

Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0154) PIR 22-0220
Date: Monday, April 4, 2022 at 4:31:40 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: GeneralCounsel
To: AO Records
CC: GeneralCounsel
Attachments: Fwd Mu word_Redacted.pdf, FW SOS Morning News Clips 1 24 22.pdf

EXTERNAL SENDER

Good afternoon,

Consistent with our March 7 email, please find the attached documents responsive to your request for information under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

The responsive documents contain email addresses of the general public. An email address of a member of the public is confidential under section 552.137 of the Texas Government Code. The attorney general authorized all governmental bodies to withhold an email address of a member of the public without first requesting an attorney general opinion in Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009). Thus, this information has been redacted.

We appreciate your patience as we continue to process your request in accordance with the terms of the PIA. We require additional time to review our records and produce additional responsive documents. We will provide you any additional responsive documents—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—by 5:00 p.m. on April 25, 2022. *See* Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, March 7, 2022 2:23 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0154) PIR 22-0220

Good afternoon,

Please see the attached letter, with enclosures, in response to your request for information under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

The responsive documents contain email addresses of the general public. An email address of a member of the public is confidential under section 552.137 of the Texas Government Code. The attorney general authorized all governmental bodies to withhold an email address of a member of the public without first requesting an attorney general opinion in Open Records Decision No. 684 (2009). Thus, this information has been redacted.

Certain information has also been withheld from the attached production pending a determination from the Attorney General's Open Records Division on our request for a ruling.

As stated in the letter, we require more time to continue reviewing our records and produce additional responsive information. We will provide you additional responsive documents—to the extent such information is not excepted from disclosure under state or federal law—by 5:00 p.m. on April 4, 2022. *See* Tex. Gov't Code § 552.221(d).

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, February 25, 2022 1:15 PM
To: 'AO Records' <records@americanoversight.org>
Cc: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0154) PIR 22-0220

Good afternoon,

Thank you for contacting the Office of the Texas Secretary of State. Please see the attached letter, with enclosure, in response to your request for information under Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Williams
Legal Assistant to the General Counsel
Office of the Texas Secretary of State

From: AO Records <records@americanoversight.org>
Sent: Thursday, February 10, 2022 8:55 AM
To: GeneralCounsel <GeneralCounsel@sos.texas.gov>
Subject: Public Information Request (TX-SOS-22-0154)

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Dear Public Information Officer:

Please find attached a request for records under the Texas Public Information Act.

Sincerely,

Dylan Winters (he/him)

Paralegal

American Oversight

records@americanoversight.org

www.americanoversight.org | @weareoversight

PIR: TX-SOS-22-0154

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From: John Scott
Sent: Monday, January 24, 2022 9:46 AM
To: John Scott
Subject: FW: SOS Morning News Clips 1/24/22

Sensitivity: Personal

From: Sam Taylor <SMTaylor@sos.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, January 24, 2022 8:25 AM
Subject: SOS Morning News Clips 1/24/22
Sensitivity: Personal



Texas Secretary of State Morning News Clips January 24, 2022

[Vote-by-mail rejections are testing integrity of Texas Republicans' voting law](#), *Texas Tribune*, January 24, 2022

[League of Women Voters threatens to sue Texas over cap on voter registration forms](#), *San Antonio Express-News*, January 21, 2022

[Changes in store for voter applications as deadlines approach](#), *KTRE-TV*, January 21, 2022

[More than 1 in 4 mail-in ballot applications rejected in Denton County](#), *Denton Record-Chronicle*, January 21, 2022

[New mail-in ballot rules leading to rejected applications in McLennan County, statewide; Officials urge early start](#), *Waco Tribune-Herald*, January 22, 2022

[Fort Bend Co. judge explains new elections process, addresses mail ballot application discrepancies](#), *KPRC-TV*, January 21, 2022

[Texas Supreme Court to hear state's bid to toss political map challenge, but not until after primary](#), *Dallas Morning News*, January 21, 2022

[Texas man charged with election threats to Georgia officials](#), *Associated Press*, January 21, 2022

[East Texas Democrat Official Pleads Guilty to Voter Fraud](#), *Texas Scorecard*, January 21, 2022

[Beto O'Rourke says he'll reach out to 2 million Texas voters in February amid voting problems](#), *Dallas Morning News*, January 21, 2022

[Read the never-issued Trump order that would have seized voting machines](#), *Politico*, January 21, 2022

[On Voting Rights, Democrats Say They Had to Go Down Swinging](#), *New York Times*, January 20, 2022

[Biden tries to chart a new path on the US-Mexico border, but similar roadblocks remain](#), *CNN*, January 21, 2022

[U.S. airs concerns over Mexico energy plan, points to economic risk](#), *Reuters*, January 21, 2022

[Foreign truckers will need to be vaccinated to enter US starting Saturday](#), *Washington Examiner*, January 21, 2022

[Opinion: Changing mail-in ballot process is not voter suppression](#), *Midland Reporter-Telegram*, January 21, 2022

[Editorial: Lawmakers were warned of problem with mail-vote application. They screwed it up anyway](#), *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, January 21, 2022

[Sen. Alvarado: It's past time for online voter registration in Texas](#), *Houston Chronicle*, January 22, 2022

[Column: Paper voter registration system is 'absurd.' But Texas does it anyway](#), *Austin American-Statesman*, January 23, 2022

[Editorial: And so begins the restricting of democracy](#), *San Antonio Express-News*, January 21, 2022

Vote-by-mail rejections are testing integrity of Texas Republicans' voting law

Alexa Ura

Texas Tribune

January 24, 2022

<https://www.texastribune.org/2022/01/24/texas-vote-by-mail-rejections/>

Barely started down the path toward the first elections conducted under voting restrictions enacted last year by Republican lawmakers, Texas voters and local election officials have found themselves

enveloped in a fog of errors, delays and miscommunications as they navigate new rules for casting votes by mail.

Only a small slice of the state's electorate is allowed to cast absentee ballots, and the trickle of requests for mail-in ballots that began in early January is now swelling into the usual pre-election flood.

But hundreds of applications are being rejected — in many cases because voters appear to not know the new rules. Local election workers themselves are still deciphering the procedures, and say they've been hampered by a paucity of help and information from the Texas secretary of state's office. Meanwhile, the state is scrambling to provide training under the crush of advising counties on implementing a multitude of election changes.

“We are bombarded,” said Yvonne Ramon, the Hidalgo County elections administrator. “To try to review Senate Bill 1 alone was a monster, and it wasn't just on us. It was on the state. It was on every [election official] at every level.”

Signed into law by Gov. Greg Abbott in September, the voting law known as Senate Bill 1 contained an array of new restrictions on the state's voting process and narrowed local control of elections.

Among its many provisions — and the earliest to be tested — are new rules for voting by mail. Absentee voters are now required to include a state identification number like a driver's license number or a partial Social Security number on their applications for a mail-in ballot. Those numbers must match information in a voter's record or their application will be rejected.

Regular mail-in voters must submit new applications each year, and when counties began accepting them this year, the rejection rates were staggering. Hundreds of applications were deficient, in some cases missing an ID number. In other cases, voters had listed a number that didn't appear to be on file with the local elections office.

The secretary of state's office has been working to backfill its records to include both driver's license numbers and Social Security numbers for most voters, but various Texas counties — including some of the state's largest — did not know they were supposed to check the state's database along with their own when trying to validate an application.

Election officials across the state said they either weren't aware the driver's license numbers had been uploaded to the state database, known by election administrators as TEAM, or weren't aware that the new numbers would not sync with their local databases. To them, it appeared the numbers were missing from a voter's record.

“There were several large counties that are offline that were not aware that they'd have to go beyond their internal systems, and I'm one of them,” said Chris Davis, the Williamson County elections administrator. (Counties that use a local database are known as “offline counties.”)

The discrepancy helped drive an initial 50% rejection rate of applications in Travis County, the “vast majority” of which officials attributed to the new rules, before offline counties learned the new driver's license numbers had not been pushed to their local databases. The rejection rate had dropped to

27% in figures Travis County Clerk Dana DeBeauvoir released Tuesday, though the total number of applications the county received had more than doubled by then.

The rejection issues led to a public spat between DeBeauvoir, a Democrat, who criticized the state for not providing counties with comprehensive guidance, and the secretary of state's office, which zeroed in on the county's rejection of an "unusually large" share of applications in a press release calling on officials to correct "erroneous" rejections.

But the information gap over matching ID numbers went beyond Travis County. While "waiting to get clear instructions" from the state, Vona Hudson, the election administrator in rural Tom Green County, said she was running into ID issues with 40% to 50% of the applications coming in.

Hudson didn't get clarity on the syncing problems until a last-minute webinar held by the secretary of state's office Tuesday morning to address "frequently asked questions" about the new ID requirements.

In a statement this week, the governor's office put the blame for issues with the new rules on county officials "erroneously interpreting the law" instead of asking the state for assistance.

"The bottom line is that counties should not be rejecting valid mail ballot applications," said Nan Tolson, a spokesperson for the governor. "The Secretary of State's office will continue to work with counties across the state to combat the misinformation being spread by county election officials and ensure that all valid mail ballot applications are processed."

But beyond the confusion over how to match numbers, early figures released by some of the state's largest counties showed that a bigger problem was applications coming in with no ID numbers on them at all.

For example, Bexar County initially rejected 125 applications because voters provided a driver's license number that was not in their voter record, while 200 were rejected because the ID section was not filled out. Thirty applications were rejected because the voter submitted an outdated application form that didn't include the new ID field.

Of the 208 applications Harris County initially rejected based on the new rules, 137 were rejected because voters had not filled out the new ID requirements. As of Jan. 14, county officials said they had rejected another 172 applications that lacked ID numbers.

In its update Tuesday, Travis County said about half of the 509 applications it had rejected did not include any ID information.

County officials said they were also hamstrung in how much education they could provide voters about the new requirements. In SB 1, Republican lawmakers made it a state jail felony for an election official to "solicit the submission" of an application to vote by mail if the voter did not request it — a broad prohibition election officials said has made them fearful that once unremarkable voter outreach efforts could now be construed as criminal.

SB 1 also made it a state jail felony for local election officials to proactively send applications to voters who did not request them, even if voters automatically qualify to vote by mail because of age. Political parties can still send out unsolicited applications on their own dime.

“It’s understandable if you’re focusing on what’s most important in a given week or a given month that you might lose track of some of these other issues, and I think that goes for secretary of state as well,” Remi Garza, the president of the Texas Association of Election Administrators, said of the miscommunication between the state and the counties.

But this was a foreseeable situation, said Garza, who serves as the elections administrator for Cameron County.

Voting rights advocates have panned state Republican leadership over the issues, both because the problems were forewarned and because the law’s implementation date has not allowed election officials enough time to roll out its new requirements. Over the last year, advocates questioned how voters were expected to know which ID number might be on their voter record when they aren’t required to provide both while registering to vote.

Lawmakers bear “the responsibility to foresee problems in the implementation of a law,” said James Slattery, a senior staff attorney with the Texas Civil Rights Project, who testified on the ID issues at the Legislature.

“They are now reaping what they’ve sown,” said Slattery. “Though I should say it’s really the voter reaping what they’ve sown, which is the tragedy of all this. At the moment, it’s the voters that are facing the consequences.”

Texas election officials have had a relatively short window to implement SB 1’s raft of requirements. The legislation was passed in the fall, instead of the spring’s regular legislative session; the state and counties were also redrawing political boundaries that election officials then needed to incorporate into their systems.

Interpreting the law and providing guidance on how to enforce it falls to the secretary of state, the state’s chief elections officer, whose office in the last few months has been responsible for updating hundreds of election forms, revising various handbooks for election workers, creating checklists and advisories to address various changes to the ballot counting process, and providing technical and legal support to both party and county officials ahead of the primaries.

