

ROBERT NICHOLS

A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR NICHOLS

CAPITOL OFFICE
P.O. Box 12068, Room EL704
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0103
FAX: (512) 463-1526
Dial 711 for Relay Calls



COMMITTEES:
Transportation, *Chair*
Business & Commerce
Finance
Local Government
Redistricting, Special

ROBERT L. NICHOLS
STATE SENATOR

Dear friends,

The 88th Legislative Session has come and gone, and again I am proud to continue to represent you in the Texas Senate. I believe it is important you hear directly from me about how we are working for you, so I am sending you this newsletter. Inside you will find an update on what the Legislature accomplished.

Some things you may be most interested in reading include:

- ★ *how the Legislature sought to deliver property tax relief to homeowners statewide*
- ★ *what the State did to continue to expand broadband internet access in rural and underserved areas*
- ★ *how the State is supporting law enforcement in rural areas*
- ★ *how the Legislature is giving retired teachers a cost-of-living adjustment*

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.

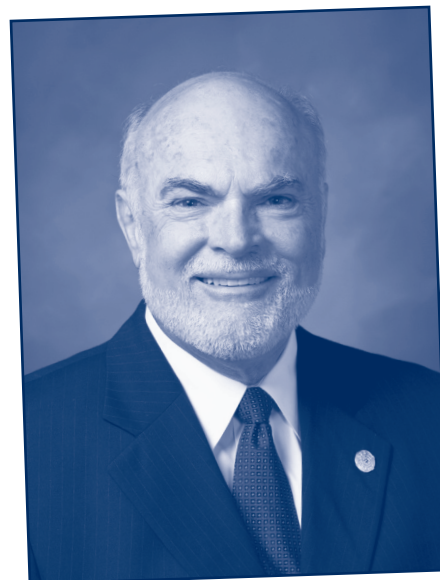
It has and continues to be one of the greatest honors of my life to represent you in the Texas Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert L. 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 7th election.

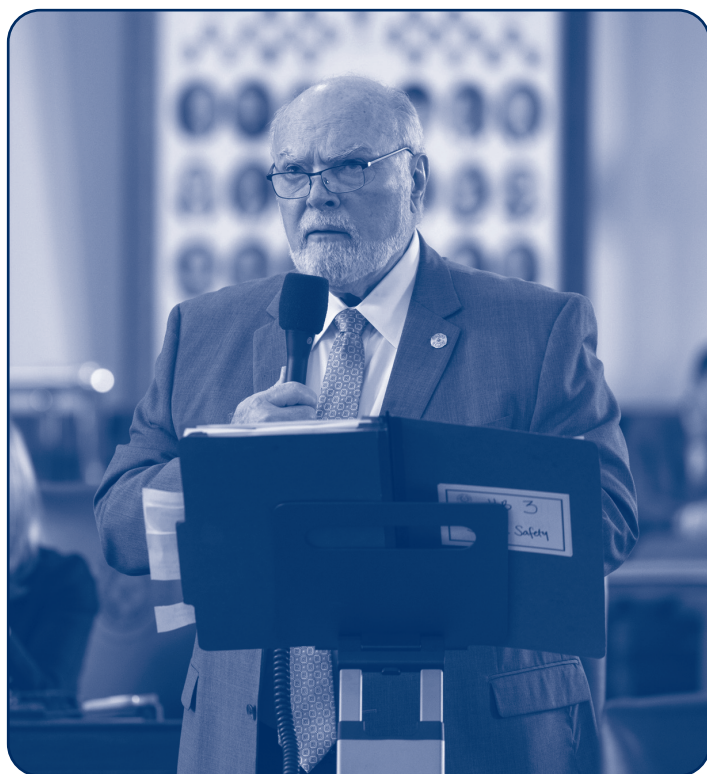


★ PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

In January of this year, Comptroller Glenn Hegar announced the state would have a historic surplus of over \$32 billion. About half of that was immediately earmarked for property tax relief, to return excess state dollars to taxpayers. At the end of the 88th regular session, the House and Senate had not quite decided exactly how to provide that relief. A deal was struck during the Second Called Special Session and both chambers passed Senate Bill 2 and Senate Bill 3.

