

State Representative Gary VanDeaver



HD 1



87th Legislature
Bowie | Franklin | Lamar | Red River

87th Legislature Report - House District 1 Bowie, Franklin, Lamar & Red River counties January 2021

Around the District. Solar power industry growth.

As reported by the *Houston Chronicle* earlier this year, the solar power industry is experiencing exceptional growth across the United States. There is a 260-megawatt Impact Solar project, on 1,500 acres in Lamar County that will power more than 41,000 homes in North Texas.



Though the renewable component of the energy industry is growing quickly, it is experiencing a shortage of

trained and skilled workers, which opens up possible opportunities for people whose jobs have been displaced because of the pandemic. The Texas Workforce Commission has resources to help displaced workers at Work in Texas:

<https://www.workintexas.com/vosnet/Default.aspx>

This site has information for job seekers and employers.

Around the Capitol. Coronavirus update. As of January 29, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is currently reporting a total of 2,003,135 cases of COVID-19 in the state, which includes an estimated 373,638 active cases with 1,867,289 individuals who have recovered from the virus. There have been 35,168 confirmed COVID-19 related fatalities. DSHS is also reporting, that Texas

has received and distributed a total of 3,012,350 doses of COVID-19 vaccine, which has been administered to 1,923,503




people. DSHS announced on 01/29/2021, they will

ship approximately 500,000 doses of vaccines next week to providers across the state. DSHS also said it is still accepting applications for hub designation, but it won't be adding any new hub sites next week. Johnson & Johnson should soon request its Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and once approved this vaccine should start coming to the state in February. This vaccine does not require the cold storage necessary for the Pfizer vaccine, and it is only a one-dose vaccine rather than the two doses required for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

Need help with college tuition for kids or

grandkids? The comptroller's office announced upcoming webinars for two of the state's tuition savings programs. Learn more about the [Texas Tuition Promise Fund](#)[®], the state's tax-advantaged

The logo for the Texas Tuition Promise Fund, featuring a blue graduation cap and a green star with a white outline, next to the text "TEXAS TUITION PROMISE FUND" and the tagline "A Prepaid Plan as Smart as You Are".
prepaid college tuition plan, and the [Texas Match the Promise Foundation](#)SM, a

501(c)(3) public charity offering scholarship opportunities to eligible participants in the Texas Tuition Promise Fund. In addition, the webinars will present information about matching scholarship opportunities available through the *Texas Match the Promise Foundation*.** There are five webinars in February; sign up at

<https://www.texastuitionpromisefund.com/events/>

For questions regarding the webinars, contact:

TuitionPromise@cpa.texas.gov. For more

information about the Texas Tuition Promise Fund,

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visit [TuitionPromise.org](https://www.tuitionpromise.org) or call 800-445-GRAD (4723), option 5. * Residency restrictions apply. **Residency restrictions, age requirements, eligibility criteria, household income restrictions and contribution requirements apply.

Governor's State of State address to be virtual.

Governor Greg Abbott will hold his biennial State of the State address on February 1, 2021, at 7 p.m. The speech will air on 15 Nexstar television stations, and Nexstar will make the live feed available to every broadcast company serving Texas. Dallas's KDAF-TV and Shreveport's KTAL-TV are the Nexstar stations in our area that should carry this address on Monday. During the address, Governor Abbott will update Texans on the state's response to COVID-19, highlight exceptional Texans from across the state and outline his priorities for the 87th Legislature. Traditionally, a governor's State of the State speech is made to a joint session of the Texas Legislature, and governors will announce their "emergency items" for the session. Such an emergency designation allows the legislature to accelerate its work on the issues deemed by the governor as of utmost importance to the state. In announcing the virtual event this year, Governor Abbott said: "The 87th Legislative Session is an opportunity for the Legislature and statewide leaders to solve the challenges facing our state on behalf of every Texan. Working together to serve the people of Texas, we will put the Lone Star State on a path towards a healthier, safer, freer and more prosperous future for all."

