



My five cents...

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

For immediate release
September 9, 2021
word count: 754

Contact: Shelby Conine
Tel: 512-463-0103

This weekend, we recognize the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. We remember and pray for all the Americans who were killed during the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Flight 93. Let us never forget.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Governor Abbott calls third special session

Governor Abbott announced this week that he will be calling the Legislature back for a third time starting September 20. One of the most important topics the legislature will cover in this special session is redistricting. The redrawing of legislative boundaries is a once-a-decade process that shapes the political landscape for the next ten years. In addition to redistricting, the Legislature will also address appropriating federal pandemic aid dollars, vaccine mandates by local governments, transgender athletes in school sports, and legislation similar to a bill that the Governor vetoed after the regular session related to chaining dogs. This third session comes on the heels of the second special session that saw the passage of legislation on election integrity, bail reform, and border security. I look forward to once again joining my colleagues in Austin to work on these issues.

2. Senate Redistricting Committee holds public hearings

For the past week, the Senate Select Committee on Redistricting that I serve on has been holding public hearings daily to gather input from local communities about the redrawing of legislative boundaries. Every ten years after the release of the Census, the Legislature must redraw district lines for the State House, State Senate, US Congress, and State Board of Education to adjust for population changes across the state. Last month, the US Census Bureau officially released the data to the states. The data show that Texas' population grew by more than 4 million people in the last ten years. As a result, Texas gained two new US Congressional seats. Decisions about where to place those seats and how the other 36 US Congressional districts will look have to be made by the Legislature as well. The Senate has been gathering public testimony about communities of interest in virtual public hearings that Texans can participate in from anywhere across the state.

3. New TxDOT task force to direct highway safety project funding

This week the Texas Department of Transportation announced a new task force that will identify safety projects that focus on reducing the number of fatalities on Texas highways. The group is comprised of TxDOT representatives and members of each of the state's 23 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). The Safety Task Force will have an initial two-year term and will develop a short-term plan to invest funding in current safety initiatives like rumble strips, cable barriers, shoulder widenings, and other safety projects. Additionally, they will develop a long-term plan to identify funding sources, establish criteria to determine the effectiveness of the plan, and create incentives for partnerships in reducing highway deaths. The task force will provide regular updates to the Commission with a final report delivered at the end of its initial two-year term. Safety on our roadways is one of the highest priorities at TxDOT and additional safety planning is essential to ending deaths of Texas roadways. This task force will help Texas on "The Road to Zero," an initiative to reduce the number of deaths on Texas highways by half by 2035 and to zero by 2050.

4. Operation Lone Star continues

The Texas Department of Public Safety continues working to secure our southern border. Operation Lone Star includes air, ground, marine, and tactical security assets along the border to combat human trafficking and drug smuggling into Texas. Since the beginning of Operation Lone Star, DPS has made 5298 criminal arrests and over 65,000 migrant apprehensions and referrals. DPS has also seized 1,500 firearms, over 8,300 pounds of cocaine and methamphetamine, and over \$14.7 million in currency. Officers have also been involved in 694 vehicle pursuits. I'm proud of the work they are doing with the Texas National Guard and local law enforcement.

5. Texas again named #1 state for infrastructure

For the fourth year in a row, Site Selection Magazine has named Texas the number one state for infrastructure in 2021. The Global Groundwork Index measures the state's success in combined infrastructure and corporate end-user project investment. It identifies where billions of dollars in corporate facility activity intersect with billion of dollars in roads, bridges, airports, tunnels, pipelines, utilities, railroads, and other major infrastructure projects. Louisiana, Virginia, Arizona, and Ohio rounded out the rest of the top five.

###