



My five cents...

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

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On August 27, 1908, Lyndon Baines Johnson was born near Johnson City, Texas. LBJ would go on to become a US Congressman, US Senator, the Vice President under President John F. Kennedy, and finally the President of the United States. His birthday is celebrated as a state holiday.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Elections bill advances in the House

The House is set to consider Senate Bill 1, the election integrity and security bill. It passed the House Committee on Constitutional Rights and Remedies chaired by Rep. Trent Ashby this week and will be voted on the floor soon. The bill ensures that early voting hours are standardized and expanded statewide. It also protects the sanctity of the ballot by strengthening the requirements for mail-in voting by adding identification requirements to mail-in ballots. Voters would simply have to include either their driver's license number or identification card number on their ballot and application. Those without either can use the last four digits of their Social Security numbers. The bill also bans drive-through voting with exceptions for those with disabilities. This bill makes it easier to vote and harder to cheat.

2. Remain in Mexico policy reinstated by Supreme Court

This week, the US Supreme Court reinstated the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP), also known as the Remain in Mexico policy, that was first introduced by the Trump administration. It requires asylum seekers at the southern border to wait in Mexico while their claims are evaluated by US authorities. Earlier this month, Texas and Missouri asked a lower federal court to examine the process under which the Biden administration reversed the policy. That court found that the Biden administration failed to follow proper procedures in canceling the policy and that the alternative of paroling asylum applicants into the US may violate federal law. Texas and Missouri argued at the Supreme Court that the MPP "eliminated the 'free ticket' into the United States" and "served to discourage such futile and dangerous journeys."

3. Border security funding increases in House bill

The House Appropriations Committee approved a nearly \$2 billion increase in funding for border security efforts over the next two years. The bill would pay for prosecuting and detaining illegal immigrants on trespassing charges, building border barriers, and deploying additional state troopers to the border to help with the crisis. This bill would also repay the transfer of \$250 million that came from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in June that was a down payment for border wall construction. In addition, Governor Abbott has deployed 2,500 National Guard members and 1,000 DPS employees to patrol the southern border region as part of Operation Lone Star. The increased funding would allow the state to stem the flow of illegal immigration and proactively build infrastructure to reduce an influx in the future.

4. Staying prepared during hurricane season

As hurricane season continues, it's important to always be prepared before a storm occurs. For example, it's possible East Texas may be impacted by a potential storm that is currently forming in the gulf this weekend. While it's currently a Tropical Depression, experts expect it to strengthen into a Tropical Storm and maybe even a hurricane. The Gulf Coast is in the cone of uncertainty for this storm, so East Texans are encouraged to be vigilant. Here are a few tips to prepare before the storm from the Texas Hurricane Center:

- Put together an emergency supply kit
- Create a communication plan with your family
- Sign up for your community or county warning system
- Know flood risks in your area
- Know your evacuation routes
- Keep important documents in a waterproof container
- Follow weather alerts

As always, stay safe, follow local orders, and be extremely cautious of any water on roads. Remember, turn around don't drown.

5. Tax relief bills advance in the House

This week the House considered three bills that would give property tax relief to elderly and disabled Texans and new home owners. Senate Bill 8, Senate Bill 12, and Senate Joint Resolution 2 all take aim and relieving the property tax burden many Texans feel. Senate Bill 8 allows homeowners to claim their homestead exemption in the year they acquire the property, rather than having to wait until January 1 of the next year. Senate Bill 12 and the accompanying SJR 2 would extend the reduced tax rate passed during the 2019 legislative session to elderly and disabled Texans who did not receive that compression.