The compressed timeline has specifically compounded the challenges around the new ID requirements.

The state was responsible for the creation of a new online portal mail-in voters can use to track and fix issues with their applications and ballots. But when the new online system launched mid-January, counties had not yet received training from the state on how to use it. The secretary of state’s office hosted its first webinar for counties on how to use the ballot tracker on Thursday — a week after it went live.

The office had also created a new form for county officials to use to inform voters of defective applications with instructions on how to fix errors, including through the new tracker on the state’s

website. But the letter pointed voters to a voting homepage that until last week lacked a direct link to the tracker. A spokesperson for the secretary of state's office said earlier this month that they were in the process of updating the layout of the website.

Additionally, the revised application for a mail-in ballot and the specialized envelope to return completed ballots, which now must also include the ID numbers, were not finalized until December. This meant county officials were unable to order updated mailing materials until soon before they needed to start sending them to voters.

Tarrant County felt the time crunch in preparing to mail out ballots to overseas voters, which counties were required to do by Jan. 15. Speaking before the county commissioners court last week, elections administrator Heider Garcia said the envelopes weren't delivered to the election office until the afternoon before the deadline.

"There have been a lot of things with these changes to the law that have been kind of a photograph finish over the last few weeks," Garcia said at the hearing.

The pressure to implement the law has been felt intensely by election administrators in counties that are running local special elections before the March primary.

In Tom Green County, Hudson has been scrambling to obtain updated materials for a Jan. 29 election to fill a spot on the San Angelo City Council. The county has been waiting on its printing vendor who has been waiting on an order of the specific paper stock needed to print the voting materials.

The new ID rules have also forced new, specialized printing jobs of the applications and envelopes for mail-in ballots so that they can be sealed to protect a voter's sensitive information while the materials travel through the mail.

When she couldn't get new applications from the vendor in time, Hudson made Xerox copies of a print out on regular paper and mailed them to voters with a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope to place them in. When it became clear she wouldn't receive the revised ballot envelopes with enough time to get them to voters, she created a separate document for voters to record their ID numbers that she's sending out with old envelopes.

Hudson said the implementation of SB 1 has left her "between a rock and a hard place." Her proposed resolution means she can't use the state's prescribed forms, but she knows the voters in her county who rely on mail-in ballots, including many who are homebound, won't be able to participate in the election otherwise.

"I think all of us, including the secretary of state, are kind of in a perfect storm, if you will, trying to get this implemented as quickly as we can when also facing shortages in equipment, paper," Hudson said. "I wouldn't want to be implementing as much as the secretary of the state is having to do. But do I wish we had gotten some things a little faster? Absolutely, because I think it would be better for our voters."

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League of Women Voters threatens to sue Texas over cap on voter registration forms

Cayla Harris

San Antonio Express-News

January 21, 2022

<https://www.expressnews.com/news/legislature/article/League-of-Women-Voters-threatens-to-sue-Texas-16795308.php>

The Texas chapter of the League of Women Voters is threatening to sue the state if officials do not provide the organization and other advocacy groups with additional copies of voter registration forms.

The organization made the threat in a letter to Texas Secretary of State John Scott on Friday, taking issue with the office's decision to limit the number of forms available for political and advocacy groups. The office cited supply chain issues, saying paper shortages and "cost constraints" have forced them to limit orders to 2,000 forms at a time.

But the league alleges that this practice — first reported by KUT — violates the National Voter Registration Act.

"Voter registration organizations play a critical role in registering individuals to vote in Texas — particularly because Texas is one of only eleven states that do not provide their residents the ability to register to vote online," wrote Grace Chimene, the president of the League of Women Voters of Texas, and Danielle Lang, the senior director of voting rights at Campaign Legal Center.

"As such, any cap on the number of voter registration forms provided to voter registration organizations is concerning and impedes an organization's ability to conduct its work."

Sam Taylor, a spokesman for the Secretary of State's office, did not respond directly to the letter's allegations. But he said the office is "treating all requestors the same, and (we) are aiming to provide 75 percent of all bulk requests for voter registration forms, including to all of the various LWV chapters across Texas."

Chimene said that promise isn't enough, and volunteer advocacy groups — including the League of Women Voters — shouldn't be responsible for printing out their own forms.

"Which 30 percent are we not going to register?" she said.

Friday's letter noted that Texas has a \$7.85 billion budget surplus, and the state "surely can apportion some of this surplus toward ensuring that every Texas citizen has an opportunity to engage in the fundamental right to vote."

Jan. 31 is the deadline to register to vote in the March 1 primary election.

The lawsuit threat is the latest escalation of the league's dispute with the Secretary of State's office. Their relationship grew tense this week, after Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner criticized state officials for declining to send 2,000 forms to the league's Houston chapter.

A volunteer had submitted the request last week, but the office notified her on Tuesday that it was only able to send 50 copies "due to extenuating circumstances beyond our control."

Turner called the situation “disgraceful,” but Taylor, the spokesman for the Secretary of State’s office, asserted the accusation was “absolutely false.”

A copy of the volunteer’s emailed request and the ensuing response from the state verifies the league’s account, but it may have been a misunderstanding. Though the volunteer regularly corresponds with the Secretary of State’s office, she didn’t identify herself in the initial request, potentially causing the confusion, Chimene said.

The office notified Chimene late Thursday that it would send an additional 7,000 free forms to the Houston chapter, but the group had already contracted a third-party company to print 10,000 copies. The effort will cost \$1,800, Chimene said.

The league will likely direct the 7,000 forms to another chapter, she said.

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Changes in store for voter applications as deadlines approach

Donna McCollum

KTRE-TV

January 21, 2022

<https://www.ktre.com/2022/01/22/changes-store-voter-applications-deadlines-approach/>

NACOGDOCHES, Texas (KTRE) - The window is narrowing for deadlines surrounding your right to vote in the March 1st primary election. One cutoff date pertains to voter registration, and the other concerns submitting a vote-by-mail application. Both are complicated by unforeseen factors.

On Thursday, election office staffs sat through a state webinar on how to run an election since new voter laws have been passed.

“We’re learning as we go,” said Nacogdoches County election administrator Todd Stallings. “This is new waters for us.”

Voters will also have to keep their head above water. The voter registration deadline for the March 1 primary is January 31. Application forms have changed only slightly. There is nothing to worry about if you tell the truth.

“The fine (for providing false information) has changed from \$2,000 to \$4,000,” Stallings said.

The bigger problem is a shortage of paper limits how many new forms party chairs are sent. In a pinch, the old forms will be accepted.

Applications for a mail-in ballot have also changed.

And third parties continue to mail old applications to those over 65 even though they can be rejected by registrars.

Applicants must provide a state ID number, such as a driver's license or the last four digits of their Social Security number, and the numbers must match what registrars have on file. And if they don't?

"That's the biggest new thing is that we're going to have to reach out to some of those voters," Stallings said.

The window is narrowing. The mail-in ballot application deadline is Feb. 18, after the start of early voting in the primary.

After all that, a ballot will be sent.

Look for changes there, too. Don't seal it until one last important step is completed.

"The voter has got to write in either their driver's license number or the last four of the social. They've got to be present in order for the ballot to be counted," Stallings said.

There are a lot of rules new for the voter and the registrars.

"I'm not an expert on it yet, but I will be by Election Day," Stallings said with a chuckle.

You can check your voter status online. The digital access is on the Texas secretary of state's website, under the "my voter portal" tab.

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More than 1 in 4 mail-in ballot applications rejected in Denton County

Zaira Perez

Denton Record-Chronicle

January 21, 2022

https://dentonrc.com/news/denton_county/more-than-1-in-4-mail-in-ballot-applications-rejected-in-denton-county/article_0558c2d1-ba27-5f3f-961e-a7e1dfe36a61.html

Before you send in your mail-in ballot application, double-check that it's the updated one that now asks for either your Social Security number or driver's license number.

The Denton County Elections Administration by Thursday had received nearly 1,000 applications from voters who wished to cast a ballot by mail this year. Of the 991 that had landed in the administration's office by noon Thursday, about 27% were rejected. Elections Administrator Frank Phillips said most of those rejected were from people who used the old form.

"What makes [the new one] different from the old form is they now have to supply one of two numbers — either their driver's license or last four numbers of their Social Security number — and one of those numbers has to match what we have on file in the voter registration system," Phillips said in a phone call Thursday.

This change came as the result of a new law that went into effect this year in Texas. The law also restricts voting by mail to registered voters who are at least 65 years old, sick or disabled, out of the

country on election day and during early voting, expecting to give birth within three weeks before or after election day, or in jail but otherwise eligible to vote.

Phillips said people who are eligible to vote by mail can find the application online on the Denton County elections website, the Texas secretary of state's website or in person at the local elections office.

"I would recommend — because the form asks for either/or — I would recommend putting both," Phillips said. "The reason I recommend putting both is because if they don't remember which number they used when they registered to vote ... odds are we're going to have one of them."

Earlier in the week, the percentage of rejected applications for voting by mail stood at 43%. Phillips said he expects this number to go down as the office gets more applications, and he believes they're getting the old application because those applications were already out in the community.

"Hard copies of these things were distributed by the thousands by political parties and candidates," he said. "They're everywhere."

John Zeigler of Denton said he and his wife mailed in their application within a couple of days of each other but have not received their ballots. Zeigler said he suspects he may have mailed in the wrong one.

He said he and his wife also haven't received their new voter registration cards. According to the county elections website, voters should receive them this month.

"When I go to the state site to check, we're both active [voters]," Zeigler said. "We haven't moved. They're just behind."

He said it's his preference to vote by mail because he sees many people unmasked in public.

"I'm not dying to vote," Zeigler said. "I want to vote, but I'm not going to die as a result of showing up to the polls."

Phillips said in an email Friday he expects the last of the new voter registration cards will be mailed out Friday or Saturday.

"The late redistricting threw everyone off a little," he said.

Phillips said applicants whose mail-in ballot applications were rejected will receive a letter from his office stating the reason. He said reasons for rejections have been a combination of using the old form and not supplying the identifying number the elections office has on record.

The last day for the elections office to receive a voter's mail-in ballot application for the primary elections is Feb. 18. Early voting starts Feb. 14, and election day is March 1.

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New mail-in ballot rules leading to rejected applications in McLennan County, statewide; Officials urge early start

Tommy Witherspoon
Waco Tribune-Herald
January 22, 2022

https://wacotrib.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/new-mail-in-ballot-rules-leading-to-rejected-applications-in-mclennan-county-statewide-officials-urge/article_20e079b2-7afb-11ec-9667-7f8bba3a833e.html

This year's election season is off to a bumpy start as changes in state law are causing voter confusion and forcing election officials across the state to reject hundreds of mail-in ballot applications.

In some cases, applicants simply leave out required information or use old forms without the required fields. In many cases, however, applicants include the requested information, but a critical piece, generally a driver's license number or a Social Security number, is missing from the voter data the state has on file to check against. To register, voters do not have to provide both an ID number and a Social Security number.

The Texas Secretary of State's Office said about six months ago that about 2 million registered voters lacked one of the two numbers in their voter file despite the office's efforts to update that information into the state's voter rolls, McLennan County Elections Administrator Jared Goldsmith said. Those numbers have since dropped to around 700,000 voters, he said.

The state's largest counties have had to reject hundreds of mail-in ballot applications each, The Texas Tribune reported. Travis County, for example, had rejected about half its applications, mainly because of the new requirements, according to the Tribune report.

McLennan County has turned away about 25 of the 400 applications it has received since the first of the month, Goldsmith said.

Most of the rejections here also have been because of a mismatch between the new identification requirements and the voter information the county has on file. Applicants are asked to provide a driver's license or state ID number, or the last four digits of their Social Security number if they do not have a state ID. They also can indicate they have not been issued a state ID or Social Security number if that is the case.

