



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on August 11, 2021

Arrest Warrants Issued to Bring Fugitive Texas Democrats Back to Work

Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan has signed arrest warrants for Democratic lawmakers who fled the state to block the election-reform bill they claim would hinder the ability of minorities to cast ballots.

The issuing of the warrants were first [reported](#) on by *The Dallas Morning News*, which states Phelan signed civil arrest warrants for 52 absent Democrats late Tuesday, following the Texas House of Representatives voting [80-12](#) to force the fugitives to return, which, in turn, followed the Texas Supreme Court [clearing](#) the way for the House to order runaway legislators back to the chamber to secure a quorum and use law enforcement for that purpose. The warrants were said to be delivered to the House sergeant-at-arms on Wednesday morning.



Richard McMillin/iStock/Getty Images Plus

The House Democrats in the suit have until Thursday at 4:00 p.m. to respond to the court.

The arrest warrants are civil, not criminal, Republican lawmakers specified. Law-enforcement officers carrying out arrest orders could only try to bring them to the House chambers. “People aren’t going to jail, but they got to come back to work,” State Representative Mayes Middleton [said](#).

The Texas Supreme Court’s order came at the request of Governor Greg Abbott and House Speaker Dade Phelan to overturn a recent ruling by a Travis County district judge that blocked them from ordering the arrest of the Democrats who fled to Washington, D.C., to disrupt the legislative session. While in D.C., the lawmakers met with several high-profile Democrats, including Vice President Harris and Senator Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), to advocate for federal voting-rights legislation, and held virtual meetings with [others](#), such as the Clintons. State Representative Julie Johnson and her “wife,” Jessica González, took the opportunity to have a romantic [getaway](#) in Portugal.

Though the Democrats successfully stalled the bill during the 30-day special session which ended last Friday, Governor Abbott immediately called for a second special session that began on Saturday.

While some House Democrats have already returned home, more than 20 of their colleagues remain in D.C., thus when the legislature gathered for its second special session, it still could not reach a quorum.

The *Texas Tribune* [reports](#) that when the House could not meet its 100-member threshold to conduct business Monday, legislatures adopted a procedural move known as a “call of the House.” That move locks doors to the chamber and prevents members on the floor from leaving unless they have permission in writing from the speaker. After at least four of the Democrat lawmakers returned to the



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chamber Monday, making the quorum short by just five members, some of their Democratic colleagues who were still in Washington [expressed](#) their dissatisfaction with the “traitors.” Representative Ana-Maria Ramos of Richardson [tweeted](#) regarding the returning Democrats that they “all threw us under the bus today.”

Some of the Democrat lawmakers who returned to Texas said they still would not show up for work. Representative Celia Israel returned to Austin but [reportedly](#) stated “there is no way” she would go to the Texas House. “Every day that we can not be on the floor doing business according to Gov. Abbott’s agenda is a good day,” Israel added.

Likewise, Representative Evelina “Lina” Ortega [said](#) she is home in El Paso but will not go to the House floor until there is already a quorum or a majority of her party caucus decides to be there. “I pretty much feel that it’s a shame that the governor and Republicans ... are really using the dirtiest tactic available to them,” Ortega stated after the House voted to send law enforcement after the absentee Democrats. “To me it’s all about a power grab. I’m glad to stay away and continue to fight them.”

Dallas News [indicates](#) the fugitive Democrats “remain defiant,” and that “an untold number are outside the reach of the House sergeant-at-arms and state troopers.” “I just question whether DPS or anyone can break down my door to come and put me in shackles and drag me there,” Representative Vikki Goodwin (D-Austin) wondered. “I feel certain that I can stay in my home, and stay off the House floor.”

Also on Tuesday, in response to the Republican push to force the Democrats to do their job, a coalition of 21 Democratic-aligned groups, including Planned Parenthood Texas Votes, the state’s Sierra Club chapter, the Texas Organizing Project, Progress Texas, and other “progressives,” [released](#) a statement urging House Democrats to continue breaking quorum to counteract Governor Abbott’s “tyranny” and “assault” on voting rights: “In the face of an assault on voting rights unlike anything we’ve seen since Jim Crow, on transgender kids looking to participate in youth sports programs, on access to safe medication and abortion care, on teachers looking to teach an uncensored version of history, and so much more, Texas lawmakers cannot give in to Gov. Abbott’s attempts at tyranny.” A coalition maintained that staying off the House floor is “the only way to preserve our right to vote.”

The *National Review* [explains](#) that “the Texas bill is no more a voter-suppression measure than the Georgia election law ... which occasioned outraged accusations of the arrival of Jim Crow 2.0 that ultimately fell flat.”

The Texas bill, just as the Georgia Election Integrity Act of 2021, is aimed at pushing back against the voting procedures that were supposed to be only temporary expedients introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as drive-through voting. The bill would explicitly prohibit election officials from implementing practices not contemplated under the state’s election statutes.

Among the provisions are increased security and transparency of the election process. For example, it would be required for voters to provide a driver’s license number or other identifier on absentee ballots, matching the existing voter-ID requirement for registering to vote and voting in person.

The legislation also would only allow for solicited ballots to be sent to those voters requesting them, mandate that all voting systems have a paper trail on or before 2026, and require live streaming of vote-counting proceedings.

All of those provisions are dubbed “restrictive,” but arguably there is no way they prevent voters of any race from casting a ballot.



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