



My five cents...

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

For immediate release
June 27, 2019
word count: 740

Contact: Sydni Mitchell
Tel: 512-463-0103

On July 4th, we will celebrate our nation's freedom. The signing of the Declaration of Independence, in 1776, marked the birth of the United States of America as an independent Nation. I hope you are able to celebrate with fireworks, friends and family, as I know I will be.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Rural Broadband

Senate Bill 14, with I authored, has been signed into law by the Governor. This bill will help to increase access to broadband internet for rural areas in Texas. This would be done through the help of Texas Electric Cooperatives (Co-Ops). These Co-Ops are member-owned non-profits, which have over 300,000 miles of distribution lines throughout rural Texas. By utilizing their existing electricity infrastructure, they would be able to deploy broadband to the members they serve and meet their need for high speed internet. There are large areas of rural Texas that do not have access to high speed internet or even cell phone coverage, many of them within Senate District 3. This will help rural Texans to not only have access in their everyday lives, but also for their businesses.

2. Veto Period

Upon receipt of a bill, the Governor had 10 days to review and either sign or veto the bill before it automatically became law. In addition, the governor has the power of line-item veto for the states budget, where he can remove certain provisions listed, without killing the entire budget.

The Governor's veto period ended on June 16th and he vetoed 58 of the approximately 1,323 bills passed by the Texas Legislature. Some of the bills he vetoed were because he felt they interfered with Texans rights, or that they may have an unintended consequence. For the first time in many sessions, the Governor did not exercise his line-item veto powers and signed the states budget, which is approximately \$250 billion for the next two years, exactly as it was passed by the House and Senate. I am very proud of the work the Legislature accomplished this session and look forward to getting back to the district and sharing with you all that we accomplished.

3. Stealing Packages

When you think of thefts, mail theft might not be the first thing that comes to mind, however, Texas ranks 15th in mail thefts in the nation. To address this, House Bill 37 was passed and signed into law this session, which will criminalize mail theft. The penalties will range from a Class A misdemeanor to third degree felony, depending on the number of addresses mail was taken from. If there is evidence an offender intended to obtain someone's information or steal from the address of a disabled or elderly person, the punishment could go up to a first degree felony.

Before this bill was passed, mail theft wasn't defined in the state's penal code, so crimes were often charged as property or identity theft. This legislation also gives state and local law enforcement department the ability to handle the cases, instead of being required to refer all mail crimes to federal officers

4. Selling Lemonade...Legally

Many kids grow up earning spending money by selling lemonade or other beverages in their neighborhoods. However, did you know that it is actually illegal for them to be doing this, as homemade drinks are banned under the Texas Food Establishment Rules because of health concerns? Thanks to House Bill 234, which goes into effect on September 1st, Texas children will now be able to operate lemonade stands...legally. It legalizes temporary lemonade stands or stands selling other nonalcoholic beverages run by anyone under the age of 18 on private property or in public parks. Property owners associations would be prevented from adopting rules, or requiring permits or fees to prevent children from running a stand.

5. Texas Unemployment Rate

Texas unemployment rate of 3.5 percent is the lowest it has been since the federal government began collecting the data used to calculate the rate in 1976. In the past month, Texas has added 19,600 non-farm jobs, and jobs categorized as professional and business services exceeded all other categories with an additional 8,100 jobs. 4,500 additional education and health services jobs were the second highest increase in May. Many municipalities have even lower unemployment rates. Providing Texans with jobs not only ensures they are able to contribute to our economy, but also means that they can provide meaningful changes for themselves and their families.

###