Senate Bill 2 increases the Texas homestead exemption to \$100,000 for Texas homeowners beginning on this year's property tax bill. It also includes \$7 billion worth of school district property tax rate compression, or tax decreases, a three-year pilot project that will evaluate the efficacy of a 20 percent circuit-breaker on appraised value increases for non-homesteaded property valued at \$5 million or less, and allows citizens to elect three county-wide directors for County Appraisal Districts in counties with a population of 75,000 or more. To ensure school districts are not adversely impacted by these changes, the bill also includes a hold harmless provision for school districts.

Senate Bill 3 doubles the franchise tax exemption for businesses. The exemption increases from \$1.235 million to \$2.47 million, eliminating this tax for 67,000 businesses. SB 3 also eliminated a "nuisance-tax," which required businesses that did not owe any franchise taxes to file "No Tax Due" paperwork. If a business did not file that paperwork, the entity was fined. Both the paperwork and the fine have been eliminated for small businesses.



Sen. Nichols laying out House Bill 3 on the Senate floor. House Bill 3 was Senator Nichols' hallmark school safety legislation this session.



Sen. Nichols with Sen. Parker on the Senate floor.

★ MATERNITY LEAVE FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

Senate Bill 222 guarantees paid maternity leave for state employees. Women who give birth to a child, adopt a child, or have a child via surrogacy are now entitled to eight weeks of paid leave. Men whose spouse has a child, adopt, or has a child via surrogacy are also now entitled to four weeks of paid leave. This bill was one I was proud to author with Representative Will Metcalf. I think it is important the state of Texas emphasize our support for children and families. As a parent and grandparent, I know the importance of the first days and weeks of a new child's life, and the physical impact that childbirth has on a mother. I also believe offering this benefit will help attract and retain talent. Texas should support mothers and their babies and lead by example for other employers in the state.

★ BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

The legislature continues to make strides to improve broadband access across the state, and this session was no different. Representative Trent Ashby filed House Bill 9, which creates the Broadband Infrastructure Fund. The bill allocates \$1.5 billion to a new fund meant to expand internet availability. The fund itself will have to be approved by voters in a constitutional amendment election this fall. The appropriation will help finance and develop high-speed internet services and provide matching funds for federal money from various sources. This bill builds off legislation passed last session that created the Broadband Development Office (BDO). The BDO released its broadband map earlier this year which indicated that many rural areas had little or no access to service. Broadband access is essential for business, education, health care, and more. Now more than ever, it's imperative that our rural communities bridge the digital divide.

★ STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY JOINS THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM

In the summer of 2022, the Stephen F. Austin State University Board of Regents decided to explore the benefits of joining a university system. Of the six university systems in the state, four made formal invitations to SFA to join their system. Those included the University of Texas System, Texas A&M University System, Texas State University System, and the Texas Tech University System. After a thorough examination of each invitation and input from the community, the Board of Regents voted to join the University of Texas System. In order to do that, state law had to change to move SFA into the UT System. That's why I filed Senate Bill 1055 with Representative Travis Clardy. The bill moves SFA into the UT System while maintaining SFA's name, colors, mascot, and identity. This new relationship will benefit both entities and the transition began this summer.

★ COMMUNITY COLLEGE FINANCE REFORM

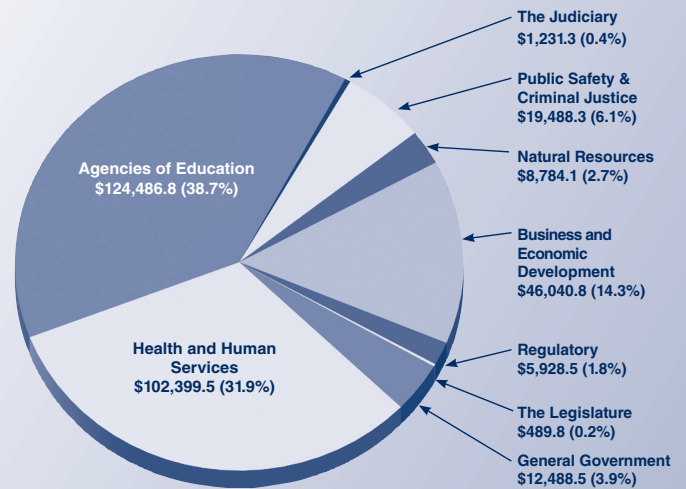
In Texas, community colleges are funded primarily by local property taxes, student tuition and fees, and state dollars. The current system gave each institution a base allotment for core operations and then more funding based on a formula driven by the number of instructional hours students received and the number of students who complete certain milestones, like degrees awarded or curriculum sequences completed. That system, over time, decreased the state's share of funding to less than 25 percent of community colleges' budgets. There was no question it was time for a change. House Bill 8, authored by Representative Gary VanDeaver, shifts the funding balance away from the old formula and to a system driven by student outcomes. Schools will be rewarded for the number of credentials awarded in high-demand industries, number of students who earn 15 credit hours and transfer to a four-year institution, or the number of students who earn 15 credit hours as part of a dual-credit program. The new formulas also increase community college funding from \$1.8 billion to about \$2.2 billion.



