



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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April 21 is San Jacinto Day in Texas, which celebrates the final battle of the Texas Revolution in 1836 when Texas won its independence from Mexico. The battle was fought in present-day La Porte, Texas and lasted just 18 minutes before General Sam Houston defeated General Santa Anna's Mexican army.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Beaumont, Orange County award General Land Office grants**

Last week the General Land Office announced awards in the Beaumont and Orange County areas for the Affordable Rental Program rehabilitation projects and Infrastructure awards. These awards form from \$300 million in Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery funds for long-term disaster recovery from flooding during Tropical Storm Imelda and other significant flooding in South Texas. In Beaumont, there was a total award of almost \$10 million in rehabilitation for affordable rental complexes and almost \$5 million in a variety of infrastructure projects. In Orange County, there was a total award of \$11 million for infrastructure projects.

## **2. Bill moving Stephen F. Austin State University to the University of Texas System passes Senate**

This week, Senate Bill 1055 was voted unanimously out of the Senate. I authored this bill with the help of Representative Travis Clardy and our partners at SFA and the University of Texas System. The bill now goes to the House where Representative Clardy's identical legislation has already received a House hearing. There is overwhelming support in both chambers for these bills. We both look forward to working together to ensure there is a seamless transition for SFA into the UT-System. This will be an exciting new era in SFA's 100 year history.

## **3. School Safety bill passes Senate**

This week my bill, Senate Bill 11, passed the Senate unanimously. This bill increases school districts' school safety allotment and changes the formula to reflect a per campus funding basis. It includes \$230 million in increased funding for school safety, in addition to the \$600 million in the supplemental appropriations act for school safety and security grants. The bill also creates

regional school safety review teams that will provide technical assistance to school districts in their region and perform intruder detection audits of each campus in their region on an annual basis. In addition, the newly created Office of School Safety and Security at TEA will conduct in-depth vulnerability audits on campuses once every four years to ensure that all facility access controls, emergency operations procedures, and other school safety requirements are being followed. The office will also serve as a resource for districts relating to school safety and host a registry of approved school safety vendors. That office will be led by the Director of School Safety and Security who will be appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate. This bill creates a layered approach to school safety while maintaining local control for districts to assess their needs and choose their school safety solutions. I'm proud to have worked on this bill and I'd like to thank the Lt. Governor and the other members of the Senate for their input and support.

#### **4. Law enforcement accreditation bill passes Senate**

This week the Senate passed Senate Bill 267, by Senator Phil King, which would create a grant program to provide financial assistance to law enforcement agencies to achieve accreditation. The bill would also require law enforcement agencies employing at least 20 peace officers to become and maintain accreditation. Investing in law enforcement agencies through a grant program will help professionalize the industry, create an environment that fosters better communication between local governments and law enforcement agencies, and ensure the highest standards of excellence in law enforcement. The bill would offer \$18 million in grants of up to \$30,000 through the Comptroller's Office. Agencies could be accredited through the Texas Police Chiefs Association Law Enforcement Agency Best Practices Accreditation Program, the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc., the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, the Sheriffs' Association of Texas, or another association identified by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement.

#### **5. Sales tax holiday**

This weekend April 22-24 is the emergency preparation supplies sales tax holiday. Those supplies include portable generators, emergency ladders, hurricane shutters, axes, batteries, nonelectric can openers, carbon monoxide detectors, nonelectric coolers and ice chests, fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and more. There is no limit on the number of qualifying items you can purchase, and you do not need to give an exemption certificate to claim the exemption.

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