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Texas Leaders Use Official Powers in Redistricting Showdown

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Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and U.S. Senator John Cornyn, who faces Paxton in the upcoming Republican primary, are both actively using their official capacities to challenge Democratic lawmakers who fled the state to block a GOP-led redistricting plan.

On Friday, Paxton filed a lawsuit with the Texas Supreme Court seeking to remove 13 absent Democratic state House members from office. His legal filing cites statements from

those lawmakers that, according to Paxton, confirm their refusal to return to Texas and obstruct legislative business.

At the same time, Senator Cornyn requested federal assistance to locate the missing Democrats. In a Thursday statement, Cornyn confirmed that FBI Director Kash Patel assigned agents from Austin and San Antonio to support the effort. Although the FBI has declined to comment publicly, it remains uncertain what role federal agents can take, since leaving the state does not violate federal law.

Paxton's lawsuit follows a similar effort by Governor Greg Abbott, who has pursued the removal of Rep. Gene Wu, the House Democratic leader. This legal approach to disqualify elected officials in the middle of a legislative session is without precedent in Texas politics.

At a recent news conference in Illinois, Rep. Gene Wu addressed the situation, saying, "We will not be broken by these antics. We are not here to play games or to make waves."

Another Democrat targeted, Rep. John Bucy III, expressed firm resistance on social media, declaring he will "not back down" despite Paxton's efforts.

Paxton has expanded his pressure campaign by filing an emergency petition in Illinois seeking to enforce civil arrest warrants for the absent lawmakers. These warrants were authorized by Texas House Speaker Dustin Burrows. Many Texas Democrats traveled to Illinois to prevent the Texas House from meeting the two-thirds quorum required to conduct business.

Additionally, Paxton has initiated legal action against former U.S. Representative Beto O'Rourke. O'Rourke's political action committee, Powered By People, has helped finance the travel expenses of Democrats who left the state. Paxton's office is seeking an injunction to prevent the PAC from further fundraising for this purpose.

On the Democratic side, some lawmakers involved in the quorum break are eyeing Senate bids. State Rep. James Talarico, a spokesperson for the absent House members, has acknowledged that the experience will shape his future political decisions. In a recent interview with CNN's David Chalian, Talarico said, "I'm still processing everything that's been happening, and I have no doubt it will inform my decision about how to continue my service."

Meanwhile, the Texas House is set to resume on Monday. Speaker Burrows confirmed that the state Department of Public Safety will enforce the civil arrest warrants for the missing

Democrats. "We have all hands on deck," Burrows said. "We are continuing to explore new avenues to compel a quorum and will keep pressing forward until the job is done."

Burrows also revealed additional punitive measures for absentee lawmakers. Thirty percent of each absent member's monthly operating budget will be withheld, and they must now appear in person for certain administrative requests, including travel reimbursements and staff salary changes. Failure to comply will result in canceled newsletters and withheld funds.

Earlier this week, Governor Abbott stated on NBC that the Democrats cannot indefinitely delay redistricting. "I'm going to call special session after special session after special session with the same agenda items on there," Abbott said. Special sessions in Texas can last up to 30 days each.

Responding to this, Rep. Talarico told CNN's Wolf Blitzer, "We're taking this one special session at a time, and my colleagues and I have agreed to stay out of the state capitol for the next two weeks to kill this rigged map and stop this corrupt process."