



Houston Chronicle

Sheila Jackson Lee, Al Green go to Austin to fight GOP redistricting plan

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Comments

U.S. Reps Sheila Jackson Lee and Al Green traveled to Austin on Monday to make a rare in-person plea to members of the Texas Senate to change a redistricting plan that would shift hundreds of thousand of Black residents in Houston into new congressional districts.

Jackson Lee said the proposed redistricting plan for Houston is unnecessarily “radical and drastic” and would sever neighborhoods that have been in the 18th Congressional District for the last 50 years.

“This surgery seems totally without purpose,” said Jackson Lee, who is the longest-serving member of Congress from Houston.

Downtown Houston, Third Ward, Texas Southern University, and the University of Houston, would all be removed from Jackson Lee’s 18th Congressional District. Even her home of nearly 50 years would be removed from the district, preventing her from being able to vote for herself in future elections unless she moved. Parts of her district would be put into Green’s neighboring 9th Congressional District or Rep. Sylvia Garcia’s 29th Congressional District. In all, more than 200,000 people in mostly Black neighborhoods would get new members of Congress.

“I am respectfully asking for these districts to be repaired,” Jackson Lee said.

Despite the pleas of the two Democrats, the Senate Redistricting Committee voted 9-6 to adopt the proposed maps without any changes. State Sen. Joan Huffman, a Houston Republican who is leading the redrawing effort, said she is open to changes to the map and told Green and Jackson Lee they have to have those proposals in by Thursday morning to be considered by

the full Senate. Huffman offered no promise that any of the changes would receive her support.

Every 10 years after the U.S. census, the Texas Legislature is required to redraw all of the state's congressional districts to account for population shifts and to assure each district has a near-identical number of people.

The Republican plan created two entirely new districts in Houston and Austin, and mostly protects current members of Congress by making their districts more partisan.

While the districts of Jackson Lee and Green would remain Democratic strongholds, both objected to the shuffling of communities that could result in them being pitted against one another in the 9th District unless something changes. Members of the House, however, are not required to live in their districts.

Green questioned why Republicans would decide that the only two members of Congress in Texas who would be placed in the same district in all of Texas would be two of the longest-serving members who happen to be Black.

"It doesn't look right," he said.

Green took exception to Republicans taking parts of the International District out of his 9th Congressional District and moving them into the 7th Congressional District, represented now by U.S. Rep. Lizzie Fletcher, a Democrat.

After Green and Jackson Lee testified, Huffman insisted once again that the proposed maps are in compliance with the Voting Rights Act, which aims to protect minority communities from having their voting rights infringed upon. Huffman has repeatedly said she had the maps drawn without consideration of race.