



My five cents...

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

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Contact: Sydni Mitchell
Tel: 512-463-0103

We will soon celebrate Labor Day, and while that is usually a sign we should soon welcome Fall the temperatures outside are not reflecting that. I hope you have a safe, and cool, Labor Day weekend with friends and family.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Sunset Advisory Commission

This month, the Sunset Advisory Commission met to vote on several recommendations for agencies including the Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Texas Military Department and the Finance Commission of Texas. We also heard testimony on new agencies including the School Land Board and The Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

One of the most debated issues we voted on was a recommendation to close inefficient DPS offices across the state. I have heard from many individuals in not only Senate District 3, but also across the state who were concerned their local DPS office would close. I am pleased to share the Sunset Commission unanimously voted to not close those offices. These offices provide an essential service to not only rural areas, but the entire state. The Legislature will continue to study this issue and ensure the people of Texas are provided the services they need.

2. School Visits and Accountability

As a Texas State Senator, education has always been a top priority of mine. I represent a predominantly rural area, where the concerns and needs of its school districts vary from those of a more urban district. Before each Legislative session, I make a special tour to meet with the 101 Superintendents from each school district in Senate District 3, and whoever they would like to bring with them. This provides me with the opportunity to learn how we can best ensure our students have the educational tools they need to be successful. I appreciate the Superintendents for taking the time to meet with me, as my staff and I begin this tour.

As the newest school accountability scores have been released by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), I look forward to discussing with the superintendents their views on these scores and how

they can be used to benefit our school districts. TEA has recently launched www.txschools.org which can be utilized to look up your school district to find their performance score, funding for the district, enrollment, and information about each individual campus.

3. Protecting Our Schools

The Senate Select Committee on Violence in Schools and School Security, which was created after the school shooting in Santa Fe, recently released their interim report with policy recommendations to be considered during the upcoming Legislative session. The report included recommendations to increase security by adding funding for metal detectors, alarm systems, cameras and the school marshal program. School infrastructure and facility design was also discussed to ensure best practices are being utilized. They also made recommendations to expand mental health first aid training for school staff, and to consider methods to increase the number of counselors and school psychologists in schools. To read the entire report from the Select Committee, you can visit <https://senate.texas.gov/cmte.php?c=565>.

4. Busy Week at Capitol

The end of August reminded me of session in some ways as we had multiple committee hearings in one week. The Senate Transportation Committee, of which I am Chair, met to discuss funding and project selection for future projects in the statewide transportation plan utilized by the Texas Department of Transportation. We also discussed toll road penalties and how toll authorities can improve customer service and eliminate those penalties were are not justified.

The Senate Business and Commerce Committee, on which I serve, also met to discuss legislation passed in previous legislative sessions which deregulated certain occupational licenses, as well as reviewing licensing requirements and fees which entities must meet. We heard testimony on social media privacy laws, and any access issues that may exist regarding digital access for descendants.

5. National Hunting and Fishing Day

A great pastime of many Texans is hunting and fishing, and this is especially true in East Texas where we are blessed with numerous lakes and vast hunting opportunities. I would encourage you to celebrate National Hunting and Fishing Day which is set for September 22nd, 2018. This day is an annual celebration of the contribution hunters and fishermen make in conserving and protecting the wild resources of the state. Through license sales hunters and anglers help pay for most fish and wildlife conservation program in the state, ensuring opportunities and preservation for generations to come.