



State Representative
Gary VanDeaver
April 2024 E-Newsletter



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

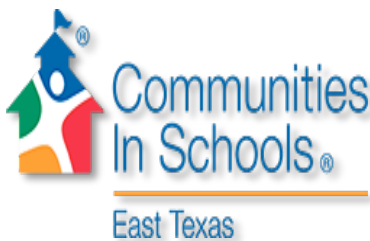
District Update

Texarkana Courthouse Square wins APA Great Places award for 2023. The American Planning Association (APA) recently designated the federal courthouse and post office in Texarkana as one of its “Great Places” for 2023 at a ceremony in Austin last month. The Courthouse Square was built in 1931 and has recently undergone some major restoration and according to the APA press release, is a “major tourist attraction that straddles the Texas-Arkansas state line where people can actually stand in two places at once.” The three-year restoration project was funded from local philanthropic and statewide sources. Everyone should be grateful for these efforts helping to preserve such a key location in downtown Texarkana helping make the area an attractive cultural and social gathering place!



Photo provided by city of Texarkana.

Communities in Schools (CIS). Communities In Schools (CIS), whose mission is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life, recently collaborated with Northeast Texas Community College (NETCC) to present its annual Certificate And Professional Programs Exploration Day (CAPPED) program for area high school students who are still on the fence about whether or not college is a good option for them. The program hosted about 300 students from area school districts including these in House District 1: Clarksville, Daingerfield, Pewitt and Rivercrest. CIS’s mission is to help students succeed by removing roadblocks and providing support and resources.



The CAPPED program provided students opportunities to hear in-depth information and ask questions about various career fields and real-life issues concerning how long it will take and what salaries can be expected. The NETCC program included opportunities to learn more about these career fields: agriculture, auto body repair, computer technology, criminal justice, welding, Emergency Medical Services, medical assistant, physical therapy, fire academy, truck driving and numerous other fields. Thanks to CIS and NETCC for working hard to help our students succeed!!

State Update

TDEM urges Texans to be prepared. Springtime in Texas brings fields of beautiful wildflowers and wonderfully mild days before the summer blast furnace cranks up. It can also bring fast-moving and dangerous storms. The Texas Department of Emergency Management



(TDEM) urges Texans to prepare for severe weather with safety precautions that include monitoring local weather reports, gathering supplies for an emergency to-go kit and heeding warnings of local officials. Texans can check road conditions at DriveTexas.org (<https://drivetexas.org/>) and access flood tracking information at TexasFlood.org. For more tips to stay safe during severe storms, visit TexasReady.gov.

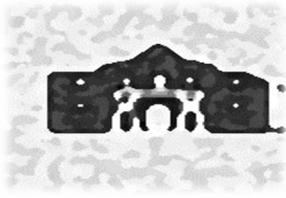
TxDOT's new campaign: "Talk. Text. Crash." The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is doubling down efforts to reduce distracted driving across the state. Its new "***Talk. Text. Crash.***" is a new statewide public awareness campaign that educates Texans on the dangers and risks of driving distracted while also raising awareness of statewide laws. The campaign addresses and discourages all forms of distracted driving when behind the wheel, with the overall goal of saving lives and reducing crashes. Distracted driving is anything that keeps a driver's focus off the road, traffic and surrounding conditions.

It has been illegal since 2017, to read, write or send a text while driving, and drivers are subject



to a \$200 fine for such violations. The fine is only one aspect when considering the other consequences that can happen while barreling down the highway at 70+ miles an hour. At 70 MPH, a vehicle will cover just over 100 feet per second or about three seconds to travel the length of a football field. Please stop and think about the damage and trauma you can cause when you send that text or change the music while driving distracted.

Cenotaph at the Alamo restoration project update. Texans have long-been passionate about the Alamo knowing what it symbolizes for our sense of freedom, accountability and self-reliance. In 2011, the legislature transferred management and oversight of the Alamo to the Texas General Land Office (GLO), which is the state's oldest agency created by the Republic of Texas in 1836. The GLO is charged with the stewardship of all state-owned land to not only manage the natural resources but preserve its history. The GLO has been working hard to ensure the Alamo is restored in such a manner that preserves its historical significance.



Alamo restoration efforts have not been without controversy and vigorous debate with a particular focus on the location of the Cenotaph (empty tomb), which was erected in 1939 on the Alamo Plaza across from the Alamo. The Cenotaph honors and remembers all who sacrificed their lives in the battle for Texas independence. Figures on the 60-foot-high structure, which has the theme of *Spirit of Sacrifice*, include such heroes as James Bowie, Davy Crockett and William B. Travis. The main controversy about the Cenotaph stemmed from an earlier restoration plan that would have moved the statute about 500 feet south along the plaza and placed it in front of a local, downtown hotel. Many Texans rebelled and that plan was scrapped; however, the controversy heightened people's attention about ongoing restoration plans. Here is a link to the GLO's homepage for more information about the Alamo: <https://www.thealamo.org/>.

The GLO commissioner, the Honorable Dawn Buckingham, M.D., recently shared information with the legislature concerning the results of the structural evaluation of the Cenotaph that determined "the over 80-year-old monument will need work to ensure its proper maintenance and longevity." Commissioner Buckingham also shared the Alamo's Cenotaph Live Camera: <https://www.thealamo.org/cenotaph-live-cam> where Texans can watch the restoration project and "stay informed about the ongoing efforts to preserve this special symbol of sacrifice and valor."



PACT Act expands health benefits for veterans. The Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act is a federal law that expands health care and benefits for veterans who were exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxic substances. The federal Veterans Administration (VA) recently announced the following changes to help veterans and their survivors speed up implementation of the PACT Act:

- Expands and extends eligibility for VA health care benefits for veterans with toxic exposures and veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War and post-9/11 eras;
- Adds 20+ more presumptive conditions for burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxic exposures;
- Adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation;
- Requires the VA to provide a toxic exposure screening to every veteran enrolled in VA health care; and
- Helps improve research, staff education and treatment related to toxic exposures.

If you are a veteran or survivor, you can file claims now to apply for PACT Act-related benefits. Here is a link for more information about these changes:

<https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/#whats-the-pact-act-and-how-wil>. The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) also has resources to help veterans who are unsure whether their exposure to these toxins qualifies for enrollment or if they were previously denied enrollment. The TVC encourage veterans to follow-up with their VA health care facility or contact the TVC health care advocate through this link: <https://www.tvc.texas.gov/contact/>. The TVC provides assistance to veterans at not cost to help enroll in VA health care or file disability claims ([TVC Claims](#)).

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!

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[Email Gary](#)

Useful State Government Websites

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

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