



State Representative  
**Gary VanDeaver**  
January 2023 E-Newsletter



## 88th Legislature Report - House District 1 Bowie | Cass | Lamar | Morris | Red River

### District Update

**Local cities receive park grants.** On January 26, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission recently approved local park grant applications from around the state to help create and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities. I am pleased that two park projects from House District 1 were approved for funding.

The city of Reno (Lamar County) received a \$150,000 small community grant for its Reno Kiwanis Park All-Inclusive Playground project. Proposed developments include a playground with ADA elements and playground surfacing. I was happy to send a letter of support for this project when the original application was made in 2022. Congratulations to the city of Reno and everyone who worked to develop this innovative park that expands outdoor opportunities for everyone.

The city of Hughes Springs (Cass County) also received a \$150,000 small community grant for its Hughes Springs Recreational Complex project. Their proposed developments include pickleball courts, outdoor fitness elements, solar lighting, interpretive signage, sidewalk replacement, site amenities and parking. These new park projects will serve many people and will have very positive effects on their communities.

**SNAP benefits.** My office recently received information from the *Feeding Texas* organization that February 2023 will be the last month of increased SNAP benefits known as the "Emergency Allotments" that were authorized in the early stages of the pandemic. Current SNAP beneficiaries will see at least a \$95 a month reduction in benefits. SNAP is a federal program that provides food assistance to eligible low-income families and individuals in Texas. Texans in need can apply for this program and other benefits at [YourTexasBenefits.com](https://www.yourtexasbenefits.com).

**Information to assist Texans.** The governor's office periodically informs legislative offices about initiatives and programs that can help our constituents. Here are links to two such programs:

- **Texas Travel Industry Grant Funding.** Beginning on February 1, travel- and hospitality-related businesses can apply for up to \$20,000 in one-time funding to help offset pandemic declines and impacts on their businesses. Information about the Texas

"The Texas House of Representatives is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. This newsletter is available in alternate forms upon request. Please call 1-800-241-1163."

Travel Industry Recovery Grant can be found at [@TexasEconDev](#): and at [tir.gov.texas.gov](http://tir.gov.texas.gov).

- **February 2 - virtual resume class.** Texas veterans in the market for a new job can register for a resume-building virtual training session to be held this Thursday (02/02/2023). Veterans will learn about federal jobs, resume writing, interview selection & more with this virtual class for job-seeking Texas Veterans, their spouses, dependents & transitioning military. Here are links for more information ([@TexasVeterans](#);) and registration ([Register here](#)).



*Rep. VanDeaver during Community College day at the Capitol on January 26, 2023.*

**Community colleges visit the Capitol.** Students, faculty and staff from the state's 50 community colleges visited the Texas Capitol on Thursday, January 26, to rally on important issues and to meet with their legislators. I had the pleasure of meeting individually with representatives of the three community colleges in House District 1: Northeast Texas Community College; Paris Junior College and Texarkana College. Additionally, I spoke at their rally about the work and recommendations of the Texas Commission on Community College Finance that I served on last year. Here is a link to the commission's work:

<https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/meeting/advisory-committee-supporting-documents/txcccf-final-report-to-the-88th-legislature/>.

The commission recommends that the legislature change its funding model for community colleges to an outcomes-based model so their funding is aligned with the success of students who earn a degree, certificate or credential of value that allows students to get a job earning living wages while meeting regional workforce demands; transfer to a four-year institution; and recognize dual credit students who complete a pathway or sequence of courses leading to the workforce or continued education on track for a degree.

Changing the funding model for community colleges presents the legislature with a generational opportunity that highlights and rewards colleges for meeting regional workforce demands while ensuring that students are on track for opportunities and a successful future. The commission spent many hours discussing the important role that community colleges play in our state's ongoing economic successes. The efforts of the commission and the legislature can only strengthen their important role for Texans, their families and communities. I look forward to the discussions and debates about the importance of our community colleges and their role in the continued economic successes of Texas.

**Ready to retire?** If you are a college or university employee getting close to filing the necessary paperwork to retire, here is some information you may find very useful. A constituent recently contacted my office with an issue relating to a person's eligibility for a pension and health insurance coverage after retirement. This person's situation though not particularly common is not uncommon either, since the person had worked in public schools for several years before working many years at a higher education institution.

