



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols  
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The Texas House has passed House Bill 3, the school finance overhaul bill with a historic vote of 148-1. It is headed to the Senate and we will continue to work to ensure school districts are funded equitably.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

## 1. **House Committee Passes Property Tax Relief**

In February, the Senate Property Tax Committee passed SB 2, which would prevent local entities, such as cities and counties from raising their property taxes more than 2.5 percent, without voter approval. Cities and counties can currently collect an additional eight percent in revenues without an election. With the provisions of this bill, if voters do not approve an increase, the entity would be forced to set a tax rate that only allows it to collect revenues from existing properties which are less than 2.5 percent over the previous year.

The House Ways and Means Committee has recently passed HB 2, which is very similar to the Senate version. While keeping the similar 2.5 percent rollback, House Bill 2 adds exemptions and keeps the original eight percent rollback for community college districts, emergency services districts and hospital districts.

## 2. **Securing our Borders**

The Texas Department of Public Safety recently reported over 100,000 migrants have attempted to cross the US-Mexico border in March 2019 alone. This increase has forced Customs and Border Patrol to use 40 percent of its man-power to perform tasks unrelated to securing the border. Since 2011, over 194,000 criminal aliens have been booked into Texas jails with over 299,000 criminal offenses committed by illegal aliens. The Congress of the United States has consistently delayed significant action on the border, forcing Texas to shoulder the burden.

To address the humanitarian and security risks on the US-Mexico border, the Texas Senate has passed Senate Resolution 535, of which I am a co-author, declaring this crisis an emergency and asking Congress to take action immediately.

### **3. Consumer Protection**

Over the past few years, story after story has come out of individuals who have visited a free standing ER and later received an astronomical bill for services rendered. Freestanding ERs have been in Texas since 2009, and were created in an attempt to eliminate some of the burden of overcrowded emergency rooms. While they may 'take' certain insurance plans, that does not mean they are within the insurances network, which can lead to increased bill totals.

HB 2041 will require these facilities in Texas, before delivering care, to disclose to patients in writing all health plans that are in-network of the facility, and any fees that could be charged with services provided. Its purpose is to ensure future patients are not surprised by huge bills after their visits. A facility that does not comply with this regulation could face up to \$25,000 in fines.

### **4. Free Speech on College Campuses**

There are approximately 38 public colleges and universities in Texas. These campuses vary on many different levels, including the policies for free speech on their campuses. Some campuses allow outdoor common areas to serve as traditional public forums and are open to individuals and small groups for 'expressive activities', including speeches and the distribution of literature. Other campuses only allow forums to be held by faculty, staff and students, and require those outside the university to be sponsored or invited by a student, faculty or staff organization.

To ensure there is a cohesive policy across all campuses, SB 18 was recently passed on the Senate floor which would create a uniform policy statewide. SB 18 would allow any person, including those not affiliated with the school to engage in expressive activities in all common outdoor areas. Universities will be allowed to set reasonable restrictions on time, place and the manner of the activity.

### **1. Texas Medical Association 'First Tuesdays'**

The 'First Tuesday' of each month is always a busy day at the Capitol. On these days, doctors and medical students from around the state come to the Capitol to lobby on behalf of their profession and their patients. Referred to as the "White Coat Invasion," this practice has been going on since 2003 and is a chance for legislators to discuss bills regarding the practice of medicine with those who know it best. These individuals provide an invaluable service to our state and I look forward to working with them for many years to come.

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