The good news, Goldsmith said, is that the problems causing applications to be rejected can be corrected with a simple phone call to the county elections office. Goldsmith and local party officials urge voters who hope to vote by mail to begin that process now so that any mistakes or problems can be corrected in time for all the votes to count.

Elections office workers are calling, emailing or writing letters to would-be voters whose applications have been rejected so they can correct whatever problems there are, Goldsmith said.

If voters are unsure what information they provided on their voter registration applications, they can call Goldsmith's office at 254-757-5043 or go to votetexas.gov to check on their registration status

and to make sure the identifying information they provide on their mail-in ballot applications matches the voter registration information the state already has.

The deadline to register to vote for the March 1 primary is Jan. 31, while the deadline to have applications for mail-in ballots back to the elections office is Feb. 18.

All voters eligible for a ballot by mail must apply to receive one. Voters age 65 or older are automatically eligible. Other voters can qualify if they are outside the county during the election, if they are unable to get to the polls without assistance because of an illness or disability, or if their health would be put at risk by going to the polls. Others can qualify if they are expecting to give birth within three week before or after Election Day and of if they are in jail or under involuntary civil commitment.

Goldsmith said for anyone wanting to vote by mail, it is important to read the application carefully, follow the instructions and make sure each section is filled out and each required box is checked.

“I would say the law was modified more than changed,” Goldsmith said. “The biggest change is the identifying numbers. They have to match.”

The numbers on both the application, and later, the envelope used to return the actual ballot have to match state records. Signature matching previously was the main tool for verification.

Once voters receive mail-in ballots, Goldsmith said they likely will notice that the carrier envelope in which their ballots will be returned this year is white with a purple stripe on the left side. Before, those envelopes were yellow. It is important that voters write the same identifying numbers they used on their application on the space provided on the white and purple carrier envelope. That space is under a secrecy flap that the voter will seal. They also must sign the carrier envelope, Goldsmith said.

Election administrators like Goldsmith are prohibited from sending out unsolicited mail-in ballot applications, but party officials and candidates can. Goldsmith smiled when asked about provisions that subject elections officials, including those in his position and local party chairs, to potential criminal penalties for violations of the new state voting law.

“My opinion is we are going to follow what the secretary of state tells us to do,” Goldsmith said. “It’s the law and we have to follow the law. Changes can be difficult for some, and if the voters have questions about it, we will be happy to help them because we want to make sure there is no confusion.”

Opponents of the new law charged that the changes would create new, more restrictive barriers to voting and serve as impediments especially for racial minorities, people with disabilities and older people, among others. Supporters said proposals in the bill would safeguard elections from fraud, despite offering no evidence that it is prevalent.

Democrats opposed to the bill left the state last summer, delaying debate over the legislation and leaving the House without a quorum to conduct business for weeks.

Peaches Henry, president of the Waco chapter of the NAACP, called the effects of the law “voter suppression” and said she already is fielding calls from confused, mostly elderly voters who are having trouble with the mail-in ballot applications.

“This is not innocuous. It is deliberate, obtuse and complex,” Henry said. “It is meant to confuse the public. It is meant to make the process of voting too complex and obtuse that people will give up. That is what it is intended to do. It is not meant to protect the integrity of the vote at all. That is utterly untrue. The public should not allow themselves to be gaslighted, and that is what is happening.”

Brad Holland, chair of the McLennan County Republican Party, said the “scare tactics” with which some approached the changes are “off the mark.”

“I think the most important thing is, despite all the inflammatory rhetoric, that voting in 2022 continues to be easier than before and more secure than before,” Holland said. “If you look at it, we are having three weeks of early voting and allowing voting on Saturday and Sunday. Voting is not difficult despite what everybody says. It is easy to vote. If people are going to complain if you have to put your driver’s license number or Social Security number on a request for mail-in ballot and think that is restrictive, I fail to see their logic. It was to make it easier to vote and more secure, and frankly, to level the playing field across the board, which was a problem back in 2020.”

Mary Duty, chair of the McLennan County Democratic Party, said her goal in coming weeks is to try to educate the voters to the changes and to encourage those who want to vote by mail to get the process started now.

“I think the (mail-in ballot) application is actually more readable,” Duty said. “But there is always that hesitancy when the government says give me all your information. But you have to show a driver’s license or state ID card to vote, anyway. I just tell people to call the election office to make sure what number you are supposed to use and then use that one.”

Early voting for the primary begins Feb. 14 and runs through Feb. 25. There is no early voting on Presidents’ Day, Feb. 21.

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Fort Bend Co. judge explains new elections process, addresses mail ballot application discrepancies

Brittany Taylor

KPRC-TV

January 21, 2022

<https://www.click2houston.com/news/local/2022/01/21/fort-bend-county-judge-to-raise-awareness-of-new-elections-process-under-sb1-address-mail-ballot-application-discrepancies/>

RICHMOND, Texas – Fort Bend County Judge KP George held a press conference Friday afternoon to raise awareness of the new election process following the passing of Senate Bill 1 and to address concerns over mail ballot application discrepancies.

The judge was joined by Fort Bend County Elections Administrator John Oldham, Rep. Ron Reynolds and several other county elected officials.

“As our country and county becomes more diverse, it is so important that everybody gets an opportunity to exercise their constitutional right,” George said.

He addressed numerous changes that have happened and directed those who qualify on how to vote by mail.

To apply for a mail-in ballot, you have to be 65 years or older, sick or disabled, out of the country during voting elections, an expectant mother or are being detained in jail.

Since the passing of the bill, the judge said it is important to know that one must submit a request for an application and that the county is not allowed to send out a ballot by mail without solicitation. Voters will have to fill out an application and send it to the county’s elections office.

To fill out an application, you can call the election office or download an application at votetexas.gov.

Judge George expressed his concern over the amount of mail-in ballot applications that are being rejected since the passing of the SB1 bill. So far, county election officials reported at least 50% of ballot applications being rejected compared to the county’s average of 5%.

He said ballot applications are being rejected for many reasons including missing personal information. Applicants must list their Texas driver’s license number, Texas personal identification number, or election identification certificate number on the form. If an applicant does not have one of those numbers, then the form requires the last four digits of their social security number to be written in instead.

Reynolds called the SB1 a “voter suppression bill” that has caused many problems, such as massive confusion among voters and disenfranchisement in the minority community.

He said he will continue to advocate at the state level for everyone to vote, and these issues must be resolved before the primary elections. He said there is a need for Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act to help stop SB1.

Fort Bend County Attorney Bridgette Smith-Lawson said her office is ready to stand in support of the integrity of elections. She said they will ensure that fundamental rights are being protected and freedom of speech at the polls is protected.

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Texas Supreme Court to hear state’s bid to toss political map challenge, but not until after primary

Sami Sparber

Dallas Morning News

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<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2022/01/21/texas-supreme-court-to-hear-states-bid-to-toss-political-map-challenge-but-not-until-after-primary/>

AUSTIN — The state’s bid to toss a legal challenge arguing last year’s GOP-led redistricting effort violated the Texas Constitution is headed to the state Supreme Court, which accepted the case Friday.

The all-Republican high court set oral arguments on March 23, well after the March 1 primary election.

The Legislature’s GOP mapmakers last fall approved new political lines that could cement Republicans’ grip on power for the next decade and blunt the voting strength of nonwhite voters who fueled Texas’ population surge.

As federal lawsuits over the new maps pile up, some Democrats are focusing on fights in state court. In two combined cases, a group of mostly Democratic, Hispanic lawmakers from both chambers challenged the constitutionality of when and how Republicans drew the boundaries.

After two days of oral arguments in December, a three-judge state district court ruled against temporarily blocking the new legislative maps, but set a trial for January. Texas then appealed the court’s denial of its motions to dismiss the case, putting the trial on hold.

The lawmakers’ attorneys said they don’t seek to overturn the maps for the 2022 election cycle but argued for expedited resolution of the appeal “to allow sufficient time for the parties to litigate the merits before the 2023 legislative session.”

“For decades, MALC has defended the freedom to vote and equal access to the ballot box. We are not surprised that [Texas Attorney General] Ken Paxton would attempt to undermine our members and the millions of Texas voices they represent,” said state Rep. Rafael Anchía, chair of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus, one of the challengers against the maps.

Focusing on the timing of the redraw are two Democratic state senators, who sued to block the Legislature from redistricting in a special session last year. Also at issue are rules for keeping counties intact when drawing Texas House districts.

Similar to a suit they filed in federal court before redrawing began, the senators’ legal team argued the Texas Constitution requires that redistricting be done in a regular session that won’t happen until 2023.

That makes the newly drawn state House and state Senate plans invalid, said attorneys for Sens. Roland Gutierrez, D-San Antonio, and Sarah Eckhardt, D-Austin.

State lawyers argued the Legislature is “perfectly free to redistrict whenever it wants,” and warned that blocking the maps will disrupt the 2022 elections already in motion.

The court fights are not uncharted territory. Every Texas redistricting plan has been either changed or tossed out by a federal court after being found in violation of the U.S. Constitution or the federal Voting Rights Act.

The consolidated case was assigned to a special three-judge panel of Democrat Karin Crump and Republicans Emily Miskel and Ken Wise. If the state Supreme Court affirms the lower court’s

decision, “the parties need sufficient time to return to the special three-judge district court, obtain a final judgment, and complete any appeal from that judgment,” the challengers said in a filing.

The senators’ legal team also argued the new state House map violated the “county line rule” of the Texas Constitution, which requires that counties with sufficient population be kept intact in drawing Texas House districts.

The Mexican American Legislative Caucus in the Texas House made a similar case that the rule was broken, arguing it was designed to ensure people have local representation.

The complaints focus on the redrawing of Cameron County in the Rio Grande Valley.

As lawmakers last fall debated the new House lines, they narrowly adopted a major change in South Texas. House District 37 was redrawn from a seat President Joe Biden won by 17 percentage points, to a seat the president won by only two points over former President Donald Trump in the 2020 election.

That amendment, developed by Rep. J.M. Lozano, R-Kingsville, was denounced by some Valley lawmakers.

The plaintiffs’ legal team argued the county line rule requires that two districts be wholly contained within Cameron County. Yet Lozano’s tweaks give Cameron County just one wholly contained district, with two that connect to adjoining counties.

The new House plan “dilutes representation of Hispanics, especially those that vote,” District 37 Rep. Alex Dominguez, who is running for a Texas Senate seat, testified in December. “It makes it more difficult for Hispanics to elect their candidate of choice.”

State lawyers argued the new boundaries do not dilute votes in Cameron County, and that Cameron got the number of districts it was constitutionally entitled to. District 37 Democratic candidate Ruben Cortez Jr. joined the senators’ suit, along with political organization Tejano Democrats.

In the federal court fight, a three-judge panel set a September trial start date. The U.S. Department of Justice has sued to block Texas’ gerrymandered congressional and state House maps. Several civil and voting rights groups, as well as individual voters, are among the plaintiffs in the consolidated federal redistricting case.

Court challengers say the redrawn congressional, legislative and State Board of Education maps do not reflect the major growth of the Hispanic community, which made up nearly half of the state’s population gain since 2020. People of color accounted for 95% of the state’s population boom over the last decade, with much of the growth concentrated in cities and suburban areas, census data show.

A push by Tarrant County Democratic state Sen. Beverly Powell to temporarily block the redraw of her district is scheduled to be heard Tuesday in federal court.

In the plan for state House elections, the number of majority-white district seats increased from 83 to 89, among eligible voters. The number of majority-Hispanic districts dropped from 33 to 30, and the

number of majority-Black districts dropped from seven to six. Asian voters remain without majority control in any district.

The decennial process following a U.S. Census typically leads to lawsuits in Texas, with the courts largely siding with Republicans in recent years. Lawmakers can draw maps in a way that benefits their party's political future as long as they do not discriminate on the basis of race.

