



**House District 1 - Bowie, Franklin, Lamar & Red River counties**  
**District & Capitol Interim Report**  
*September 2016*

***Around House District 1. SRBA strategic planning session.*** Earlier this month, the Sulphur River Basin Authority (SRBA) continued its efforts to remake itself after receiving a very critical review by the staff of the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission (SAC) and being before the Commission twice over the summer. Under the leadership of its new president, Mike Sandefur from Texarkana, SRBA reached out to the other water stakeholders within the basin to help determine its priorities and goals through a strategic planning process.

The goal of the strategic plan is to create a list of measurable goals for SRBA to achieve and as a way to measure the progress that has been made protecting the Sulphur River Basin. Texarkana College President, James Henry Russell, was brought in to lead this planning process.

Failure to involve other stakeholders in making plans for the Sulphur River was a major criticism in the staff SAC report. There will be additional planning meetings in the next few months to help SRBA continue addressing the serious issues identified by the SAC. During the 85th Texas Legislature, legislation will be filed to address the challenges facing SRBA.

These stakeholders included: Riverbend Water Resource District; the city of Texarkana, Texas; Region D Water Planning District; the Northeast Texas Municipal Water District; and the Ark-Tex Council of Governments. According to President Sandefur, everyone agreed that SRBA must address the sedimentation in Lake Wright Patman as a top priority to ensure the health of the Sulphur River Basin. For more information on SRBA, visit their website: [www.srbatx.org](http://www.srbatx.org).

***Region D.*** The Region D Water Development Board (Region D) met for their regular board meeting on Wednesday (09/14), and it marked the beginning of a new chapter as Chairwoman Linda Price's term ended in August. The board elected Mr. Richard LeTourneau of Harrison County to serve as its new chairman. At the meeting, the board voted to include Riverbend Water Resource District as a Water User Group (WUG). Before this becomes final, Region D must submit a letter to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) asking that Riverbend be added as a WUG for the 2021 water plan. The designation allows the Red River Army Depot to have representation, through Riverbend, during the region's water planning process.

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*Riverbend.* Riverbend Water Resource District met Wednesday (09/28), for a special called meeting that was followed by a strategic planning session. The board elected as its new officers: Jim Green - President; Marshal Wood - Vice President; Fred Milton - Treasurer; and Kelly Mitchell - Secretary. Sean Rommel, former president, will remain on the board. The board also approved its 2016-17 budget. During their strategic planning session, the board reviewed their old strategic plan, created in 2013, and updated it to align with current priorities. A few of the goals identified in these discussions included: increasing Riverbend's ability to secure grants; expanding memberships; improving their website in order to help the public stay informed; and maintaining a healthy relationship with Red River Army Depot by meeting its water needs. More information on Riverbend can be found at [www.rwr.org](http://www.rwr.org).

*Cox Field receives \$1.1 million grant.* The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), acting on behalf of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), offered the city of Paris an airport improvement grant for Cox Field. The grant is for \$1,106,666 million for hangar and pavement improvements at the airport. The funds were awarded by TxDOT's Aviation Facilities Grant Program to help preserve and improve the state's general aviation system, which accounts for more than three million flight hours per year and provide aircraft facilities for agricultural, medical, business and commuter use.

*Texarkana designated a Texas Cultural District; plans celebration.* According to the city of Texarkana, the Texas Commission on the Arts named it as an official Texas Cultural District. Texarkana along with Waco, Arlington, Amarillo, Rockport, Plano and Salado received this designation in 2016. The city is planning a celebration event in Texarkana on Tuesday, October 25th at 11 am at the Federal Courthouse.

Cultural districts are special zones designed to harness the power of cultural resources to stimulate economic development and community revitalization. These districts can become focal points for generating businesses, attracting tourists, stimulating cultural development and fostering civic pride. Here is a link for more information: <http://www.visittexarkanadistrict.com/>.

