

ROBERT NICHOLS

A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR NICHOLS

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ROBERT L. NICHOLS
STATE SENATOR

Dear friends,

The 85th Legislative Session has come and gone, and again I am proud to represent you in the Texas Senate. Because I believe you should hear directly from your elected officials about how we are working for you, I am sending you this newsletter. Inside you will find an update on issues affecting Texans.

Some things you may be most interested in reading include:

- ★ *ways the Legislature sought to ensure the health and safety of children in our state*
- ★ *how you can now more easily exercise your second amendment rights*
- ★ *what the State is doing to improve school accountability*
- ★ *how the Legislature is working to protect drivers on Texas roads*

Of course one document cannot answer every question or address every concern. If there is something you want to know from me, please do not hesitate to call the Capitol office or the district office closest to you. As a resident of Senate District 3, these offices belong to you. My staff and I are here to help.

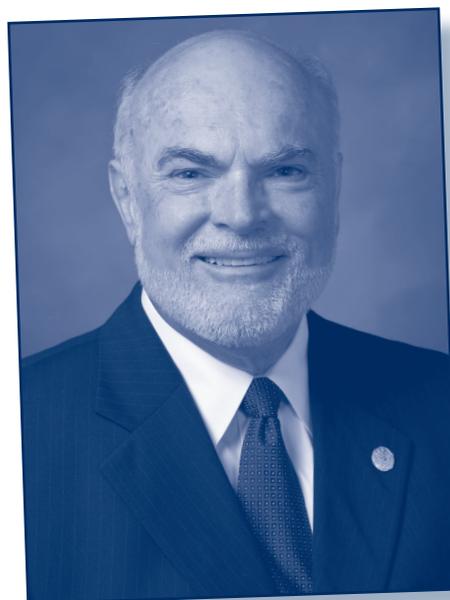
It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to represent you in the Texas Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Lee Nichols".

Robert L. Nichols
State Senator

P.S. Inside you will also find information on how to get a summary of the proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution. As a voter, you will have the opportunity to approve or reject these proposed amendments during the November 7 election.



LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 85TH SESSION

★ EXERCISING YOUR SECOND AMENDMENT RIGHTS

Before the 85th Legislative Session, Texas had the highest fees in the Nation to obtain a license to carry, which imposed an undue burden on Texans' constitutional right to bear arms. With tremendous support from both the Senate and the House, Senate Bill 16 which I authored, was passed and ensures Texas will now have one of the lowest fees in the country for a license to carry.

The new law, which goes into effect on September 1, 2017, reduces the fee for first-time license holders from \$140 to \$40. The renewal fee has been lowered from \$70 to \$40. The licensing fees for law enforcement officers and those in the Texas military forces have been waived. This bill was supported by the National Rifle Association and the Texas State Rifle Association.



Sen. Nichols with Governor Greg Abbott and House members at the bill signing for Senate Bill 16, the License to Carry fee bill.

★ CHILD WELFARE REFORM

During his State of the State address at the beginning of the Legislative Session, Governor Greg Abbott spoke about the state's child welfare crisis and named it one of his four emergency items. The Legislature quickly began to take steps to address this issue by passing a number of bills and adding more than \$500 million to Texas' child welfare system.

House Bill 5 makes the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), which was previously housed under the Health and Human Services Commission, a stand-alone agency. House Bill 7 focuses on how DFPS works with the court system. DFPS is directed to only remove children from their home because of allegations of violence or abuse, and not for other nonviolent misdemeanors. It also allows an opportunity for parents to respond to allegations against them. Senate Bill 11 was also signed, which lets the state create a community-based care system by contracting with nonprofits to oversee children who are in foster care, have been adopted, or are being cared for by a relative.

