



# State Representative Gary VanDeaver

March 2024 E-Newsletter



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

### District Update

**Mayor Branson honored.** In June 2023, the New Boston City Council unanimously passed a resolution designating U.S. Highway 82 from Elm Street to the western city limits as the “Johnny Branson Memorial Highway.” Earlier this month, members of the Branson family joined with TxDOT to unveil the signage. One sign is located just across the street from the Family Dollar Store, and the other sign is across from Skaggs Country Store and Grill. Rep. VanDeaver said these signs are an appropriate honor for and recognition of Mayor Branson’s passion and dedication to the city of New Boston.



Photo of the Branson family by Susan Lindsey, Bowie County Citizens Tribune.

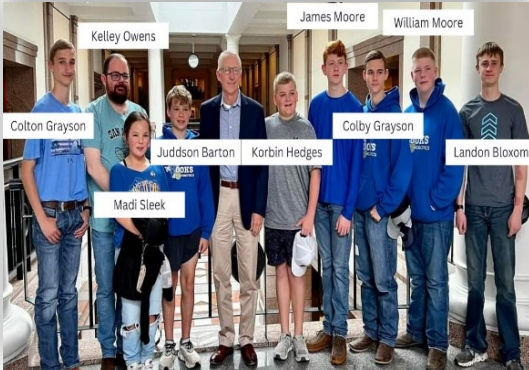
**Groundbreaking – A&M – Commerce.** Earlier this month, Rep. VanDeaver participated in groundbreaking ceremonies at Texas A&M – Commerce for the new Agricultural Multipurpose Education & Training Center and the Ted & Donna Lyon Center for Gamebird Research Center. According to the school’s press release, the new multipurpose center will house agricultural research and economic development in such fields as sustainable agriculture, animal science, urban agriculture, equine studies and more while the Lyon Gamebird Research Center will include state-of-the art quail research.



Rep. VanDeaver speaking at the TAMU - Commerce groundbreaking.

Rep. VanDeaver told the audience that: “In these facilities, tomorrow's agricultural leaders will gain the knowledge and skills necessary to impact the future of agriculture. As a proud alumnus of this university, I was honored to work with President Rudin and members of the A&M system leadership to secure the funding for this project.”

**Hooks ISD Robotics Team visits Capitol.** While in Austin for the AgRobotics Competition, students from the Hooks ISD ag robotics team stopped by the state Capitol to visit with Rep. VanDeaver. This competition is held in conjunction with Rodeo Austin's Youth Robotics Challenge "designed to allow participants the opportunity to demonstrate their robotics, engineering, and problem-solving skills." As a former ag teacher, Rep. VanDeaver told the students how much the industry has changed since he was in the classroom and how schools are working to keep up with those changes so our students are prepared for future jobs with needed and current skills. Rep. VanDeaver said: "it was great to visit with these outstanding young people during their visit to the Capitol. Programs such as this highlight the importance of fully funding our public schools."



Hooks' AgRobotics team at the Capitol with Rep. VanDeaver.



Texarkana ISD's Texas High School band at the Capitol.

**Texas High School Marching Tiger Band.** TISD's Texas High School Marching Tiger Band also visited the Capitol this month while on their Spring Band Trip that started with a trip to San Antonio. While in San Antonio, the band visited the Alamo where it saw the movie: "Alamo the Price of Freedom." Other activities included a band performance, a visit to the Tower of the Americas, a 4-D viewing of the "Skies Over Texas," a tour of the Natural Bridge & Cavern, a visit to Fiesta Texas, a walk along the River Walk and visit to Sea World. On their way home, the group stopped to visit the Capitol for an official tour and to drop by Representative VanDeaver's office. We are always glad to have visitors stop by our office while visiting the Capitol.

**HD 1 counties in solar eclipse's path of totality.** Most of the five counties in House District 1 are in the path of totality for the upcoming solar eclipse on April 8. Many communities and businesses have been preparing for months for an increase in visitors to the area just before and during the eclipse.



The University of Texas at Austin's McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis has up-to-date information about this once-in-a-lifetime event. Here is a link: <https://mcdonaldobservatory.org/eclipse> where you can get eclipse information, tips and sign up for emailed updates. One of the most important things to remember about viewing the solar eclipse is to make sure to wear protective glasses to avoid damaging your eyes and vision from looking at the eclipse without adequate protection. The path of totality includes approximately 12 million Texans from Eagle Pass to Texarkana. According to the Great American Eclipse website (<https://www.greatamericaneclipse.com/texas-2024-eclipse>): "The total solar eclipse first enters Texas at the international border at



1:27 pm CDT and leaves Texas at the Oklahoma and Arkansas borders at 1:49 pm CDT. Through Texas, the speed of the Moon's shadow will accelerate from about 1580 miles per hour to about 1850 miles per hour." Here is a link to access this map: <https://science.nasa.gov/eclipses/future-eclipses/eclipse-2024/where-when/>.

