



# My five cents...

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

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Friday, March 8th is a very important day at the Capitol as it is the bill filing deadline for the Legislature. Each legislative session is 140 days long and the 60th day is always the last day to submit bills. Over the remaining 80 days, bills will be discussed in committees and those that pass will be sent to the House and Senate floors.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

## 1. School Safety

This week, the Senate Education Committee held a hearing on school safety proposals. SB 11, by Senator Larry Taylor, includes proposals to establish threat assessment teams in each district and train employees on trauma-informed care, allow schools to use bond funds to retrofit vehicles for school safety purposes, and require districts to notify parents when a threat is received.

SB 243 and SB 406 were also heard which would eliminate the mandate that trained school marshals keep their firearms under lock and key. SB 243 would let school districts decide on whether they want their marshals to openly carry their weapons. Another bill, SB 244, would eliminate the cap on how many school marshals each school district could have.

## 2. City Ordinances

This week, the Senate State Affairs committee passed SB 15, which would prevent a municipality or county from adopting any policies that may exceed or conflict with federal or state law relating to any form of employment leave, hiring practices, employment benefits and other terms of employment. For example, a city council or county making these regulations which would then apply to all private businesses within its borders. The reasoning behind the bill is that private employment regulations are a statewide issue, and should not be determined by each individual municipality as that can cause confusion to have different policies across the state. This bill would not prevent a city or county from adopting policies for their own employees, or prohibit a private employer from instituting their own employment policies.

## 3. Human Trafficking Prevention

In Texas, there are approximately 313,000 victims of human trafficking, both labor and sex trafficking. Currently the Office of Attorney General (OAG) houses the Human Trafficking Task Force, which works with state agencies, local law enforcement and nonprofits to fight human trafficking. However, there is not a cohesive coordinated effort of how funds are most efficiently spent. Because of this, Senator Nelson has filed SB 72 which creates the State Human Trafficking Prevention Coordinating Council, which will be housed at the OAG. The council will be made up of the governor, the attorney general and members of six state agencies including the Department of Public Safety and Department of Family and Protective Services. The focus of the council will be to develop a state plan and collaborate human trafficking related expenditures across state agencies.

#### **4. Legalizing Marijuana**

Recently, the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence held a hearing on HB 63 which would decriminalize possession of one ounce of marijuana or less. It would instead become a civil offense with a fine up to \$250 for the first three infractions, and then would become a Class C misdemeanor with a penalty up to \$500 with no jail time for any offenses after. Supporters of this bill state the current penalties for possession outweigh the transgression, and a conviction could ruin peoples lives, even though it is now legal or decriminalized in other states.

Opponents of this bill, including many police agencies, believe there are many issues that could arise with the decriminalization of possession. They believe that loosening the law could further promote the use of the drug in the state and lead to use of more serious drugs. I have and will continue to oppose the decriminalization of marijuana possession.

#### **5. Senate Page Program**

There are many different opportunities during session, but one of the best is the ability of students to serve in the Senate Page program. Students will get the unique opportunity to see how our state government works up close and in action. They will be able to meet with legislators and staff, observe committee hearings, help Senate offices with various tasks and if we are in session during their shift, work on the Senate Floor. Students must be 6-18 years of age to serve. Spots are available for three-hour shifts in the morning and afternoon. To find out more information about your child serving as a page, please don't hesitate to call my office at 512-463-0103.

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