This dual work history was credited in two of the state's largest employee pension systems: the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) and the Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS). Both systems require that employees meet the "rule of 80" to qualify for retiree benefits of a pension and health insurance coverage. The "rule of 80" is a requirement that an employee's age plus the number of years worked equal 80. Once that happens a person is eligible to retiree with benefits.

Colleges and university employees must meet the "rule of 80" in the two separate systems to receive their pension benefits from TRS and their separate health insurance benefits from ERS. (Please note that employees/retirees of the University of Texas System and Texas A&M University System receive their health insurance benefits from their university systems and not ERS.) Unfortunately, the constituent who contacted my office did not realize that to receive retiree health insurance a separate "rule of 80" had to be met in the ERS system. Additionally, officials with the institution where the constituent worked did not realize that their employees had to meet a separate rule of 80 in the ERS system to receive health insurance benefits after retirement

The constituent's situation was somewhat unusual in that the person retired as soon as eligible and met the TRS "rule of 80" using a combination of age, years as a public school employee plus the years as a higher education institution employee. ERS does not consider or calculate a person's employment in public schools for meeting their rule of 80, so when this constituent retired, the person met the necessary rule of 80 to retire with a pension (with TRS) but did not have enough years of service to meet the rule of 80 for health insurance benefits with ERS

This constituent hopes that knowing about this experience and that there are requirements to be met in both systems will keep other people from experiencing the same disappointment upon retirement. The constituent encourages people who are soon planning to retire to be sure to reach out directly to both TRS and ERS to fully understand their unique work situations and years of service. Here are online links to both systems:

TRS: [https://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/active\\_member\\_planning\\_retirement.aspx](https://www.trs.texas.gov/Pages/active_member_planning_retirement.aspx); and  
<https://ers.texas.gov/>.

## State Update



*Rep. VanDeaver during inauguration day.*

**Representative Gary VanDeaver sworn in.** On January 10, 2023, I was sworn in as a member of the 88th Texas Legislature. It has been one of the highest honors of my life to serve House District 1 for the past eight years, and I look forward to continuing to represent you at our state's Capitol this session.

**Comptroller Hegar released the BRE.** The day before the legislature convened, Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar released the Biennial Revenue Estimate (BRE), showing the state is projected to have a record \$188.2 billion in revenue available for general-purpose spending during the 2024-25 biennium, a 26.3 percent increase from the 2022-23 biennium.



*Comptroller Hegar during the release of the biennium revenue estimate.*

This is a historic budget estimate the legislature has available to appropriate for the 2024-25 biennium.

Much of the buzz about the BRE has focused on the estimated budget surplus of \$32.7 billion for the 2024-25 biennium. This excess amount far exceeds any previous surplus legislators have had access to use in its appropriations process. While almost everyone at the Capitol and in the state have ideas and projects these funds should be used for, I feel it is important we invest in programs and projects that make the future of our people, communities and state brighter and more economically sound. I recently spoke at a public education panel hosted by the *Texas Tribune* and said we also need to invest money in our public institutions, particularly in our teachers.

Our forefathers created spending limits and caps in the budgeting process so there is also an emphasis on saving excess funds to use in future economic downturns and to meet unexpected challenges. Because as the saying goes, "what goes up, must come down."

Since the early 2000s, there have also been historic budget shortfalls ranging from \$10 to \$20 billion dollars that legislators had to scramble to fill with new-found revenues and fees. I am confident that we will thoughtfully review agency and institution budgets along with the needs of a growing state to craft a balanced budget for the next biennium. Will it have all of the bells and whistles that everyone wants to fund? No, but the budget writers will carefully examine the data and needs to ensure the economic success of our state continues.

The link down below showcases the breakdown of this biennial revenue estimate.

### [Breakdown of the Biennial Revenue Estimate](#)

#### **88TH LEGISLATURE HAS KICKED OFF!**

Legislators have been working hard to represent their constituents as demonstrated by the legislation filed so far.

The House has filed **1,844** bills and resolutions to date (1/31)  
The Senate has filed **670** bills to date (1/31).

