



# 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 March 2021**

**Around the District.** The Texarkana Chamber of Commerce held a Kinetic Gig ribbon-cutting on March 29, 2021. Last year, Windstream began delivering ultra-fast internet to the Texarkana area. Kinetic has invested significantly in its network to deliver high speed and reliability. The expansion of broadband internet is a step to reach areas that have been deprived of access while people have been trying to work and educate students from home. Originally planned for 2020, this event had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.



*L - r: Holly Franklin (holding ribbon); Ray Wilson; Sharon Elkins; Luc Sanderson; Mike Hunsucker; Jennifer Harland; Mayor Allen Brown; & Allison Wright (holding ribbon). Photo: Natalie Haywood; Texarkana Chamber of Commerce*

**Around the Capitol. Bills before House Committees.** As the current legislative session reaches its half-way point, I have been busy attending committee hearings and laying out bills before House Committees. All of the 18 bills that I

filed this session have now been referred to House Committees, and I have requested committee hearings on all of these bills. To date, I have laid out the following bills in various committees:

**HB 315 - State Affairs** - honorably retired peace officer can purchase a uniform for burial.

**HB 363 - Public Education** - student data privacy bill.

**HB 773 - Public Education** - achievement indicators under the state's accountability system.

**HB 890 - Juvenile Justice & Family Issues** - allowing juvenile courts to continue holding remote hearings.

**HB 1496 - Public Education** - clarifying reporting requirements for school districts in cooperative purchasing agreements.

**HB 3402 - Natural Resources** - local bill for Franklin County Water District to expand their road authority to ensure the district can maintain and build roads as needed without

assessing any new taxes.

Three of the bills above (HB 315, HB 363 & HB 773) have been voted out of their subject-matter

committees to the House Committee on Calendars that sets bills on House Calendars for



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a vote by the full House of Representatives. My staff continue to work with committee offices to schedule public hearings on the rest of my bills this session. You can always follow the action at the Capitol at Texas Legislature Online: <https://capitol.texas.gov/>.

**Legislature responds to power failures during winter storm.** Hours and hours of public testimony has been heard in both the House and Senate trying to get to the bottom of the power failures during February's historic winter storm. Texas governor, the Honorable Greg Abbott, has declared that fixing the power grid failures and other problems that contributed to millions of Texans spending days in their dark, cold homes is an emergency item for the legislature to address this session. The House's legislative package will reform ERCOT, ensure the reliability of the electric grid in extreme weather conditions, defend ratepayers and improve coordination during times of crisis. I am sure there will be more bills coming before the Texas House as the issue is analyzed further and best practices and solutions are identified.

**Texas expands accessibility to COVID vaccines.** As of March 29, any Texan over the age of 16 is eligible to receive a vaccination against the COVID-19 virus. To date, Texas has administered over 10 million doses of the vaccine. Through the [Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler](#), Texans can create a profile to place themselves on a statewide wait list for



the vaccine. A day after individuals enter their personal information and preferred appointment times, the state will match them

with the next available appointment in their home county. If no appointments are available, the website will keep the user's information on file until the next opportunity pops up according to state health officials. Anyone who chooses not to sign up online can also call a toll-free number to get his or her name on the list: 1-833-832-7067. The line will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., seven days a week.

Looking for COVID-10 vaccine and testing information? See the following resources:

Texas DSHS [COVID-19 vaccine website](#)  
 COVID19TX [Vaccine Availability Map](#)  
 COVID-19 [Vaccine Hub Providers](#)  
 COVID-19 [Testing Sites Map](#)

**April 1 voter registration deadline approaches.**

Texas Secretary of State Ruth R. Hughes reminds eligible Texas voters of the upcoming April 1 voter registration deadline for local general elections on May 1. Texans can use this link for more information [register](#) so you can be prepared to vote in upcoming local elections. Texans should begin by checking their registration status on the Texas Secretary of State's website on the ["Am I Registered?" page](#). If you have moved to a new address within the same county or have changed your name, you can [update your information online](#).



Eligible Texans who are not already registered to vote may complete and print a [voter registration application here](#), or

request an application from their [county elections administrator](#). Once completed, eligible Texas voters should submit the

application to the [county voter registrar](#) in their county of residence. Completed voter registration applications must be postmarked by April 1 in order to be accepted. Voters with questions about how to cast a ballot in the upcoming May 2021 uniform election can call **1-800-252-VOTE** or visit [VoteTexas.gov](#) for more information.