This year, GOP lawmakers have a clearer path to prevailing because Texas is no longer required to get federal approval for new political maps. The new maps are generally expected to withstand lawsuits, but battles over aspects of the boundaries could last several years.

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Texas man charged with election threats to Georgia officials

Paul Weber

Associated Press

January 21, 2022

<https://apnews.com/article/georgia-austin-texas-elections-arrests-c82d47a3dec7376bc07f68610847ad9d>

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The U.S. Justice Department said Friday that a Texas man has been arrested on charges of posting threatening messages on Craigslist about killing government officials in Georgia following the 2020 election.

It was announced as the first arrest by the Justice Department's new Election Threats Task Force that was created last summer.

Chad Stark, 54, is charged with one count of communicating interstate threats, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison. Federal prosecutors accuse Stark of posting a message on Jan. 5, 2021, titled, "Georgia Patriots it's time to kill (redacted) the Chinese agent - \$10,000."

Prosecutors did not name the officials in documents filed in federal court in Georgia.

Stark appeared before a federal judge in Austin, Texas, on Friday for an initial appearance. He was not required to enter a plea and asked the court to appoint him an attorney.

He told the court he did not own any firearms and was granted release under conditions that included instructions to not leave the Austin area. He did not comment to reporters after leaving the courthouse.

"The Justice Department has a responsibility not only to protect the right to vote, but also to protect those who administer our voting systems from violence and illegal threats of violence," Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

According to the indictment, Stark's message stated, "Georgia Patriots it's time for us to take back our state from these Lawless treasonous traitors." It goes on to urge Georgia residents to "militia up" and calls for shooting several unnamed officials as well as local and federal judges.

Former President Donald Trump has made repeated unproven claims that widespread fraud cost him the election, and some of his supporters have targeted election officials and workers in Georgia and elsewhere, making violent threats against them. Trump called Georgia GOP Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger an “enemy of the people” after the election.

Raffensperger released a statement Friday condemning threats against election workers and urging support for them “now more than ever.” Spokesman Walter Jones said he could not comment on whether anyone in Raffensperger’s office was a target of the threats.

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East Texas Democrat Official Pleads Guilty to Voter Fraud

Erin Anderson

Texas Scorecard

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<https://texasscorecard.com/local/east-texas-democrat-official-pleads-guilty-to-voter-fraud/>

Four years after an East Texas Democrat won a close primary election, he admitted to illegal mail-ballot harvesting in the race. But he won’t face any jail time. In fact, he’s running for re-election.

Gregg County Commissioner Shannon Brown pleaded guilty this week to misdemeanor voter fraud and was sentenced to a year of probation.

Brown was originally charged with 23 felonies.

In 2018, Brown edged out his Democrat primary opponent by just five votes.

Soon after, local officials announced a voter fraud complaint had been filed, alleging Brown’s campaign had organized a scheme to illegally harvest mail-in ballots by falsely claiming voters had a disability.

Brown and three others were indicted in 2020 on a total of 134 felony counts, including engaging in organized election fraud, illegal voting, fraudulent use of an application for a mail-in ballot, unlawful possession of a mail-in ballot, tampering with a governmental record, and election fraud.

According to authorities at the time of Brown’s arrest:

To increase the pool of ballots needed to swing the race in Brown’s favor, the group targeted young, able-bodied voters to cast ballots by mail by fraudulently claiming the voters were “disabled,” in most cases without the voters’ knowledge or consent. Under Texas election law, mail ballots based on disability are specifically reserved for those who are physically ill and cannot vote in-person as a result.

Brown and a co-defendant were sentenced to a year in jail, but their sentences were probated.

He’s staying in office and is running for re-election in the March 2022 Democrat primary.

“I am proud of my service on the Commissioners Court,” Brown said in a statement released to local media. “I intend to finish what we have started, and I look forward to continue vigorously representing my constituents.”

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Beto O’Rourke says he’ll reach out to 2 million Texas voters in February amid voting problems

Philip Jankowski

Dallas Morning News

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<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2022/01/21/beto-orourke-says-hell-reach-out-to-2-million-texas-voters-in-february-amid-voting-problems/>

AUSTIN — Texas Democratic gubernatorial candidate Beto O’Rourke announced on Friday a major push to reach 2 million voters in February amid new voting laws he said are efforts by Republicans to suppress votes.

O’Rourke said his campaign will reach out via blockwalking, phone calls, text messages and letter writing to inform voters how to navigate the new election provisions in Senate Bill 1 that so far have led to the rejection of hundreds of mail in ballot applications in North Texas.

“This new law was intended to make it harder to vote, and it looks like it’s working,” O’Rourke said at a news conference outside the Texas AFL-CIO headquarters in Austin.

Some Democrats in Texas, including the O’Rourke campaign, had been holding out hope that Congress would pass legislation strengthening protections for voters. However, when the Senate failed to weaken the filibuster Wednesday and effectively killed those bills, O’Rourke said his campaign shifted gears.

“There is no one riding to our rescue in Texas. No cavalry to save the day. This one is completely on us,” O’Rourke said.

Over the past week, election officials have seen the rejection of vast swaths of mail-in ballot applications sent in advance of the March 1 party primaries. In North Texas alone, more than 600 voter applications were tossed mainly for voters failing to meet new rules under SB 1 that require an ID number submitted with the application.

The Texas Secretary of State’s office has also come under fire for refusing to provide thousands of requested voter packets routinely given to voter registration groups such as the League of Women Voters of Texas. Secretary of State John Scott has said that the shortages are resulting from supply chain issues.

The League of Women Voters of Texas on Friday threatened to sue the Secretary of State if his office does not provide their requested voter registration packets.

“Voter registration services from organizations like the League of Women Voters are a vital component of a fair and accessible democracy,” said Grace Chimene, president of the League of

Women Voters of Texas, in a news release. “We call on Secretary Scott’s office to do whatever it takes to meet the demand in voter registration for Texans.”

The office is also at the forefront of a partisan audit of the 2020 presidential election targeting Dallas, Collin, Tarrant and Harris Counties. Ten members of Congress from Texas have requested the Department of Justice to monitor the ongoing effort, which so far has led to the removal of nearly 1,200 suspected non-citizens from Dallas County’s voter rolls.

Since his unsuccessful race against incumbent Texas Sen. Ted Cruz in 2018, O’Rourke has been known for his campaign’s impressive ground game. With this new effort, the El Paso native is flexing that muscle again, telling reporters that in the last 10 weeks, he has amassed 44,000 volunteers that have signed up for thousands of shifts to educate voters about the changes in Texas’ voting laws.

They will knock on doors, make phone calls and write letters, O’Rourke said.

“In the immediate term, we can make sure that we educate each other about what it takes to vote now in Texas and our volunteers are going to be doing that over the course of this next month,” he said.

When questioned, O’Rourke also took a swipe at Gov. Greg Abbott’s “Parental Bill of Rights” that the governor announced at a charter school in Lewisville Thursday. If elected, O’Rourke said he would increase teachers’ salaries and funding for public schools.

“We’re up against the threat right now of a governor who wants to defund public schools,” O’Rourke said. “He calls it vouchers. He may refer to it as choice. But the simple truth is that he’s going to take money out of public schools that are already starved for resources and send them to private schools.”

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Read the never-issued Trump order that would have seized voting machines

Betsy Woodruff Swan

Politico

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<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/01/21/read-the-never-issued-trump-order-that-would-have-seized-voting-machines-527572>

Among the records that Donald Trump’s lawyers tried to shield from Jan. 6 investigators are a draft executive order that would have directed the defense secretary to seize voting machines and a document titled “Remarks on National Healing.”

POLITICO has reviewed both documents. The text of the draft executive order is published here for the first time.

The executive order — which also would have appointed a special counsel to probe the 2020 election — was never issued. The remarks are a draft of a speech Trump gave the next day. Together, the two documents point to the wildly divergent perspectives of White House advisers and allies during Trump’s frenetic final weeks in office.

It's not clear who wrote either document. But the draft executive order is dated Dec. 16, 2020, and is consistent with proposals that lawyer Sidney Powell made to the then-president. On Dec. 18, 2020, Powell, former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn, former Trump administration lawyer Emily Newman, and former Overstock.com CEO Patrick Byrne met with Trump in the Oval Office.

In that meeting, Powell urged Trump to seize voting machines and to appoint her as a special counsel to investigate the election, according to Axios.

A spokesperson for the House's Jan. 6 select committee confirmed earlier Friday that the panel had received the last of the documents that Trump's lawyers tried to keep under wraps and later declined to comment for this story on these two documents.

The draft executive order

The draft executive order shows that the weeks between Election Day and the Capitol attack could have been even more chaotic than they were. It credulously cites conspiracy theories about election fraud in Georgia and Michigan, as well as debunked notions about Dominion voting machines.

The order empowers the defense secretary to "seize, collect, retain and analyze all machines, equipment, electronically stored information, and material records required for retention under" a U.S. law that relates to preservation of election records. It also cites a lawsuit filed in 2017 against Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger.

Additionally, the draft order would have given the defense secretary 60 days to write an assessment of the 2020 election. That suggests it could have been a gambit to keep Trump in power until at least mid-February of 2021.

[The full text of the never-issued executive order can be read here.](#)

It opens by citing a host of presidential authorities to permit the steps that Trump would take, including the Constitution and Executive Order 12333, a well-known order governing the intelligence community. But the draft executive order also cites two classified documents: National Security Presidential Memoranda 13 and 21.

The existence of the first of those memoranda is publicly known, but the existence of the second has not been previously reported. NSPM 13 governs the Pentagon's offensive cyber operations. According to a person with knowledge of the memoranda, 21 makes small adjustments to 13, and the two documents are viewed within the executive branch as a pair.

The fact that the draft executive order's author knew about the existence of Memorandum 21 suggests that they had access to information about sensitive government secrets, the person told POLITICO.

The draft order also greenlit "the appointment of a Special Counsel to oversee this operation and institute all criminal and civil proceedings as appropriate based on the evidence collected and provided all resources necessary to carry out her duties consistent with federal laws and the Constitution."

To bolster its provisions, the draft order cites “the forensic report of the Antrim County, Michigan voting machines.” That report was produced by Russ Ramsland, who confused precincts in Minnesota for those in Michigan, according to the Washington Post. Michigan’s secretary of state, meanwhile, released an exhaustive report rebutting election conspiracy theories and concluding that none of the “known anomalies” in Antrim County’s November 2020 election were the result of any security breach.

"This draft order represents not only an abuse of emergency powers, but a total misunderstanding of them," said Liza Goitein, co-director of the liberty and national security program at the nonprofit Brennan Center for Justice. "The order doesn't even make the basic finding of an 'unusual and extraordinary threat' that would be necessary to trigger any action under [federal emergency powers law]. It's the legal equivalent of a kid scrawling on the wall with crayons."

The draft remarks

The draft document labeled “Remarks on National Healing,” also now in the select panel’s possession, provides a first look at the remarks Trump would deliver the next day, which stand in jarring contrast to other rhetoric Trump employed at the time and continues to use when discussing the insurrection.

“I would like to begin today by addressing the heinous attack that took place yesterday at the United States Capitol,” it opens. “Like all Americans, I was outraged and sickened by the violence, lawlessness and mayhem. I immediately deployed the National Guard and federal law enforcement to secure the building and expel the intruders. America is, and must always be, a nation of law and order.”

That claim that Trump immediately ordered the National Guard to head to the Capitol may be false. The Jan. 6 select committee sent a letter Thursday saying that Trump’s defense secretary at the time of the riot, Chris Miller, “has testified under oath that the President never contacted him at any time on January 6th, and never, at any time, issued him any order to deploy the National Guard.”

The “national healing” document continued with sharp criticism of the attack.

