



# My five cents...

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

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The third week of session has been a busy one, with the pace beginning to pick up. The fun is only beginning for this legislative session.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

**1. Committee assignments.** Late last week, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick released the Senate committee assignments for the 86th legislative session.

I am honored to continue to serve as chair for the Transportation Committee, as well vice chair of Business and Commerce, and a member of the Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations committees.

I am grateful to Patrick for these opportunities and look forward to working with all of my colleagues in the Senate to serve the people of Texas.

**2. Senate Finance.** The Senate Finance Committee, on which I serve, have begun their hearings on the state's budget. Over the next few weeks we will hear the legislative appropriations requests from every state agency and higher education institutions, as well as public testimony. These requests are a starting point to determine their budget needs for the next two years.

The hearings this week have focused on Article I, General Government, which includes the Texas Comptroller, Library and Archives Commission, Veterans Commission and Office of the Attorney General.

Next week we will be hearing from public safety, judiciary, natural resources and business and economic development agencies like the Department of Motor Vehicles and Workforce Commission.

**3. Texas Mental Health Consortium.** In a sometimes rare occurrence, all 31 members of the Senate have signed on as co-authors of SB 63, which creates the Texas Mental Health Consortium. This consortium will be made up of an advisory board of representatives from the state's health-related higher education institutions and nonprofit organizations that focus on mental health.

The consortium will work together to find ways to improve early identification and access to mental health services, addressing psychiatry workforce issues, promote and coordinate mental health research and strengthen judicial training on juvenile mental health.

Over the past several sessions, the Legislature has made significant progress on mental health through funding and other resources. With an increase in youth suicide rates and with recent school shootings, it is important that resources are provided to pediatricians, schools and families to ensure these children are able to receive adequate treatments and help.

The state also has seen a shortage in mental health professionals, which creates a barrier in services. These institutions not only are training these professionals, but they also have a wide array of expertise and resources that can help to meet the challenges in meeting the mental health needs of Texans.

**4. Get involved.** I believe ensuring accessibility and transparency are some of the most important things a Legislature can do. It is a positive way for members to remain accountable to the people they serve.

One way we are able to do this is by providing many resources online. You can utilize these resources by visiting [capitol.texas.gov](http://capitol.texas.gov). Through this site, you will be able to view a livestream of Senate and House committee hearings, as well as watch both chambers when they are in session.

Another tool available is being able to look up bills by subject and keyword, review bill analyses and learn about the possible fiscal implications of a bill. You also may sign up to receive email notifications when bills of interest to you are assigned to committee and then advance through the legislative process.

By keeping abreast of happenings in your State Capitol, you ensure accountability and integrity for all Texans.

**5. Adoption of Texas flag.** On Jan. 25, 1839, the Republic of Texas adopted the Lone Star flag, which was designed by Dr. Charles Stewart from Montgomery, who was the second man to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence.

The colors of the flag, which also mimic those of our national flag, all symbolize the values that our state represents with white for purity, “Old Glory Red” for bravery and “Old Glory Blue” for loyalty. When Texas became the 28th state in the union in December 1845, this flag became the official state flag and continues to fly today.

I am proud to be a state senator for our great state in the Capitol, over which our state flag flies proudly.

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