

# Custody Of The House: How Republicans Are Enforcing Quorum In Texas

- By amuse
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When Texas House Democrats fled the chamber on August 4, 2025, they did so with a single objective: to break quorum and stall a vote on redistricting. It was not the first time Texas Democrats engaged in this tactic, but this latest exodus tested the limits of institutional patience. Republicans responded by reaching deep into the House rulebook, invoking rarely used powers designed precisely for moments like this.

House rules authorize the Speaker to issue a “call of the House.” Once a call is ordered, absent members can be compelled to attend. The rule is explicit. The Speaker may direct the Sergeant-at-Arms, or officers appointed by him, to arrest and return members needed to restore quorum. On that August afternoon, Speaker Dustin Burrows did not hesitate. He ordered a call of the House and, in an unambiguous gesture of seriousness, issued arrest warrants for the absent Democrats.

This time, the financial stick was also brought down swiftly. Under newly adopted rules, members who break quorum incur a \$500 per day penalty. Unlike the discretionary fines of previous walkouts, this penalty is automatic. Burrows confirmed publicly that fines were accruing daily. The cost of apprehension, however, remains subject to separate approval, a reminder that even in a moment of crisis, procedure still governs the House.

Yet, despite the warrants, no Democrat was physically arrested during the first special session. DPS troopers searched, but Burrows controlled both the method of enforcement and the resources assigned. Many Republicans, bristling at what they viewed as timidity, demanded more aggressive pursuit. Their frustration was not misplaced. Authority unused risks becoming authority undone.

With the second special session came a change in tactics. On August 18, when Democrats returned from their two-week absence, they entered a chamber under new rules of control. Burrows announced that those who had fled would now remain under the watchful “custody” of DPS troopers whenever outside the House chamber. The point was unmistakable. They had defied the rules once. They would not be permitted to do so again.

Representative Nicole Collier refused to sign what Republicans labeled a “permission slip,” granting her trooper escort. The consequence was that she confined herself to the House floor, turning her chamber desk into a bed. She posted her makeshift imprisonment to X, presenting herself as a political captive. Yet, the reality is she could have slept in her office or gone home, trooper nearby. Her supposed incarceration was voluntary, a choice staged for cameras and sympathizers.

While Burrows tightened his grip inside the chamber, Attorney General Ken Paxton carried the fight into the courts. Burrows had initially given Democrats until August 8 to return before seeking judicial remedies. When they did not, Paxton filed petitions with the Texas Supreme Court to vacate their seats. On August 11, the court consolidated the petitions, setting deadlines for the Democrats to file briefs by August 29, with Paxton’s reply due September 4. A mid-September ruling is expected. Republicans, impatient for justice, must now endure the deliberate pace of judicial procedure.

Paxton did not stop there. He pursued the financial arteries sustaining the walkout. On August 8, a Fort Worth judge granted him a temporary restraining order against Beto O’Rourke and his NGO, Powered by People, forbidding them from raising or disbursing funds to Democrats. Beto responded defiantly, seeking a counter-order in El Paso. One day later, he brazenly violated the Fort Worth order, raising funds in public while mocking the state’s authority in coarse, expletive-filled language livestreamed on YouTube. Paxton countered with a motion for contempt, urging the court to jail Beto for 180 days. The judge has ordered Beto to appear on September 2 to explain himself.

By mid-August, Paxton secured an expansion of the restraining order and moved to revoke business licenses associated with Beto and his network. On August 15, the same day the second special session began, he pushed further still, opposing Beto's attempt in El Paso to halt his bribery investigation. The court ordered Beto to sit for a deposition and provide discovery by August 29. Paxton is playing a long game, striking at the walkout's financiers while pursuing legal accountability for the walkout itself.

Meanwhile, the redistricting fight that prompted the Democratic exodus continued. The initial map proposed in the first special session shifted key portions of Fort Bliss from Democrat Veronica Escobar's 16th District into Republican Tony Gonzales's 23rd District. The second-session map reversed course, returning Fort Bliss and El Paso International Airport to Escobar. On its face, this looked like a concession to Democrats, fueling suspicion that the walkout had been rewarded. Representative Brian Harrison voiced the sentiment bluntly, accusing leadership of bending to Democratic demands while ignoring Republican calls to maximize GOP gains.

The reality is less conspiratorial. Redistricting, especially mid-decade, is a minefield of legal challenges. Judge Jerry Smith's decision to pause the LULAC case loomed large, and mapmakers sought to minimize vulnerability. Some suggest the Department of Defense quietly pressed for a unified district to avoid splitting the base and airport across districts. If so, it would have been less about appeasing Escobar and more about maintaining military cohesion. Still, perception often trumps nuance in politics, and the optics of the change unsettled many Republicans.

The new map nevertheless preserves the GOP's essential advantage. Analysts suggest it solidifies the five pickups originally envisioned and introduces the possibility of as many as seven. That is no small prize. But the fallout has not been without collateral damage. State Representative Steve Toth, challenging Dan Crenshaw in the 2nd Congressional District, found himself drawn outside its new boundaries. Though not disqualifying under federal law, the change complicates

his candidacy. Democrats Lloyd Doggett and Jasmine Crockett also found themselves displaced. Redistricting is an unforgiving instrument, indifferent to individual ambitions.

Through all of this, the GOP in Texas has shown both fracture and resolve. Burrows faltered in the first session, hesitant to fully enforce the power of arrest, perhaps because his speakership depends on the very Democrats who bolted. Yet in the second session, he corrected course, tethering Democrats to DPS custody and reasserting the House's authority. Paxton, meanwhile, has taken up the task of accountability, targeting both the rogue members and their benefactors. His campaign against Beto O'Rourke and outside funders demonstrates that Republican patience for quorum games has run dry.

The task is not complete. The Supreme Court must rule on the Democrats' seats, and Paxton's legal pursuit of Beto remains ongoing. But the message is clear. Quorum is not a game. The rules are real, and defiance will not go unanswered.