“The Demonstrators who infiltrated the Capitol have defiled the seat of American Democracy,” the remarks state. “I am directing the Department of Justice to ensure all lawbreakers are prosecuted to the fullest extent” of the law.”

The document follows with a direct communication to the rioters: “We must send a message - not with mercy but with justice. To those who engaged in acts of violence and destruction, I want to be very clear: you do not represent me. You do not represent our movement. You do not represent our country. And if you broke the law, you belong in jail.”

The remarks departed significantly from the way he described the rioters in other contexts. In a video released during the attack, Trump struck a tone of empathy with the mob.

“We have to have peace,” Trump said then. “So go home. We love you. You’re very special. You’ve seen what happens, you see the way others are treated that are so bad and so evil. I know how you feel.”

The day after the attack, facing a torrent of criticism and public discussion about invoking the 25th Amendment in order to remove him from office, Trump delivered an Oval Office address similar to the draft remarks. In that address, Trump also condemned the violence at the Capitol and called for perpetrators to be held accountable.

A Trump spokesperson declined to comment for this story.

Draft vs. reality

The draft remarks go on to describe emotions running high after an intense election. “But now, tempers must be cooled and calm restored.”

Trump “vigorously pursued every legal avenue to contest the election results,” the remarks add, and still urges election “reform” so voters could be confident about future contests.

“But as for THIS election, Congress has now certified the results,” the remarks say. “The election fight is over. A new administration will be inaugurated on January 20th. My focus now turns to ensuring a smooth, orderly and seamless transition of power. This moment calls for healing and reconciliation.”

In the year since the riot, Trump’s recent characterization of the attack has veered wildly from that sentiment in the draft remarks. The former president has described the 2020 election as “the insurrection” and Jan. 6, 2021, as “the Protest.” He has also praised Ashli Babbitt, a rioter who entered the Capitol and was shot and killed there by a police officer.

The remarks go on to strike a unifying tone in discussing the coronavirus.

“The pandemic isolated millions in their homes, damaged the economy, and claimed countless victims,” the document continues. “Ending the pandemic and rebuilding the economy,” it adds, “will require all of us working together,” along with renewed emphasis on patriotism, faith and community.

“We must renew the sacred bonds of love and loyalty that bind us together as one national family,” it adds.

While Trump has courted the disapproval of some in his own base by publicly sharing that he’s received a booster shot against Covid, he has chiefly emphasized the success of vaccines against the virus as his own personal victory.

“I came up with a vaccine, with three vaccines,” Trump told conservative pundit Candace Owens last month. “All are very, very good.”

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On Voting Rights, Democrats Say They Had to Go Down Swinging

Carl Hulse

New York Times

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/20/us/politics/democrats-voting-rights.html>

WASHINGTON — In forcing a tense Senate showdown over voting rights, Senator Chuck Schumer violated a cardinal rule of congressional leadership: Don't go to the floor unless you are certain you have the votes to win.

Mr. Schumer, the New York Democrat and majority leader, definitely did not have the votes to win approval of his party's voting rights package on Wednesday. He and everyone else in the Senate knew it well before Democrats failed to break a Republican filibuster against the legislation and then lost a bid to overhaul the filibuster rules when two Democrats refused to go along.

The outcome left Democrats disappointed and distressed that they do not yet have a legislative answer to what they see as an alarming trend of Republican-led states imposing balloting restrictions aimed at reducing participation by minority voters.

But as they assessed Wednesday's wide-ranging debate and solid party unity on voting rights — if not on Senate procedure — Mr. Schumer and other Democrats said they believed they did the right thing even though, for them, it produced the wrong result.

Their view is that Democrats could not identify the new state voting laws as an existential threat to democracy and make voting rights their top priority and then shy from holding a vote because they could not prevail.

In an interview on Thursday, Mr. Schumer, far from beaten down, expressed pride in the way Democrats had handled the fight. He said Democratic senators and their allies recognized that such a battle could not be won in a single clash, but could never be won at all if the fight was not joined.

"On civil rights, it is not linear," said Mr. Schumer, pointing to a positive response from activists who urged Democrats to go to the mat on voting rights even though they were not going to succeed. "You've got to keep fighting. And they see that the Democrats really fought for something we believed in, even if we couldn't win."

"This issue is different than any other issue," said Mr. Schumer, who dismissed as ridiculous the criticism that Democrats should have held off when they could not produce either 60 votes to overcome the filibuster or 50 votes from their caucus to unilaterally change the rules and pass the bill. "It's the fundamental backbone of our country — voting rights. But it's also the core of our party."

It was not always a foregone conclusion that Democrats would come up short.

Despite declared opposition to changing the rules from two of their party's centrists, Senators Joe Manchin III of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, Democrats hoped that they could be persuaded that safeguarding the right to vote — and protecting some politically at-risk colleagues — outweighed preserving a signature bit of Senate procedure. After all, many other Democrats who had long been reluctant to tinker with the filibuster had changed their view because of the voting legislation emerging in Republican-led states after the 2020 election.

But it was not to be. Both holdouts stuck firmly to their guns, a refusal to budge punctuated by Ms. Sinema's loud "aye" vote to uphold the rules.

Republicans remain mystified by Mr. Schumer's strategy. They cannot fathom why he would want to highlight the divisions between most of his caucus and Senators Manchin and Sinema, provoking grass-roots outrage at two senators he is going to need on other issues as Democrats try to resurrect President Biden's stalled agenda.

They cannot understand why he would force 47 of his members to join him on record in support of curbing the filibuster in a losing cause, a vote that Republicans will now try to exploit by accusing Democrats of a power grab in pursuit of progressive initiatives such as granting statehood to the District of Columbia and expanding the Supreme Court.

Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the minority leader, called the debate that ended with the filibuster intact perhaps the most important day in Senate history. He said the vote would haunt Democrats, even though they did not succeed.

"An unprincipled attempt at grabbing power is not harmless just because it fails," he warned Democrats. "Voting to break the Senate is not cost-free just because a bipartisan majority of your colleagues have the wisdom to stop you."

Democrats brushed off such talk and said they found the clash cathartic. They said it yielded some benefits, including simply reminding lawmakers that the Senate is still capable of waging an intense and consequential debate. Even some Republicans said the daylong rhetorical battle over voting rights, which brought dozens of senators to the floor to speak, vote and engage in procedural tussling, was a refreshing change from the usual desultory action and phoned-in filibusters.

"It certainly produced the closest thing we have seen to a Senate debate in 15 years," said Senator Jeff Merkley, Democrat of Oregon and a leading proponent of reining in the filibuster.

Democrats said the political pressure also brought Republicans to the table for discussions about potential changes in the administration of federal elections and the counting of presidential electoral votes to avoid a repeat of the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol, opening a potential path to compromise.

Mr. McConnell said again on Thursday that Republicans would entertain changes in the Electoral Count Act to close loopholes that Donald J. Trump and his allies tried to use to overturn the election results.

"It clearly is flawed," he said of the existing law. "This is directly related to what happened on Jan. 6, and we ought to be able to figure out a bipartisan way to fix it."

Even Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a charter member of the "don't vote if you don't have the votes" club, said Mr. Schumer did the right thing in forcing action.

"You had to have the vote," she told reporters on Thursday, reflecting a view shared by progressive activists who had previously shown some frustration with Democrats.

"There was this legislative dance going on about who would vote for it and this Washington inside political game of 'We don't have the votes and we don't want people to take a stand,'" said Marc Morial, the head of the National Urban League and a former mayor of New Orleans. "It was really important to get everyone on the record and put a marker down."

Mr. Schumer said Democrats were still considering their future voting rights approach and could break out elements of the legislation for separate votes.

“While last night’s vote was disappointing, it will not deter Senate Democrats from continuing our fight against voter suppression, dark money, partisan gerrymandering,” he said on Thursday. “On an issue this important, not doing everything we could would have been unacceptable.”

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Biden tries to chart a new path on the US-Mexico border, but similar roadblocks remain

Priscilla Alvarez

CNN

January 21, 2022

<https://kvia.com/your-voice-your-vote/politics/cnn-us-politics/2022/01/21/biden-tries-to-chart-a-new-path-on-the-us-mexico-border-but-similar-roadblocks-remain/>

A proposal to vaccinate migrants that was a source of tension inside the White House last year is back on the table as the Biden administration tries to change the way the United States deals with migrants at the southern border.

In August, when a report on the proposal emerged, top White House officials, including chief of staff Ron Klain, tried to seek reassurance that in fact the plan wasn’t happening.

Klain and Susan Rice, one of President Joe Biden’s top aides, shot down the proposal — intended to address public health concerns — because they thought it would encourage more people to come to the US, sources tell CNN.

Migrants being detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and minors in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services were already being offered vaccinations. But the proposal — reported in The Washington Post last summer — would apply to migrants encountered at the US southern border and released in the US as they await court hearings.

The plan, which originated at the Department of Homeland Security, is before the White House again, but no decision has been made, according to a senior administration official.

A White House spokesperson disputed the account about Klain and Rice, saying that “a decision on vaccinations for migrants had not been made at the time, just as a decision hasn’t been made right now.”

“We have put in place public health protocols that prioritize the health of border communities, agents and migrants. We are always evaluating potential updates to the protocols,” the spokesperson said.

Biden administration officials are trying to reset and resurface plans to rework how the US handles migrants at the US-Mexico border, following a year of record arrests and fierce political backlash. But the issues and political concerns that vexed the administration over the last year are likely to persist.

Biden outlined ambitious goals during his first days in office to repeal the hardline policies of his predecessor, overhaul the US immigration system and create a better, more humane system at the southern border. And his administration has made inroads on several fronts. The Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank, recorded nearly 300 executive actions taken on immigration as of January 19, 2022.

The US-Mexico border, though, often gains the most attention, and there the administration has juggled executing on progressive objectives with worrying over optics as Republicans seized on the issue as an example of poor management.

In recognition of increased migration to the US, Biden tapped Vice President Kamala Harris, who's expected to travel to Honduras next week, to address the root causes of migration — an intractable issue that's dogged administrations for years and takes time to yield results.

Internally, the back-and-forth pits camps of officials against each other: those who wanted to take a more progressive position and others operating under a model of deterring migrants, which has long been a US position.

A slew of Biden appointees who had been heralded by immigrant advocates and assigned to immigration have departed — or plan to depart — the administration, including figures like Andrea Flores, an American Civil Liberties Union attorney who's since joined New Jersey Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez's office, Tyler Moran and Esther Olavarria, who's retiring.

One source familiar with internal discussions described the arrival of thousands of unaccompanied children just weeks into Biden's presidency as a "big political bruise" that stalled plans to overhaul the system at the border. Instead, as border arrests climbed, discussions about the return of a Trump-era border policy requiring non-Mexican migrants to stay in Mexico — a program condemned by Biden on the campaign trail — began to ramp up inside the White House, the source said. A lower court later required the policy's revival.

Administration officials have conceded that progress on building out a new system on the US-Mexico border has been a challenge.

"There is still significant work underway. It has been a challenge. It has been frustrating to all of us inside and personally to me," Olavarria, the White House's deputy director for immigration, said during a Migration Policy Institute event this week, citing in part the unprecedented surge of migrant minors early in the administration.

"There's much more that we need to be doing and could be doing," she added. "The building blocks for that are also underway."

The whiplash of the last year, sources say, stems in part from record border apprehensions, which are often used as a barometer of success for administrations. The growing number of migrants at the US-Mexico border, which is reflected in border arrest figures, angered Klain, according to the source, who called meetings on the matter with the chief of staff tense.

A White House spokesperson said "no one was angered," adding that the administration knows irregular migration is a challenge.

The spokesperson also maintained the administration is committed “to building a fair, humane and lawful immigration system” and providing access to asylum and other legal migration pathways to those seeking protection.

