

## Lone star showdown

### Democrats' actions were noble

During the night of May 11, 2003, 58 Democratic members of the Texas House of Representatives secretly boarded buses and headed out of state. Their trek into Oklahoma came after a month of fighting an unfair and unconstitutional redistricting plan specifically designed to eliminate districts held by Democratic representatives in the U.S. Congress. By leaving that night, not only did the Texas Democrats save Texans the right to choose their own representatives instead of having them chosen for them, but they also brought attention to a nasty, mean-spirited and raw grab for political power by House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

The existing district map was designed by a federal three-judge panel in the eastern district of Texas on Nov. 14, 2001 after the Legislature failed to do so, according to The Houston Chronicle. In accordance to Supreme Court rules, redistricting must be done to reflect population changes after every census, meaning redistricting does not need to occur in Texas for another eight years.

The proposed redistricting plan killed by the Democrats had clear political purposes, which DeLay does not deny. He told reporters, "I'm the majority leader and we want more seats."

Democrats hold 17 of Texas' 32 congressional districts. DeLay's redistricting plan would give Republicans at least five more congressional seats by pulverizing the districts currently held by Chris Bell of Houston, Martin Frost of Dallas, Max Sandlin of Marshall, Jim Turner of Crockett and Charles Stenholm of Abilene, according to The Chronicle. Republicans would also have a good chance of winning districts held by Lloyd Doggett of Austin, Chet Edwards of Waco and Ralph Hall of Rockwall.

DeLay defends the proposed changes by saying that they will more accurately reflect Texas' Republican majority, and that the current map benefits Democrats. However, John Alford, a Rice University professor who has advised Democrats and Republicans — including Gov. Rick Perry — on redistricting, disputes this claim.

Alford told the Associated Press that 20 out of the 32 districts in the existing map actually contain a majority of Republican voters. Five of these districts are held by Democratic representatives — Crockett, Edwards, Hall, Stenholm and Turner — because the voters want them to be.

The proposal to do away with these districts instead of trying to win them fairly, which should be a cakewalk with a majority of Republican voters, is cowardly and undemocratic.



JENELLE WILSON

People have the right to choose their representatives. DeLay does not have the right to choose representatives for them.

Alford also called the partisan gerrymandering (or as the Democrats have dubbed it "Tommymandering") unconstitutional. The Supreme Court requires that districts be compact and contiguous, which some of the proposed districts fail to meet.

Take, for example, the state capital. In the existing map (which, with the redistricting map, is available online from the Austin American-Statesman), Austin is only a part of one district. Under the new map, Austin would be divided by four districts. The proposed 15th district would run from the southeast corner of Austin, down toward Laredo and then wrap around the southern border with Mexico, almost 350 miles away. This ludicrous slicing of the state led Rep. Nick Lampson to nickname the plan the "Texas Chainsaw Massacre," an apt description.

Luckily, the Texas Constitution provides a way to stop such clear, massive abuses of power, and the 55 Democrats who actually stayed out of state — minus the three who came back earlier in the week — were brave enough to use those means. It is unfortunate that other bills died along with the redistricting plan, but the Legislature had been in session for 118 days before the Democrats left. It was the Republican leadership that decided to bring up the redistricting map before other important legislation during the last four days to consider bills. It was also the Republican leadership that decided not to pull redistricting off the table, which would have brought the Democrats back in time to address some of the remaining legislation.

Redistricting should never have been an issue; it was not necessary, and the Legislature had more important things to do. However, once it was clear that the plan would be brought up, the Democrats were forced to respond. Leaving the state was the only certain way of stopping this abuse of power specifically designed to give Republicans even more power. Preventing an undemocratic and unconstitutional piece of legislation was the right thing to do.

Representatives have an obligation to stand up for and protect their constituents, and that is exactly what the 55 Texas Democrats did.

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major. Graphic by Ivan Flores.

### Democrats walked out on Texas

Think of a spoiled child playing with other kids. When something doesn't go his way, what happens? Likely, he will throw a fit, cry some, and if he is a real brat, he might just take his toys and leave. On May 11, in the fashion of children a tenth their age, Democrats in the Texas House of Representatives quit working for Texans and left for Oklahoma. In the most partisan and undemocratic action since reconstruction, House Democrats, nicknamed the "Chicken D's," fled Austin to shut down the Legislature. The cost will be high for the citizens of Texas, and those legislators should pay with their jobs.

The Democrat flight was ill-timed. Redistricting, a process that determines the shape of U.S. congressional districts, was slated for a vote on May 12. Since Democrats had long controlled the redistricting process, they were upset Republicans would get their way now that they were in power. Without at least some of those 58 Democrats present, the House of Representatives did not have a quorum to conduct business. In accordance with state law, the Speaker of the House Tom Craddick dispatched state troopers to capture the fugitive law makers. By hiding out of state until the deadline for a floor vote on all legislation, the redistricting bill, along with the hundreds of others, died without a vote.

