



# My five cents...

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

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The fourth week of session has been a busy one as Senate Finance continues to meet every day to hear from every agency in the State. This week we have heard from agencies such as the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, Texas Supreme Court, the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Texas Department of Agriculture.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

## **1. Eminent Domain and Landowners**

Eminent Domain can often be hot button issue in a state full of oil and gas exploration and can often mean many different things to the parties involved. Eminent domain gives governments the legal right to seize private land for public use. In some cases, private companies can use eminent domain if they compensate landowners accordingly for their property.

Senator Lois Kolkhorst has filed SB 421, which would mandate companies who use eminent domain, to hold a public meeting and ensure landowners not only understand the ins and outs of the process, but also have an opportunity to have their questions answered. It would also provide specific protections for landowners and would penalize companies if they do not provide proper compensation to landowners. The purpose of this bill is to ensure that the eminent domain process is fair and transparent to all parties involved.

## **2. The Sutherland Springs Hero**

In the Texas Senate, we have the opportunity to honor and recognize many different individuals and groups, however, this week, we were able to recognize an individual who has become known as the Sutherland Springs hero. In November 2017, after hearing gun shots come from the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Stephen Willeford ran out of the safety of his home, and with the help of a neighbor, chased the gunman away from the church. Twenty-six people died that day and 20 others were hurt, but it is because of the bravery of Mr. Willeford and a neighbor, that more lives were not lost. The Texas Senate honored he, his wife and family on the Senate floor and thanked him for bravery.

### **3. Breakfast with Superintendents**

The Texas Association of School Administrators held their midwinter conference in Austin this week. My staff and I had the opportunity to attend the breakfast for the Region 4, 5, and 7 Education Service Center Regions. I understand it is often hard for these administrators to get to Austin and advocate for their school districts, and I appreciate the time they are able to give.

As Senate District 3, with its 101 school districts, is a predominantly rural area, the concerns and needs of its school districts vary from those of a more urban district. Because of this, I welcome opportunities to talk with educators to better understand how decisions made in Austin are impacting their local school districts.

### **4. House Committee Assignments**

House Speaker Bonnen released committee assignments for House members late last week. I was encouraged to see that many of the House members within Senate District 3 were given significant positions in various committees. Now that they have their assignments, committees in the House and Senate will soon begin holding hearings. I look forward to working with all of the House members in East Texas, as only by working together can we effectively advocate for the people we represent at home.

### **5. Farm Bureau and Community Colleges**

Every week there are various associations and groups that visit the Capitol to advocate for the issues that are important to them. Texas Farm Bureau was one of those groups this week as they came to the Capitol for their legislative day. These men and women represent Texas so well and remind us all of how important agriculture has and will continue to be for our state. It is always an honor to meet with this and other grassroots organizations who are working for the interests and livelihoods of rural Texans.

We also had students and staff from our local community colleges come to the Capitol this week to meet with members of the Legislature for Texas Community College day. I am always encouraged to see young adults taking an interest in how their state government works and finding out what they can do to represent the interests of their college campuses.

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