



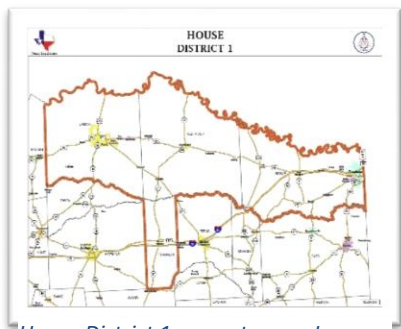
**GARY**  
**VanDeaver**  
**State Representative**

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

**September 2020**

**Around the District. New Boston mayor retires.** After faithfully serving the city of New Boston for many decades, the Honorable Johnny Branson retired last month as mayor after holding that position for 25 years. I cannot thank Mayor Branson enough for his decades and decades of service to our community. I know that everyone joins me in wishing the Mayor and his family all of the best.

**2020 Listening Tour announced.** I am pleased to announce that the current pandemic will not keep me from hosting my fall Listening Tour to hear directly from people living in House



*House District 1 current map. Image provided by the Texas Legislative Council.*

District 1. I want to hear about important issues I need to keep in mind going into the 87th legislative session in

January. This year's Listening Tour will be held via Zoom and is scheduled for 6 p.m., on Tuesday October 13.

Participants will need to register prior to the meeting to receive the necessary log-in information. You can register at [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_R8NfNqeyR3Ofot3NJus7nw](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_R8NfNqeyR3Ofot3NJus7nw), beginning today. My office will send a reminder about this event before the meeting.

**Listening Tour for Students.** I will also reach out to area superintendents about scheduling a Listening Tour for Students via Zoom.



*Photo provided by TPWD.*

**Prescribed burn notice.** The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) recently notified my office that it will

conduct prescribed burns in the Pat Mayse Wildlife Management Area sometime between November 2020 and January 2021. Burns are dependent on weather, vegetation conditions, current and expected fire danger and many other considerations. TPWD will notify local officials as plans are finalized prior to each burn. To find out more about the TPWD Wildland Fire Management program, visit their website at:

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[https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/wildland\\_fire\\_management/](https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/wildland_fire_management/).

**Around the Capitol. Broadband coverage in rural Texas.** People living in rural Texas have long struggled with less than optimum internet access, coverage and costs. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown an even brighter spotlight on the gaps between the "haves" and "have-nots" for this essential tool of life as we know it today. Earlier this month, I was one of 88 legislators signing a letter to Governor Abbott calling for work to begin even before the start of the next legislative session on a statewide "Texas Broadband Plan." As I mentioned in my August 2020 enewsletter, research conducted by Connected Nation Texas shows significant gaps in coverage across the state with over 800,000 rural Texans lacking adequate broadband infrastructure so essential to fully participate in life today either at work, home or school. The bicameral, bipartisan letter to the governor stresses the need for a new statewide broadband plan to be developed and implemented as soon as possible. I look forward to working with my House and Senate colleagues to make this happen for the good of our citizens, state and economy.

**Visitation restrictions loosened for long-term care facilities.** Not being able to visit a loved one or friend in a long-term care facility can be devastating to the resident, as well as the



friend or loved one. When these facilities became coronavirus hotspots earlier this year, the

state restricted visitations to keep residents

and staff as safe as possible. These restrictions have been devastating to many residents and their families, and many have noted the adverse impact on the residents from being so isolated from their support networks and family members. The governor announced that rules were being enacted by the Texas Health and Human Services agency as of September 24, to allow visitations at these facilities under certain conditions and would allow residents to designate essential caregivers who can have direct access to the residents. The long-term care facilities, staff, residents and the essential caregivers must closely follow the new guidelines; however, these changes are an attempt to allow direct, face-to-face contact between the residents and those closest to them. Here is a link to an overview of the new rules governing visitations at long-term care facilities:

<https://hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/services/health/coronavirus-covid-19/reopening-visitation-ltc-facilities.pdf>.