A senior administration official told CNN that officials are now weighing proposals to chart a new path on the US-Mexico border, focusing on the use of new technologies to make asylum more accessible and evaluating models used by the United Nations to receive migrants. But that remains contingent on the end of a Trump-era public health order that has effectively barred migrants from seeking asylum — an authority the Biden Justice Department defended in court Wednesday. Administration officials say they’re focused on developing a plan for when that happens.

A hemispheric challenge

Previous administrations have similarly faced challenges on the US southern border as conditions in the Western Hemisphere have deteriorated. The coronavirus pandemic exacerbated those conditions, forcing the Biden administration to contend with even larger number of migrants — many of whom are claiming asylum — at the border.

“The way the President views this is that we are facing something historic in the Western Hemisphere. We’ve never seen displacement at this scale,” another senior administration told CNN.

A recent report from the International Organization for Migration, part of the United Nations, found that the pandemic impacted migration from Central and South America, spurring movement across the region. Data collected by US Customs and Border Protection also revealed an increase of South Americans crossing the US-Mexico border.

Biden acknowledged the state of the region during a nearly two-hour news conference Wednesday, saying he’s in contact with the leaders of the countries in South America and working closely with them “to deal with helping the countries in question.” He also nodded to the plight of people who choose to leave their home countries.

“People leave because they have real problems,” he said.

Harris, meanwhile, has announced private investments in the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, and administration officials are considering a potential regional compact spanning countries in Central and South America to promote coordination on stemming the flow of migration and work to stabilize the region.

But the results of those initiatives take time, leaving the focus on the border.

The senior administration official maintained that improving asylum at the US southern border remains a “top priority” for Biden.

“We want to create a system that’s quick, that’s transparent, that people can register and have an appointment quickly and have their claims heard. Easier said than done, but that’s the goal,” the official said, referring to asylum claims.

“If we were to create something that makes sense, that people know how to access it, that they don’t have to wait in line for very long, we think that would be more attractive to many people than crossing through the desert,” the official said, adding that there’s a lot of planning going on behind the scenes to bring that to fruition, including also entertaining reception models like those used by the United Nations abroad.

A regulation initially proposed last year that provides asylum officers more authority by allowing them to hear and decide claims is also expected soon, according to Olavarria. The rule would overhaul the asylum system in an attempt to settle claims faster and help alleviate the immigration court backlog. Immigration judges currently decide asylum claims.

First, however, comes winding down a public health authority, known as Title 42, that allows the expulsion of migrants encountered at the border and effectively bars asylum. The White House has declined to say when that might end, punting to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And on Wednesday, the Biden administration defended the use of the authority — which has resulted in more than 1 million expulsions of migrants — in court.

Wednesday’s oral arguments before a federal appeals court put into focus the border conundrum facing the administration: trying to defend a controversial policy that pushes people back into Mexico, while recognizing the dangers of doing so in another lawsuit.

Judge Justin Walker cited what he called a “self-contradiction,” noting that in a case concerning the Trump-era “remain in Mexico” policy, which forces non-Mexican migrants to stay in Mexico until their US court dates, the Justice Department says migrants face persecution, abuse and other harms. (The Biden administration tried to terminate the program, but a court order required it to be re-implemented.) But in the Title 42 case, the Justice Department defended expelling migrants to Mexico.

“What are we supposed to do with this?” Walker asked the Justice Department attorney.

Immigrant advocates and Democratic lawmakers have posed similar questions to the administration. Revamping systems at the US-Mexico border, though, will likely require additional funds and as a result, sign-off from Congress, where both parties have been deeply divided on immigration and are unlikely to come to a consensus on an overhaul during an election year.

“Throughout President Biden’s first year in office, his administration has taken some critical actions to fix our broken immigration system,” Menendez said in a statement, adding that more needs to be done to reverse Trump policies on the border.

“In 2022, when immigration policy and border management will be focal points of national debate, the Biden-Harris administration cannot run away from immigration policy,” he added.

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U.S. airs concerns over Mexico energy plan, points to economic risk

Dave Graham

Reuters

January 21, 2022

MEXICO CITY, Jan 21 (Reuters) - U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm on Friday flagged concerns about Mexico's plan to tighten state control of the electricity market, saying it could impede investment and economic development in North America.

Granholm met President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and senior members of his Cabinet, including Energy Minister Rocio Nahle, on Thursday and Friday on a visit to Mexico City in which the Mexican power market initiative drew close scrutiny.

"In each meeting, we expressly conveyed the Biden-Harris administration's real concerns with the potential negative impact of Mexico's proposed energy reforms on U.S. private investment in Mexico," Granholm said in a statement.

"The proposed reform could also hinder U.S.-Mexico joint efforts on clean energy and climate."

Later, Granholm said the United States wanted to partner Mexico on economic integration and development, but that this had been rendered "a challenge" by the electricity proposal - even as she expressed hope matters could be resolved.

Granholm said competitive energy markets that benefit North America should be upheld, and that she had been assured Mexico is committed to supporting clean energy and working out current disputes with projects within the rule of law.

Officials, lawmakers and business leaders say in private they believe Lopez Obrador's power market initiative will be watered down, but it is unclear by how much or whether it will be enough to restore bruised investor confidence.

Earlier, Lopez Obrador said his government would address future energy disputes with companies "case by case" as he took questions on the meetings with Granholm. [read more](#)

Lopez Obrador last year launched his constitutional reform to boost state control of the electricity market, arguing it was a matter of national security, and that past governments had skewed the market in favor of private capital. [read more](#)

The president, a leftist resource nationalist, has often couched his opposition to foreign and private participation in the energy sector as part of his drive to eradicate corruption.

"We were talking about all this, and (Granholm) understands that our mission is to banish corruption from our country as well as showing our openness to dialogue, and to go case by case," he said, referring to potential disputes.

He acknowledged "a small number" of both U.S. and Canadian companies have complained, but did not name any.

Granholm said Mexico had so much potential renewable energy that if fully realized, it could power the country at least 10 times over, create millions of jobs, and develop an export industry geared for a world seeking clean energy solutions.

At an event with Granholm, Mexican Finance Minister Rogelio Ramirez de la O said Mexico would work with the rest of North America to lure manufacturing investment across the Pacific from Asia and reduce trade deficits.

After Granholm's meeting with Lopez Obrador on Thursday, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard on Twitter forecast that "understanding" would be reached on clean energy in North America.

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Foreign truckers will need to be vaccinated to enter US starting Saturday

Anna Giaritelli and Zachary Halaschak

Washington Examiner

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<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/foreign-truckers-will-be-required-to-be-fully-vaccinated-to-enter-us-starting-saturday>

Foreign truckers will be required to prove they are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus upon entering the United States from Canada or Mexico starting Saturday, according to the Biden administration. The move is likely to disrupt supply chains further.

The Department of Homeland Security announced late Thursday that all non-U.S. citizens crossing at the land ports of entry or ferry terminals must be immunized. The mandate means foreigners traveling for essential purposes, including work and school, must show their vaccine cards.

About 1 in 10 Canadian truckers are unvaccinated, meaning that 12,000 to 18,000 workers will be affected by the restriction, according to the Ontario-based Canadian Trucking Alliance. It's unclear how many Mexican drivers are likely to be blocked by the policy.

"Starting on January 22, 2022, the Department of Homeland Security will require that non-U.S. individuals entering the United States via land ports of entry or ferry terminals along our Northern and Southern borders be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and be prepared to show related proof of vaccination," said DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. "These updated travel requirements reflect the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to protecting public health while safely facilitating the cross-border trade and travel that is critical to our economy."

Since Nov. 8, only nonessential travelers coming across to shop or visit were required to get the vaccine.

U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and U.S. nationals are exempt from the new rule. Noncitizens who illegally enter the U.S., predominantly by way of the southern border, are not required to be vaccinated, a problem that has frustrated Republican lawmakers who say the Biden administration's standards are contradictory.

In March 2020, the Trump administration imposed a monthlong ban on foreign, nonessential travelers seeking admission from Canada or Mexico. The move was at the recommendation of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and it was renewed monthly through November 2020.

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Changing mail-in ballot process is not voter suppression

Stewart Doreen

Midland Reporter-Telegram

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<https://www.mrt.com/opinion/article/Changing-mail-in-ballot-process-is-not-voter-16794562.php>

I disagree with President Joe Biden, who insinuated that the elections this year will be illegitimate if Democratic Party legislation isn't passed. He's wrong.

One can't call the elections from 2020 the most secure in history and then call into question the system 14 months later. Our president isn't alone with claims of voter suppression. This past week, Midland County Democratic Party officials stated that voter suppression was alive and well in Midland County. I again disagree. But don't take my word for it.

I asked Midland County Elections Administrator Carolyn Graves. She said that while there will be changes for those who vote by mail, it is not "voter suppression."

Today's commentary isn't about calling out hyperbolic Democrats in Midland County. My only advice to them is worry more about building up the ranks inside the county. Inspire, don't scare. Put together a field of candidates that can compete in November. As it stands now the general election will be nothing more than a bye week for the local Republican Party. You represent Democrats in Midland County, not the out-of-touch in Washington or Austin. Give our residents a reason to be excited about what is happening locally. As it stands now, the trip to the ballot box this year for Democrats will be to vote for governor and not much else. Local Democrats deserve better.

Getting back to voting in Midland. I am of the opinion that Graves and her staff deserve the highest marks for making voting accessible for all. This past week, she spent time with me to explain the changes that will take place for those people who want a ballot by mail. She said it is a little more complicated but that the Elections Office is there to help those even if it means meeting someone "curbside."

Here are some changes she highlighted.

Every person has to request their own application for a mail-in ballot. If someone calls, he or she can request one, but someone else in the house must make their own request. If that means, passing the phone to that other person, Graves said that will work.

"We have to speak to each person individually," Graves said.

The ballot envelope requires the information that the Elections Office has on file. When an application to receive a mail-in ballot is sent, the person must put their driver's license number or last four digits of their social security number on a specifically marked place of the flap of the envelope. Graves

recommends putting both. If the information that is part of application doesn't match what the Elections Office has on file, the applicant will be sent a rejection letter.

"Then they have six days to come in and show us their ID," Graves said.

Mark the "annual" box on the application and you will receive every ballot (for which one is eligible to vote) that year. Each January, you must do it again.

College students can't have someone else get their mail-ed ballot application for them. One can be downloaded (this is available to anyone).

Anyone bringing in a mail-in ballot request, must do it themselves. Graves said if needed, an Elections Office official will meet someone curbside to take the application from them.

"We will still jump through hoops," Graves said. "The hoops we will jump through have just been changed."

Don't wait until the last minute. Unsure about voting status or some other part of the process. Give yourself time to make sure you can participate. A person must be registered to vote for the Primary elections by Jan. 31. The deadline to submit an application for ballot by mail is Feb. 18.

Contact the Midland County Elections Office at 432-688-4912 or go to www.co.midland.tx.us/328/Elections-Office for more information.

It really doesn't matter your political preference; the Midland County Elections Office has a record of making it easy to be part of the process. The move to election centers (one isn't restricted to one precinct) has provided convenience beyond belief, and in most cases, there aren't the long waits that we see in more populated areas, especially if one takes advantage of the ample opportunity to cast a ballot.

The process has changed for those wanting to vote by mail. Still, those who choose to educate themselves on the process shouldn't have a problem voting for the candidate(s) that they choose – Democrat or Republican.

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Lawmakers were warned of problem with mail-vote application. They screwed it up anyway

Editorial Board

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

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<https://www.star-telegram.com/opinion/editorials/article257588448.html>

The process of applying for a mail-in ballot is a mess. It's entirely the Legislature's fault. And lawmakers were warned it would happen.

We can't say simply or strongly enough how badly the new Texas election-security law has screwed up the situation for thousands of Texans who want to vote absentee and are allowed to do so.

