



**District & Capitol Report - 86th Legislature
House District 1 - Bowie, Franklin, Lamar & Red River counties
March 2019**

Around the District. In last month's e-newsletter, I mentioned that Department of State Health Services (DSHS) recently awarded special designations for Christus St. Michael Health System in Texarkana and that Paris Regional Medical Center had received a Stroke

Designation Award. Since that time, my office has been informed that Wadley Regional Medical Center has also received special



accreditation from the American College of Cardiology as Texarkana's first and only accredited Chest Pain Center. According to the press release issued by Wadley, the hospital's "goal is to significantly reduce the mortality rate of heart attack patients by reducing the time it takes to receive treatment and increasing the accuracy and effectiveness of treatment. Wadley has demonstrated expertise and commitment to quality patient care by meeting or exceeding a wide set of stringent criteria and completing an on-site survey by the American College of Cardiology." This is great news for the Texarkana area and its residents who face heart health challenges.

Congratulations to Wadley!

Around the Capitol. On March 18, we passed the half-way point in the regular session of the

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86th legislature, which means as the number of days get fewer, we are spending more and more time in committee meetings and on the House floor debating many important bills. On March 27, the House spent over 12 hours debating the state budget for the 2020-21 biennium. The bill now goes to the Senate where they will substitute their version of the budget and send it back to the House. After those formalities, the all-important 10-member conference committee will really begin the heavy lifting to craft the next state budget. We passed our budget after hours of thoughtful discussion, and at the end of the day, the House made unprecedented investments to reform school finance, provide property tax relief, fund Hurricane Harvey & more! It is important to note that HB1 stays below constitutional spending limits and the growth of population-plus-inflation. We funded our state's highest priorities while remaining responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars. Some highlights of House Bill 1 (the 2020-21 budget) include:

THE TEXAS BUDGET FUNDS:

- ✓ SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM
- ✓ PROPERTY TAX RELIEF
- ✓ SCHOOL SAFETY
- ✓ MENTAL HEALTH
- ✓ SEXUAL ASSAULT TESTING & RESPONSE
- ✓ HURRICANE HARVEY RECOVERY
- ✓ HUMAN TRAFFICKING & MORE!

Other top priorities. At the start of the legislative session, leadership in both the House and Senate committed to reforming our state's school finance and property tax systems. The key bills that have been filed in the House for these issues are **HB 3** (school finance) and **HB 2** (property tax reform). These bills will come before the full House in the next two weeks with HB 3 set on next Wednesday's House Calendar, and HB 2 will be heard the following week. Highlights of these bills include:

HB 3: "The Texas Plan. The Time is Now." The bill is built upon years of preparation, research, and witness testimony conducted and collected by the House Committee on Public Education, and the Texas Commission on Public School Finance. The Commission's findings are well worth the state's investment, and House Bill 3 includes an overwhelming majority of those recommendations.

House Bill 3 fundamentally transforms the way Texas invests in its students. This bill puts into motion approximately \$9 billion in funding – beyond enrollment growth and current law entitlement over the next two years – and includes a series of reallocations that prioritize resources toward students with the highest needs. This \$9 billion investment represents a significant increase in the state's share of public education funding that will reduce recapture, provide much-needed property tax relief, and strengthen support for our schools. House Bill 3 funds its changes through education formulas that provide stability for school districts and ensure that funding will exist beyond the next two years. The investments we make today will still exist for the students of tomorrow and set the stage for our state's economic success. The

bill makes school funding formulas more efficient and equitable by reframing our approach to public school funding. Rather than focusing on how much is being invested in districts and the education system as a whole, House Bill 3 focuses on how much we are investing in our classrooms. Only when we focus on improving student outcomes can we truly transform our public education system. House Bill 3 reforms our public school finance system from top-to-bottom. It reduces reliance on recapture, eliminates outdated or otherwise inefficient funding allotments to our districts, boosts investment in low-income/high-needs communities, and systemically increases per-pupil funding by raising the basic allotment to new heights.

HB 2: "The Texas Taxpayer Transparency Act."