## State Update

***VanDeaver receives state award.*** As noted on its website, the Texas Business Leadership Council (TBLC) "is a statewide network of CEOs and senior business executives who advance a long-term vision of a prosperous Texas in a globally competitive business environment." On March 27, Rep. VanDeaver received TLBC's *Woody L. Hunt Legislative Leadership Award* recognizing legislators who, "through their leadership and vision, have made a significant contribution to Texas public policy." In 2023, Rep. VanDeaver filed and passed House Bill 8 that modernized the funding model for community colleges to focus on outcomes and reward them when students earn a degree, transfer to a four-year institution, receive a credential or certification to enter the workforce or enlist in the military. Rep. VanDeaver believes the changes made in HB 8 will have historic effects and transform the lives of Texans now and in the future.



Rep. VanDeaver speaking at the TBLC Policy Summit. Photo by: Rep. Orr.

### ***New law replaces "Chapter 313" economic development***

***agreements.*** What began as an innovative approach to spur economic development at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the passage of House Bill 1200 (77R, 2001) ended in controversy 20 years later when the 87<sup>th</sup> legislature in 2021, decided not to renew Chapter 313 of the Texas Tax Code. House Bill 1200 created the Texas Economic Development Act (Chapter 313) that allowed local school districts to give ad valorem property tax exemptions to certain corporations and limited liability companies that promised to create a certain number of jobs in the school district. School districts contracted with these companies to abate their property taxes over a 10-year period often in exchange for a payment by the company known as "payment in lieu of taxes." Many of these Chapter 313 agreements were lucrative for the partnering school districts and companies so much so that these agreements were sometimes referred to as "corporate welfare." Many Chapter 313 agreements were between school districts and renewable energy companies creating massive wind farms across Texas. The parties frequently did not adhere to the job creation requirements that often fueled the criticisms about Chapter 313. To the delight of many, the legislature let the Tax Code's Chapter 313 expire on December 31, 2022.

Though Chapter 313 agreements were no longer allowed, many local and state officials and business representatives felt the state still needed a robust economic development incentive plan to attract jobs and investments. In 2023, legislature adopted House Bill 5 (88R), known as the *Jobs, Energy, Technology and Innovation Act (JETI)*, to improve the state's economic development process. Renewable energy projects are not allowed and agreements cannot waive the job creation requirements. Eligible projects include the construction of a new project or expansion of an existing facility in these categories: manufacturing; utility services; development of natural resources, agriculture/forestry/fishing/hunting and mining/quarrying/oil and gas extraction; research and development of high-tech equipment or technology; or critical infrastructure. The local school district and the governor's office must approve the project agreement. House Bill 5 took effect on January 1, 2024, so the JETI is still in its infancy but many people are cautiously optimistic this revised economic development program will keep the Texas economy growing and prospering well into the future.

***Texas Tobacco Quitline helps overcome addiction.*** In 2023, the legislature added \$2 million to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) budget to expand use of its nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) medications from two to eight weeks to help people quit the use of tobacco. According to DSHS Commissioner Jennifer Shuford, MD, MPH, the leading cause of preventable illnesses and death is tobacco use that leads to cancer, heart disease and stroke, as well as increased risks for stillbirth and sudden infant death syndrome. Texas Tobacco Quitline services are free and confidential and can be accessed through [YesQuit.org](https://www.yesquit.org) and 1-877-YES-QUIT. Treatments include NRTs and quit coaching sessions that are available to participants 18 and older.

***Rural Broadband ReConnect Program – USDA.*** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced that eligible entities have until May 21, 2024, to apply for funding in its Rural Development Broadband ReConnect Program that pays for construction, improvement or acquisition of facilities and equipment needed to provide broadband service in eligible rural areas. Here is a link: <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/program-overview>, which can help foster economic opportunities in rural America.



***Happy Easter!*** I wish you and your family a blessed Easter as we observe this most solemn, yet joyful event. May we all take a moment to give thanks for the many blessings in our lives and hope for the future.

## 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 we can do to help you. Follow me on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for more updates!

### District Office

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### Representative

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