



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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One hundred years ago this week, Lamar University in Beaumont originated as South Park Junior College when the Beaumont ISD superintendent sought to develop plans for a junior college. Later that year, the institution's doors opened, and the name was changed to Lamar College and later Lamar University. I'm a proud alumnus of Lamar University!

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Property tax relief passes Senate

This week the Senate passed Senate Bills 3, 4, and 5 which would provide \$16.5 billion in tax relief. All three bills are primarily authored by Senator Paul Bettencourt.

Senate Bill 3 would increase the homestead exemption to \$70,000. This is an increase from the current homestead exemption of \$40,000. The bill also raises the over-65 and disabled homestead exemption to an additional \$30,000, meaning if a homeowner is over 65 or disabled their exemption will total \$100,000. The bill is co-authored by all 31 senators and was unanimously voted out of Senate this week. SB 3 is the enabling legislation for the requisite constitutional amendment this would require. Senate Joint Resolution 3, which proposes the constitutional amendment, also passed the Senate unanimously. It would put the issue to the voters in November.

Senate Bills 4 and 5 were also passed unanimously. SB 4 compresses school district tax rates beyond the current rates. Essentially the state is appropriating tax dollars to buy down school district tax rates. Senate Bill 5 raises the personal property tax exemption for businesses. Currently, businesses only have a \$2,500 exemption for personal property owned by the business. Senate Bill 5 would raise that exemption to \$25,000. That measure is also included as part of the ballot measure that will go to the voters in November. I was proud to co-author all of these bills to provide meaningful property tax relief.

2. TRS cost of living adjustment heard in Senate Finance Committee

This week the Senate Finance Committee voted to give our retired teachers a well-deserved cost-of-living adjustment. Senate Bill 10 passed the Senate Finance Committee unanimously and all

31 Senators have signed on. The bill would provide a four percent increase for teachers who retired before September 1, 2013, and a two percent increase for those who retired after September 1, 2013, and before January 1, 2022. The bill also gives a one-time \$7,500 supplemental check to any retirees 75 years old or older. The total cost will be \$4.7 billion. Our retired teachers deserve a cost-of-living adjustment, and I was proud to sign on and vote for this bill.

3. Broadband bill heard in committee

Senate Bill 1238 was heard in Senate Business and Commerce Committee this week. Last session, the Legislature took incredible steps toward ensuring all Texans are connected to high speed Internet in House Bill 5. It directed the Broadband Development Office to create and publish the state's first broadband map and plan – which it has, and both are now publicly available. Senate Bill 1238 increases the speed threshold for an area to be considered “served;” brings state statute in compliance with federal guidelines, which includes the preference for fiber deployment; and updates how broadband access is defined and adopts standards for what constitutes served, underserved, and unserved areas, among other things. This bill is vital to our continued efforts to support broadband proliferation throughout the state. I'm excited to work with my fellow Senators and Rep. Trent Ashby to get this done.

4. Ankle monitor removal increased penalty bill passes Senate

This week the Texas Senate passed a bill that would increase the penalties for tampering with or removing an ankle monitor that a person is required to wear. Senate Bill 1004 by Senator Joan Huffman increases the penalty to a state jail felony, unless the person is in a super-intensive supervision program in which case the penalty would be a third degree felony. Ankle monitors are used to ensure that there is accountability for defendants who are out on parole or on bail. This bill enhances public safety for our communities, and I was proud to support it in the Senate.

5. Bail reform moves to House

The Senate passed Senate Joint Resolution 44 this week which would deny bail to offenders accused of violent or sexual offense or human trafficking. In recent years, there have been instances of violent offenders being let off on low or no bail. This bill would ensure a defendant's appearance in court, the safety of the community, law enforcement, and the victim. This is another proposition that would appear on the ballot in November should it pass both chambers with enough support.

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