So far, legislators have filed a total of **2,514** bills and resolutions! You can expect much more to be filed before the March 10, bill filing deadline.

**Bill filing continues.** I have filed two additional bills since last month for a total of 11 House bills filed so far. Here is the link to Texas Legislature Online where you can follow a bill's progress, watch committee hearings and see what is happening on the floor of the Texas House and Senate: <https://capitol.texas.gov/> Here is information about these bills:

- [HB 1237](#) - relating to the salary reclassification of certain positions with the Texas Department of Insurance State Fire Marshal's Office.
- [HB 1238](#) - relating to the school health and related services program, including parental consent for program services, the establishment of a school health and related services program advisory council, and the publication of the Texas Medicaid Provider Procedures Manual.



Rep. VanDeaver with the Houston Astros.

**Texas House honors Houston Astros' World Series Win.** Last month, the Texas House invited the Houston Astros to the Capitol to honor their winning the 2022 World Series over the Philadelphia Phillies. Both the Texas House and Senate passed resolutions commemorating their victory. There is a lot of work to be done in the next several months, but I always cherish joyful moments like these in the House Chamber.

**Cockerham joins Capitol staff.** Earlier this month, Ms. Elizabeth Cockerham joined my staff so if you call the office you may have the chance to speak with her. Here is a note from her: "Hi everyone! My name is Elizabeth Cockerham, and I am now serving as Rep. VanDeaver's policy analyst this session. I am currently studying law and politics at Stephen F. Austin University with plans to graduate in May with my BA degree. I am a born and raised Texas girl and am so blessed to be working for an experienced state representative and staff. Here's to the start of a great legislative session, I look forward to continuing to serve you all!"



Ms. Elizabeth Cockerham, new Policy Analyst for Rep. VanDeaver.

## Contact Information

**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 or the Capitol office if there is anything you thing we can do to help you. Follow me on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for more updates!

**District Office**  
Bowie County Courthouse  
710 James Bowie Drive  
New Boston, Texas 75570  
(903) 628 - 0361

**Capitol Office**  
Room E1.304  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, Texas 78768-2910  
(512) 463 - 0692

**State Representative Gary  
VanDeaver**  
[Email Gary](mailto:gary@texas.gov)

## Useful State Government Websites

Governor of Texas . . . . . [www.gov.texas.gov](http://www.gov.texas.gov)  
Texas Senate . . . . . [www.senate.texas.gov](http://www.senate.texas.gov)  
Texas House of Representatives . . . . . [www.house.texas.gov](http://www.house.texas.gov)  
State of Texas . . . . . [www.texas.gov](http://www.texas.gov)  
Texas Legislature Online . . . . . [www.capitol.texas.gov](http://www.capitol.texas.gov)  
Office of the Attorney General . . . [www.texasattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov)  
Health & Human Services Commission . . [www.hhs.texas.gov](http://www.hhs.texas.gov)  
Medicaid, Food Stamps, & TANF . . [www.yourtexasbenefits.com](http://www.yourtexasbenefits.com)  
Child/Elder Abuse Reporting . . . . . [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org)

Texas 2-1-1 (United Way) . . . . . [www.211.org](http://www.211.org)  
Texas Education Agency . . . . . [www.tea.texas.gov](http://www.tea.texas.gov)  
Texas Department of Motor Vehicles . . . . . [www.txdmv.gov](http://www.txdmv.gov)  
Texas Department of Transportation . . . . . [www.txdot.gov](http://www.txdot.gov)  
Texas Department of Public Safety . . . . . [www.dps.texas.gov](http://www.dps.texas.gov)  
Texas Department of Insurance . . . . . [www.tdi.texas.gov](http://www.tdi.texas.gov)  
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department . . . . . [www.tpwd.texas.gov](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov)  
Texas Workforce Commission . . . . . [www.twc.texas.gov](http://www.twc.texas.gov)  
Texas Veterans Commission . . . . . [www.tvc.texas.gov](http://www.tvc.texas.gov)

"The Texas House of Representatives is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services. This newsletter is available in alternate forms upon request. Please call 1-800-241-1163."