



My five cents...

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

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Contact: Sydni Mitchell
Tel: 512-463-0103

Many times the pace of the legislative session can get a little hectic. I often tell my staff that session is more like a marathon than a sprint. We well on our way through our marathon, as we have just passed the 70th day, which is the half-way point of the session.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. License to Carry

At the beginning of this week, I laid out Senate Bill 16, which lowers the fee Texans pay to obtain a license to carry or concealed carry license by \$100, making it one of the lowest in the country. Currently, Texas has the highest fees in the nation to obtain a license, which imposes an undue burden on Texans constitutional right to bear arms through these means. The proposed \$40 fee would cover the necessary cost by the state for county, state and federal background checks. The license renewal would also be lowered from \$70 to \$40.

2. Senate Finance Committee Approves Budget

Over the past few months, I have shared with you the process of the Senate Finance Committee as we work towards approving a budget for the upcoming biennium. After weeks of hearing from each agency in the state, as well as our time in workgroups, the Committee has voted out their version of the budget. This budget fully funds public education, including funding for student enrollment growth, and increases the appropriation for Child Protective Services, which includes funding to strengthen foster care capacity and retention of staff. It also increases funding for mental health in the state, as well as funding for new construction and repairs for our states hospital system and dedicated funds for transportation.

3. School Choice Hearing

This week, the Senate Committee on Education held a hearing on Senate Bill 3, also known as 'School Choice', which would give public funds to parents who want to put their children in private schools or public charter schools. This bill would establish education savings accounts and tax credit scholarships, which parents could use for tuition, educational software, tutoring for

home school students, or stay in public school and get funding for transportation to go to another public school.

I believe education is and always will be the most important issue the Legislature considers. As a state we have a responsibility to ensure our future generations are receiving an education which will help them to become productive and contributing members of society. When I was elected to serve as Senator, I pledged to represent Senate District 3 to the best of my ability. As this bill continues through the legislative process, I will keep the feedback from those within my district in mind.

4. Grants for Veterans Mental Health

This month, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) announced they will award up to \$10 million in grant funding to community collaboratives across the state to help Texas veterans and their families with mental health issues. These grants are intended to improve the quality of life of Texas veterans by helping local communities to expand the availability, increase access and enhance delivery of mental health treatment and services.

This program was established by a bill, which was passed last session, providing the funding to be matched with local and private funds by grantees demonstrating a commitment to addressing mental health needs of not only veterans, but also their families in their local communities. More than 10,000 veterans are projected to be served through these programs. For more information on accessing behavioral health services in Texas, please visit <https://MentalHealthTX.org>. You can also find more information on services for Texas veterans, their families and survivors by visiting <https://veterans.portal.texas.gov>.

5. Official Breakfast Item of Texas

We all know the bluebonnet is the official flower of Texas, the states nickname is "The Lone Star State", and the Mockingbird is our state bird. However, did you know that pecan pie is our official pie, our official fish is the Guadalupe bass, or that the official footwear of Texans is the cowboy boot? These important designations are often done during a legislative session, and this session is no different. House Concurrent Resolution 92 has been filed to make the breakfast taco the official breakfast item of Texas. Often as popular as barbecue and chili, the breakfast taco has become a popular item, no matter what type, for all Texans.

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