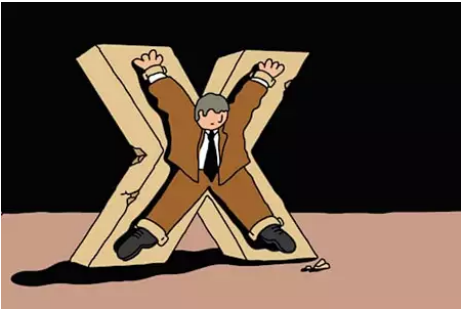
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