



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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This week we mourn the loss of 21 Texans in a horrific shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Words can not adequately express our grief and we offer prayers of comfort to the families affected, the community, and our state.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Finance and Business and Commerce hearings

Two Senate committees I am a member of held hearings in Austin regarding their interim charges. The Senate Business and Commerce committee met to discuss the supply chain, cybersecurity, and the state workforce. Over the past two years, there have been several supply chain disruptions and we were tasked with examining the causes and impacts of those disruptions on the economy and industry. Regarding cybersecurity, we reviewed regulations relating to cybersecurity protections and requirements for local governments, state agencies, and critical industries. Lastly, we discussed the possibilities of remote work for the state workforce. We heard from state agencies about their remote work options and their implications for statewide recruitment and employment.

In Finance, we covered property tax relief and tax exemptions. We discussed ways to further reduce Texans' property tax burden, including using state revenue to eliminate the school district maintenance and operations property tax. We also heard from experts on state tax exemptions and possible expansions of those exemptions.

2. Coastal Barrier Protection System legislation makes headway in Congress

This month, the US House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure approved legislation that would fund a \$31 billion proposal to build a levy system on the Gulf Coast designed to protect Texas from major hurricanes. Two weeks before, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee also unanimously approved a similar piece of legislation. Approval in both chambers is a critical step forward. The Coastal Texas Protection and Restoration Feasibility Study, the formal name for the project, is the largest engineering recommendation of its kind that the US Army Corps of Engineers has ever proposed. The plan includes gates spanning the

Galveston Bay that can block a storm surge of up to 22 feet, as well as rows of dunes that would line Galveston Island and Bolivar Peninsula. That's part of a larger coastal spine that also extends to Orange and Jefferson Counties.

3. TDEM announces new Texas Emergency Management Academy

The Texas Division of Emergency Management announced the creation of the Texas Emergency Management Academy this month. The new program is aimed at training the next generation of the emergency management workforce. The Academy will prepare interested individuals for emergency management careers at TDEM in a variety of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation capacities. Graduates will receive a certification as basic emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and earn several nationally recognized emergency management certifications. The Academy will be based in San Antonio, will last eight months, and is scheduled to begin in late Summer 2022. To learn more and apply, visit www.tdem.texas.gov/academy.

4. Criminal Justice hearing covers catalytic converter thefts

The Senate Committee on Criminal Justice met in Houston to discuss one of our interim charges, catalytic converter theft. In the past two years, the state has seen an alarming increase in catalytic converter thefts. Thieves have targeted this automobile part due to the precious metals inside, including platinum, palladium, and rhodium. Catalytic converters can be sold for around \$250. They can be stolen rather quickly, with some thieves able to remove one in just two minutes. In some cases, the thieves become violent if a victim encounters them during the theft. Harris County Sheriff Deputy Darren Almendarez was killed when he confronted two men attempting to steal his catalytic converter. Last session, the legislature passed House Bill 4110 to combat these thefts. During this hearing, we discussed additional steps that could be taken next session.

5. Sales tax holiday for water-efficient products this weekend

This weekend is a sales tax holiday for certain energy- and water-efficient and ENERGY STAR® products. Texans can save on these purchases from May 28-30. The Texas Comptroller's office estimates shoppers will save about \$14 million in state and local sales tax. Products displaying a WaterSense® label can be purchased tax free for personal or business use. These include showerheads, bathroom sink faucets and accessories, toilets, and landscape irrigation controls. It also applies to lawn and garden products that help conserve water outdoors. Certain energy-efficient products can also be purchased tax free, including air conditioners, refrigerators, ceiling fans, light bulbs dishwashers, and washing machines. There is no limit on the number of water-efficient or energy-efficient products Texans can purchase tax free this weekend.