Sen. Nichols with students from Hudson Middle School at the Capitol.

2024-25 BIENNIUM CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON HOUSE BILL 1 LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD

FUNDING BY ARTICLE, ALL FUNDS
TOTAL = \$321,337.6 (IN MILLIONS)



NOTES: Appropriations for the 2024-25 biennium made in Article IX are included in the functional articles shown. Funding excludes Interagency Contracts. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD ID: 8117

Please note: future special sessions may affect listed budget numbers.

★ ELECTRIC VEHICLE ROAD USE EQUALIZATION

Texans are choosing alternatively fueled vehicles like electric vehicles more often. As a result, there are concerns about how they contribute to funding the maintenance of the roads which they use. Currently, Texas uses the gasoline and diesel fuel taxes to fund transportation projects. Electric vehicles do not pay these taxes, so the revenue from the fuel tax is decreasing. This negatively impacts the state's ability to fund road projects and improvements for drivers across Texas. That's why I filed Senate Bill 505. The bill simply increases the registration fee for electric vehicles to adequately compensate for the loss of state and federal gasoline fuel tax revenue. This aims to solve the growing problem fairly and provide adequate funding for the State Highway Fund.

★ ELIMINATION OF ANNUAL VEHICLE INSPECTIONS

Currently, Texas drivers are required to get their vehicles inspected on an annual basis. However, studies have shown that vehicle inspections do little to improve road safety and are unnecessary. Most modern vehicles are equipped with diagnostic systems that constantly monitor vehicle safety and detect and alert owners to potential issues, making additional inspections obsolete. So, during the 88th legislative session, the Legislature passed House Bill 3297 by Representative Cody Harris, which eliminates vehicle inspection requirements starting in 2025. Texans living in 17 counties will still have to get an emissions test annually. Those counties include Brazoria, Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, El Paso, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Johnson, Kaufman,

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 88TH SESSION

Montgomery, Parker, Rockwall, Tarrant, Travis, and Williamson. While safety is one of our top priorities, unnecessary burdens on Texas drivers should be eliminated. I was proud to cosponsor this legislation when it came to the Senate.

★ RETIRED TEACHERS COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT

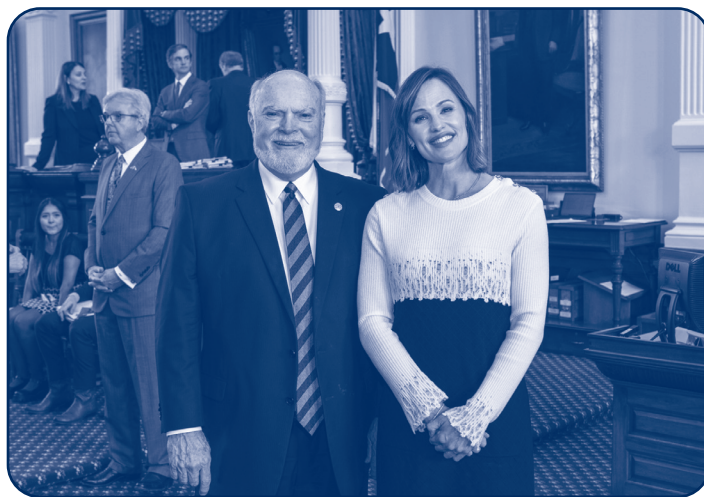
Over the past several sessions, lawmakers have made large investments into the Teacher Retirement System to ensure the fund becomes actuarially sound. This session, the TRS pension fund reached that milestone and the legislature had a substantial surplus, conditions that allowed for a cost-of-living adjustment for teachers who retired before December 31, 2021. The bill, Senate Bill 10 by Senator Huffman, also gives a bonus stipend for certain retired teachers. Retired teachers who are 75 and older will receive a bonus check of \$7,500 and retirees between the ages of 70 and 74 will receive a \$2,400 bonus check. Eligible retirees will also receive between a 2 percent and 6 percent cost-of-living adjustment depending on when they retired. The supplemental checks and the cost-of-living adjustment provides \$5 billion in benefit enhancement. The cost-of-living adjustment is subject to voter approval in November. Our retired teachers worked hard to educate the next generation of Texans. They deserve our continued support, and I was proud to coauthor this legislation with every member of the Senate.



