



# My five cents...

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

For immediate release  
May 4, 2017  
word count: 748

Contact: Sydni Mitchell  
Tel: 512-463-0103

In classrooms at schools and colleges across Texas, students are counting down the days until they can start their summer vacation. In an almost identical countdown, legislators are marking the days left until the end of session. As I write this, we have 25 days left in the 85th Legislative Session.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol:

## **1. Veterans Agriculture Exemption**

In Texas, you can receive an agriculture property tax exemption if your property has been in production of income for five of seven years. Unfortunately, this rule can negatively affect the individuals who serve in the United States armed forces. Many times they are deployed or stationed outside of Texas and unable to file the appropriate documents or keep the property in production of income.

I am carrying House Bill 777 by Rep. Ashby, in the Senate which amends the tax code to allow armed service members who are deployed or stationed outside of the state, the ability to maintain eligibility for this exemption. The intended use of the land must be resumed to the manner it was previously, not later than 180 days after the date the owner returns.

## **2. Individual Graduation Committees**

During the 84th Legislative Session, Senate Bill 149 was passed and established 'individual graduation committees' to help students graduate if they have failed to pass the required state exams. These students must meet the requirements from the individual graduation committee, made up of teachers, principals and counselors. The students attendance records, performance in classes, tests , and class projects are used to determine if a student should be allowed to graduate through a committee.

This provision was originally to expire in September 2017. This week, Senator Seliger passed Senate Bill 463 to extend this expiration date to September 2019. I was proud to co-author this bill, which ensures all students have the opportunity to succeed.

### **3. Appealing A Property Appraisal**

Current law requires a property owner to appear in person or submit a written affidavit in a property tax protest. This requirement can be restrictive to property owners for multiple reasons. Those opting to protest in person must take valuable time away from work or family, but in doing so can more effectively argue their opinion. This is especially difficult for individuals who own property on which they do not regularly reside. Those opting not to appear in person do not have to give up their time. These protestors may not be effective in arguing their position through writing.

House Bill 455 by Representative Metcalf seeks to accommodate these difficulties by allowing a property tax protester to appear at their protest hearing via telephone conference call with the Appraisal Review Board. Property owners can therefore thoroughly explain their arguments without sacrificing time or travelling long distances. I was proud to carry this bill in the Senate as I believe this will help to alleviate burdens on property owners and taxpayers.

### **4. Nominations Committee**

One aspect of state government many are not aware of is governmental appointments. The Governor of Texas makes approximately 3,000 appointments during a four-year term to various state boards and commissions. Some of those include the Animal Health Commission and the Texas Pharmacy Board.

While the Governor appoints these positions, the Senate must confirm the individual positions. Having served previously on the Senate Nominations Committee, I am very aware of the impact state boards have on Texas. Our East Texas communities are blessed with many individuals whose expertise could benefit our state as a whole and I encourage you to get involved. For an application and more information, please visit [www.governor.state.tx.us/appointments](http://www.governor.state.tx.us/appointments).

### **5. Choice in Annexation**

State law currently allows a city, every year, to annex an equivalent of up to 10 percent of its incorporated land, from its extraterritorial land, which could be up to a 5-mile area which surrounds city limits. While the city is not required to get the residents' approval, it does have to issue various levels of advance notice, depending on how many people live in the area if there is a long term annexation agreement in place. Areas with more than 100 homes usually receive about 3 years notice.

The Senate has passed Senate Bill 715 which would instead require cities to get the consent of more than half of the property owners in the area proposed to be annexed. If an area has less than 200 residents, a petition would be involved. For larger areas, they would have to hold an election.

###