



State Representative **GARY VANDEAVER**

October 2024 E-Newsletter



HD

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

District Update

Wildfire in Red River County. Early last week, a wildfire broke out in Red River County near Detroit. The fire was about 30 acres and burned an overgrown hay meadow. The Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) and other first responders quickly mobilized to contain the fire. Part of that effort included dropping water from Lake Cooper from planes to keep the fire from spreading. These agencies deserve a big "thank you" for acting so quickly to protect our homes and properties from a small fire that could have quickly grown into a much larger and dangerous one: Red River County, Lamar County, Titus County; Bogata VFD, Detroit VFD; Blossom VFD, Deport VFD, Rosalie VFD, Talco VFD, Cuthand VFD, Northwoods VFD, Bagwell VFD, Red River County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and Lamar County OEM.

West Fraser Mill going solar. Earlier this month, West Fraser Mill in New Boston held a ribbon cutting



West Fraser ribbon cutting ceremony - October 11, 2024.

for its new solar array that will produce clean, renewable energy to help operate its local plant by providing about 30 percent of its energy needs while also reducing green house gas emissions. West Fraser is a diversified timber company that produces lumber and other wood products for construction, as well as pulp, plywood, newsprint and wood chips. The company uses more than 95 percent of each harvested tree, which is consistent with the company's philosophy of sustainability and being environmentally friendly. West Fraser has

owned the local mill since 2007 and has increased its production almost 100 percent during that time. A special "thank you" is owed to West Fraser for its hard work, dedication and commitment to not only improving its operations but investing in our local economy to help grow New Boston!

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Legislative briefings. This week, Rep. VanDeaver spoke at two meetings of retired teacher groups to discuss upcoming elections and priority issues for the next legislature including the need to increase funding for our schools so our teachers can receive a much-needed pay raise; adopting a balanced state budget for the 2026-27 biennium that will allow TRS to hold the line on premiums for TRS-Care and maintain the stability of the TRS pension system. Rep. VanDeaver also discussed the need for the US Congress to act on two Social Security-related programs that adversely impact TRS members whose school districts do not participate in Social Security.

Congressional action is needed to eliminate the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) that prevent government employees whose employer is not enrolled in Social Security, like most Texas school districts, from receiving the Social Security benefits from a spouse or their own benefits if they actually earned the required 40 quarters of covered employment in a job covered by Social Security. These two programs were adopted in the 1980s and have caused serious problems for retired Texas school employees for many years.

Rep. VanDeaver also talked about the general appropriations act (state budget) that is the only piece of legislation that the state constitution requires the legislature to pass each session. Rep. VanDeaver has been on the House Committee on Appropriations since his first legislative session in 2015, and during last year's session, he served as the chairman for the Committee's subcommittee for Article III, which includes funding for public education, higher education and the Texas Teacher Retirement System (TRS). VanDeaver reminded everyone that our state constitution mandates a balanced state budget with no deficit spending allowed. The state comptroller of public accounts has to certify there are sufficient revenue to pay for and support all of the state expenditures for the next two-year period.

Importance of the state budget. The state comptroller, the Honorable Glenn Hegar, issues the constitutionally required Biennial Revenue Estimate (BRE) the day before the session starts to let lawmakers know how much money the legislature has to spend for the next biennium. The release of the BRE is a closely watched event that helps tee-off the start of the 140-day regular session that convenes at noon the next day. VanDeaver also touched on key issues important to the group of retirees including holding the line on their premiums for their TRS Care insurance program and ensuring the actuarial soundness of their pension system. Though the election cycle at the state and national level have often been contentious, Rep. VanDeaver expressed his hopes that once the election is behind us, lawmakers will focus on the needs of their constituents and do what is in their and the state's best interest. Here is a link to the Texas Legislature Online (TLO) website where you can follow legislation filed and committee hearings in the upcoming session: <https://capitol.texas.gov/>.