Often children thrive more in the care of family members, than in foster care. However, many times relatives may not be able to afford to take the children into their homes, such as grandparents who are on a fixed income. House Bill 4 increases the payments for relatives who are caregivers to abused children. To qualify they would have to make less than three times the federal poverty level, and could receive up to \$4,200 a year in assistance. I believe this is a great step toward ensuring these children have homes.

★ BANNING 'SANCTUARY CITIES' IN TEXAS

Governor Abbott has signed Senate Bill 4, also known as the Sanctuary Cities bill, into law. Entities, such as cities, counties and public colleges, are now banned from implementing policies to refuse to enforce federal immigration laws in Texas. Sheriffs, police chiefs and other local leaders could face a Class A misdemeanor charge if they refuse to cooperate with federal authorities and honor requests from Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers to turn over immigrants in custody for possible deportation.

Local entities or campus police departments who intentionally violate this law could be subject to civil penalties of up to \$1,500 for the first violation, and up to \$25,500 for subsequent violations. State entities could also be denied state grant funds, if their law enforcement agencies failed to honor requests from the federal government. This was one of Abbott's priorities which he listed as one of four emergency items at the beginning of this legislative session.

★ TEXTING WHILE DRIVING

Texas has joined the majority of other states in passing a provision to ban texting while driving. House Bill 62 created a ban on reading, writing or sending electronic messages from a phone in a moving vehicle. Texting would still be allowed in an emergency, and drivers can use their phone to access their GPS and music apps.



Nichols with Sheriffs from around Senate District 3.

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 85TH SESSION



Sen. Nichols with Lt. Colonel Dick Cole, who at 101 years old is the only surviving Doolittle Raider. Their air raid during WWII was the first air strike on the Japanese Home Islands.

This bill does not supersede stricter local ordinances, however, practices that are against both local and state law, such as typing a text, would be subject to only a state citation. A police officer would have to witness a violation or there be other evidence, such as the person admitting to texting or weaving in traffic, for a citation to be issued. For a first offense it would carry a fine of up to \$99, and \$100 to \$200 for a second offense. If texting leads to an accident causing death or serious injury, it would be a Class A misdemeanor.

★ MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

While many times there were opposing opinions about topics in the Capitol this year, mental health was an issue that brought the Legislature together. Members realized the failure to properly address mental health was not only costing the state, but was also costing those who are affected with mental health and substance abuse problems. Surveys have shown that one in five Texans have a mental health need, but many times are unable to receive or even afford treatment.

To help address this dire need, the Legislature provided funding to address capacity and eliminate the long waiting lists for community health service, as well as funding for community collaborative grants for jail diversions and support for other local mental health projects. Almost \$300 million, which was phase one of three phases, was allocated to replace or repair mental health facilities in the state, such as Rusk State

Hospital in our district. To help address the shortage of practicing psychiatrists, Senate Bill 674 was passed to help fast track licensing for psychiatrists who move to our State. With the steps made in this and previous legislative sessions, Texas is taking the right steps towards providing treatment for those who need it.

★ PROTECTING THE STUDENTS IN OUR STATE

In the past few years, the news media has been filled with stories of improper relationships between teachers and students. The Legislature took a great step toward ensuring the well-being of the students in our state by passing Senate Bill 7. It sets guidelines for addressing improper relationships between teachers and students. Under the rules of this bill, a principal and/or superintendent could be charged with a felony, punishable by up to two years behind bars, if they fail to report improper teacher conduct to authorities. It would also revoke pensions from teachers convicted of felonies involving a student.

Teachers will receive training on how to properly handle personal relationships and communications with students. They would also have to sign a pre-employment affidavit disclosing whether they have been charged or convicted of an improper relationship with a child.



Sen. Nichols with FFA students from Senate District 3.

★ PASTOR SERMON PROTECTION

My grandfather was a Methodist minister who traveled and visited different communities in East Texas. He taught me the important role ministers play in our lives and because of this I believe it is important to ensure we are protecting pastors and the religious freedoms of all citizens of Texas. The Texas Legislature took a great step towards this by passing Senate Bill 24, which makes it impossible for a government entity to force religious leaders to hand over their sermons.