The law requires applicants to list either part of their Social Security number or their driver's license number. For the application to be approved, the number must match whatever the applicant used to register to vote. But few remember which they used or even realize that it's an issue. So, county election officials have no choice but to reject the application.

Mail ballot security is important. Fraud, while still rare, is much more likely in absentee balloting than in-person voting. But Republican lawmakers were warned of this exact problem when writing the law last year. Their only attempt to fix it — allowing the voter to try, try again — falls far short of the convenience that elderly and disabled voters deserve.

At one point this month, Tarrant County was rejecting 40% of applications over the issue, elections administrator Heider Garcia told county commissioners. That rate has improved since, but other large counties are having similar issues.

Garcia advises applicants to list both numbers to avoid the issue. Rejected applicants receive a letter and another application to send in. But the deadline to apply, Feb. 18, is fast approaching.

Some people registered under a driver's license they no longer have, and they'll have to take additional steps to "cure" their application. A small number will be affected, but this kind of hassle is the exact problem with so many election-security initiatives.

We'll say again: Vote fraud is extremely rare. So is voter suppression. The heated debate around these issues, all the way up to President Joe Biden comparing his opponents to segregationists, is the result of incredibly close elections in which each side's core voters are convinced that the other party is so unlikable that it wins only when it cheats.

The political irony in Texas and elsewhere is that the elderly, more likely to use absentee ballots, are an important Republican constituency. When GOP legislators make mail voting more difficult, they hurt their own efforts. And intentionally or not, they buy into the idea that higher turnout is automatically better for Democrats, when research — and election results such as in Virginia last year — show that's not the case.

There's an important distinction between how Texas handles mail voting and what some Western states do. California and others mail out actual ballots automatically to registered voters. Texas requires a vetted application to dispatch a ballot. Some conflate the two as a way to taint all mail-in voting, which isn't fair to the millions of law-abiding Texans who rely on it.

Then there's the issue of the difficulty of registering to vote in Texas. New registration is impossible online; the necessary form must be mailed to your county elections office. The secretary of state's office is limiting the number of applications given to voter-registration groups because it can't ensure an adequate paper supply. Really.

Individuals can print the form and mail it in, if they have the necessary computer equipment. And at least in this case, supply-chain issues have stung businesses and individuals in a number of unexpected ways.

The problem with mail-ballot applications? It was known, predicted and inadequately addressed. That's your Legislature at work.

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It's past time for online voter registration in Texas

Carol Alvarado

Houston Chronicle

January 22, 2022

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Opinion-It-s-past-time-for-online-voter-16796549.php>

The state's chief election officer, the Texas secretary of state, recently announced that supply chain issues have forced the state to reduce the number of voter registration card applications available for the public.

Voter registration organizations that have requested applications are only receiving a fraction of the number they request.

This is inexcusable, indefensible and downright embarrassing.

New 18-year-old adults, citizens who have moved to Texas from other states, naturalized citizens and previously unregistered Texans might not be able to exercise their right to vote in the upcoming election on March 1 because of a supply shortage of voter registration cards.

We are not talking about not being able to buy toilet paper — it is our sacred right to cast a vote. This is sad, tragic, laughable and happening in real time.

It didn't have to be this way.

I have filed legislation to allow universal online voter registration every session since 2013 and I will file a bill next session.

If my bill gets a hearing, I will not need to call up a panel of experts to testify why we need the bill; I will just point to the events of this past week to make a compelling case.

Online voter registration is safer, more secure and cheaper than its paper equivalent.

It was first implemented close to 20 years ago in Arizona. Now 42 states and the District of Columbia allow online voter registration. This includes red, blue, purple, small and large states.

Notably there have been no major scandals involving fraud or other issues that have caused states to scale back use of online voter registration.

In August 2020, a federal court ruled that Texas was in violation of the National Voter Registration Act because the state was not giving residents the option to register to vote when they renewed their driver's license.

Texas was forced to comply and since then, 1.5 million Texans have used the online system to register to vote or change their voter registration address. We have not heard any reports from the Texas secretary of state that this system is being abused with fraudulent registrants.

This latest episode of voting in Texas confirms the obvious. Texas is not a voter friendly state.

Last summer, I stood for 15 hours straight on the floor of the state Senate to bring national attention to legislation that makes it difficult for Texans to access the ballot box.

During my filibuster Texans from across the state sent me their concerns about this bill, including how difficult it would be for older Texans, veterans and those with disabilities to cast their vote.

Nevertheless, Texas adopted the most restrictive voting measure of any state in the nation and we are already paying the price.

One of the provisions I spoke out against was a new requirement for voters to include their state-issued ID card number or the last four digits of their Social Security number on mail ballot applications. The number needs to be the exact same one a voter used when they first registered to vote — even if it was decades ago. If the number doesn't match, then the application must be rejected.

So if you used your driver's license number when you registered to vote but then you used your Social Security number for the mail ballot application, you're out of luck. I warned that mail ballot applications would be rejected because of this unnecessary requirement. I was correct.

We are now getting reports that election officials across the state have been forced to reject up to half of mail ballot applications because of confusion over what must be included on the application. What's worse is the state has not provided a way for voters to correct their applications.

We're running out of time; mail ballots are already being sent out. It looks like the so-called election integrity legislation will disenfranchise many Democratic and Republican party primary voters. It is no secret that those in control of state government want to make it hard for certain folks to vote.

That was on full display last year during the regular legislative session and subsequent special called sessions. There is, however, a difference in making it harder to vote and not letting you vote.

The jig is up. Enough. Let's join the rest of the country in the 21st century and get online with voter registration.

Alvarado represents District 6 in the state Senate.

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Paper voter registration system is 'absurd.' But Texas does it anyway

Bridget Grumet

Austin American-Statesman

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<https://www.statesman.com/story/news/columns/2022/01/23/grumet-texas-uses-absurd-paper-voter-registration-system/6598786001/>

I'm not saying I could hear the anguished cries of Tax Assessor-Collector Bruce Elfant from across town. But I knew he'd be worked up about this one.

Here was the headline from KUT and The Texas Tribune: "Texas says supply chain issues have limited the number of voter registration forms it can give out."

That's right. As roughly 1,500 people a day move to Texas, and as we're heading into a big election year where the governor and other races will be decided, the secretary of state's office is carefully rationing its distribution of voter registration forms because ... there's a paper shortage.

"When I saw the headline, I said, 'I know how we could reduce paper,'" Elfant told me. As Travis County's voting registrar, Elfant has argued for years that Texas should adopt an online voter registration system — something 40 other states, red and blue alike, have used quite safely for years. (Two more states are developing such systems now.)

"The idea that we still have a paper-based (voter registration) system is just absurd," Elfant continued.

And then he went for the jugular. "Oklahoma is ahead of us, for God's sake. We know we don't want to be behind Oklahoma on anything."

Unlike Elfant, you probably don't spend much time thinking about Texas' voter registration system, paper or otherwise. But this struck me as a good moment to discuss how Texas' stubborn refusal to embrace online voter registration — an innovation that would clearly make it easier to vote — leaves our state with less accurate voter rolls at a greater cost to taxpayers.

Cutting out the middleman

Right now, when you register to vote, you fill out a paper form, including your name, birth date and driver's license number. That paper form goes to the county registrar — in Travis County, that's Elfant's office — where a worker types the information into a computer system.

From there, the process is fully digital. The information is electronically submitted to the Texas secretary of state's office, which checks the applicant's information against other databases. The state then sends Elfant's office a list of the verified applicants who should be added to the voter rolls.

Online voter registration would simply take out the middleman, that data entry person at Elfant's office. People would enter their information into a secure website. The secretary of state's office would continue to receive the information electronically and determine voter eligibility just as it does now.

Studies have shown significant savings in states that offered online voter registration, mainly by reducing the need for paper forms, postage and data entry staff (although paper forms are still available for those who need them). Arizona saw its administrative costs drop from 83 cents per paper registration to 3 cents per online registration. Multiply that across a state like Texas, where hundreds of thousands of new voters register each year, and the savings would be sizable.

Elfant also emphasizes such a system would improve the accuracy of the voter rolls. Have you ever tried to decipher someone else's terrible handwriting? The data entry folks in Elfant's office face that problem daily. If they misread someone's form and type something wrong, the application will be rejected.

Or if the application is simply too hard to read, or missing key information, it will be rejected.

Or if the application isn't postmarked by the 30-day cutoff before the next election, that person won't be allowed to vote in that election. In presidential election years, Elfant said, his office typically gets about 1,000 voter registration applications that aren't postmarked by the deadline, even though he suspects they were dropped in the mail in time.

"We have thousands of people who are denied their right to vote because of our paper-based system — far more than the 43 people the attorney general's office has voter fraud cases for," Elfant said. "I wish our Legislature would care as much about those people."

An easy call everywhere but here

Online voter registration hasn't been controversial, at least outside of Texas.

The Presidential Commission on Election Administration, co-chaired by prominent Republican and Democratic election lawyers, wholeheartedly recommended it in 2014.

Republican states have it. So do Democratic ones. A decade ago, the National Conference of State Legislatures declared, "Online voter registration is a nonpartisan trend with a capital 'T.'"

Not so much in Texas, though. Instead of spending a few hundred thousand dollars to launch online voter registration, Texas spent years and untold resources fighting lawsuits over it.

In 2020, the courts finally forced Texas to provide online voter registration to people renewing their driver's licenses, as part of complying with the federal motor voter law. Since then, about 1.5 million Texans have registered to vote that way.

But the state still refuses to expand online voter registration beyond driver's license renewals. In the last few sessions, lawmakers wouldn't even consider such bills, including legislation by Austin state Rep. Celia Israel, a Democrat.

In a 2015 committee hearing, the objections centered around fears of hacking, ignoring the plethora of services that Texas already provides securely online. A few opponents dreamed up "Mission Impossible"-style voter impersonation plots.

Then one critic said the quiet part out loud.

"What's at stake here for you three young Republican state reps?" Harris County Republican Party official Alan Vera asked GOP members of the House Committee on Elections in 2015. "The state of Colorado, your counterparts, passed online voter registration in 2010. Colorado is a red state. How could it hurt? Four years later, they don't have their jobs, and Colorado is not a red state anymore. That's what this is about."

Studies have found online voter registration doesn't help one party over the other. But, lamentably, when it comes to voting policies in Texas, we're past the point where facts matter.

Yes, we've got forms for that

This month's dust-up over paper voter registration forms arose because of the fine print. Lawmakers last session boosted the penalty for illegal voter registration from a class B misdemeanor to a class A misdemeanor. The state needs to print new voter registration forms reflecting that — but it's running into difficulty getting enough forms from its vendor.

After some backlash, the secretary of state's office said voter applications on the old forms could still be submitted. The agency also noted people can print out their own application from the secretary of state's website, and then mail that in.

Elfant told me he's not worried about running out of forms. Travis County prints its voter registration applications in house. His staff is still distributing the old forms, with the updated penalty information stamped on them.

What irks Elfant — and should frustrate anyone who cares about good government — is that Texas is still clinging to a paper voter registration system that is costly, cumbersome and out of step with Texans' expectations. Nearly two-thirds of Texans said they support online voter registration, according to a 2020 poll by the Texas Politics Project.

"We know what the right thing is," Elfant told me. "Someday, we'll get there and wonder why it took so long."

Grumet is the Statesman's Metro columnist. Her column, ATX in Context, contains her opinions. Share yours via email at bgrumet@statesman.com or via Twitter at [@bgrumet](https://twitter.com/bgrumet).

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And so begins the restricting of democracy

Editorial Board

San Antonio Express-News

January 21, 2022

<https://www.expressnews.com/opinion/editorial/article/Editorial-Texas-voting-restrictions-16794278.php>

"A canary in the coal mine" refers to miners releasing birds ahead of them to detect the presence of carbon monoxide. If the canary died, that was evidence of a fatally toxic environment.