The bill:

- Encourages taxpayers and local government to work together in setting a budget and adopting property tax rates in a way that meets the needs of their community.
- Creates a more open process that engages the public and empowers voters. It gives taxpayers the ability to authorize higher property tax rates in the event more revenue is needed to cover essential services and meet contractual obligations.
- Empowers taxpayers to make a more informed decision about their property taxes since it allows property owners to see how a proposed rate affects their bill; how it compares to costs in the previous year; who is proposing the increase; and where they can go to

voice their concerns about any proposed increase.

- Expands opportunities for taxpayers to collaborate with local leaders in the rate-setting process as outlined below:
 - 1) First, taxpayers will receive transparent information on the front end that shows them how a proposed rate directly affects their bill;
 - 2) Taxpayers can then utilize that information to express their stance on the rate change directly with local elected officials and governing bodies during public hearings; and
 - 3) In the event the adopted rate exceeds the rollback rate, an automatic election is triggered, empowering voters to take a final stand at the ballot box.
- The Taxpayer Transparency Act is not a revenue cap. It's a bill that fosters collaboration between those who set property tax rates and those who pay them.
- A more open process is beneficial to EVERYONE. Only when taxpayers and local governments work together can they budget in a way that best fits the needs of everyone in the community.

Specifically, HB 2:

- Lowers the rollback rate for most taxing units;
- Institutes an automatic November ratification election when a taxing unit

adopts a property tax rate above the rollback rate;

- Calculates how much one would owe under the proposed tax rates and discloses the "No New Revenue" tax rate for each taxing unit on an individual's tax bill (like a line-item receipt);
- Requires the same property tax bill to include the time, date, and location of public hearings where property tax rates will be deliberated or adopted;
- Further enhances tax bills by requiring local governments to include a chart comparing what the recipient paid in property taxes last year versus what they will pay this year;
- Gives taxpayers the option of filling out a short form -- attached to their electronic tax bill -- that will generate a message outlining the recipient's stance on their bill before automatically sending it to the appropriate taxing unit;
- Creates a Property Tax Advisory Board within the Office of the Comptroller to make ongoing recommendations to improve effectiveness and efficiencies in the property tax system;
- Allows taxing units that adopt rates below the designated rollback rate to save the "unused increment" and apply it toward raising the rollback rate by that amount in subsequent years, until the amount is spent or five years have passed;
- Expands opportunities for property owners to protest or appeal their appraisal value through after-hours

protests and requires notices from appraisal districts to be issued electronically; and,

- Protects property owners from seeing their property values increase during the protest process at the appraisal review board level.

My bills. The House Committee on Public Education (HPE) began March by holding a hearing on the STAAR tests, including panels from TEA, assessment experts, and education groups, to discuss the readability and curriculum alignment of the exams. In the same hearing, I laid out **HB 1480**, which eliminates four STAAR exams; removes high stakes associated with the tests; and provides accelerated instruction for students to perform at grade level by the end of the next year. At the next meeting, we heard public testimony on HB 3 (Huberty, et al) , which will invest \$9 billion in funding above enrollment growth for the next two years, raise the basic allotment from \$5,140 to \$6,030, and fund full-day, high quality Pre-K. In the hearings on March 12th and March 19th, I laid out the following bills:

- **HB 1051** - extends funding for an adult high school diploma and industry certification charter school program (voted out of committee March 19th).
- **HB 735** - allows school districts to lower M&O tax rates if conditions exist.
- **HB 1388** - requires TEA to continue giving credit to schools whose students participate in coherent CTE sequences (voted out of committee March 26th).
- **HB 1556** - alleviates statutory burdens on school districts purchasing items in

aggregate (voted out of committee March 26th).

HB 330, which is adding an exemption to the dropout computation in honor of Simms ISD's Bowie High School senior Scott Akins, passed unanimously by the full House with 147 yeas on March 20. It has been sent to the Senate where a companion bill with Senator Bryan Hughes' office (SB 1983) has been referred to the Senate Committee on Education. **HB 396** was amended on the House floor and passed unanimously with 141 yeas on March 21st. It has also been sent to the Senate.

At the last HPE meeting in March, 35 bills relating to school safety and mental health in education were heard. There was discussion regarding increased trainings, hardening campuses, and improving mental health resources. As of today 448 bills have been referred to HPE, 111 have been heard, and 36 have been voted out, including six of my bills.

