



My five cents...

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

For immediate release
January 17, 2019
word count: 742

Contact: Sydni Mitchell
Tel: 512-463-0103

The Legislature has ended our second week of session, and we will continue to pick up the pace as the long race ahead continues.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. Inauguration

On Tuesday, Governor Greg Abbott and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick took their oaths of office and have each begun their second terms of office. In both of their inaugural addresses they focused on keeping increases to property taxes at a minimum, overhauling the state's method of funding school districts, and providing pay increases for teachers. The inauguration festivities after inaugural ceremony, paid for with private donations, included a BBQ on the Capitol lawn and an inaugural ball that evening.

2. House and Senate Budgets

The House and Senate have each filed their version of the base budget, which will serve as the basis for budget negotiations. The Senate's budget, which contains \$243 billion overall for the biennium, includes a \$4.3 billion increase in public education spending, a \$178.5 million increase for Child Protective Services, as well as an increase in funding for the prevention, investigation and prosecution of human trafficking related activities.

Over the next few months the Senate and House will not only reconcile the differences between the two budgets, but will also continue to make new changes and alterations. Some of my priorities this session are reducing property taxes and ensuring our schools districts are funded equitably. This includes providing them with the means to increase their teachers salaries in a way that works for their individual districts.

3. Pay Increases for Teachers

Over the past few years, there have been many conversations regarding education, and specifically teacher pay raises. The average salary for a teacher in Texas is \$53,000, with the

average starting salary starting at just about \$47,000. However, for most teachers in school districts within Senate District 3, the average can be much lower.

Senate Bill 3, filed by Senator Nelson, would provide a \$5,000 raise to all full-time classroom teachers within the state. With approximately 350,000 classroom teachers in Texas, this would be a \$3.7 billion increase in the school finance budget over the next two years. The bill proposes building a new formula into the school finance system that would then distribute funding to each school district based upon the number of full-time teachers each district employs. The school districts would be required to use that funding only for raises of salaries from the previous year.

4. Confederate Plaque

In a previous column, I wrote about the upcoming meeting of the Texas Preservation Board in which they would discuss whether to remove of the Children of the Confederacy plaque, which was hung in 1959 and claimed the underlying cause of the Civil War was not to sustain slavery. This was proven false, as preservation of slavery was listed in the documents calling for the secession of Texas. The Preservation Board, which includes the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, members of the House and Senate and a public member, voted late last week to remove the plaque from its place in the Capitol. It is still unclear where it will be located after its removal.

5. Timeline for Session

I am often asked why the Texas Legislature does not meet every year. My answer is the framers of the Texas Constitution envisioned a citizen legislature which only meets every other year for 140 days, and is therefore unable to infringe too much on citizens' lives. Many years later, their vision is still being fulfilled.

There are many provisions written into our rules which ensure we are placing a value on our time and only the most pressing issues are able to be addressed. An example of this would be that no legislation can be fully passed in the first 60 days of session. The exception to this rule is if the Governor designates a specific item for emergency legislation. There is a saying in the Capitol that "time kills bad bills" and I have found this to be true

Below are some important dates to keep in mind for this session:

- March 8th - This is the last day bills in the Senate and House can be filed.
- May 27th - This is the final day of the 86th regular session, which happens to fall on Memorial Day.
- June 16th - This is the last day the Governor can sign or veto bills passed during the regular legislative session.

###