In these early days of the first election cycle under a new Texas voting law, the previously simple task of mailing in an application to request a ballot has become the canary released into our electoral system, showcasing how democracy can be restricted and threatened.

In some of the state's largest counties, including Bexar, election officials are rejecting an unprecedented number of mail-in applications for ballots because they don't meet the state's new identification requirements. Under the new law, known as SB 1, the applications must include a

driver's license number, state ID number or, if a person does not have one of these, the last four digits of his or her Social Security number.

The data must match that on the person's previous voting record, or the application is rejected. But most people don't remember the number they used when originally registering.

Texas is already severely restrictive in who can vote by mail, and this change makes it more cumbersome for those who are eligible.

Of the first 300 rejections processed in Bexar County, 80 percent were because of the new ID requirements. Another feature of this new law, which is unnecessarily complicating a procedure once routine, is that people can no longer request an application for someone other than themselves, including relatives. For example, an 85-year-old woman requesting an application for herself can't also request one for her 88-year-old husband who lives in the same house. He must make that request.

Bexar County Elections Administrator Jacque Callanen has correctly called these new provisions "ridiculous." We would also call them unsurprising. Critics of SB 1 predicted this type of confusion, delay and frustration for voters as the bill made its way through the 87th Texas Legislature.

The state's new voting law is doing exactly what Texas Republicans intended: making it more burdensome for Texans to vote, specifically those Texans who may not vote for them.

Besides the changes in mail-in applications, several other canaries in SB 1 are warning us of the encroachment on voting rights.

Like voting suppression legislation from other Republican-led statehouses, SB 1 arose as a response to the lies of twice-impeached former President Donald Trump that the 2020 election was stolen from him due to widespread voter fraud. This is not true.

Some of the other provisions that restrict access to voting: The law bans overnight early voting hours and drive-thru voting; allows partisan poll watchers greater autonomy in polling places; makes it a state jail felony for local election officials to take it upon themselves to distribute mail-in ballot applications, even when given to voters who automatically qualify to vote by mail, or assist groups who are helping get out the vote.

All these changes were made in the name of "election integrity" and "election security" to protect against "voter fraud" even though voter fraud is virtually nonexistent in the country and state.

Each time Gov. Greg Abbott and Republican state legislators invoke "election integrity" to defend the changes made in how Texans vote, they imply that it was compromised in the 2020 elections.

It wasn't. At the time, the Texas secretary of state called the elections "smooth and secure." Republicans performed exceptionally well in Texas in 2020. SB1 is arbitrary and purely partisan.

None of this was necessary — as evidenced by the recent Trump-inspired voting audit in Harris, Dallas, Tarrant and Collin counties. An audit that found not much of anything.

The problems counties are experiencing with mail ballot applications, we fear, is the first canary in the ballot box.

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From: John Scott
Sent: Sunday, November 21, 2021 7:12 AM
To: Sam Taylor; Joe Esparza; Adam Bitter; Keith Ingram
Subject: Fwd: Mu word
Attachments: The Washington Post Vote Hoax.xlsx

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From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: Sunday, November 21, 2021 6:31:10 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: John Scott <JScott@sos.texas.gov>; [REDACTED]
Subject: Mu word

CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE of the SOS organization. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you are expecting the email and know that the content is safe. If you believe this to be a malicious or phishing email, please send this email as an attachment to Informationsecurity@sos.texas.gov.

Read your [joint](#) article about the attempted breach of an Ohio election facility by seekers of evidence of voter fraud with a certain amount of bemusement.

Together, the incidents in Ohio and Colorado point to an escalation in attacks on the nation's voting systems by those who have embraced Trump's **false claims** that the 2020 election was **riddled with fraud**.

Please understand something very clearly; I wouldn't piss in Trump's ear if his brains were on fire!!!

I also didn't need to "break" into election systems anywhere to find prima facie evidence of "widespread" voter fraud virtually everywhere.

Attached is a spreadsheet containing just a *tiny smidgen* of examples of the WIDESPREAD voter fraud in the 2020 primary election in Texas.

That is if you use the dictionary's definition of the word "[WIDESPREAD](#)", the primary meaning being over a wide (geographical area). These days, revisionists try to dismiss that accurate definition which they find inconvenient to their narrative that there is NO EVIDENCE OF WIDESPREAD VOTER FRAUD.

The attached excerpted dataset was extracted from the official Texas Secretary Of State's Voter History (~January 15, 2020) which the SoS compiled into 254 files, one for each county, sorted alphabetically; i.e. 001 in column 1 is Anderson County and 254 is Zavalla County.

To [quote](#) the Strother Martin character in the iconic Paul Newman Movie, "What we've got here is a failure to communicate".

One incident is happenstance; two incidents is circumstance; three incidents is enemy action. I've listed half a dozen examples of evidence of voter fraud occurring in counties all over Texas. It took me all of 30 seconds or so.

Real deep data dive, that! <sarcasm>

You see, it's voter fraud to vote more than once in the same election. It's also voter fraud to vote in more than one primary election. We gottem both.

And neither the local officials who transcribe this data nor the state officials are detecting it, much less interdicting the fraud.

The fact is that the curation of voter data is chaos. There's tens of thousands of people registered to vote in multiple states. There's people voting in two different states in the same election. There are dead people voting. There are people on the voter rolls in some states whose birth dates go back to the 19th century. There are people registering to vote who claim their residence is a Fed X or USPS mail box; thousands of them.

There's hundreds of people in the county I live in with multiple voter registration cards.

With all due respect, you guys don't have an effing clue what you're talking about when you claim that there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud.

But apparently that inconvenience isn't going to deter you purveyors of falsities from continuing to promote your own phony narratives.

Mr. Scott, Gregg Abbott [doesn't](#) have to spend \$4 million dollars to prove the 2020 election was anything but "smooth and secure".

Send me a case of Lone Star beer and I will send you evidence of voter fraud in ~86% of the counties in Texas.

You reporters have your editor contact me and I will be happy to supply you with actual DATA to work with instead of hysterical supposition and innuendo that anyone disturbed about voter fraud is some sort of alt-right conspiracist.

Bryan, when are you going to do something about those voters in your senate district that jumped the Red River to vote in Oklahoma and Texas a year ago? Let me know, cause you got some that voted in Arkansas and Texas too!! 😊 Not to mention those on parole and felons on criminal probation.

Amy, Emma, Devlin, as soon as you people do your own DATA DRIVEN research, get back with me. It takes a bit more than a brief stint as a middle school math teacher to address data issues competently, accurately and truthfully.

Del
8324571809

CountyNum	Precinct	ID	Whole	Last	First	Middle	Other	Sex	Street	StrtNum	StrtNam	StrtTyp	UnitTyp	UnitNum	City	Zip5	Zip4	MAddr	MCity	State	MZip5	MZip4	Vote1	VStat	Blank	Vote2	ElecTyp	Blank2	VoteTyp	FileNam
110	45	1020810414	ACEVEDO, GRISELDA HERRERA	ACEVEDO	GRISELDA	HERRERA		F	317 DOUGLAS St	317	DOUGLAS	St			LEVELLAND	79336		317 DOUGLAS ST	LEVELLAND	TX	79336		20050622	V		20200303	PO	DEM	ED	combined.txt
110	45	1020810414	ACEVEDO, GRISELDA HERRERA	ACEVEDO	GRISELDA	HERRERA		F	317 DOUGLAS St	317	DOUGLAS	St			LEVELLAND	79336		317 DOUGLAS ST	LEVELLAND	TX	79336		20050622	V		20200303	PO	REP	ED	combined.txt
138	401	1013221024	PARKER, FRANCES NICHOLSON	PARKER	FRANCES		NICHOLSON	F	841 7TH S	841	7TH				MUNDAY	76371		PO BOX 749	MUNDAY	TX	76371		19800324	V		20200303	PO	DEM	EV	combined.txt
138	401	1013221024	PARKER, FRANCES NICHOLSON	PARKER	FRANCES		NICHOLSON	F	841 7TH S	841	7TH				MUNDAY	76371		PO BOX 749	MUNDAY	TX	76371		19800324	V		20200303	PO	REP	EV	combined.txt
116	428	1012605028	ARMSTRONG, JOHN RUSSELL	ARMSTRONG	JOHN	RUSSELL	JR	M	1707 MEADOWVIEW Rd	1707	MEADOWVIEW	Rd			COMMERCE	75428		1707 MEADOWVIEW RD	COMMERCE	TX	75428		19880228	V		20200303	PO	DEM	ED	combined.txt
116	428	1012605028	ARMSTRONG, JOHN RUSSELL	ARMSTRONG	JOHN	RUSSELL	JR	M	1707 MEADOWVIEW Rd	1707	MEADOWVIEW	Rd			COMMERCE	75428		1707 MEADOWVIEW RD	COMMERCE	TX	75428		19880228	V		20200303	PO	REP	ED	combined.txt
116	429	1012682457	RICH, TIMOTHY	RICH	TIMOTHY			M	4059 STATE HWY 24	4059	STATE	HWY			CAMPBELL	75422		4059 STATE HWY 24	CAMPBELL	TX	75422		19930901	V		20200303	PO	DEM	ED	combined.txt
116	429	1012682457	RICH, TIMOTHY	RICH	TIMOTHY			M	4059 STATE HWY 24	4059	STATE	HWY			CAMPBELL	75422		4059 STATE HWY 24	CAMPBELL	TX	75422		19930901	V		20200303	PO	DEM	ED	combined.txt
116	429	1012682457	RICH, TIMOTHY	RICH	TIMOTHY			M	4059 STATE HWY 24	4059	STATE	HWY			CAMPBELL	75422		4059 STATE HWY 24	CAMPBELL	TX	75422		19930901	V		20200303	PO	REP	EV	combined.txt
205	104	1012148620	MIRELLES, VENANCIO LUIS	MIRELLES	VENANCIO	LUIS		M	1201 ANTONIA Ave	1201	ANTONIA	Ave			SINTON	78387		1201 ANTONIA AVE	SINTON	TX	78387		20000804	V		20200303	PO	DEM	AB	combined.txt
205	104	1012148620	MIRELLES, VENANCIO LUIS	MIRELLES	VENANCIO	LUIS		M	1201 ANTONIA Ave	1201	ANTONIA	Ave			SINTON	78387		1201 ANTONIA AVE	SINTON	TX	78387		20000804	V		20200303	PO	REP	EV	combined.txt
214	10	1011689454	GUERRA, CALIXTO	GUERRA	CALIXTO			M	4471 OLD HWY 83 GARCENO Rd	4471	OLD HWY 83 GARCENO	Rd			RIO GRANDE CITY	78584		4471 OLD HWY 83	RIO GRANDE CITY	TX	78584		20000314	C		20200303	PO	DEM	AB	combined.txt
214	10	1011689454	GUERRA, CALIXTO	GUERRA	CALIXTO			M	4471 OLD HWY 83 GARCENO Rd	4471	OLD HWY 83 GARCENO	Rd			RIO GRANDE CITY	78584		4471 OLD HWY 83	RIO GRANDE CITY	TX	78584		20000314	C		20200303	PO	DEM	EV	combined.txt
113	5	1008394693	HOLLEMAN, KENNETH WAYNE	HOLLEMAN	KENNETH	WAYNE	SR	M	811 MARKET St S	811	MARKET	St			GRAPELAND	75844		811 S MARKET ST	GRAPELAND	TX	75844		20060409	V		20200303	PO	DEM	ED	combined.txt
113	5	1008394693	HOLLEMAN, KENNETH WAYNE	HOLLEMAN	KENNETH	WAYNE	SR	M	811 MARKET St S	811	MARKET	St			GRAPELAND	75844		811 S MARKET ST	GRAPELAND	TX	75844		20060409	V		20200303	PO	REP	ED	combined.txt