



## **Search for fleeing Democrats studied**

House committee will focus on the FAA search for the group that fled to Oklahoma

*By Suzanne Gamboa*  
Associated Press Writer  
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Democrats this week should get details they've sought on federal involvement in the search for Texas lawmakers who left the state to prevent a vote on a redistricting bill.

A House committee hearing on Tuesday will focus on the Federal Aviation Administration's search for state Rep. Pete Laney's plane. The Transportation Department released a report Friday evening.

Investigators found that a call from a staffer for U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay to the FAA's congressional liaison, David Balloff, triggered the search. The search stretched over eight hours and involved at least 13 employees, the report said.

Since mid-May, Democrats have alleged that DeLay used political influence to involve federal agencies in a political matter, an allegation he denies.

Laney, former Texas House speaker, used his private plane to join 50 other Democrats in Ardmore, Okla., on May 12 to break the quorum on a congressional redistricting bill.

An unnamed senior aide in DeLay's office phoned Balloff on May 12 for help in finding Laney's plane, according to the Transportation Department's investigation.

Balloff did not ask the staffer why she wanted the search. And he did not inform supervisors of the call until May 21, when they asked.

DeLay spokesman Jonathan Grella said the information was public. But when Gene Marx, an FAA employee in Washington, asked another controller for the plane's May 11 flight history, Marx was told he might need a Freedom of Information request, transcripts show.

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