



GARY
VanDeaver
State Representative

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

Around the District. Lake Marvin Nichols hearings. Since November, there have been three public hearings conducted in East Texas about the proposed Lake Marvin Nichols Reservoir to see if an inter-regional conflict can be avoided between East Texas's Region D and the Dallas-area Region C water planning groups as they develop their water needs and plans for the next 50 years. When the current state water plan was being developed in 2015, the inter-regional conflict over the proposed Lake Marvin Nichols between Regions C and D had to go through a formal mediation process that resulted in Region C agreeing not to file any permit requests for lake construction over the then-next five years and Region D agreeing that the lake could be in projections of water resources beginning in 2070. As regional water planning groups are finalizing their initially prepared plans (IPPs) for the 2021 state water plan, it is clear that the disagreement between Region C and Region D over the need for Lake Marvin Nichols remains.

Region C has proposed to accelerate the construction of the lake to 2050 so it can meet larger-than-projected growth demands in the Metroplex while coping with the reduced projections of available water in the future due to the new "drought of record" that occurred in 2011-12. Region C will meet on February 10, to adopt its IPP for submission by March 3 to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB).

At the January 14 joint meeting with Region C delegates in Sulphur Springs and the January 23 meeting of the full Region D board, it is clear that neither the board members nor people who live in Region D support construction of the lake. Region D is scheduled to adopt its IPP on February 26, at its next meeting.

Statutes and TWDB rules govern what steps must be taken to resolve an inter-regional conflict. Here is a link to the "next steps" if the two regions cannot come to a satisfactory agreement relating to Lake Marvin Nichols:

[https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=31&pt=10&ch=357&rl=62](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=31&pt=10&ch=357&rl=62)

My staff have attended these meetings and listened to the public comments about the lake and how disruptive it will be to families and businesses in the proposed foot-print of the lake and its mitigation area. If the two regions submit conflicting plans, it will again be up to the three TWDB commissioners to decide how to resolve the conflict. Please know that I and my staff are watching the hearings and listening very carefully to the discussions concerning the proposed lake.

Clarksville area TxDOT public hearing announced. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recently announced it will hold a public hearing on February 13, from

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6-8 p.m. at the Avery ISD school cafeteria, at 150 San Antonio Drive, to receive input about proposed road improvements on US 82 east of Clarksville to County Road 3310 in Bowie County. You can also submit written comments that will be a part of the public record, by submitting those no later than February 28, to TxDOT, attention: Daniel Taylor, P.E., 3600 S.W. Loop 286, Paris 75460. Your comments can also be emailed by the 02/28/2020 deadline to daniel.taylor@txdot.gov.

Lighting at Hotel Grim. After much hard work and sweat equity, the restoration project at Hotel Grim is officially off and running. After 30 years of vacancy and discussions regarding its future, work began in November 2019 on the revitalization of the iconic Hotel Grim. The \$26 million dollar development will add 93 residential units in downtown Texarkana and will include over 3,600 square feet of new office and meeting room space. The development is led by the Cohen-Esrey Development Group from Overland Park, Kansas, and includes historic and housing tax credits from the state



Photo courtesy of Lana Orr Aikin and David Orr

of Texas. On January 21, the Texarkana City and Development Team held a ceremonial "sign lighting" to celebrate this project. My office has been happy to work with city officials when needed to smooth the path with various state agencies to help make this project a success. I look forward to attending a future "ribbon cutting" ceremony when the hotel is finally restored and open to the public!

US Census & redistricting. As mentioned last month, April 1 is the country's official "Census Day" where people living in all households are

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to be counted. The United States has conducted a dicennial census since 1790, and the importance of these counts continue to grow. The December 2019 - January 2020 *Fiscal Notes*, a bimonthly publication of the state comptroller's office, focuses on why the 2020 census is so important and what the population counts are used for to help people understand the importance of participating in the census. Here is a link to this edition of *Fiscal Notes*: <https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/fiscal-notes/2020/jan/census.php>.

Since being admitted to the United States, each census has shown that Texas has gained population every 10-year period. The state grew 15.3 percent from 2010 to 2019, from 25 million to almost 29 million. Texas currently has 36 representatives in the United States Congress, and it is expected to add three more seats to its delegation.

Many people complain about their tax dollars going to Washington, D.C., and I am one who would like to keep more of what I earn. Census counts are used as a means to help Texans recoup some of their tax dollars and ensure that those tax dollars flow to where the people are who need those program dollars. Any undercounts in Texas census data can have long-term effects on dollars that flow back to the state in such programs as: Medicare Supplemental Insurance (Part B); Medicaid; SNAP benefits; school lunches; highway planning and construction; Section 8 housing vouchers; and the state Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). According to *Fiscal Notes*, in 2016 alone, Texas received over \$24 billion for Medicaid programs and services.

In addition to helping Texans get a larger return on their taxes, the census count is used to redraw boundaries for elected state and local offices. Growth across the state has not been even and this will greatly impact how elective

districts are redrawn by the legislature in the 87th regular session in 2021. If the legislature is unable to agree on newly drawn legislative districts by the end of its regular session in May 2021, the state Legislative Redistricting Board (LRB) will take over the task. The LRB includes these offices and officials: lieutenant governor (Dan Patrick); speaker of the Texas House of Representatives (currently it is not known who will be Speaker in 2021); attorney general (Ken Paxton); comptroller of public accounts (Glenn Hegar); and commissioner of the general land office (George P. Bush).

