

☆ INTERIM UPDATE ☆

Dual Credit Class Participates in Mock Legislative Session at State Capitol

In February, Representative White invited high school students from Warren, Woodville, Wells, and Kennard to the State Capitol for a tour and to participate in a mock legislative session he orchestrated with Texas House parliamentarian Chris Griesel. These outstanding students from East Texas were enrolled in a dual credit Texas Government course offered through Angelina College.



Students from Warren High School

During the mock legislative session, the students used bills filed and discussed by Representative White during the last regular session. The pieces of legislation that the students debated and voted on related to subjects such as transportation, expanded voting opportunities for deployed military veterans, and end-of-course assessments. The students initially considered the legislation in a committee hearing and then on the House floor.



Students from Woodville High School

"There is no substitute for hands-on experience," said Representative White, "and I think the process these students engaged in has been a valuable lesson in how our government works and what's involved in making the laws we live under as a society. I am extremely proud of these students and honored to be a part of their educational experience. I look forward to what they will do in the future."

Preserving and Protecting Southeast Texas Water Resources

One of the major issues in the 2013 legislative session was addressing our state's water needs to accommodate our population growth and economic demands today and in the future. Last November voters overwhelmingly approved the creation of the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas, or SWIFT, without raising taxes or imposing new fees on Southeast Texas families and small businesses. This appropriation will provide financing for our local governments to fund community projects in the state water plan through low-interest loans. Payments on these loans will provide the revenue to sustain and grow the SWIFT for future use.

Representative White supported the creation and funding of the SWIFT but knows it will not completely solve our water infrastructure needs. During the interim, he has been engaging communities about resources available from a number of state and

federal agencies and organizations for local water and wastewater infrastructure improvements in cooperation with the Texas Water Infrastructure Coordination Committee, or TWICC. TWICC brings together various government agencies and community organizations to assist local governments in determining the best strategy for funding proposed projects. Several communities have discussed their projects with members of TWICC, and earlier this year a workshop was held in Polk County for local government officials to interact directly with representatives of the participating agencies and organizations, which among others include the Texas Water Development Board, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Texas Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Texas Rural Water Association. Those who attended said it was a productive meeting and provided a great deal of beneficial information.

How to Contact Rep. White

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Newton County Judge Truman Dougherty, Commissioner Thomas Gill, Representative White, Shankleville Heritage Society Business Manager Laretha Clay, and DETCOG Executive Director Walter Digges at the First Annual Texas Purple Hull Pea Festival, organized by Laretha Clay.

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
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Constituents Visiting the State Capitol

Representative White is always eager to host constituents at the State Capitol. Just contact his office, and his staff would be happy to arrange a visit for you.

*Pictured: Students enrolled in the Onalaska JROTC program*



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
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Corrections - Vice Chair  
Agriculture and Livestock  
Human Trafficking

STATE OF TEXAS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



2014

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As the interim draws to a close and the 84th Legislative Session approaches, I am meeting with loggers, local elected officials, nurses, school administrators, teachers, business owners, doctors, pastors, and families about the aspirations, hopes, and dreams of the people of Southeast Texas. As with previous generations of Texans, we are faced with many challenges. However, with hundreds of people moving to our state every day, it is clear Texans are doing something right, and I am compelled to do my part to make our community an even better place to live, work, and nurture a family.

This newsletter is intended to provide a brief update on what is happening in House District 19 and throughout the state. Interim hearings are well underway, and several important developments regarding policy items such as education, jobs, and border security have occurred. Discussions with constituents will continue on these issues and others in the coming months.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your representative in our state legislature. In preparing for the legislative session next year, my staff and I are working hard to address the concerns of Southeast Texans in a practical and judicious manner consistent with our priorities.

Please feel free to contact our office through any means listed in this newsletter. I am eager to hear from you.

Sincerely,

James White



HARDIN • JASPER • NEWTON • POLK • TYLER

## Preparing Young Texans to be Future Leaders

In response to concerns expressed by our parents, teachers, students, and the business community, the Legislature in 2013 implemented major changes in the state's testing and graduation requirements and reformed school accountability measures. House Bill 5 reduced the number of end-of-course assessments students must pass to graduate from high school from fifteen to five. This much-needed change allows teachers to focus more on classroom instruction instead of test preparation. Furthermore, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) recently reported that 81 percent of the Class of 2015 has already passed all of the required tests necessary to graduate.

