



GARY
VanDeaver
State Representative

**86th Legislature Report - House District 1
Bowie, Franklin, Lamar & Red River counties
August 2020**

Around the District. Hard Won, Not Done; 19th amendment centennial observed. August 18, 2020, marked the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment to the United States Constitution giving women the right to vote. The long and hard-fought change was celebrated in Paris with a recognition by the Paris City Council of this achievement by a recently formed local group known as "Hard Won, Not Done."



The group is engaging in ongoing efforts to register people to vote, donate books to schools and libraries, work to recognize women-owned businesses while trying to involve

as many people as possible in the community to make Paris a better place for everyone. Thank you, and congratulations to *Hard Won, Not Done*.

Paris Kiwanis Club meeting. For one of the few times in months, I had the pleasure of speaking face-to-face with my constituents in the Paris Kiwanis Club at their August meeting. It was a

great pleasure to speak at this event where I tried to lay out some of the key issues facing the legislature when it reconvenes in January.



Rep. VanDeaver speaking to the Paris Kiwanis Club on August 18. Photo courtesy of: Klark Byrd, The Paris News.

Around the Capitol. Unemployment benefits and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

The economic impact from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic is still wreaking havoc upon hardworking Texans who have lost their jobs due to no fault of their own. My office has



helped many House District 1 constituents with the significant challenges reaching the TWC for assistance with their unemployment insurance (UI)

claims. Unfortunately, these issues have not been completely resolved as people struggle to take care of their families.

"The Texas House of Representatives is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. This newsletter is available in alternate forms upon request. Please call 1-800-241-1163."

Texas was recently approved to participate in the president's program to offer an additional \$300 a week for certain people who lost their jobs due to the coronavirus. Unfortunately, not all deserving Texans qualify for this extension of benefits, and the benefits are not guaranteed for any longer than three weeks at a time. To qualify for the extension of these UI benefits, a person must be receiving at least \$100 a week in UI benefits, but almost 350,000 Texans receive less than that amount each week so they are excluded from receiving this extra benefit. Another reason people may not initially qualify for the \$300 additional UI benefits is that they did not indicate on their initial application for unemployment benefits that their job loss was due to the coronavirus pandemic. If that was the case, people can update their information with the TWC.

Since the week ending March 14th, TWC has taken over 4.5 million claims for UI benefits and paid \$25.2 billion in UI benefits to Texans affected by COVID-19. Of that, \$15.9 billion has been paid in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (additional \$600 per week that ended July 25); \$1.6 billion has been paid in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA); and \$531.2 million has been paid in Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (additional 13 weeks of benefits authorized by the CARES Act for those who have exhausted regular unemployment benefits). TWC has borrowed \$4.5 billion in federal loans since June to pay state-funded UI benefits. TWC Call Centers remain open 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM seven days a week. On August 17, TWC had approximately 60,000 unique callers place just over 288,000 call attempts to their call centers.

TWC is also working to address a potential fraud situation after the agency's investigators confirmed changes to UI claimants' accounts indicating suspicious activity. There has been no evidence of a breach in any TWC system. In most of these cases, bad actors appear to have obtained password or private information from these individuals through direct hacking or phishing. In these cases, claimants are innocent victims and TWC is contacting individuals if TWC determines that their information may have been acquired by an unauthorized person. TWC is also asking that all claimants be vigilant regarding their account information and treat it just as they would their bank or credit card accounts. TWC is also encouraging that claimants regularly check their accounts to confirm the accuracy of their mailing address, email address and bank account information. If an individual suspects fraudulent activity involving his or her UI account, please report it to TWC through the fraud submission portal found at <https://www.twc.texas.gov/news/twc-investigating-potential-fraud-cases>. If they encounter any difficulties, email twc.fraud@twc.state.tx.us or leave a message at the TWC Fraud Hotline at 800-252-3642.

US Census still ongoing; deadline moved up to September 30.

The once-a-decade count of everyone living in the United States is ongoing across the country and has also been upended by the pandemic. The original completion deadline for the count was October 31, 2020; however, that date has been accelerated a month to September 30.



Ensuring an accurate count is vital for our state and area so that Texans can receive their fair

share in return or award of federal programs and allocation of resources. The 87th legislature next year will also use these new population counts to redraw legislative, Congressional, State Board of Education and judicial offices. Texas has grown from 25.1 million in the last census in 2010, to an estimated 29.9 million as of July 1, 2020. These 4.8 million more Texans equal a 19.1 percent growth, which has been concentrated in the state's major urban and suburban counties. This uneven growth will have to be reconciled next year when seats are redrawn to reflect changes, and these results will cause urban- and suburban-area legislative districts to shrink in geographic size while districts in rural areas will have to increase in geographic size to capture more people to reach an ideal size to ensure equal representation between elective offices. If you have not completed the census, please do so as soon as possible. As of August 25, 2020, the self-reported response rate across Texas is 59.9 percent, and the numbers for HD 1's four counties, as of that date, are as follows:

- Bowie - 58.1%
- Franklin - 45.7%
- Lamar - 57.4%
- Red River - 49.1%

More information can be found at this Census Bureau website:
<https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates.html>. General information may be found at: <https://www.census.gov/>.



Voter registration and early voting. If you plan to vote in this fall's presidential

election on November 3, you need to make sure you are currently registered. The deadline to register is Monday, October 5, 2020. Here is a link to voter registration information: <https://www.votetexas.gov/register-to-vote/index.html>. You can also use this site to determine if you are already registered. Early voting begins October 13 and ends October 30.