Supporters of the Democrats say that their week-long vacation in Oklahoma did not cost the taxpayers anything. However, there are costs larger than a Holiday Inn suite and a Greyhound bus ticket involved. The shutdown means the Legislature will have to hold a special session, which will cost at least \$1.7 million, according to Citizens for a Sound Economy. The group also states that it cost taxpayers \$365,000 a day to operate the capital while the Democrats lounged by their hotel pool. Other costs, such as the death of public health and homeland security bills, don't have a tangible price tag. This is too steep a fee for a political ego trip.

Democrats argue that since redistricting just occurred, it is not needed. Legally, redistricting is required to be done by the Legislature after every census. However, after the last Legislature failed to finish redistricting, the courts imposed their own unrepresentative plan. In 2002, Republicans won all 29 statewide offices, control of the state



MATTHEW MADDOX

Legislature by a wide margin and 57 percent of the vote in congressional races. But because of the court's own gerrymandering, Democrats somehow beat Republicans 17 to 15 in congressional races. The only fair map for

Texans is one drawn by the Legislature, as provided by law.

Rep. Jim Dunham, a fugitive Democrat, is among those complaining that redistricting in a non-census year is wrong. According to National Review, Dunham had his own district redrawn in 1997 so that he could build a house in a different neighborhood without having to run in a new district. And no, 1997 was not a census year.

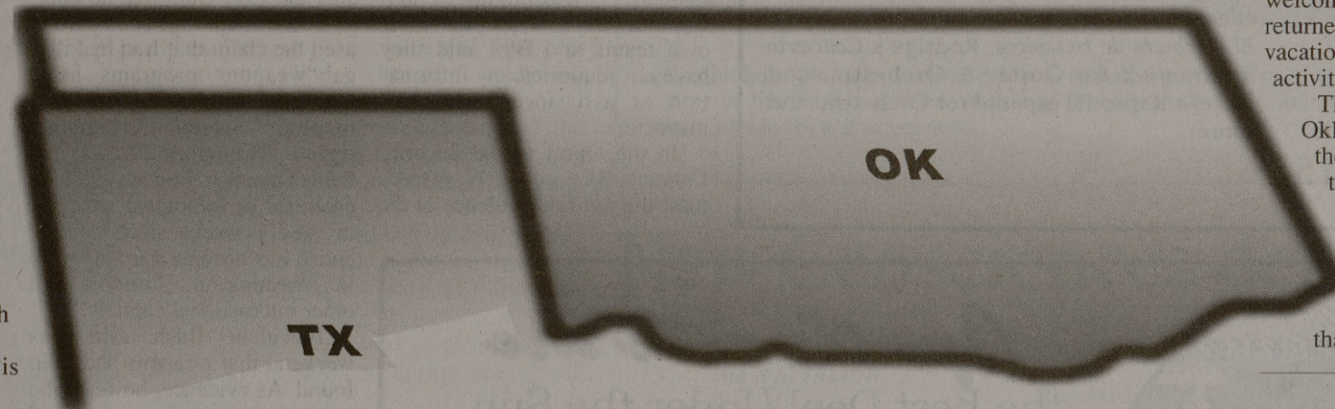
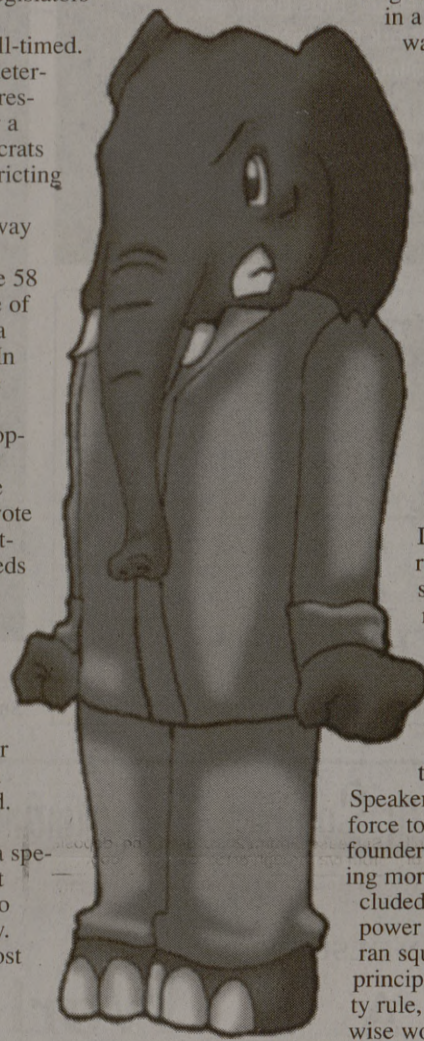
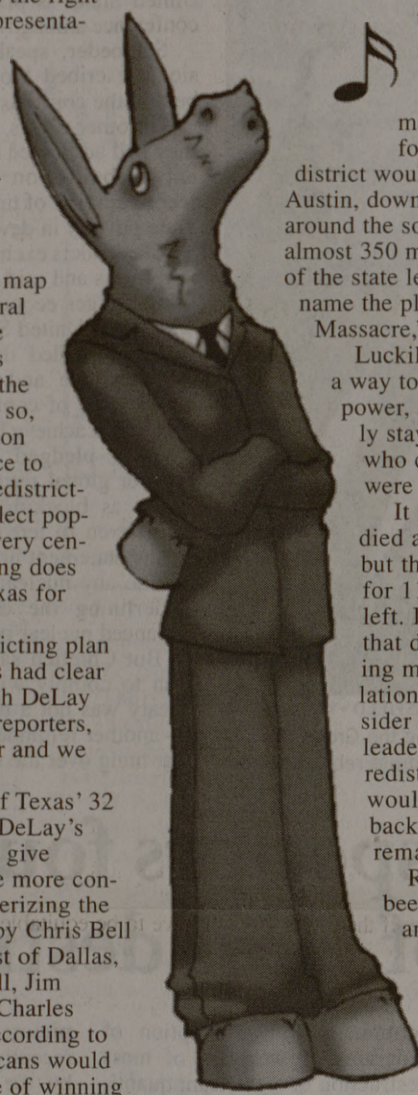
Now that they are out of power, Democrats are crying that Republican-led redistricting is unfair. In 1990, Democrats implemented one of the most skewed redistricting plans in recent history. According to analyst Michael Barone, Democrat U.S. Rep. Martin Frost's plan was "The most partisan redistricting in the '90 cycle in the nation." Barone's 1991 Almanac of American Politics called it "the shrewdest gerrymander" of the decade.