"Save the date." The House Committee on Redistricting began holding hearings across the state last September and will hold over 25 meetings before it finishes in September 2020. Plans currently call for the Committee to hold two public hearings in East Texas in mid-April with meetings tentatively scheduled in Marshall and Lufkin on April 15 and 16, respectively. Once plans are finalized, I will include information to you in future correspondence.

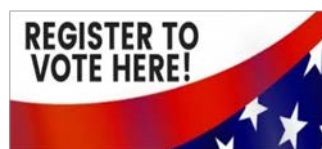


Information shared by the state's demographer at these meetings can be rather staggering to comprehend: 79 percent of the state's population lives in the D-FW to Austin-San Antonio to Houston "triangle"; 14 percent live west of I-35; and only 8.5 percent of Texans live in East Texas. As I shared with people during my Town Hall meetings last fall, a news story in the *Washington Post* stated that almost 75 percent of Texans live on only four percent of the state's land: "The latest census data shows about 20 million Texans, or 74% of the state's population, live in incorporated areas, which make up about 4% of the land in Texas." Madlin Mekelburg, PolitiFact May 13, 2019; as reported in the *Houston Chronicle*:

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<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/politics/texas/article/About-74-of-Texans-live-on-just-4-of-the-13836098.php>

Time running out to register to vote. There will be many elections this year from choosing a president to your local city council member. In order to vote in these elections, you must be registered at least one month prior to those election dates. Texas will hold primary



elections on March 3, so this coming Monday, February 3, is the deadline to register to vote in

that election. Here is a link for more information about registering to vote:

<https://www.votetexas.gov/register-to-vote/index.html>.

Around the Capitol. Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) rental costs. There have been several recent news stories about the amount that TRS will be paying to rent office space in downtown Austin for its investment



management division. TRS has confirmed that it will pay approximately \$326,000 a month for space in the new downtown *Indeed Tower* beginning in 2021 for a 10-year

lease that was negotiated in 2018 at \$38.50 a square foot in the downtown Austin central business district Class A market. The negotiated per-squarefoot price is almost \$10 a square foot less than what space is currently leasing for in the same building at \$49/square foot.

Needless to say, with the many challenges that TRS retired and active members have in paying their health insurance premiums and living on a fixed income, many TRS members have reacted very negatively to this exorbitant lease package and would like further explanations. On

January 27, I sent a letter to the new chairman (Rep. Giovanni Capriglione) of the House Committee on Appropriations (HAC) requesting that our committee invite TRS officials to a future committee hearing to explain their decision making process and why such a contract was excuted. On Thursday, 01/30, Rep. Jim Murphy, the chairman of the the House Committee on Pensions, Investments and Financial Services, said his committee will hold a hearing, possibly in March, to discuss the TRS lease. Chairman Capriglione is also expected to sit in on this hearing. As plans are finalized for this, I will keep you posted.

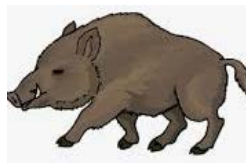
Help with insulin costs. Earlier this month, drug company Eli Lilly announced an effort to help Texans struggling to pay for their insulin and encouraged people to reach out to the company at 833-808-1234 for assistance and information.



Church shootings. Mass shootings in public spaces have become an all-to-common occurrence in our schools and churches including the most recent shooting at a church in White Settlement the end of December. In 2015, when the legislature enacted the state's "open carry" law, "volunteer security service teams" were required to become licensed private security officers, which unfortunately created barriers that prevented churches from easily using their members to serve as a voluntary security team. The 85th legislature in 2017, adopted Senate Bill 2065 that removed this obstacle so that congregations can more easily work with their members to create voluntary security teams. The bill also made clear that anyone who has a license to carry permit can possess his or her weapon in church buildings and on their grounds *unless* the church has posted the signs required in Texas Penal Code §§30.06 and 30.07 prohibiting weapons on the church's grounds and in

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buildings. This change should allow churches the necessary tools to help maintain the safety and security of their worshippers and guests.



Reporting feral hogs - online tool. The Texas A&M Forest Service recently announced that the Texas A&M Natural

Resources Institute (NRI) has an online platform so that Texans can report feral hog sightings and any damage done by the hogs. According to the Forest Service, the online tool "captures data such as the location, number of feral hogs sited, estimations on age and the type of damage being caused." Members of the public can also upload pictures to this site: <https://nri.tamu.edu/news/2018/november/new-reporting-tool-for-wild-pigs/>. The information from the public provides a real-time look at hog behavior as they and humans intersect more frequently and in different areas.

Texas Timber Tax Workshop 2020. The Texas Forest Service also recently announced its upcoming *Texas Timber Income and Property Tax Workshop* scheduled on February 10, 2020, in Diboll, Texas. The workshop will cover such topics as timber taxation and latest changes in tax laws needed to prepare tax returns for 2019. The cost of the workshop is \$75/person and more information can be found at: <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/taxworkshop>.

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.