



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release
February 9, 2023
word count: 760

Contact: Shelby Conine
Tel: 512-463-0103

Super Bowl LVII is this weekend and, for the first time in history, both starting quarterbacks are from the great state of Texas. Whichever team you support, it will be a win for the Lone Star State!

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Business and Commerce hearing on the electric grid

This week the Senate Business and Commerce Committee met to discuss possible redesign of the electric market and the electric grid. Representatives from the Public Utility Commission, the grid manager, and the Independent Market Monitor attended to give testimony and answer questions about the PUC's recent decision to adopt a new market design known as the Performance Credit Mechanism, or PCM. Essentially, the PCM is meant to help produce enough power in peak demand hours when electricity production drops due to equipment breakdown or renewable energy sources go offline. It's designed to incent the creation of new gas-powered generation plants that would produce during critical, "high-risk" hours and would require utilities and retailers that consumed power during those hours to buy performance credits from the generators. Concerns were raised about the reliability of the proposed new system and its ability to incentivize construction of plants that produce dispatchable electricity, meaning electricity that can be turned off and on as needed. The committee will continue to discuss options to ensure grid reliability in the market redesign process.

2. Online sports betting bills filed in the House, Senate

This week Senator Lois Kolkhorst and Rep. Jeff Leach filed bills in their respective chambers that would allow Texans to bet on sporting events. Legalizing sports betting would require a change to the state constitution, so the bills would have to receive a 2/3rds vote in both chambers and then go before the voters in November. If the measure passed in November, Texans could start placing bets in 2024. The bill would require any revenue collected by the state from sports betting to go to education, specifically for property tax relief. The Texas Lottery Commission would be charged with overseeing and regulating the industry. In total, 36 states have approved legalized sports betting, whether through online platforms or in casinos. The bills as introduced here would allow Texans to use online platforms.

3. Opal Lee portrait unveiled in the Senate

The Grandmother of Juneteenth, Opal Lee, was honored on the Senate floor this week during the unveiling of her portrait. The portrait was commissioned by the Texas Senate and created by native Texas artist Jess Coleman. Opal Lee is best known for her work to make Juneteenth a federal holiday to commemorate the end of slavery in the United States. President Biden signed a bill to officially recognize Juneteenth as a federal holiday in 2021. It was the first new federal holiday since Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was created in 1983. Her portrait will join the late Rep. Barbara Jordan's as the only two Black Texans to have portraits in the Senate chamber.

4. Governor announces plan to ban TikTok on all state devices

This week Governor Abbott announced a plan to ensure security on personal and state-issued devices by banning TikTok on those devices, among other measures. The social media app TikTok is owned by a Chinese company, ByteDance, that has been linked to the Chinese government. The app collects data from users that can be sensitive or personal in nature. There has been some concern about TikTok posing a national security threat because of the data it collects. The Governor's new cybersecurity initiatives would ban and prevent the download or use of TikTok and prohibited technologies on any state-issued device. It would also prohibit employees or contractors from conducting state business on prohibited technology-enabled personal devices, prohibit those devices from entering sensitive areas, and implement network-based restrictions so that prohibited technology couldn't be used on state networks. It's imperative that the state protects sensitive information and critical infrastructure from cybersecurity threats. This plan is an important step in that direction.

5. Nederland ISD teacher wins 2023 Milken Educator Award

This week, Jenna Dean, a fourth grade teacher at Helena Park Elementary School in Nederland, was awarded the Milken Educator Award. The award is given to outstanding teachers who are in the early-to-mid point in their career for their accomplishments and for the promise of what's to come. Recipients receive a \$25,000 unrestricted award. The program was created by Lowell Milken in 1987 and has awarded nearly 3,000 educators with almost \$70 million. Many know the Milken Award as "The Oscars of Teaching." Congratulations to our well-deserving winner!

###