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 85TH SESSION



Sen. Nichols with members of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe during their first Legislative Day at the Texas Capitol.

A governmental entity includes the state and any of its agencies, as well as any political subdivision of the state such as a city, county or school district. A religious leader will be protected in that they cannot be compelled to disclose a written, audio or video version of a sermon delivered during religious worship of a religious organization, and they may also not be compelled to testify regarding the sermon.

★ TEXAS SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABILITY

During the 84th Legislative Session, the way the state's school districts and campuses were evaluated was changed to an A-F accountability system. This was done in an effort to provide a transparent and comprehensive way of evaluating their performance. After the preliminary ratings were released, it became apparent changes to the system were necessary. Different plans were filed this session in both the House and Senate to address this need.

House Bill 22 was passed which requires school districts and campuses to be rated in three categories: Student Achievement, Student Progress and Closing the Gaps. School districts who do well would have the opportunity to create their own accountability system, which when combined with the state's accountability system, could count for up to half of their overall grade. District-level A-F ratings will be implemented during the 2017-2018 school year, and campus-level ratings will not be assigned until the 2018-2019 school year.

★ BUY AMERICAN IRON & STEEL

When you think of steel and iron manufacturing, your first thought may not be of Texas. Did you know our state is home to dozens of facilities, with four of them in counties within Senate District 3? This industry provides 68,000 plus jobs, sends millions of dollars of tax revenue to our state coffers and local communities and serves as the state's number one recycler.

To ensure we are able to keep iron and steel manufacturing growing in our state, Senate Bill 1289 was passed to require large state projects, such as buildings, roads and bridges, to purchase iron and steel from an American supplier. If an American supplier is not prepared to supply the project, or the cost would exceed 20 percent more, a cheaper foreign import may be used. I believe this will assist in ensuring there is an economic boost for Texas workers and the industry as a whole.

★ HELPING TEXAS MAINTAIN ITS COMPETITIVE EDGE

Since 1989, due to permitting requirements and weight allowances in the State of Texas, industry has been forced to export partially empty shipping containers -- a practice that costs businesses money, especially on international trade. This causes Texas ports and businesses to lose their competitive edge with other states and the international market.

Senate Bill 1524, of which I am author, helps to solve this problem by creating an annual permit, which would allow ocean going containers to travel within 30 miles of a port of entry, with an allowed increased weight limit. The permit also requires the trucks to have extra axles to better support the container and distribute weight. Applicants, who want to haul containers covered under the provisions of this legislation, would be required to obtain extra training for a commercial driver's license.

It is estimated that billions of dollars in new economic development could be invested along our coast because of the provisions of SB 1524. We will now be able to maintain our competitive edge and strengthen its position as the nation's number one exporting state, as we compete with other states such as Louisiana, New York and Florida, who already have these measures in place.



Nichols with TxDOT Administration, in recognition of the agencies 100th Anniversary.

SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS, SENATE DISTRICT 3

First elected to the Texas Senate in 2007, Robert Nichols represents 19 counties including the greater part of East Texas and Montgomery County.

Nichols serves as Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee and serves on the Finance, Administration and Business and Commerce Committees. He is a member of the Legislative Audit Committee and is serving his second term on the Sunset Advisory Commission.

