



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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It's time to spring forward! Daylight Saving Time begins this weekend. Remember to set your clocks forward Saturday night.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Bill filing deadline**

This Friday, March 10 marks the end of the bill filing period for the 88<sup>th</sup> Legislature. After Friday, no more general law bills can be filed. There are exceptions for local bills. After the deadline, the Legislature and the public will have a good idea about the total number of bills filed and what they do. Then, the real work begins. More bills will be voted out of committee and begin to make their way through the process. From now until May 29, we'll be hearing and voting on legislation at a rapid pace.

## **2. Senate school safety legislation filed, referred to committee**

Last week, I filed Senate Bill 11 which builds on the work of previous legislatures on school safety. The bill is based on the work of the Senate Special Committee to Protect All Texans, which I chaired. There are six main components of this legislation: increasing the school safety allotment by creating a per campus funding formula, establishing the Office of School Safety and Security, delineating responsibility between TEA and the Texas School Safety Center, creating School Safety Review Teams, enhancing truancy prevention tactics, and allowing districts to share discipline records for students who transfer schools.

During our committee hearings, we heard from school districts that the current school safety allotment rate of \$9.72 per student per year was insufficient to meet their needs. For districts that get little funding, maintaining a high standard of safety and security depletes already limited funding for their classrooms. In the bill as filed, each district would receive \$15,000 per campus in their district. On top of that, districts would receive \$10 per student per year for school safety. The creation of School Safety Review teams is another essential piece to school safety. The team would work with districts on school safety and physically go to each campus and evaluate the school's safety and security. These important reforms will help enhance our children's safety at school.

### **3. Supplemental budget bill heard in committee**

This week, the Senate Finance Committee heard Senate Bill 30, the supplemental appropriations bill. The supplemental appropriations bill is used to close out the previous biennium budget process and appropriate any left over funds. Included in the supplemental appropriations bill is \$3.8 billion to pay customer rate relief charges associated with Winter Storm Uri, \$2.3 billion to expand inpatient mental health care capacity, \$600 million for school safety and security grants, and \$1 billion for a benefit enhancement for retired teachers, among other things. The funds come from a mix of federal and state dollars. The bill was voted out of committee and will go to the floor soon.

### **4. First bills voted out of Senate**

This week Senate Bill 372 and Senate Bill 728, both by Senator Joan Huffman, were voted on the Senate Floor and sent to the House this week. This marks an important milestone in the legislative session. Senate Bill 372 creates a criminal offense for the unauthorized disclosure of non-public judicial opinions and judicial work product. In the summer of 2021, someone working at the US Supreme Court leaked a draft of the majority opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, an opinion which overturned *Roe v. Wade*. This bill would protect Texas judicial opinions from being leaked. The other bill, Senate Bill 728, brings the state in line with the federal Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. This bill would require clerks to report certain information related to juvenile mental health records to the Department of Public Safety, which reports information to the National Interstate Criminal Background Check System (NICS). These records will be part of the background check conducted when a person buys a firearm from a Federal Firearms Licensee.

### **5. THECB offers new low-interest loan option**

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is now offering a new low-interest loan option for Texas students. The Future Occupations and Reskilling Workforce Advancement to Reach Demand (FORWARD) Loan Program is designed to help students who are seeking to obtain a high-value credential in a high-demand occupation. The loan should help reduce the debt burden on students by allowing students to repay the loan over 10 years. The loans are open to students that will be able to complete their program in two years or less and are in high-demand programs like technology, nursing, teaching, supply chain/transportation and logistics, and energy.

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