



My five cents...

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

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Happy New Year! I hope your year has started off with a bang, as I know mine has with the start of session.

During this legislative session, as a way to help you keep up with important issues, I will be writing this column once a week to share things I hope are of interest to you which are happening at *your* Texas Capitol each week.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. 85th Legislative Session Begins

On January 10th, the 85th Legislative Session began. Set to last 140 days during odd-numbered years, the session is the time the Texas Legislature has to pass a two-year budget and address existing and proposed new laws. It has and continues to be one of my greatest honors to represent you in the Legislature. Part of the oath of office all members of the Legislature take, calls for us to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of our great state. This is a great reminder that in the busyness of session, legislators should never stray from the guiding principles of our Constitution. I take this pledge very seriously and strive to represent you well in Austin.

2. States Revenue Estimates

The primary purpose, and only constitutionally required task, of a legislative session is to prepare and pass a balanced state budget for the upcoming two fiscal years. To provide the Legislature with a guideline as to what revenue is available, State Comptroller Glen Hegar released his Biennial Revenue Estimate. He estimates \$104.9 billion in state revenue will be available for general-purpose spending in the two-year budget period, beginning on September 1st. This number guides the members as we prepare the state's budget.

This estimate is down by a significant amount compared to the last biennium. While this will create several challenges for our state, I will be working with my colleagues on the Senate Finance Committee to ensure we are able to find greater efficiencies in our state budget, making sure to get the most out of every state dollar.

3. DETCOG Reception

The night before the 85th Legislative Session began, many residents from Senate District 3, including County and City Judges, Commissioner and Mayors, attended the Deep East Texas Council of Governments reception. It was a great show of involvement from the people of East Texas who are making their voices heard at the Capitol.

I look forward to working with members of this delegation and would encourage more constituents to become involved. Seeing you at the Capitol is a reminder to me of who I represent in the Texas Senate. As always, feel free to contact your Senate office if my staff or I can assist you.

4. Last Sunset Advisory Commission Meeting

This week the Sunset Advisory Commission held its final meeting to make recommendations for reforming state agencies. One of the recommendations voted on was to create the Texas Behavioral Health Executive Council which would house the boards for Psychologists, Marriage and Family Therapists, Professional Counselors and Social Workers. The Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselors and the Council on Sex Offender Treatment would also be regulated by this Council. Each board will maintain its autonomy in creating rules, but will have increased resources to assist in administrative tasks as well as to address enforcement issues. We also voted on recommendations for the Optometry Board, Texas Medical Board and the Texas Department of Transportation.

All of the recommendations the Commission has voted on over the last year will now be drafted into bills, to be considered by the Legislature. I look forward to continuing to work on these important pieces of legislation to ensure our state's government is working as efficiently as possible.

5. Working with House Members

Within Senate District 3 there are 10 House Districts. As we represent many of the same individuals, my office works closely with the House offices all year round to ensure we are able to effectively advocate for the people we represent at home. We are blessed to have such great House members to represent East Texas.

Each session, I make it a priority to work with each state representative to discuss issues they are working on, as well as to share my goals for the next few months. As I am sure you understand, working with the House is important because no bill can be passed by a single chamber. Close coordination ensures that the voice of East Texas is heard loud and clear in our state's legislature.

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