During his six sessions as a state senator, Nichols authored and passed legislation to protect landowners' rights, increase educational opportunities in East Texas and reform transportation policies. He has also worked to reduce Medicaid fraud, and promote free-market principles. He was designated as a Top Legislator by Texas Insider, a Champion of Free Enterprise by the Texas Association of Business, a Courageous Conservative by the Texas Conservative Coalition, and a Top 10 Best



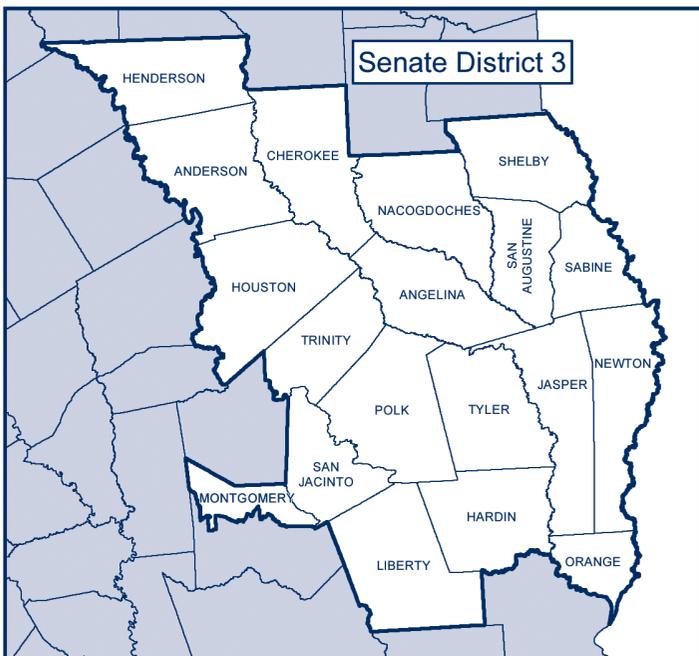
Nichols with General Land Commissioner George P. Bush.

Legislator for the 85th Legislative Session by Texas Monthly Magazine.

Before running for the Texas Senate, Nichols served as transportation commissioner for eight years where he established a reputation for increasing efficiency without compromising quality.

Nichols is a businessman from Jacksonville, Texas. In his hometown he served on city council, was elected mayor, built four successful manufacturing facilities, earned 32 U.S. patents, and created more than 900 jobs for East Texas families.

Working his way through college by selling fireworks and ironing clothes for other students, Nichols earned a bachelor's degree from Lamar University in 1968. He married his high school sweetheart, Donna, and they are the proud parents of three children: Brittney, Joshua, and Collynn'rae. He is a member of the First United Methodist Church in Jacksonville.



Texas Constitutional Election

This fall, Texans will have the opportunity to vote on seven amendments to the Texas Constitution. The last day to register to vote in this election is October 10, 2017. Early voting begins October 23 and continues through November 3. Election Day is November 7, 2017.

To view a summary and analysis of these amendments please visit: http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/const_amends.htm. To ensure you are registered to vote you can visit www.votetexas.gov.

Copies of the summary will also be available in all of Sen. Nichols' district offices. Or, if you prefer, you may contact his Capitol office at (512) 463-0103 and staff will gladly send you a copy.

SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS

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- Texas Comptroller
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- Texas Legislature Online
www.capitol.texas.gov
- Texas Governor
www.governor.texas.gov
- Texas Attorney General
www.ago.texas.gov
- Texas Department of Agriculture
www.agr.texas.gov
- Texas General Land Office
www.glo.texas.gov

HELPFUL TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

- General Help & Services 2 - 1 - 1
- Cancer Information Service (800) 4-CANCER
- Child Support Hotline (800) 252-8014
- Consumer Protection Hotline (800) 621-0508
- Governor's Assist. Hotline (800) 843-5789
- Elections Division (800) 252-VOTE
- Social Security Administration (800) 772-1213
- Lawyer Referral Service (800) 252-9690
- Crime Victim Clearinghouse (800) 848-4284
- Immunization Hotline (800) 252-9152
- Medicaid Hotline (800) 252-8263
- WIC Hotline (800) 942-3678
- Nursing Home Complaints (800) 458-9858
- Rehabilitative Services (800) 792-1109
- Injured Worker Hotline (800) 252-7031
- Child Care Information (800) 862-5252
- Unemployment Hotline (800) 558-8321

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