



My five cents...

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

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Though the Capitol has been closed to the public for most of this year, my staff is hard at work preparing for the upcoming legislative session. Though session will surely look different this year due to the ongoing global pandemic, we are still focused on the needs of the state and our constituents. Please reach out to my office if you have any needs or concerns.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Neches High School Volleyball wins state championship for third year

Congratulations to the Neches High School volleyball team on winning back-to-back-to-back UIL Class 1A State Championships! The Lady Tigers scored a 3-0 win over the Blum Lady Cats at the state championship game in Garland. They finished 29-4 on the season. Lexi Rodgers, a senior, was named MVP of the tournament. Though both teams played well, I'm proud of the hard work and dedication the Lady Tigers showed during the tournament and throughout their season. Once again, congratulations, ladies!

2. Texas Association of Rural Schools Champion of Rural Schools Award

Last month, the Texas Association of Rural Schools recognized me as a Champion of Rural Schools. I've always believed that education is the most important issue the state legislature works on. I appreciate the hard work of all our teachers and administrators during this challenging time and know that in the upcoming legislative session education will be one of the most important things we discuss. Last session, I was happy to support House Bill 3, a landmark bill overhauling the public school finance system. I am particularly proud to receive the Champion of Rural Schools award. Ensuring a high-quality education that puts our students first is always my top priority.

3. Entergy announces \$360,000 in funding for Hurricane Laura, Delta relief

This month, Entergy Texas announced a commitment of \$360,000 in Hurricane Laura and Hurricane Delta relief funds. A large portion of that fund, roughly \$160,000, will go directly to Southeast Texas relief organizations. In total, eleven local organizations are receiving funds. Entergy partnered with Foundation for Southeast Texas to distribute the funds. Foundation for

Southeast Texas is a nonprofit, public charity that accepts funds from donors, manages them, and distributes them to nonprofits in the community. Hurricanes Laura and Delta ripped through the Gulf Coast and Southeast Texas earlier this year, causing widespread damage and power outages. This year's storm season was particularly active. We thank Entergy for their hard work to help rebuild after such a difficult year.

4. DSHS announces COVID-19 Vaccination Distribution Plan

In November, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and Governor's Office announced the guiding principles for the state's COVID-19 Vaccination Distribution Plan. The plan is expected to be implemented as early as December. It outlines the criteria under which the vaccine will be initially available. Those criteria include protecting health care workers, protecting front line workers, protecting vulnerable populations, mitigating health inequities, data-driven allocations, geographic diversity, and transparency. These guidelines were established by the Expert Vaccine Allocation Panel (EVAP), which was created by DSHS and includes 17 members from across the state. The EVAP also recommended that healthcare workers working directly with COVID-19 patients and other vulnerable populations to be the first to receive the vaccine. That would include hospital staff, emergency medical services, staff at long-term care facilities, and home health care workers. This announcement comes on the heels of several vaccine candidates reaching late stages in vaccine trials with high rates of success. Pfizer has applied to the Food and Drug Administration for an Emergency Use Authorization for their vaccine. If approved, the vaccine could start being administered next month.

5. TxDOT emphasizes road safety projects, commits unprecedented \$600 million in funding

The Texas Department of Transportation has proposed spending \$600 million on projects aimed at decreasing road deaths on Texas roadways. Roughly two-thirds of that money will go toward straightening roads, improving lighting, and adding guardrails. These projects are intended to reduce "departure incidents," or incidents when a driver veers from the roadway. Texas leads the nation in auto-mobile related deaths. TxDOT has put an emphasis on road safety and hopes this investment will help to cut road deaths in half by 2035 and achieve zero road-related deaths by 2050. This additional investment will particularly benefit East Texas as rural roads can be some of the most dangerous in the state. Officials in each of TxDOT's 27 districts will submit a four-year safety plan detailing projects that would enhance road safety.

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