Some have applauded the Democrats' use of the quorum rule and their desertion across state lines. However, the quorum was invented so the minority party could not be locked out of business, not as a tool to hold the democratic process hostage. This is apparent in the power entrusted the Speaker of the House to use police force to arrest truant members. "The founders debated the idea of requiring more than a majority. They concluded that putting such immense power into the hands of a minority ran squarely against the democratic principle. Democracy means majority rule, not minority gridlock." These wise words were spoken by U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle-D, on Jan. 30, 1995.

The liberal media's favorite whipping boy, U.S. House Speaker Tom DeLay-R, has taken heat from the press for the gridlock. Busy pointing the finger at DeLay for encouraging redistricting, they have overlooked the meddling from the other side of the national isle. They don't bother to ask who urged the Democrats to run for the border. According to the Fort Worth Star Telegram, staff members of Frost stayed with the fugitive Texas Democrats in Oklahoma and even welcomed them back at Austin when they returned. Both staffers claimed that they were vacationing. Apparently, vacations are a popular activity with Democrats these days.

Those Democrats who escaped to Oklahoma were not working to represent their constituents, rather, they were working to protect their own incumbency and party: the most selfish and partisan of motives. Redistricting and voting out of office those members who chose to run rather than work is the best way to stop this tyranny of the minority. Be thankful it was not Texas House Democrats

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## Universities must not abuse tuition hikes

Editor's note: The following editorial appeared in the June 1, 2003 issue of The Bryan-College Station Eagle:

By the time you read this, Texas A&M and The University of Texas — and 11 other state-supported schools — most likely have been given authority to set their own tuition rates. Earlier this weekend, a conference committee of legislators from the Texas Senate and House were working out details of the bill, which is part of the overall appropriations bill.

If passed as expected, the schools which now can charge tuition of \$92 per semester hour would be authorized to increase the rate up to \$115 this fall and up to a whopping \$142 for the fall of 2004. That's an increase of 54 percent in little more than a year if the schools take full advantage of their authority.

Of course, the per-hour tuition doesn't take into account the ever-increasing fees, the rising cost of books and housing and other expenses associated with attending college.

The legislation as proposed would direct some of the additional tuition money to help middle-class and low-income children attend college. Even so, if A&M and UT in particular take full advantage of the authority to increase tuition, they will price themselves out of the range of many Texas families. They already are in danger of becoming institutions peopled only by

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children of well-to-do white families.

In passing the tuition increase legislation, lawmakers are going back on their promise of no new taxes. The tuition increase certainly is a tax increase of families with children in college or about to enter one of the schools with deregulated tuition. It most assuredly is a disincentive for poor children and those from lower middle class families to try and better themselves with a college education. A&M, UT and the other schools need to be sensitive to those families in raising rates.

If A&M does raise its tuition fees, A&M President Robert

Gates wants to spend most of the extra money hiring new faculty. That's great, but there are a few things A&M and UT must do to keep faith with their shareholders — the people of Texas.

The schools really need to scrub their budgets before raising tuition. We know they have made money cuts already, but there are no doubt more cuts that can be made.

Both schools need to require more of their professors to actually teach. Research is important, but teaching is the primary reason UT and A&M exist. At the prices students and their families are paying, they deserve to be taught by more professors than people working on their own degrees. And the teachers who do teach need to be able to communicate effectively with their students, whatever the subject being taught.

A&M and UT need to ensure that classes are offered in sufficient numbers and times so that students can graduate on time. We continue to hear of students who must return to campus for another year or sometimes longer because they are unable to get into the courses they need to graduate in a timely fashion.

As famed coach Darrell Royal once said, "You have to dance with who bring you." That's good advice for A&M and UT, both of which have grown and thrived because of the support of Texas working families and their children for well more than 100 years.