Sen. Nichols asking questions during a Senate Finance Committee hearing on the state budget.

★ NURSING EDUCATION GRANT PROGRAMS

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the state's need for more nurses. This session lawmakers extended support for increasing the supply of nurses through expanding two key programs – the Nursing Faculty Loan Repayment Program and the Nursing Innovation Grant Program – and creating three new grant programs. The new programs include the Clinical Site Nurse Preceptor Program, the Clinical Site Innovation and Coordination Program, and the Nursing Faculty Grant Program. Taken together, these

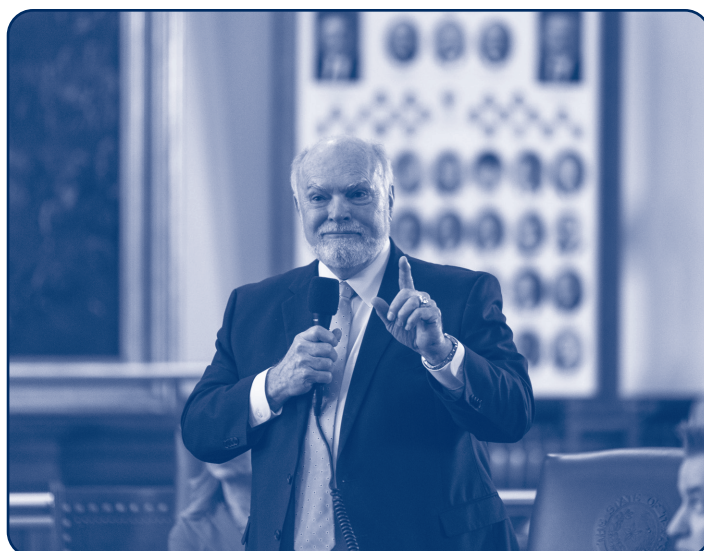


Sen. Nichols with actress Jennifer Garner, who came to the Capitol to advocate on behalf of early childhood education programs.

programs significantly increase funding for nursing programs and scholarships and increase the number of faculty to further expand nursing programs. As Texas continues to grow, ensuring we have adequate health care resources and workforce will be essential to keep Texans healthy and thriving.

★ RURAL LAW ENFORCEMENT GRANT PROGRAM

Supporting law enforcement, particularly in rural areas, is imperative to keeping Texans safe. Departments in rural communities lack resources they need to attract and retain deputies and procure equipment. During the 88th Legislative session, Senator Springer authored Senate Bill 22, which creates the grant programs for rural sheriffs' offices, constables' offices, and rural prosecutors' offices. Departments in counties with a population of 300,000 or less will be eligible to apply for these grants which will help increase minimum salaries. Minimum salaries could go up to \$75,000 for a county sheriff, \$45,000 for constables and certain deputies, and \$40,000 for jailers. I'm proud to support the brave men and women in law enforcement, especially in rural areas like East Texas.



Sen. Nichols voting 'yes' on the Senate floor.

SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS, SENATE DISTRICT 3

First elected to the Texas Senate in 2007, Robert Nichols represents 18 counties including the greater part of East and Southeast Texas.

In the Texas Senate, Nichols currently serves as Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee. Senator Nichols also serves on the Business and Commerce, Finance, Local Government, and Select Redistricting Committees. He is a member of the Legislative Audit Committee, and a former Vice-Chair of the Sunset Advisory Commission.