The standard high school curriculum was also restructured, with all students now automatically enrolled in the Foundation High School Program and required to earn one or more endorsements in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), public services, business and industry, or arts and humanities. This revision will allow our local communities to design learning opportunities that correspond with the aspirations and expectations of their students, parents, teachers, and local industry while providing students more flexibility in their course of study and better preparation for their professional career as lifelong learners in a 21st century global

economy. Students beginning high school this fall will be the first class to graduate under this new program.

Finally, House Bill 5 implements an expanded accountability system to measure school and district performance. The new accountability system includes ratings for student achievement, financial health, and community engagement. Each district must evaluate its performance in these areas with the assistance of a local committee and report its findings to TEA. Scores should be posted on district websites by August 8 and on the TEA website by October 1.



*Tyra Adair of Chester High School with her mother Belinda Adair and coach Charlotte Barnes. Tyra competed in the 400 Meter Dash at the 2014 UIL State Track & Field Meet.*

## Property Taxes and Taxpayer Rights

One of the issues Representative White is frequently asked about is property taxes. Although the state prescribes how property taxes should be imposed, the Texas constitution has reserved this authority to appraise property values, assess property taxes, and collect and spend revenue from property taxes for local governments. Property taxes are used to fund schools, maintain roads, and provide a number of other services. The Texas constitution forbids your state government from collecting property taxes.

Taxing units such as counties, cities, and school districts set tax rates after considering their budget needs and the value of taxable property within their jurisdiction, which is determined by an independent appraisal district in each county. Citizens can petition for a rollback election if the tax rate established is significantly higher than the previous year's, and they can protest the appraised value of their property through the county appraisal review board. Property

owners who are over age 65 or are disabled can claim an exemption on some or all of their taxes.

Every two years, the state Comptroller's Office compiles property value data from each school district, which legislators use to determine how much state assistance is necessary to ensure equitable funding. This information is available on the Comptroller's Office website along with resources that further explain how property taxes are collected and what property owners can do to ensure this process is administered in a fair, predictable, and efficient manner. It can be accessed at [www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/](http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/).

As a homeowner, Representative White understands how property taxes affect his constituents' personal finances, and next session he will join other legislators in crafting legislation to, at least, lower property taxes, if not completely eliminate them. For specific questions about your property taxes, contact your county tax assessor-collector or appraisal district.

## Creating Jobs and Prosperity in Southeast Texas

Southeast Texas is seeing signs of increased economic activity with the completion of the Keystone Pipeline Gulf Coast Project earlier this year, and the recent passage of federal legislation could further bolster this trend by providing funding for improvements to the Sabine-Neches Waterway. A recent study by the Maguire Energy Institute at Southern Methodist University indicates that the construction of the southern leg of the Keystone Pipeline created nearly 5,000 jobs and generated \$3.6 billion for the Texas economy and \$72 million in local tax revenue for the counties along the route. With the initial capacity to transport 700,000 barrels of oil per day and the addition of another segment from the current route to refineries in Houston to be completed later this year, the new pipeline has the potential to produce sustained economic growth in Southeast Texas for many years.

The passage of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act should also significantly impact our

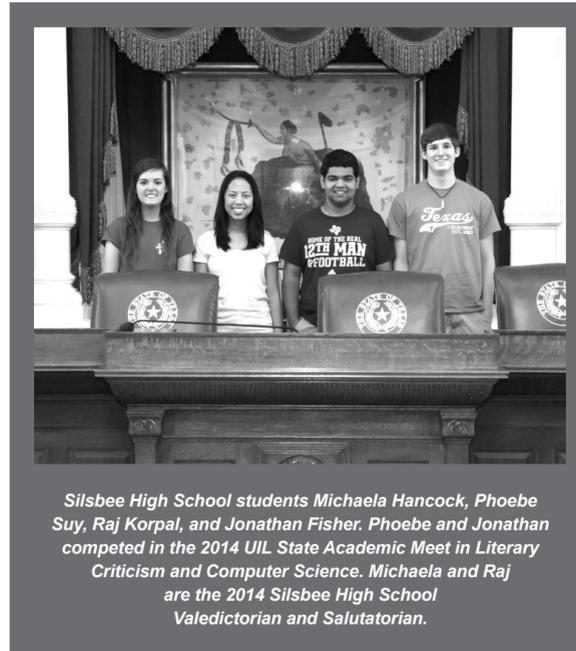
economy in Southeast Texas. This legislation authorizes the construction and funding of thirty-four infrastructure projects throughout the country, including deepening the Sabine-Neches Waterway from forty feet to forty-eight feet. It will provide \$748 million for the project, or about 75 percent of the total cost. Once completed, the expanded opportunities for shipping oil, natural gas, and Southeast Texas agricultural products such as timber are projected to create 200,000 additional jobs.

