



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols
by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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When I drive across the district meeting with community leaders, local elected officials and constituents, I am constantly reminded of how lucky we are to live in East Texas. As we soon celebrate Thanksgiving, I am thankful for the opportunity to represent Senate District 3 in Austin as your State Senator. I hope your holiday is filled with family, friends and lots of pumpkin pie.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Protecting Our Children

Earlier this month, Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick and Speaker of the House Straus sent a letter to Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Commissioner Hank Whitman, instructing him to work towards improving the protection of children at risk of abuse. The letter instructed DFPS to hire and train more investigators, address the shortage of foster homes and residential providers, create more accountability for Child Protective Services (CPS) and to enhance partnerships with faith-based communities. This letter was in response to reports of children not being seen in a timely manner by CPS.

The Senate Finance Committee held a hearing to discuss these issues and hear from DFPS on how they plan to improve child safety as well as receive an update on CPS initiatives which were funded in the previous session. The Legislature will be addressing this issue immediately and during the upcoming session to ensure children in our state are protected.

2. First Day to File Bills

In preparation for the 85th Legislative Session, my office and others have begun to work on drafts and will be able to begin filing bills on November 14. Many of the ideas we get for legislation come from those in the district who have presented issues affecting themselves or their community. Not all problems constitute the need for a new law, but on the *rare* occasion one is necessary, my office is ready to work with you on those issues. I intend to file legislation which addresses the concerns of SD 3 as well as the state. I will continue to keep you updated as we continue in the process for the upcoming session and look forward to working for you in the Texas Senate.

3. Starting the Budget

Over the past month, state agencies and universities presented their Legislative Appropriations Requests (LAR) to the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees, Legislative Budget Board as well as the Governor and Lt. Governor's staff. These LAR's give the agencies a chance to discuss their budget request for the next two years, as well as to present exceptional items for projects requiring additional funding beyond their regular budget.

These hearings are just the beginning of creating the state's budget for the next two years. All of the information will be put together and presented to the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees to begin reviewing, as well as hold hearings. The primary purpose, and only constitutionally required task, of a legislative session is to prepare and pass a balance state budget for the upcoming two fiscal years. As a member of Senate Finance, I will work hard to help pass a balanced budget while limiting unnecessary spending.

4. Commemorating Texas' History

To ensure the history of our state is preserved for generations to come, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) oversees the states historical markers. These commemorate the history and architecture of houses and buildings, military sites, events which changed the course of local and state history and honor individuals who made lasting contributions to our state and local communities.

The THC is currently accepting applications for subject markers, designated Historic Texas Cemeteries (HTC), and Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL) markers. Age, significance and architectural requirements govern the eligibility of topics and sites when applying for subject, HTC and RTHL markers. Applications are due by **November 15, 2016**. If you would like to see a site in your county or community preserved, please contact the THC's History Programs Division at 512-463-5853 or to download a toolkit to help in the application process please visit thc.state.tx.us/markertoolkit.

5. Veterans Day

Veterans Day, which was originally known as Armistice Day, commemorated the ending of World War I in 1918. In 1954, President Eisenhower changed the name to ensure all U.S. Veterans were included. On November 11th, we will pay tribute to all American veterans and their services to our country. If you have a Veteran in your life, I encourage you to honor and thank them for the sacrifices they made to ensure we have our freedom.

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