**REMINDER:** *Voter registration & early voting.* If you have not registered to vote yet, you have until Tuesday, October 11, to do so. Early voting starts Monday, October 24, and runs through Friday, November 4. Polls will be open on Election Day from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.; be sure to check with your county registrar's office for more information on locations to vote early or where to vote on Election Day. You will need to be registered to vote so you can cast your ballot for President of the United States, as well as important local elections including those being conducted by Paris Junior College (PJC) and Texarkana College (TC). If you live in the service area of either of these institutions, here are links to both PJC (<http://www.parisjc.edu/downloads/annex-3.pdf>) and TC (<https://www.texarkanacollege.edu/serviceplan/>) so you can acquaint yourself with the issues before going to vote.



*Voter ID information.* Please note that on August 10, 2016, the state of Texas entered into an agreement with a federal district court on an order changing the voter identification requirements for all elections held in Texas after this date until further notice. The following is a list of acceptable forms of photo ID:

- Texas driver license issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS);
- Texas Election Identification Certificate issued by DPS\*;
- Texas personal identification card issued by DPS;
- Texas license to carry a handgun issued by DPS;
- United States military identification card containing the person's photograph;
- United States citizenship certificate containing the person's photograph; or

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- United States passport.

\*Election Identification Certificates can be obtained from the Franklin County Sheriff's office located at 208 TX-37, Mount Vernon, 75457, on Monday through Friday. The admin office is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and the telephone number is 903-537-4539. For more information about the current requirements for the identification needed for voting, refer to the Secretary of State's website: <http://www.votetexas.gov/register-to-vote/need-id>.

*Around the Capitol. AG's office - child support - car registrations.* Late last month, the state's attorney general's office started notifying parents who are at least six months behind in their child support payments with warnings that they will not be able to renew their car registrations until they start paying off the deficit amount. The new program targets estimated 12-14,000 delinquent parents across the state.

*Texas Economy.* On September 14th, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Glenn Hegar, provided a briefing on the current Texas economy to members of the Texas House of Representatives and their staff members. The comptroller has lowered its biennial revenue estimate for the current biennium by \$2.7 billion, but Texas is lucky enough to have the nation's largest economic stabilization fund (i.e., Rainy Day Fund). The Rainy Day Fund is a source of revenue that can be used as a "method of finance" for the legislature to consider using when state revenues fall short. This account is not to be used to fund ongoing expenses but rather as a safety net to fund one-time challenges. Legislators could face more pressure to tap into the Rainy Day Fund to subsidize high priority obligations when the 85th Legislature convenes in January 2017.

*Texas Historical Records Advisory Board.* The Board has joined with archival institutions across the country to celebrate the month of October 2016 as *Archives Month*. Archives, libraries and special collections work to preserve historical records and to make them accessible to the public. For more information, visit [www.thrab.org](http://www.thrab.org).

*Joint meetings of the House Committees on Appropriations & Public Education.* In May 2016, the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the state's current school finance system, though flawed, is minimally constitutional. Texas House Speaker Joe Straus (San Antonio) issued additional interim charges to the House Committee on Appropriations (HAC) and the House Committee on Public Education (HPE) to study the school finance system to find further efficiencies. The additional charges to these two committees, which I serve on, directed us to study:

- "Current law requires the elimination on September 1, 2017, of Additional State Aid for Tax Relief (ASATR), which was intended to offset the cost of tax-rate compressions enacted in 2006. Review how this loss of funding would impact school districts." ASATR is funding that the state provided to school districts in order to encourage them to reduce their tax rates to \$1 per \$100 in property valuation in 2006. State law calls for that money to go away in 2017 unless the Legislature acts. In the current school year, ASATR funding provides an estimated \$350 million to the state's public education system.
- "Study the use of local property taxes to fund public education and its effects on educational quality and on Texas taxpayers. Specifically, recommend ways to reverse the increasing reliance on recapture payments to fund public education statewide." As property values have increased, more school districts have become subject to recapture, meaning that some of their local property tax dollars are sent back to the state and distributed to school districts with less property wealth. Since 2006, the number of school districts paying recapture has increased from 142 to 238.

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These committees met for over 20 hours on 09/28 & 09/29, to hear invited and public testimony. It is obvious that parents and school officials care passionately about having the best education possible for their children, grandchildren and students.

***My office is here to help.*** I thank each of you for letting me serve you as your state representative. Please contact either the District office (903-628-0361) or Capitol office (512-463-0692) if there is anything you think we can do to help you.

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