



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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It's that time. Only a few days left before Sine Die and wrapping up the 88<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session!

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. School Safety bill moves to conference committee**

This past week, the Senate approved our version of House Bill 3, the school safety bill. I worked with Representative Dustin Burrows on this legislation. Schools this year will receive an increase in funding to \$10 per student in average daily attendance with an additional \$15,000 per campus per year. That totals about \$330 million per biennium. In addition, the Legislature has appropriated over \$1.1 billion for school safety grants. Those grants should be enough to cover updated facilities requirements from TEA, which were released in the fall, and may be used on reimbursements for previous expenditures. At that time, the agency also released \$400 million of safety grants as well. Together, the state will be putting over \$1.4 billion dollars of new money toward ensuring our schools are safe and secure.

## **2. Economic incentive reform bill passes Senate**

This week the Senate passed the Texas Jobs, Energy, Technology, and Innovation Act, a sweeping reform of key economic incentive programs for the state. The bill, authored by Representative Todd Hunter and sponsored by Senator Charles Schwertner, gives corporations tax incentives to move to Texas and create good jobs. Texas prides itself on being an economic powerhouse, however our property tax rates can drive employers that have large scale development projects to other states. House Bill 5 seeks to create an innovative, transparent, and accountable economic development program to attract jobs and investment in Texas through school district property tax abatement agreements. To earn the tax abatements, a company must create and maintain a certain number of full-time jobs and make a large investment in the project by the end of the first tax year of the incentive period. The project would have to be approved by the school district, the comptroller, the Governor, and a legislative oversight committee. This provides a necessary check on the proliferation of projects in the state and ensures that each project chosen is fully vetted and can achieve the economic development promised.

## **3. Senate passes community college finance reform package**

The Senate unanimously passed House Bill 8 by Representative Gary VanDeaver and sponsored by Senator Brandon Creighton this week. This bill transforms the way the state funds community colleges and increases funding across the board. The bill allocates nearly \$430 million over the biennium in additional funding for over 50 community colleges statewide. The bill creates an outcomes-based funding structure that rewards colleges for students who earn credentials of value, complete at least 15 hours of coursework and transfer to a four-year institution, enroll in dual credit courses, or take courses that apply toward workforce program requirements. It also enhances financial aid benefits, especially for students who are economically disadvantaged. This legislation was modeled after recommendations from the Texas Commission on Community College Finance, which worked on those recommendations since the 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative session concluded. This bill is essential to meeting the needs of our growing state and providing additional opportunities for students from all background to succeed.

#### **4. Bill to eliminate paper license plates passes Senate**

This week the Senate passed House Bill 718, authored by Representative Craig Goldman and sponsored by Senator Royce West. This bill would eliminate the use of temporary paper license plate tags in this state. Over the last several years, law enforcement has become aware of illegal operations that print fraudulent paper license plate tags. The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) estimated that in 2021 at least 1.8 million fraudulent paper plates were on the roads in Texas. Criminal enterprises use the paper tag system to print fraudulent tags and then commit crime using cars with fake tags. This bill eliminates that system and requires a license plate to stay with a car unless otherwise specified by the owner of the car. This bill eases the burden on law enforcement and keeps them from dangerous roadside encounters. I was pleased to work with Sen. West to ensure passage.

#### **5. Border security bill passes Senate, goes to conference**

House Bill 7, authored by Representative Ryan Guillen and sponsored by Senator Brian Birdwell, passed the Senate this week. The bill strengthens border security by creating a state crime for illegal entry into Texas from Mexico. It creates the Texas Border Force within the Department of Public Safety and authorizes them to conduct border security operations.

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