



My five cents...

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

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Did you know in July of 1832, a band of settlers in Nacogdoches attacked the town's Mexican garrison and took back the town in answer to an order requiring Texans to surrender their weapons? While not well known, the Battle of Nacogdoches, not only freed East Texas from Mexican military rule, but also served as the starting point of the Texas Revolution and led to our state becoming what it is today.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Texas Top State for Business

Earlier this month, CNBC announced that Texas had been named America's top state to do business in 2018. Texas was given top scores for quality of life, cost of living, technology and innovation. In addition, our great state's access to capital, a business friendly environment, the cost of doing business, as well as opportunities to receive a top grade education helped achieve this high ranking. In the last decade, Texas has added over 1.7 million jobs, with almost 350,000 of those in the last year. Texas is home to some of the nation's largest privately-held companies, including supermarket H-E-B and the Neiman Marcus group.

2. New Revenue for Texas

In July, Comptroller Glen Hegar told state lawmakers that due to the rise of oil prices and production, as well as an unexpected increase in sales tax dollars due to spending by Texans, the estimated revenue for the state is expected to increase by approximately \$2.8 billion. Comptroller Hegar has also predicted there will be almost \$12 billion in the Economic Stabilization Fund (also known as the Rainy Day fund) at the end of fiscal year 2019. This would be the largest ending balance in the Rainy Day fund's history. This is all good news as the Legislature begins its planning for the upcoming legislative session. While determining the state's budget for the next biennium, we must consider our priorities and covering the cost of damage caused by Hurricane Harvey.

3. Funding for Hurricane Relief

It has been almost a year since Hurricane Harvey made landfall with its historic rain falls and caused extensive damage across much of Texas. The federal government recently announced that Texas will receive more than \$5 billion from the federal government for flood control projects, repairs and studies. Almost \$4 billion of this will go towards constructing almost 27 miles of coastal levees in southern Orange County and to shore up existing coastal levees in Port Arthur and Freeport. The rest of the funding will be spent on various studies and flood control projects around the Houston area. The Federal government has also allocated \$1.9 million to the Army Corps-General Land office to be used for a study to determine which projects will best protect the Texas coast from future hurricane storm surges.

4. Election Maps

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of allowing Texas to keep its congressional and state district maps. However, there was one exception, as they believed racial discrimination was used when drawing one House district in North Texas. The case was then sent back to a lower court for final decisions. That court, a three-judge federal panel in San Antonio, recently ruled that all of the state's district maps should stay in place for the 2018 elections, despite the issues with the one House district. The state, and those who oppose how the maps were drawn have until August 6 to share with the court what changes, if any, should be made to the house district in question. If not before, the maps will be reconsidered and redrawn in the 2020 census.

5. Tax Free Holiday

As the beginning of the school year draws near, it's time to start thinking about back to school shopping. Timed to help families during back-to-school shopping, the annual sales tax holiday will provide customers the ability to buy clothing and school supplies priced under \$100 without paying state or local taxes.

This year it will be held on August 10-12th. The law exempts most clothing, footwear, school supplies and backpacks priced under \$100 from sales and use taxes, which could save shoppers about \$8 on every \$100 they spend. The law also allows layaway purchases of these items to qualify for the sales tax exemption. All sellers in the state are required to honor the sales tax holiday, so it's a great time to get prepared for the upcoming school year while saving some money in the process.

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