



My five cents...

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

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As both Chambers have passed their versions of the state's budget, The Lt. Governor has appointed five Senate members to a conference committee, who along with the appointed House members will work out the differences between the different versions. The clock is winding down for this session, but I am confident we will come to an agreement and pass the state's budget.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. Convention of States

House Joint Resolution 39, which is identical to Senate Joint Resolution 2 passed by the Texas Senate, was recently heard in a Texas House committee. These resolutions call for a convention of states, which is a gathering of at least two-thirds of the state's legislatures with the purpose of proposing amendments to the U.S. Constitution. This is possible through Article V of the Constitution, which was created to provide states with a tool to stop potential abuses of power by the federal government. These resolutions could enact term limits for U.S. officials, as well as impose spending limits and limit the powers of the federal government.

2. School Finance Bills

This week, the Senate Education Committee heard a number of bills related to the state's school finance system, which contains some provisions based on costs from almost 30 years ago. Senate Bill 2145 proposes a new funding system and would provide the same per student funding for school districts, with additional money for specific student groups such as disabled students and English language learners.

When the school finance system was ruled unconstitutional in 2005, the Legislature cut local property taxes by a third. To make up the difference in revenue for those school districts, the Additional State Aide for Tax Reduction (ASATR) was created to ensure school districts would receive the same amount of funding they received in 2005-06 school year. In 2011, the Legislature decided this program should end September 2017. Senate Bill 419 would extend this date to ensure many school districts would not be negatively affected by the loss of this promised funding.

3. Legislature Timeline

As I write this column, we have a little over a month left till the end of this legislative session. While that might sound like there is a lot of time left, we are getting down to some important deadlines. Senate Committees are finishing up their hearings of Senate bills and will soon start hearing bills which have been sent over from the House Chamber. An important thing to take note, is that if a Senate or House bill is not heard and voted out of their respective chamber committees in the next two weeks, those bills will likely die for lack of time left to go through the legislative process. It will be a busy few weeks, but I look forward to continuing to work hard for Senate District 3.

4. Emergency Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday

Many Texans are familiar with the tax free holiday in August, but did you know you can buy tax free emergency preparedness supplies from April 22nd - 24th? Created during the 84th Legislative Session, this tax free holiday ensures Texans are able to be prepared for the next potential fire, flood or tornado.

There is no limit on the number of qualifying items a person can purchase, including:

- Portable generators (less than \$3,000)
- Hurricane Shutters and emergency ladders (less than \$300)
- Batteries, carbon monoxide detectors, coolers and ice chests, first aid kits, fuel containers, fire extinguishers, ect. (less than \$75).

To find out more information on items that do and do not qualify you can visit <https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/publications/98-1017.php>.

5. San Jacinto Day

On April 21st, we commemorate San Jacinto Day, which honors the 178th anniversary of the Battle of San Jacinto between the Texan and Mexican armies. In 1835, after the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed, Mexican President Santa Anna brought his army to Texas to suppress the uprising of support for Texas independence. While the Texans lost a number of areas to Santa Anna, they were not going to back down without a fight.

On April 21, 1836, our forces fought and won the Battle of San Jacinto, also capturing General Santa Anna. After this triumphant victory, Texas became fully independent from Mexico. While the battle only lasted 18 minutes, hundreds of Mexicans were killed, injured or captured while only nine Texan soldiers were killed and 26 were wounded. We have those brave men and women to thank for our beautiful state.

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