TWDB's Marvin Nichols Reservoir feasibility review. As reported last month, the Texas Water Development Board issued its mandated feasibility review of the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir

(MNR) and invited the public to submit comments no later than midnight, October 25, 2024. Rep. VanDeaver submitted a letter outlining his concerns and objections to MRN that included:

"Moving forward there should be some serious changes to how we plan to use and conserve our water in Texas, such as the following:

1. Water Regions should have to exhaust all resources within their own region for new sources of water, efficiently utilize the existing sources that are already in use and improve conservation across the region before they use eminent domain to take water from another region.
2. Before a new project uses eminent domain to take water from another region, alternative options must be pursued that expand and enhance existing reservoirs, lakes and other available resources.
3. The effects of the required mitigation on local economies must be studied to understand the scope and full extent of moving forward with future projects.
4. Evolving technologies such as brackish groundwater desalination, water reuse and expanding current resources should take a greater role in water planning, as opposed to just building outdated reservoirs, for the future."

The TWDB's final report about the MNR is to be submitted to the governor and Legislative Budget Board no later than January 5, 2025.

TWDB awards Daingerfield almost \$4 million. Earlier this month, the TWDB announced that the city of Daingerfield was receiving almost \$4 million in financial assistance and loan forgiveness from Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF). The city will use the assistance for the planning, design and construction of a water system improvement project to construct new waterlines, upgrade the Union Street Pump Station and rehabilitate the Union Street ground storage tank. Congratulations to the city of Daingerfield!



Texarkana Symphony Orchestra. Rep. VanDeaver's office was recently informed that the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) recently awarded the Texarkana Symphony Orchestra (TSO) a Cultural Arts District grant. In addition to this grant, the TCA also awarded the TSO an Arts Respond - Performance Grant, an Arts Respond - Education Grant and an Arts Create Grant. These grants will help the TSO continue efforts to expand program offerings and share their wonderful performances with even more people in the Texarkana region. Congratulations to everyone involved with the TSO who work very hard to hone their musical skills and talents, to the staff and Board of Directors who help guide the TSO's efforts to be a source of musical joy and entertainment to all of us!

Legislative Director Trip Davis. At the end of the month, my office is saying goodbye and good luck to my Legislative Director, Trip Davis, who will be joining the office of an incoming freshman House member from the Houston area as that office's Chief of Staff. Though he has only been with my office since December 2023, he has been a valuable member of our team, and we all congratulate him on his promotion and wish him the best. Thanks, Trip!

State Update

Health insurance changes. Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) of Texas recently announced it is terminating its Medicare Advantage and managed Medicaid contracts with MD Anderson Cancer Center, effective November 1. The two companies have been working over the last several months to iron out their differences over plan coverages and cost arrangements, but unfortunately, they could not reach an agreement. The good news in all of this is that Medicare Advantage plans from the University of Texas System and the Texas A&M University System are not affected. Rep. VanDeaver suggests that his constituents enrolled in these plans check with their providers for any changes in coverage.

Veterans Day. In less than two weeks, Americans should pause a moment on November 11, to thank our veterans for all they have done for and sacrificed in keeping our country safe and secure. We owe them an enormous debt of gratitude and respect for their selfless service to our state and country. Thank you and God bless our veterans!



Bill filing starts soon for the 89th session. November 12 begins the bill filing process for the upcoming legislative session. Bill filing continues until the 60th day of the session, which is Friday, March 14, 2025. In the 2023 regular session, legislators filed 11,807 bills and resolutions and 4,550 of them passed for a 38.5 percent pass rate. The governor vetoed 77 bills that had passed both Chambers last year. Rep. VanDeaver plans to file several

bills on the first day of filing knowing that it is a long road to travel to get them through the legislative process and signed by the governor next June. As noted above, you can legislative activities, search bills that have been filed and watch committee hearings at: <https://capitol.texas.gov/>.

Contact Information

Social Media. Please follow me on my Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts for more updates!

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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