



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release  
February 16, 2023  
word count: 746

Contact: Shelby Conine  
Tel: 512-463-0103

On February 15, 1876, Texas adopted the Constitution of 1876. The document is the sixth constitution by which Texas has been governed since declaring independence from Mexico. Despite having been amended more than 230 times, it remains the basic law of Texas today.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Lt. Governor Patrick releases list of priority bills**

Earlier this week, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick released a list of 30 pieces of legislation that he would like to see passed this session. Included in the list are the state budget, electric grid improvements, property tax relief, school safety, mental health care, and other priorities. These bills will have low bill numbers, which indicates their importance to the Lt. Governor. In his press release, the Lt. Governor made note that several policy initiatives are addressed in the budget and thus will not need a bill. However, those policies are still a priority, including border security funding. Most of these bills will be filed over the next few weeks and will move through the committee process. To see a full list, go to <https://www.ltgov.texas.gov/2023/02/13/lt-gov-dan-patrick-announces-top-30-priorities-for-the-2023-legislative-session/>.

## **2. Stephen F. Austin State University honored for centennial anniversary on Senate Floor**

Stephen F. Austin State University President Dr. Steve Westbrook and other SFA representatives were honored on the Senate Floor this week to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the university. SFA's storied history began in 1923 when 270 students matriculated at the college, which was a teaching university at the time. The State Board of Regents selected Nacogdoches as the location of the new college because of its heritage as the oldest town in Texas. The homestead of Thomas J. Rusk, formerly owned by Sam Houston, was chosen as the site for the new college. Rusk and Houston had each served as the original two US Senators from Texas. Today, more than 11,000 students are enrolled at SFA and the university has expanded its offerings to more than 120 areas of study. Congratulations to everyone who has made SFA the outstanding university it has become!

## **3. Data privacy bill filed in the Senate**

Last week, I filed Senate Bill 821 to continue the work I began last session on data privacy. Last session, I authored Senate Bill 15 which prevented certain state agencies from selling personal data to companies that did not need that data. This session, my work continues in SB 821. This bill would require the Sunset Advisory Commission to evaluate whether or not a state agency is selling personal data, why they are selling the data, what statute authorizes them to sell the data, and to whom they are selling data. The Sunset Advisory Commission is tasked with evaluating the need for and performance of state agencies on a rolling basis. Each agency is required to go through the Sunset process typically every 12 years. That process is lengthy and closely examines an agency's mission, purpose, programs, and performance and addresses any problems identified. This bill would add personal data privacy protections to the sunset process and leave a lasting legacy of data privacy.

#### **4. Angelina County approves \$80 million grant for battery construction**

The Angelina County Commissioner's Court approved an \$80 million grant from the Economic Development Grant Program for the construction of Martinez Energy Storage. The project is intended to build a battery that will store excess energy that Angelina County can use during peak consumption hours. Energy will be stored when there is excess power and will be redistributed when it's needed. The deal includes a 10-year tax abatement of 70 percent and the company will hire 50 temporary workers for the construction project.

#### **5. State employee maternity leave bill referred to Senate Business and Commerce Committee**

This week, Senate Bill 222 was referred to the Senate Business and Commerce Committee. This bill, which I authored, gives state employees a paid maternity leave benefit for four weeks after the birth of a child. If an employee adopts a child, has a child via surrogate, or their partner has a child, the benefit is two weeks of paid leave. It is important to support families during the transformative time of welcoming a child into their home. The state should lead on this issue and guarantee family leave for state employees. Now that the bill has been referred, it will get set for a hearing by the chair of the committee. Typically, committees start hearings on specific legislation in mid-March after the bill filing deadline.

###