During his nine 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, a Champion for



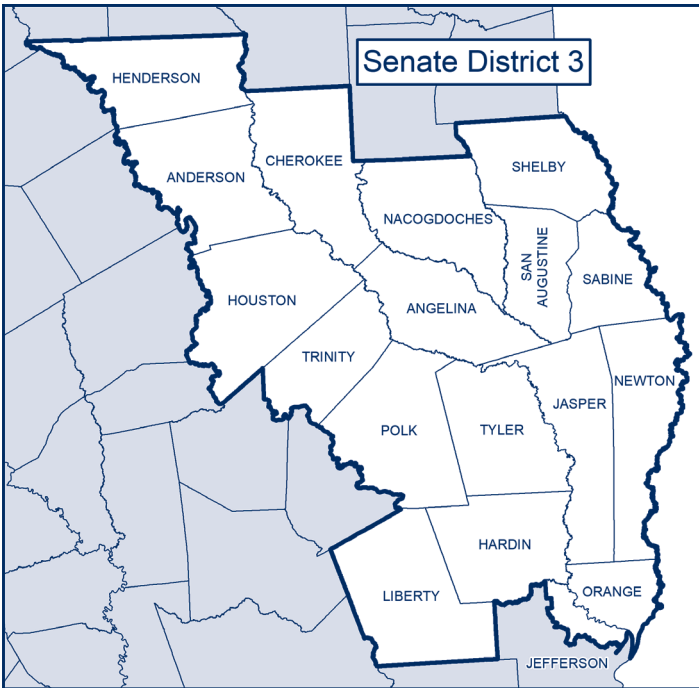
Sen. Nichols and Lt. Governor Dan Patrick discussing bills on the Senate floor.

Public Education by Raise Your Hand Texas, and a Top 10 Best Legislator for the 85th and 88th Legislative Sessions by Texas Monthly Magazine.

Before running for 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 128 foreign patents, as well as creating 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 Methodist Church in Jacksonville.



Texas Constitutional Election

This fall, Texas will have the opportunity to vote on 14 amendments to the Texas Constitution. The last day to register to vote in this election is October 10, 2023. Early voting begins October 23 and continues through November 3. Election Day is November 7, 2023.

To view a summary of these amendments please visit the Texas Secretary of State's website. 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 any of his offices listed on this document and staff will gladly send you a copy.

SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS

DISTRICT 3 OFFICES

CAPITOL P.O. Box 12068 Room E1.704 Austin, Texas 78711 (512) 463-0103 FAX: (512) 463-1526	LUMBERTON 769 S. Main St. Suite 100 Lumberton, Texas 77577 (409) 755-9893 FAX: (409) 755-9899	NACOGDOCHES 202 E. Pilar St. Suite 309 Nacogdoches, Texas 75961 (936) 564-4252 FAX: (936) 564-4276	LUFKIN 2915 Atkinson Dr. Lufkin, Texas 75901 (936) 699-4988 FAX: (936) 699-4991	JACKSONVILLE 329 Neches St. Jacksonville, Texas 75766 (903) 589-3003 FAX: (903) 589-0203
---	---	--	--	---

E-mail: robert.nichols@senate.texas.gov

The Texas Senate is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES ONLINE

Texas Senate
www.senate.texas.gov
 Texas House of Representatives
www.house.texas.gov
 Secretary of State
www.sos.texas.gov
 Texas Comptroller
www.comptroller.texas.gov
 Texas Legislature Online
www.capitol.texas.gov
 Texas Governor
www.governor.texas.gov
 Texas Attorney General
www.oag.texas.gov
 Texas Department of Agriculture
www.texasagriculture.gov
 Texas General Land Office
www.glo.texas.gov

HELPFUL TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

2 - 1 - 1
 (800) 4-CANCER
 (800) 252-8014
 (800) 621-0508
 (800) 843-5789
 (800) 252-VOTE
 (800) 772-1213
 (800) 252-9690
 (800) 848-4284
 (800) 252-9152
 (800) 252-8263
 (800) 942-3678
 (800) 458-9858
 (800) 628-5115
 (800) 252-7031
 (800) 862-5252
 (800) 558-8321

General Help & Services
 Cancer Information Service
 Child Support Hotline
 Consumer Protection Hotline
 Governor's Assist. Hotline
 Elections Division
 Social Security Administration
 Lawyer Referral Service
 Crime Victim Clearinghouse
 Immunization Hotline
 Medicaid Hotline
 WIC Hotline
 Nursing Home Complaints
 Rehabilitative Services
 Injured Worker Hotline
 Child Care Information
 Unemployment Hotline

PRSR STD
 U.S. POSTAGE
 PAID
 PERMIT NO. 2468
 AUSTIN, TEXAS

SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS

P.O. Box 12068 Austin, Texas 78711