



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release
April 6, 2023
word count: 747

Contact: Shelby Conine Vestal
Tel: 512-463-0103

Easter is around the corner. I hope you take the time to reflect on the meaning of Easter and the miracle of the Resurrection. From my family to yours, have a blessed and happy Easter.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. School safety bill heard in committee

This week Senate Bill 11 was heard in the Senate Education Committee. I authored Senate Bill 11 based on the recommendations on school safety that came out of the committee I chaired in the interim, the Special Committee to Protect All Texans. Senate Bill 11 addresses how we fund school safety, establishes the Office of School Safety and Security at TEA, further delineates responsibility between the Texas School Safety Center and TEA, the creation and responsibilities of school safety review teams, truancy, and discipline. One of the main changes is to the school safety allotment. Currently, districts receive \$9.72 per student in the district for school safety. That is insufficient. It became apparent that to adequately fund school safety, it should be done on a per campus basis. Many school safety costs are fixed no matter how many students attend the school. The Senate also included \$600 million in appropriations for school safety grants to help schools become more secure.

2. Package of grid reliability bills passes the Senate

This week the Senate passed Senate Bills 6, 7, 1287, 2012, and 2015 which all focus on grid reliability and grid reform. These bills, authored by Senate Charles Schwertner and Senator Phil King, will improve the Texas grid and add new dispatchable power as a backstop in times of critical need. Senate Bill 2012 builds on the performance credit mechanism and adds guardrails to ensure rates are manageable for Texans and that any rate increase goes directly to improve reliability. Winter Storm Uri in February of 2021 revealed failures in our electric market and since then it has been the mission of the legislature to improve reliability. It is my belief that this package of bills makes important, meaningful improvements to our system.

3. Bill criminalizing catalytic converter theft passes the Senate

Senate Bill 224 by Senate Carol Alvarado passed the Senate unanimously this week. This bill increases penalties on individuals who are found in possession of a catalytic converter. There are also provisions in the bill that enable prosecutors to go after criminal rings. It also allows prosecutors to further increase penalties if they are in possession of a firearm during the commission of the offense. Senate Bill 224 is named in honor of Harris County Deputy Darren Almendarez, who was shot and killed last year when he confronted three suspects attempting to steal the catalytic converter from his personal vehicle while he was in the grocery store with his family. The family of Deputy Almendarez was honored on the floor of the Senate the same day.

4. Senate Bill 29 passes the Senate

Senate Bill 29 by Senator Brian Birdwell passed the Senate this week. The bill would prohibit a governmental entity from enforcing a vaccine mandate, mask requirement, or business or school closures due to COVID-19. Now that we are years into living with COVID-19 and the science has developed to help us understand the virus, it is unnecessary for any local government to enforce mandates relating to COVID-19. This bill protects Texans from burdensome regulation that some local governments try to enforce. I was proud to support this legislation.

5. Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program opening soon

It is almost time for the Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program to reopen. Recipients will receive up to \$10,000 toward the cost of attendance. To be eligible for the scholarship, students must meet two of the following four criteria: on track to graduate high school with the Distinguished Achievement Program, higher school GPA of 3.0 or higher, college readiness score on SAT of 1070 or ACT of 23, or ranked in the top one-third of their senior class. Scholarship applicants must: submit an essay explaining why he/she believes military service is important, how he/she would fulfill the requirements of the scholarship and which university he/she would like to attend; submit a résumé, which must include his/her contact information, including his/her full name, mailing and physical addresses, Social Security number, phone number and email address. Please submit up to five recommendation letters. Senator Nichols is accepting applications from May 15 to July 15, 2023. He/she may send his/her application packet via email to Robert.Nichols@senate.texas.gov .

###