**Waiver ending for driver's license and identification cards.** The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) recently reminded Texans that its COVID-related waiver on expiration dates for driver licenses (DLs) and identification



cards (IDs) ends on April 14, 2021. DPS urges customers to make an [appointment](#) or renew online as soon as possible.

To assist customers with expired licenses who are unable to schedule an appointment prior to the April 14 deadline, DPS has implemented a new procedure. If a customer has a renewal appointment that falls after the deadline, they will be able to request a temporary driving permit that will be valid until their appointment date. For additional details on the new procedure, please visit the [DPS website](#).

**Deadline for Property Tax Renditions.** Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar reminds business owners that April 15 is the deadline to file property tax renditions with their county appraisal districts. Different deadlines apply for certain regulated property. Owners whose property was damaged by storm, flood or fire last year may file a special decreased value report that indicates the property's condition on Jan. 1, 2021. Filing the decreased value report could lower those owners' final tax bills

for 2021. Forms are available from county appraisal district offices statewide and can be downloaded at the [Comptroller's property tax forms webpage](#). For more information, taxpayers may contact the Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division at 800-252-9121 (press 2) or visit [the division's website](#).

**Texas Legislature 101.** Every newsletter we'll provide information and insights on the legislative process.

**Hearings.** When a bill is scheduled for a hearing, it means the public can provide testimony and members can discuss the bill in an open meeting. The representative who filed the bill will "lay it out" before committee in a very short descriptive manner, explaining its origins, intention, and actions. Public testimony is usually limited to two or three minutes depending on the chair of the committee, and you must identify yourself, your stance on the bill (whether for, against, or on), and state your case quickly. After all public testimony has been taken, bills are typically left pending during their initial public hearing to be taken up later in the session. During this time, members work with stakeholders and other members to ensure the best wording and approach to an issue is covered in the language to be adopted by the committee. Often, a bill will have a committee substitute pass rather than a filed or engrossed version of the bill. This allows for modifications, compromises and differences to be resolved.

**Fiscal Notes.** No bill can be heard in committee unless it has a fiscal note from the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) that highlights expected costs to the state if such a measure is enacted into law. This is a document that shows how

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much implementing the new law would cost or save the state. The LBB contacts various state agencies, institutions and departments to ascertain how much it would cost or save them to implement the bill. Given the current economic circumstances caused by the pandemic, the decline in the price of oil and natural gas, as well as lessened business and economic demands, any bill this session with a fiscal note (meaning it will cost the state dollars) is probably "dead on arrival" and highly unlikely to pass out of committee.

***Behind the Scenes.*** Our office is working with the constituent or organization that brought us the bill, other member offices, the drafting lawyers and any opponents, to finalize the committee version of the bill. We can substitute the language of the original bill with a "Committee Substitute" to take care of any unforeseen issues with the language. For example, one bill we had last session may have had an indeterminable affect on organizations that connect students with scholarship opportunities, an issue that we weren't aware of until the committee hearing, so we added language that would ensure this didn't occur. Some offices do not work with people who are opposed to their bills, but we always try to find solutions as best we can so that our legislation does not unintentionally harm anyone. We understand, however, that some people oppose legislation on different principles, and so we respect their choices and just want to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of what my bill does.

***Insider.*** If you oppose a bill, providing public testimony should not be your first step. Your first step should be to contact the bill author's office to speak to the staff member who is main

contact for the office. This gives you a chance to voice your concerns and them a chance to answer your questions or possibly change the language to address your concerns. Very often, we deal with people who misinterpreted the bill and register to testify against it, without talking with our office to ask questions or give us an opportunity to work with them. It can then be embarrassing when they realize at a public hearing they misinterpreted the bill so their testimony is founded on incomplete or misinformation especially since our office would have been willing to try to address their concerns. This also muddies the process because we now have to work on correcting misinformation that has been spread to the public regarding the bill or delay getting a committee substitute drafted to change language to accommodate them. Always reach out to a bill author's office for assistance in understanding or changing the legislation - it saves everyone time and helps the bill become the best it can be!

***Next Time in Texas Legislature 101.*** We will talk about what happens to a bill after a committee hearing, the alarming amount of bills that die in committee and how a bill travels to the House floor for a vote.

***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.