Broadband coverage in rural Texas. People living in rural Texas have long struggled with less than optimum internet access, coverage and costs.



The legislature in 2019, passed House Bill 1960 creating the governor's 17-member

broadband development council to:

- Research the progress of broadband in unserved areas, defined by the bill as a census block without access to broadband capable of providing certain minimum download and upload speeds;
- Identify barriers to residential and commercial broadband development in unserved areas;
- Study technology-neutral solutions to overcome those barriers; and
- Analyze specified potential benefits of statewide broadband access.

"The Texas House of Representatives is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. This newsletter is available in alternate forms upon request. Please call 1-800-241-1163."

The council created above is required to submit its report to the legislature no later than November 1, 2020, which will give the 87th legislature an opportunity to possibly adopt, fund and implement the council's findings. Once the council's final report is adopted and made public, I will be sure to share that information with my constituents.

The move to online instruction for our students has only heightened the disparity in rural areas with urban and suburban areas. My staff recently participated in an online meeting about the work of the council and ongoing efforts in Texas to address this digital divide. Here is a link showing current broadband availability across Texas by county at different rates of speed:

https://connectednation.org/texas/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2020/08/TX_Broadband_Availability_TechnologyType_Counties_2020_07_31_v2.pdf. Though next year's legislature is going to face a very serious budget deficit for the current biennium of almost \$5 billion and significant shortfalls in revenue for the 2022-23 state budget, I believe we have to address the ongoing lack of broadband services available in rural areas that adversely affect our businesses, families, schools and health care services. Doing anything less than bringing parity between our rural areas and the rest of the state is condemning our children to less than a quality education, shortchanging our economic vitality and endangering the lives of our citizens. We must do better.

State sales tax report. As mentioned previously, Texas is facing some serious economic headwinds coping with the pandemic and the collapse of the oil and gas industry. The lion's share (approximately 57 percent all

taxes collected) of available state revenue comes from the sales tax so its changes are a good indicator of how the state's economy is performing. Earlier this month, the state comptroller's office reported that total sales tax revenue for the three months ending in July 2020 was down 5.3 percent compared to the same period a year ago. The effects of the economic slowdown and low oil and gas prices were more evident in other sources of revenue in July 2020, though most were improved compared to previous months. Texas collected the following revenue from other major taxes:

- Motor vehicle sales and rental taxes — \$466 million, down 3.7 percent from July 2019;
- Motor fuel taxes — \$304 million, down 2.2 percent from July 2019;
- Oil production tax — \$187 million, down 40 percent from July 2019;
- Natural gas production tax — \$37 million, down 71 percent from July 2019;
- Hotel occupancy tax — \$34 million, down 42 percent from July 2019; and
- Alcoholic beverage taxes — \$110 million, down 6.2 percent from July 2019. These collections were inflated by a delay in liquor tax remittances, resulting in the July receipt of four months' worth of remittances in liquor taxes due to the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission. Mixed beverage gross receipts and sales taxes, which typically make up the bulk of monthly alcoholic beverage tax collections, were down 41 percent compared to July 2019.

"The Texas House of Representatives is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. This newsletter is available in alternate forms upon request. Please call 1-800-241-1163."

TABC adopts emergency rules. To get a handle on the surging coronavirus earlier this summer, Governor Greg Abbott mandated that the state's bars immediately close. This closure



TEXAS ALCOHOLIC
BEVERAGE COMMISSION
Texas Helping Businesses & Protecting Communities

greatly impacted local businesses and their employees, as well as brought attention to the disparity in the

rules between bars and restaurants that also sold alcoholic beverages but were allowed to stay open as long as they followed appropriate health-related protocols. On August 24, the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) adopted emergency rules intended to help previously shuttered bars to obtain a different license so they can reopen with a food and beverage (FB) certificate. These rules will:

- Enable retailers that sell alcoholic beverages for on-premises consumption to more easily qualify for an FB certificate; and,
- Remove some of the more difficult and costly requirements for qualification for an FB, so that these businesses can qualify without making major changes to their business models or investing in expensive equipment.

Making the FB certificate available to more businesses encourages them to operate in a manner more akin to a restaurant, serving food as well as beverages. Here is a link to the emergency amendments:

<https://go.boarddocs.com/tx/tabc/Board.nsf/files/BSSUG869C947/%24file/Emergency%20Amendments%20to%20Rule%2033.5%20Food%20and%20Beverage%20Certificates.pdf>.

"The Texas House of Representatives is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. This newsletter is available in alternate forms upon request. Please call 1-800-241-1163."

According to the TABC press release: any establishment that is opened as a restaurant must follow the checklist from the Governor's Strike Force to Open Texas. [You can find that checklist here](#). Many establishments that would have otherwise remained shuttered can possibly reopen and operate in a safe manner due to these amendments. Read the Qualifying as a Restaurant under GA-28 section on the TABC [Coronavirus Information page to learn more](#).



The Texas Historical Commission just announced an upcoming webinar at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, September 2, which is the 75th anniversary of the Japanese surrender and the end of World War II. The webinar highlights the leadership of four individuals with ties to Texas who helped bring about victory. Experts from THC sites and staff from the Military Sites Program will discuss the contributions of Adm. Nimitz, Gen. Eisenhower, Col. Hobby, and Speaker Rayburn to the largest mobilization of American military and economic resources in American history. Here is the link to register: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/3615983961574/WN_nUBnU2k9TTa7oc8hI6NA7w?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.

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

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.