



House District 1 - Bowie, Franklin, Lamar & Red River counties
District & Capitol Interim Report
January 2016

Around House District 1. Windstream. In late December and early January, several pockets of House District 1 experienced lengthy telephone outages and delays in having service restored. When this situation was brought to my office's attention, we worked closely with Windstream to get service restored. Windstream said their lines were underwater due to the recent flooding. The company has set up a temporary fix to the problem in the area by running miles of lines across a bridge over the Sulphur River. Now that service has been restored, my office will stay in contact with Windstream to make sure they adjust customers' bills and install a permanent fix to the problem of flooded lines. If your service was disconnected during this time and your bill has not been adjusted, please call Windstream's customer service at 800-347-1991.



Grants for Growth. Two area manufacturers received grants from the Texas Workforce Commission for customized training for new and existing workers. Mayo Manufacturing received \$163,582 and JCM Industries received \$74,115. At the awards ceremony held at Texarkana College, Rep. VanDeaver expressed appreciation to the two companies for establishing and growing their businesses in Northeast Texas. VanDeaver also thanked Texarkana College for the quality of their educational programs and opportunities that help spur local economic development.

From l to r: James Henry Russell (Texarkana College President); Cynthia Goerke (Executive V-P of Manufacturing, JCM Industries); Jason Parker (General Plant Manager, JCM Industries); Ron Collins (President/CEO, JCM Industries); Ruth Hughes (TWC Commissioner); Representative Gary VanDeaver; Julie Collins (Executive V-P of Sales and Human Resources, JCM Industries. Photo courtesy: Texarkana College)

Texas A&M Commerce. Rep. VanDeaver attended a briefing at Texas A&M-Commerce to hear how they will be using approximately \$1.5 million appropriated by the legislature in 2015 for the university's Institute for Competency-Based Education, which addresses the need to find alternative, affordable ways to deliver high-quality education to students, including working adults. The institute will conduct research that encourages online education and the development of competency-based education models.



Rep. VanDeaver with A&M Commerce President Dan Jones and other officials with Texas A&M University System. Photo: courtesy of TAMU-Commerce.

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Grant for the city of Paris. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) has awarded the city of Paris \$150,000 to allow the city to upgrade sidewalks and street lights, as well as address some Americans with Disability Act compliance concerns in the downtown area.

Around the Capitol. Interim committee meetings. The next legislative session does not convene until January 2017; however, legislative committees are currently meeting to study an array of issues ("interim charges") from both the Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives and the Lieutenant Governor.

The Joint Committee on Border Security. In 2015, the legislature passed one of the country's strongest border security bills in House Bill 11 that increased law enforcement and Texas military personnel along the Texas-Mexico border to strengthen the fight against human trafficking and flow of illegal contraband. The legislature also provided \$840 million for border security to hire 250 new Department of Public Safety (DPS).

The Joint Border Security Committee, established in HB 11, which I was proud to co-author in 2015, held its first interim meeting this month to hear directly from DPS about how those funds are being used. DPS director, Steven McGraw, reported that DPS has seized \$1.7 million worth of drugs and \$3.1 million in drug-related cash in the past 60 days. Additionally during that time, DPS made 300 "high threat" crime arrest and 2,350 total criminal arrests along the border while the Texas Rangers have made 23 arrests in drug-related public corruption cases.

House Public Education. In February, I will attend the first interim meeting of the House Committee on Public Education that will focus on two of its interim charges including a review of the state's current education policies and initiatives regarding middle grades and a review of current public education programs that address the needs of high performing students.

State budget & falling price of oil. Situations raging across the world and far from Texas could have a dramatic impact on the next state budget that will be adopted next year for the 2018-19 biennium. The price of a barrel of oil has plunged from approximately \$107 in January 2014, to \$56 in January 2015 to \$26.50 in January 2016. Many people will remember previous drops in the price of oil and how they greatly impacted the Texas economy. In the 1980s, the oil & gas industry was about 30 percent of the state's economy, and when prices dropped, many Texans lost their jobs and the state's economy was hurt. Will the recent drop in oil prices have similar affects in 2016 and beyond? The state's comptroller of public accounts, Glenn Hegar, recently told various legislative committees and business group members that the current decline will hurt the state's economy and job growth, but "it's not time to panic." Hegar reminded people that today's Texas economy is not like it was in the 1980s. Today, the oil & gas industry only makes up about 14 percent of the state's economy and only 2.5 percent of the state's workforce. Hegar also said that while the oil & gas industry is struggling other sections of the state's economy are still growing and that Texas is still a great place to do business because Texas is the 12th largest economy in the world. Legislators will continue watching this situation very closely and will approach next year's budgeting process with the utmost care to appropriate the limited available funds to ensure that our state's needs are met while ensuring that no dollars are wasted.

Voter registration and early voting. The March 1 primary elections will soon be here. Texans have until February 1, 2016, to register to vote in these important elections including the President of the United States. Early voting can be done between February 16 and February 26, 2016. Contact your county voter registrar's office for more information; here is a helpful link:

<http://votesmart.org/elections/offices/TX#.VgGIFWflt1s>.

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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