



My five cents...

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

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Students across the state are counting down the days until they are out of their classrooms and can begin their summer vacations. In an almost identical countdown, legislators are marking the days left until the end of session. As I write this column, we have 25 days left till the end of the 86th Legislative Session.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. School Safety Bill

Senate Bill 11, the school safety bill, was recently passed by the Texas Senate. The initiatives in the bill come from the Senate Select Committee on Violence in Schools and School Security, which met during the interim to studies methods to reduce the likelihood of school violence, reduce security threats, ensure facilities are up to standard, and facilitate mental health resources to schools. Some of the initiatives include requiring school districts to appoint school safety committees that meet once a semester to provide their district boards with recommendations on how to ensure their emergency operations plans are up to date. The bill requires districts to notify parents when a threat is received and limits mandatory school drills to eight, including evacuation fire drills and lock down, lockout, and shelter-in-place drills. It also includes grants for education loan repayment for certain school counselors.

2. School Finance

The Senate Education committee passed out House Bill 3, the school finance legislation. This bill includes an increase in the basic allotment for school districts, incentive pay for school districts who would like to pay certain teachers more, as well as funding to provide a significant raise for full time teachers and librarians. It also includes additional funding for students with dyslexia, a third grade reading outcomes bonus for students, as well as funding for full-day pre-K for low income students.

Funding will be allocated for school districts that achieve high student academic outcomes, and long term property tax relief proposals. The source of revenue to fund this bill is still in negotiation. This bill will head to the Senate floor at the end of this week and will then be sent

back to the House to work out the differences between their original proposal and the changes the Senate has made to the bill.

3. Texas Firefighter Day

House Bill 1064, by Representative Trent Ashby, is making its way through the Legislature and would designate May 4th as Texas Firefighter Day. This day will honor the service and bravery of our firefighters and the memory of those who have lost their lives in service. May 4th was chosen as it is linked to the patron saint for firefighters, St. Florian, who was the first known commander of a firefighting squad in the Roman Empire. May 4th also marks a 'Day of Fire service' for many countries worldwide. Firefighters, many of whom are volunteers, risk their lives everyday to ensure we are protected in many aspects of our lives.

4. Legislative Timeline

The legislative session is drawing close to the end with less than 30 days left till Sine Die (the last day of session). While that might sound like there is a lot of time left, we are getting down to some important deadlines. Senate Committees are finishing up their hearings of Senate bills and are starting to hear bills which have been sent over from the House Chamber. An important thing to take note is that if a Senate or House bill is not heard and voted out of their respective chamber committees in the next week, those bills will likely die for lack of time left to go through the legislative process. It will be a busy few weeks, but I look forward to continuing to work hard for Senate District 3.

5. Governor Appointees

One aspect of state government many are not aware of is governmental appointments. The Governor of Texas makes approximately 3,000 appointments during a four-year term to various state boards and commissions. Some of those include the Board of Regents for state universities, the Texas Medical Board, and the Texas Historical Commission.

While the Governor appoints these positions, the Senate must confirm the individual positions. Having served previously on the Senate Nominations Committee, I am very aware of the impact state boards have on Texas. Our East Texas communities are blessed with many individuals whose expertise could benefit our state as a whole and I encourage you to get involved. For an application and more information, please visit www.governor.state.tx.us/appointments.

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