



My five cents...

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

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We continue to hold our friends in Louisiana in our prayers after Hurricane Ida made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane this week. Texas was proud to send a Chinook helicopter, 14 crew members, 30 fire engines, and 132 firefighters to aid in hurricane recovery efforts.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. COVID-19 antibody treatment center opens in Nacogdoches

The Texas Division of Emergency Management in conjunction with Nacogdoches County, the City of Nacogdoches, and Nacogdoches Medical Center launched a new COVID-19 therapeutic infusion center in Nacogdoches. The center uses Regeneron's monoclonal antibodies to treat outpatient cases of COVID-19. Importantly, patients need a referral from a doctor to receive the treatment. This treatment is available at no cost to the patient. This new center ensures that East Texans have access to high quality treatment options at no cost. The Regeneron treatment is shown to prevent a patient's symptoms from worsening to the point of hospitalization. There are also more than 200 private health providers across the state who provide the antibody infusion treatment, including 15 in Senate District 3. To find a provider near you, visit www.meds.tdem.texas.gov.

2. Hogg Foundation awards \$3.75 million in grants

The Hogg Foundation announced grants to five organizations for the second phase of the Well-Being in Rural Communities initiative. The grants totaled \$3.75 million. One of the awardees was Better Together, a group in Nacogdoches dedicated to improving the mental and physical health of all residents in Nacogdoches County. The grants are designed to support collaborative approaches to well-being in rural communities. During the first phase of the program, awardees were successful in completing baseline assessments of communities needs, developing identities and brands, and elevating themselves to a leadership role in their communities.

3. Funding for securing the border passed House, Senate

House Bill 9 was finally passed by the Senate this week, sending the measure to Governor Abbott's desk. The legislation appropriates \$1.8 billion for securing our southern border. This

bill appropriates funds for activities related to the border crisis in the Office of Court Administration, the Texas Military Department, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Criminal Justice, the Commission on Jail Standards, the Department of State Health Services, and programs within the Governor's Office. There are ongoing threats of property crime, human trafficking, violent crime, to public health, and violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity. These funds will provide additional appropriations for overtime and staffing related to border security efforts.

4. Election integrity bill going to Governor

After hours of debate during regular session and two special sessions, Senate Bill 1, the election integrity bill, is finally passed and headed to the Governor's desk. It was named an emergency item by the Governor at the beginning of regular session and has been on the call for both special sessions. Ensuring the security and validity of our elections are central to the democratic process. Voting is a sacred right and any form of illegal voting is a violation of that right. This bill expands voting access by expanding voting hours and ensures voters in line at closing time during early voting can vote. It also gives disabled Texans more options when voting. This bill makes it easier to vote and harder to cheat. I was proud to vote for this legislation and look forward to the Governor signing it into law.

5. Bail reform legislation passes

Another priority bill that was held up during the regular session and both special sessions was Senate Bill 6, the bail reform bill. SB 6 is the enacting legislation for Senate Joint Resolution 3, which proposed a constitutional amendment codifying the changes in the bail system made in the bill. While SB 6 did pass and will become law with Governor Abbott's signature, the SJR did not receive a two-thirds vote of the House, so the measure will not be on a constitutional ballot election. SB 6 prohibits the release of violent offenders on personal bonds or the release of offenders who are charged with additional crimes while out on bail. It also requires more judicial training, data collection, and that officials examine a defendant's criminal history before setting bail. The bill is also known as the Damon Allen Act, named after State Trooper Damon Allen who was ambushed, shot, and killed following a traffic stop. His accused murderer had been previously convicted of assaulting a sheriff's deputy and was out on bond on an aggravated assault of a public servant charge.