Representative White is enthusiastic about these developments and has thanked the members of the Texas Congressional Delegation for their support of our local economy. He has urged President Obama and Congress to approve construction of the remaining section of the Keystone Pipeline from Canada to Cushing, Oklahoma, which would dramatically increase our processing capacity in Southeast Texas and greatly contribute to continued economic growth.

## Texas Veterans: Honoring Those Who Have Served

Like millions of other Americans, Representative White was appalled by the recent reports of veterans being forced to wait several months or longer to receive treatment at a number of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs clinics, where employees regularly withheld information about long wait times to avoid poor performance reviews. He joined several other Texas legislators in sending a letter to the Veterans Affairs acting secretary demanding swift action be taken to correct the situation and ensure our veterans are treated with the utmost decency and integrity. Those who have sacrificed so much to defend our security and freedom deserve no less from their government.

Although the federal government is responsible for providing our veterans medical care and administers the GI Bill education benefits program, the Texas Veterans Commission assists them in claiming these benefits as well as those provided by the State of Texas, such as college tuition assistance through the similarly structured Hazlewood Act and job skills training and placement. The Veterans Commission also distributes grants to charities and local government agencies that provide services to veterans and their families. For a directory of veterans offices and organizations in your community, visit [http://www.tvc.texas.gov/documents/tvc\\_directory.pdf](http://www.tvc.texas.gov/documents/tvc_directory.pdf).



*Silsbee High School students Michaela Hancock, Phoebe Suy, Raj Korpai, and Jonathan Fisher. Phoebe and Jonathan competed in the 2014 UIL State Academic Meet in Literary Criticism and Computer Science. Michaela and Raj are the 2014 Silsbee High School Valedictorian and Salutatorian.*

## Border Security and Human Trafficking

Due to social and political unrest in their home countries, many people from Central America, including unaccompanied children (UACs), are attempting to enter the United States at our southern border. This spike in border crossings has become a serious humanitarian crisis and public safety concern for all Texans. Since last October, more than 52,000 unaccompanied children, most of whom are from Guatemala, Honduras, or El Salvador—where gang warfare and poverty are rampant—have illegally entered the United States. Responding to this crisis has overwhelmed the U.S. Border Patrol and allowed dangerous drug cartels and human traffickers to exploit the situation by expanding their criminal networks into Texas.

Federal law requires Border Patrol agents to hand these children over to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which is tasked with providing them safe housing and legal counseling. Many of these children arrive at our southern border dehydrated and ill with various diseases, and until they can be relocated to other parts of the country, they are being held in detention centers along the border, where they are immunized and provided medical care. These detention centers are being overwhelmed with the influx of children, and law enforcement personnel are being reassigned to manage them instead of securing the border.

Representative White has urged state leadership to respond to this situation with the full array of available resources, and this summer Governor

Perry, Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst, and Speaker Straus directed the Texas Department of Public Safety to ramp up operations in the Rio Grande Valley in a manner that has proven effective in deterring illegal entries in the past. The border surge is expected to cost approximately \$1.3 million per week until the end of the year, when the Legislature will reconvene and consider additional means to secure the border in the absence of federal enforcement. Representative White will continue to monitor the situation closely and exercise careful oversight of state activities associated with border security as Vice Chair of the Committee on Corrections and as a newly appointed member of the Joint Committee on Human Trafficking.

Many of the children crossing our border hoping to find refuge in the United States become victims of human trafficking by the cartels paid to transport them here, and Texas has taken significant steps in recent years to provide assistance to such victims and prosecute the perpetrators of this heinous crime. Texas was second only to California in the number of calls made to the National Human Trafficking Hotline last year, and although this kind of criminal activity is concentrated in metropolitan areas, it has been reported in many rural parts of the state as well. Securing our Texas borders and fighting human trafficking are some of the most critical issues affecting our state, and Representative White is doing everything he can in his role as a legislator to ensure Texans are safe and our laws are enforced.



*Tyler County homeschool students and their families*



*Tyler County Historical Commission members Mary Nell Rainey and Mary Alice Nagypal at the Capitol for 2014 Preservation Texas Summit.*