



My five cents...

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

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While preparing your taxes this month, Texans can be thankful we are one of only seven states with no state income tax. Lower taxes and efficient government are just a few things which makes Texas a great place to live, own a business and raise a family.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. License to Carry

This week, Senate Bill 16 was passed on the Senate floor. This bill 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. I am thankful to Lt. Governor Patrick and my colleagues in the Senate for helping to pass this important piece of legislation.

2. Senate Passes Budget

The Texas Senate has unanimously passed their version of the budget for the next two-years. This was the first time a budget has been passed unanimously by the Senate since 2005. This budget fully funds public education, including funding for student enrollment growth. It also ensures that Child Protective Services receives an additional \$450 million. It also increases funding for mental health in the state, including funding to help eliminate waitlists for community mental health services. Funding is also appropriated for new construction and repairs for our states hospital system and dedicated funds for transportation. When the Texas House passes their version of the budget, the two chambers will come together to work out the differences.

3. Voter ID

The Texas Senate has approved Senate Bill 5, which would revamp the state's rules for voter identification. This is in response to a court ruling that the current law may discriminate against minority voters. The bill allows an individual to vote without first presenting a photo id, if they

present an alternate form of ID and sign an affidavit swearing to a 'reasonable impediment' to obtaining a photo id. There is also a penalty of up to 10 years in prison, if an individual 'intentionally' makes a false claim on the sworn document. Senate Bill 5 allows voters older than 70 to still be able to vote with an expired, but otherwise acceptable photo ID. This bill will now be sent to the Texas House.

4. Adoption Legislation

The Senate State Affairs Committee heard testimony on two bills related to adoption this week. Senate Bill 329 would allow adult adoptees in Texas to more easily access their birth certificates and medical history. Adoption records are confidential under current law, however, when an adopted person turns 18 they can request a judge to grant a court order to open the sealed file. Senate Bill 329, would allow an adopted adult to gain access to their birth records and birth certificate without a court order.

Senate Bill 1362 seeks to promote the Texas Vital Statistics Unit, a state entity which maintains all vital record data for Texans, and the Voluntary Central Adoption Registry (CAR). The CAR aims to reunite adopt adoptees with their biological parents. They currently release information after both the registered birth parents on the list and the child complete a one-hour counseling session ahead of their reunion. The purpose of the bill is to raise awareness of these programs, while maintaining closed adoptions for those who choose that.

5. Important Moments in Texas History

This week was a very important one in Texas history. This week in 1945, the Battleship Texas supported the landings for the battle of Okinawa, which was the final great amphibious assault during World War II. This great ship, which also served in World War I, carried many soldiers and provided support during landings all throughout World War II. When it was retired, it was given to the State of Texas and now sits as a memorial at the San Jacinto Monument in Houston.

Another important day this week was in 1836, where at least 342 Texas were executed by the Mexican army at Goliad. This tragic incident, which became known as the 'Goliad Massacre', brought the people of Texas to attention in realizing the cruelty of Santa Ana. Goliad joined the Alamo as a rallying cry and helped motivate those fighting for Texas Independence.

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