Here are some of the other bills that I am carrying in other House Committees that have also had hearings this session:

HB 1223 creates a criminal offense for the interference with child custody. This bill requires law enforcement to locate and return a child to the parent listed on the birth certificate, or a person entitled to the child's custody, if a report of interference with child custody is filed. This ensures that all children are accounted for and reduces the risk of human trafficking and baby selling. It is important to note that this bill does not affect parental rights; whereas, this issue is addressed by a different section of the code. This bill was

heard by the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence on March 18.

HB 2823 increases the punishment for assault committed on sports officials. The bill was heard by the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence on March 25.

Once these bills are voted out of their respective committees, they will be sent to the House Calendars Committee for consideration and hopefully set for a vote on a future House Calendar.

HB 2958 was heard on March 27, in the House Committee on Ways & Means. The bill is a local bill for TexAmericas Center in Bowie County and has broad support across the county. HB 2958 levels the playing field for TexAmericas with other redevelopment centers established when many military bases were closed or realigned by the federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission reports in 1995 and 2005. Other similar redevelopment and reinvestment zones, established after the TexAmericas Center's charter was enacted in 1997, have the ability to grant property tax exemptions to the lease holders of the centers' properties. TexAmericas Center currently does not have that authority, but HB 2958 would grant them the ability to grant tax exemptions to their lease holders. Local governmental entities, such as the county, college and school districts will see a slight reduction in their collection of property taxes, but each entity's governing boards adopted resolutions supporting HB 2958 because if TexAmericas becomes a more desirable place for prospective businesses to locate, there will be a positive impact on the area's economy with more jobs and new businesses moving to the region. This

economic growth will clearly offset any of the small reduction in property tax collections as a result of the enactment of HB 2958. Senator Hughes is carrying the Senate companion to HB 2958 in Senate Bill 579 that was also heard this week in the Senate Committee on Property Taxes. TexAmericas Center chief executive officer, Scott Norton, traveled to Austin to testify before both the Senate and House Committees.

HCR 24 was heard on March 25 in the House Committee on House Administration. The concurrent resolution requests that the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the House of Representatives direct the appropriate house and senate committees to conduct an interim study regarding the feasibility of integrating the Northeast Texas Trail into the state park system. Several residents of House District 1 made the drive down to Austin to testify in favor of the resolution before the committee.

Other bills. This session, I am carrying almost 30 bills and am working hard with my House and Senate colleagues to shepherd these bills through the legislative process. I appreciate the support and help I've received from my constituents who have come to Austin to testify in support of this legislation. To follow any legislation this session, use Texas Legislature Online at <https://capitol.texas.gov/>.

HD 1 constituents visit the Capitol. As the legislative work intensified this month, it was nice to see people from home visiting the Capitol and being involved in the legislative process while promoting their causes.



Social Work Day at the Capitol.

Several HD 1 residents who are students at Texas A&M Commerce attending *National*



Rep. VanDeaver and Austin Angus comparing socks during his visit to the Capitol on *World Down Syndrome Day* observance. Austin and his mom, Tiffany, were at the Capitol

representing the East Texas Down Syndrome group.



Realtor Day at the Capitol featured visits with Rep. VanDeaver (center) by realtors from NE Texas including Ted Conover and Jim Bell along with Pete Craig who is the East Texas Field Rep for the Texas Realtors.

My office and I are always glad to have visitors from Northeast Texas drop by our office if they are at the Capitol. We are located in E1.310 in the Capitol's underground extension, and our phone number is 512-463-0692, so please feel free to stop by while you may be in Austin.

"Art in Austin." March is National Youth Art month, and the Texas Art Education Association has a number of programs celebrating art all month. The following three HD 1 students were selected to have their art displayed at the Capitol:



"Introspective" by Amelia Bradley, Pleasant Grove High School.

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"Pieces of Me" by Isabel Turner, Redwater Junior High School.



"Wrapped" by Maryanne Garcia, Texas High School.

Congratulations to these young ladies from HD1! Your artwork is truly amazing, and it was wonderful to see your pieces on display at the Capitol this month.

Social media. Please follow me on both my Facebook and Twitter accounts!

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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.