Texas Legislature 101. My offices get lots of calls, emails and questions from HD 1 residents that demonstrate a willingness to exercise their civic duty, but oftentimes a confusion on how governments function. People are often confused about which level of government they need to turn to for help: is it a local, state or federal problem? Beginning with this newsletter, I hope to shed some light on how best to reach the right level of government to get the help you need. We hope

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these additions to the newsletters will be helpful and informative. I will start off by providing information about the state legislature, including key facts, dates, figures and insider perspectives to help our constituents engage with their state government and general overview of the legislative process:

The Texas Legislature is made up of two chambers: the House of Representatives with its 150 members and the Senate with its 31 members. The legislature convenes every odd-numbered year, starting at noon on the second Tuesday in January and cannot extend past 140 days. Thirty-day special sessions may only be called by the governor, and legislators can only address issues the governor puts on "the call" for the special session. There is no limit on the number of special sessions that can be called by a governor.

The Senate. Senators are elected for four-year terms with no term limits, and elections are held every two years with approximately half of the members up for re-election every cycle. Each senator currently represents around 812,000 Texans, but this will increase to almost a million people with redistricting in 2021. The President of the Senate is the Lieutenant Governor, which is an elected statewide office. The current Lieutenant Governor, Dan Patrick, was initially elected in 2014. He is responsible for forming committees, appointing members and chairpersons to those committees, and assigning all Senate legislation to committees.



The Texas House of Representatives. Members are elected to two-year terms with no term limits. All 150 House members are up for election every election cycle in even-numbered years. They each



currently represent around 168,000 Texans, which will also change with redistricting this year to approximately 200,000. The presiding officer of this chamber is the Speaker of the House, who is a representative elected by his or her constituents, but then chosen from the entire House membership at the beginning of each session. Representative Dade Phelan (Orange), was chosen as Speaker for the 2021 session on January 12th. This year, Representative Phelan was elected Speaker with 143 ayes and 2 nays, and 4 present not voting. The Speaker forms committees, appoints members to them and assigns legislation.

The Rules. At the start of each session new Rules of Procedure are adopted that cover issues such as duties and rights of the speaker, standing committees and their jurisdiction, the organization, powers and duties of committees, floor procedures, motions, bills, resolutions, amendments, interacting with governor and senate and special rules. This year, the special rule section was prepared by the Workgroup on Legislative Operations during a Pandemic and the Rules Review Team. Notable changes to the rules include the requirement of masks on the floor and in committee hearings by all participants, unless speaking at a microphone with social distance guidelines and/or barriers in place. Another change is the use of two-way video conferencing for committee hearings, and the live streaming of hearings to increase public access. There were also changes to electronic and physical submission of documents in various situations with the legislature, to encourage public access but decrease potential viral exposure. Once the draft rules are provided to members at the start of session, House members debate and revise the rules as needed to try and ensure smooth operations during the remainder of the 140-day session.

Want more information? The legislature and its supporting agencies long ago began providing websites and links so you can keep up with what's going on at the Capitol without having to come to Austin. Because of the pandemic, these resources are even more important. Here is a list of websites that you can use to follow along with what is going on during this year's legislative session:

- Texas Legislature Online - <https://capitol.texas.gov/>
- House of Representatives - <https://house.texas.gov/>
- Senate - <https://senate.texas.gov/>
- Legislative Budget Board - www.lbb.texas.gov
- Legislative Reference Library - <https://lrl.texas.gov/>
- Texas Legislative Council - <https://tlc.texas.gov/>
- How a Bill Becomes Law - https://tlc.texas.gov/docs/legref/legislative_process.pdf
- Governor's office - <https://gov.texas.gov/>
- Comptroller's office - <https://comptroller.texas.gov/>

What's next? The next Government 101 section will begin a dive into the legislative process, starting with how bills are developed and moved through the first stages of the law-making process.

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.