



Date: 2025-07-29
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Affirm public info: I agree

Regarding: Congressional

Message:

My name is Sarah Berel-Harrop, representing myself. Thank you for the opportunity to share my views against even re-opening redistricting- a process that is unnecessary and which you do not have to do.

I've lived in Texas, most of my life in Houston, since I was a baby. I've been in Dallas for the past five years. I am currently on a path to Unitarian Universalist (UU) ministry. Unitarian Universalists value "inclusive democratic processes" – not as an end in itself – but as a means to achieve justice and equity. And I do believe in democracy – specifically electoral politics - as one tool to achieve thriving for individuals, families, and communities. Many of our communities are vulnerable to financial concerns, lack of health care, and other barriers to thriving. And right now, people are struggling. So we do need tools to advocate for change.

As a person of faith holding faith in democracy, I've encouraged voters to engage in the voting process, mostly in a non-partisan way. I also have been an election official, a Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar, a non-partisan election observer, and a consistent voter. I'm deeply engaged and committed to the process! For the past two federal election cycles, I held the democracy portfolio for the Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry, which organizes our member congregations to advocate for UU values – including using inclusive democratic processes – in the public square.

We who are clergy have an obligation to discern and speak truth. I often wonder: at what point is it no longer responsible for me to continue to tell people that voting is an effective tool to advocate for their communities in the public square? As a UU and as a former accountant, I value substance over form.

When elected officials choose their voters, they escape accountability to earn votes or work for their constituents. That's not inclusive democracy – and at a certain point we are talking about sham elections.

I am aware that the congressional districts from 2021 were what the Republican Congressional delegation asked for. They are not fair, but not exactly a sham.

But, wait, there's more! President Trump wants y'all to "give" him five more congressional seats – and he's pointed out exactly who the Black and Latino legislators that he wants you manipulate district lines to get rid of. Make no mistake, that also means cynically disenfranchising the

mostly Black and brown voters in those districts from voting for the person of their choice. Seats in representative bodies do not belong to President Trump, they do not belong to the Republican Congressional Delegation or any sitting member, they do not belong to Governor Abbott, or the Texas House, or to you. They belong to the voters! As a citizen who believes in the promise that diverse groups can resolve conflicts about the way we should live together in a pluralistic society at the ballot box, I urge you not to enable this racist plan. This is not something that you can easily wash from your soul.

The very idea that the Texas legislature “give” any sitting president any number of congressional seats is repugnant. To stuff the process of understanding communities of interest and how changing district lines impacts communities into a 30-day special session is absurd. By all means, consider redistricting during the next two interim sessions – we in Texas are in sore need of solutions to make districts more compact, where constituents can access their congress members and engage with each other, and to rationally unwind the deleterious impacts of prior gerrymandering. That would be worthy of this body. It remains to be seen if this is a fig leaf, a kangaroo court, to pretend that you gave the people of Texas due process while manipulating the process to obtain a desired result.

If the Texas Legislature pushes through more unfair maps, when a community member who wants a voice in our representative democracy says to me, why should I vote, this system is rigged? Obviously, the answer is yes, it is, yes, it is rigged, this is a sham election. An answer that leads again to the question – is it, still, responsible for folks to continue to have faith in voting as an effective tool for their communities? Is it time to turn to different tools? I’m pretty sure that you will not care for tools other than the electoral process!

Now, Governor Abbott has said, thank you sir, I’ll get right on that. And you know how things flow (downhill). It’s in your hands now. It’s up to you. You can be the adults in the room that say, no sir, that is not the business of the people of Texas. And may you make it so.

[REDACTED]