



My five cents...

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

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The 2021 Olympic Games have begun in Tokyo, Japan. Over the next few weeks, we will all get to watch and enjoy the very best the United States has to offer compete on a global scale. I'll be watching and cheering on our Olympic athletes, particularly the 40 athletes who are from Texas.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. "Grandmother of Juneteenth" Opal Lee honored in Senate

Last week, Fort Worth activist Opal Lee was recognized in the Texas Senate with a formal resolution honoring her work. Known as the 'Grandmother of Juneteenth,' she led the movement to make Juneteenth a state and national holiday. Juneteenth marks the day in 1865 that Union troops arrived in Galveston and informed the enslaved people there that they had been freed about two and a half years earlier by the Emancipation Proclamation. It's celebrated annually on June 19th. Juneteenth has been a state holiday since 1980. Last month, President Biden signed a bill that would make Juneteenth a federal holiday, something Opal Lee has been promoting for years. Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick also made a recommendation that her portrait be permanently hung in the Senate chamber. It was an honor to meet the remarkable Opal Lee and I appreciate all the work she's done to establish Juneteenth as a state holiday and now a federal holiday.

2. Texas adds back 1.1 million jobs since peak of pandemic unemployment

Texas employers have added back more than 1.1 million jobs since the end of April 2020, the peak of pandemic unemployment. According to the June jobs report, employers added 43,900 jobs just last month and the state unemployment rate dropped to 6.5 percent. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas said its updated employment forecast predicts an addition 695,600 jobs will be added in Texas this year, leading to a total employment number of 13 million by December. They also estimate that job growth will increase by 5.6 percent in 2021.

3. Nacogdoches County launches development of countywide broadband

This month, the Nacogdoches County Broadband Committee has officially launched. The purpose of the committee is to develop a technology action plan to expand and improve

broadband access across the county. The first step is the work with residents, businesses, community organizations, and others to share input through a survey. The committee is working with Connected Nation Texas to develop a plan that reflects the challenges for expanding high-speed internet in Nacogdoches County and solutions to resolve those challenges. These survey results will be integral in developing a community action plan and mapping of where broadband is currently available. These data will also be helpful when applying for funds and other grants. Residents are encouraged to fill out a survey for every sector that impacts you or your business. The survey should only take roughly 10 minutes to complete. The survey can be found at myconnectedcommunity.org/nacogdoches-county/.

4. Texas National Guard to aid law enforcement agencies on border

This week Governor Abbott ordered the Texas National Guard to aid the Texas Department of Public Safety in their efforts at the border. DPS has been enforcing Texas law by the border by arresting those who are breaking state laws, including trespassing and other crimes. Border authorities have stopped over 188,000 attempted crossings just in June. That number is the highest this year. Local officials in border communities say this massive influx of migrants has stretched their resources thin and their law enforcement agencies to the brink. Those law enforcement agencies are overwhelmed by the presence of drug smugglers and human traffickers. The assistance of the Texas National Guard is necessary to assert some control over the situation at the border.

5. Texas reinstates full work search requirements as businesses struggle to fill openings

Last month, Texas reinstated its full work search requirements for unemployment benefits in an attempt to help businesses who are struggling to rehire employees for vacant positions. Unemployment recipients will no longer be able to cite COVID-19 concerns as a reason to not search for work. Work search requirements include registering for work search within three business days of your unemployment application and documenting searching and applying for jobs on a weekly basis. Currently in Texas, there are over 800,000 job openings with over 32,000 employers hiring according to Work In Texas, a state-run job board. In June, the state ended the federal unemployment benefit that provided an extra \$300 per week in an early attempt to get the unemployed back to work. If you're interested in applying for job openings, visit WorkInTexas.com.

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