**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.

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**Announcements from governor's office on telehealth reimbursements and new rental assistance program.** Governor Abbott recently released key information that can have a positive impact on Texans' lives today. This information includes news that major health insurers agreed to continue reimbursing network health care providers for telehealth appointments at the same rate which they pay for office visits through the end of 2020. While the agreement applies only to state-regulated plans, both the Employee Retirement System and the Teacher Retirement System will continue telehealth payment parity through the end of the year as well. According to a recent study conducted by Accenture, 4.5 million Texans have begun using virtual healthcare services since the start of the pandemic earlier this year.

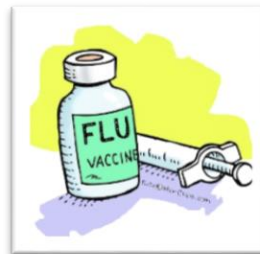
Last Friday, the governor's office also announced the establishment of the Texas Eviction Diversion Program to help renters stay in their homes, catch up on missed rental payments and avoid an eviction on their records. My office has heard from landlords across House District 1 that while it is important that renters receive this assistance, the landlords have said they are also struggling to make payments on the rental properties they own. Hopefully, the new Texas Eviction Diversion Program funding makes it into the



landlords' pockets and bank accounts so they can ensure the solvency of their own businesses.

***Does the state owe you?*** For almost 60 years,

the state comptroller's office has been responsible for managing the Texas Unclaimed Property Program that requires financial institutions, businesses and governmental entities to turn over to the state personal property that has been unclaimed or considered abandoned from one to five years. This personal property can include things such as: payroll checks, safety deposit contents, court deposits, escrow accounts, overpayments on utility bills and so forth. The comptroller's office has returned more than \$3 billion in unclaimed property to rightful owners since Texas' unclaimed property program began in 1962. The state is currently holding more than \$5 billion in cash and other valuables through the program. For more information about the unclaimed property program, or to search for unclaimed property and begin the claims process, visit the comptroller's unclaimed property website, [ClaimItTexas.org](http://ClaimItTexas.org), or call 800-321-2274 (CASH).



***Don't forget to get a flu shot.*** The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document about the upcoming flu season and the COVID-19

pandemic: [https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm#anchor\\_1597410034241](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm#anchor_1597410034241). The CDC stresses the importance of getting a flu shot this year, as well as continuing to practice social distancing, hand washing and wearing a mask to prevent both the spread of the flu and the coronavirus. Though the flu and the coronavirus exhibit similar symptoms, the only way to be sure to know if you have COVID-19 is by being tested for the virus. Here is a link to

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information from the CDC on the differences between the two illnesses: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>. Please continue taking all necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and the flu, both of which can be deadly. Visit the Testing Sites Map online for testing locations near you: <https://txdps.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8bf7c6a436a64bfe9a5ce25be580e4ff>.

**Budget watch.** The comptroller's office announced that the total sales tax revenue for the three months ending in August 2020 was down 2.7 percent compared to the same period a year ago. These numbers have been declining since the spring when the state went on lockdown to help control the spread of the coronavirus. Sales tax is the largest source of state funding for the state budget, accounting for 59 percent of all tax collections. The effects of the economic slowdown and low oil prices also were evident in other sources of revenue in August 2020, which will affect the amount of revenue for the 2022-23 budget. Texas collected the following revenue in August:

- Motor vehicle sales and rental taxes — \$468 million, down 4 percent from August 2019;
- Motor fuel taxes — \$287 million, down 12 percent from August 2019;
- Oil production tax — \$219 million, down 39 percent from August 2019;
- Natural gas production tax — negative \$15 million, down 115 percent from August 2019, due to substantial refund payments during the month;
- Hotel occupancy tax — \$31 million, down 49 percent from August 2019; and

- Alcoholic beverage taxes — \$69 million, down 39 percent from August 2019.

For details on all monthly collections, visit the Comptroller's [Monthly State Revenue Watch](#).

**The Story of Texas.** Recently, the Bullock Texas State History Museum, in Austin, sent information to my office about its many online services available to help parents and teachers engage our students during this time of



uncertainty. The Museum is named for long-time state comptroller and former lieutenant governor, the Honorable

Bob Bullock, who served the state of Texas for over 40 years. Mr. Bullock had a deep and abiding love for Texas, and the Museum is dedicated to sharing that passion. Check out this link:

<https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/education/distance-learning>. Located between the Capitol and the University of Texas at Austin, the museum is a must-see destination when you are in Austin.

**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.

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