



My five cents...

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

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On April 21, 1836, Texans fought and won the Battle of San Jacinto to defend Texas independence, also capturing General Santa Anna. After this 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. This month, let us not forget the brave men and women we have to thank for our beautiful state, as we celebrate the 182nd anniversary of the Battle of San Jacinto.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Liquor Laws in Texas

With a U.S. District judges recent ruling, Texas could soon join 31 other states which allow big-box retailers, such as Costco, Walmart and Target, to sell liquor in their stores. Currently state law prohibits these publicly traded retailers from selling hard liquor in their stores, while privately held retailers have been able to do so. Walmart has filed a federal lawsuit against the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, stating the current laws unfairly gave multiple permits to family-owned businesses while keeping larger retailers out of the game. While this ruling may overturn that law, it can still be appealed. Current state law requires large retailers, such as Walmart, to sell liquor out of a space separate from its main stores, and with its own entrance.

2. Sunset Commission

I am currently serving my third term on the Sunset Advisory Commission, which helps to keep our state's government efficient, by requiring the existence of an agency to be legislatively justified and to go through the Sunset process approximately every 12 years. We will soon hold our first hearing on April 25th and hear reports on the Texas Medical Board, Texas Historical Commission, Texas Veterans Commission, and Behavioral Health agencies including the Boards of Marriage and Family Therapists, Psychologists, Social Workers, and Licensed Professional Counselors. If you would like to find out more information on these agencies or learn how you can participate, through submitting comments online or attending the hearing you can visit <https://www.sunset.texas.gov/meetings>.

3. Sanctuary Cities

During the 84th Legislative Session, Senate Bill 4 was passed which banned entities, such as cities, counties and colleges, from implementing policies to refuse to enforce federal immigration laws. After its bill signing in May 2017, Texas was sued by various local governments who were trying to stop the law from going into effect. The 5th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals recently ruled the majority of the bill was constitutional, and Texas could enforce the law. An injunction is still in place on a provision in the bill which punishes local officials for "endorsing" policies that would prohibit or limit enforcement of immigration laws specifically. However, they are still prohibited from 'adopting or enforcing' policies which specifically prohibit or limit enforcement of immigration laws. This bill was listed as one of the four legislative priorities by Governor Abbott at the beginning of the 84th Session.

4. Lone Star Legislative Summit

I would like to invite you to attend the Seventh biennial Lone Star Legislative Summit in Nacogdoches on April 13th, where we are bringing Austin and Washington to East Texas. The day will consist of various panels covering topics such as the future of healthcare in Texas, how to recruit and retain teachers, how to grow the tourist industry in Texas, and explore how Texas has become the energy leader of the world. All events are open to the public and all panel discussions are free to attend. To find out more information about the summit and to register, please visit <http://www.nacogdoches.org/LSLS>.

5. Spring Time in Texas

There is no better indication that Spring has come to Texas than to see the wildflowers, bluebonnets specifically, as you drive down a Texas Highway. In 1901, the Texas Legislature adopted the bluebonnet as our state's flower and in 1930 the Highway Department, now known as the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), began a beautification program which led to bluebonnets being grown along most major highways throughout the state. Each year, TxDOT sows around 30,000 pounds of bluebonnet seeds.

Although, most of us have been told that it is illegal to pick bluebonnet, that is actually a myth. There is no law against it, however, laws do exist against damaging rights of ways, which includes digging up clumps of flowers or driving into fields. Please exercise caution when pulling over on the highway, and most importantly enjoy and help to preserve our beautiful state flower.

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