



My five cents...

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

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Happy New Year! I hope your holidays were filled with family and good food, as I know mine were.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. 86th Legislative Session

When you hear from me next, the Texas Legislature will have begun the 86th Legislative Session, which is set to last for 140 days. During this time, the Legislature must pass a two-year budget as well as address existing laws and consider new legislation. To stay involved with what is going on during Session, you can visit www.capitol.state.tx.us. Through this site, you will be able to view a live stream of Senate and House committee hearings as well as watching both chambers when they are in session. You can also look up bills that may interest or concern you.

Another way to keep track of what is happening in Austin is to watch out for this column, as I will be writing it weekly to keep you up to date on what is going on at your State Capitol. It has been an honor to serve as your state Senator since 2007 and I look forward to this next year and working together to make a difference for our state.

2. Sunset Hearing

This month, the Texas Sunset Commission held a two day hearing where we heard testimony and discussed agencies including the State Office of Risk Management and State Securities Board. The second day we voted on recommendations for the Texas Real Estate Commission and heard testimony on the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association and the Texas Board of Professional Land Surveying. Those agencies whose recommendations we heard for the first time will be voted on when we meet at our next meeting on January 9, 2019. These recommendations will then be turned into legislation which must pass in the upcoming session to continue these agencies.

3. Texas Bullion Depository Opening

In previous columns I have written about the Texas Bullion Depository which was established by the 84th Legislative Session, and is the first state administered depository in the United States. Other depositories have been run by the federal government or private industries. While a temporary facility was created earlier this year, a groundbreaking was held at the beginning of December at its permanent location. The 40,000 square foot facility, which is expected to be finished in late 2019, will be built on 10 acres of land near Leander. It will contain the largest Class 3 vault in the State, weighing as much as 10 NASA space shuttles, and have the capacity to hold up to \$350 billion in precious metals.

4. Historic Grants

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) has announced that owners of rapidly deteriorating historic or archaeological resources such as properties or historic sites can apply for grant funding until January 31, 2019. They must address issues of ethnic diversity, and other historically underserved subjects, groups, and property types. Heritage education projects which involve training and education about historic resources and preservation techniques are also eligible for these grants. THC estimates that each grant recipient would receive a grant in an amount of \$10,000 to \$30,000 with a one-to-one cash match required. Projects will be scored on endangerment, significance and project viability. To find out more information about these important grants, you can visit thc.texas.gov/tptf.

5. Confederate Plaque at Capitol

In the last year, there has been much discussion surrounding a plaque hanging in the Texas Capitol which was installed by the Children of the Confederacy in 1959 and claims the underlying cause of the Civil War was not to sustain slavery. As preservation of slavery was listed in the documents calling for the secession of Texas from the U.S., this has been proven false. Those calling for the removal of the plaque state that it is providing an untrue story and perspective. In addition to the removal, as it is a historical plaque, there was confusion as to who could authorize the removal.

In November, Attorney General Paxton opined that several groups could do it including a vote from the Legislature and the State Preservation Board, which oversees the Capitol. Governor Abbott has called a meeting of the State Preservation Board the beginning of January to discuss the best way to ensure we are not trying to erase history by removing the plaque, but ensuring that we are providing historically accurate information.

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