



# My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Fall is just around the corner! Which means the 2024-2025 hunting season is here. Dove hunting season opens this weekend. Be sure to get a license from Texas Parks and Wildlife and as always be safe.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Business and Commerce Committee discusses Artificial Intelligence, Texas Energy Fund**

This week, the Senate Business and Commerce Committee held a hearing on two interim charges, one regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the other on the Texas Energy Fund. The charge asks the committee to recommend a responsible regulator framework for AI development, including data privacy, industry standards, consumer protections, risk mitigation, and compliance processes. The committee heard from higher education professionals that study AI about how AI works, the levels of AI, and how it's commonly used. Panels also discussed AI in the public sector at state agencies, AI in the private sector, and AI in media, like the press, music, movies, and broadcasting. Ultimately, the state should develop a framework that addresses AI responsibly with the consumer in mind, but is not overly burdensome on new technology. It's an intricate, but important balance to strike.

The second charge the committee discussed was on the Texas Energy Fund (TEF). The TEF was created last session by Senate Bill 2627, by Sen. Charles Schwertner. It created four programs designed to incentivize the construction of more generation for the power grid. The fund was appropriated \$5 billion last session. This week, the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) selected the initial projects that will be funded by one of the programs. Out of 72 applications, 17 projects were selected to move on to the due diligence phase of the program. These projects represent 9,781 megawatts of new generation and a technologically and geographically diverse portfolio. This is another critical step forward toward the state's commitment to enhancing the stability of the grid and increasing generation resources.

## **2. One million ineligible voters removed from rolls**

Governor Abbott announced this month that Texas has removed over one million ineligible people from the voting rolls since 2021. That year, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 1, by Sen. Bryan Hughes, which further enhanced election security and integrity. Of the 1 million people

removed from the rolls, over 6,500 were noncitizens, over 6,000 had felony convictions, over 457,000 were deceased, over 463,000 on the suspense list, over 134,000 had moved, over 19,000 requested to cancel their registration, and 65,000 failed to respond to a notice of examination. The safety and security of our elections is paramount and it's our duty to maintain accurate voter registration rolls.

### **3. TxDOT announces record \$148 billion ten-year plan**

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and Governor Abbott announced a record \$148 billion investment in Texas' transportation infrastructure. That includes a \$104 billion ten-year transportation plan and over \$43 billion for development and routine maintenance. This plan is a \$5.6 billion increase in total investment from the previous year. According to the department, many of the projects on the Unified Transportation Program (UTP) are roads included on Texas' 100 most congested roadways list. Also included in the UTP is \$17.3 billion for safety and \$1.7 billion in funding for rural corridors and key roadways in economic hubs.

### **4. HHSC awarding \$3.3 million to rural hospitals for labor and delivery services**

This month, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) announced the Rural Hospital Maternal Care Operations Grant for rural hospitals that are not currently providing in patient labor and delivery services. The funding totals \$3.3 million and provides qualifying hospitals a one-time payment of \$35,000 to purchase neonatal equipment, supplies, and training for emergency labor and delivery services. Grant applications are open now and close on September 13.

### **5. Big Time Texas Hunts open for applications, hunting licenses now available**

The Big Time Texas Hunts draw is open for applications. There are 10 premium guided hunt packages and new opportunity this year to win a chance to free-range hunt a mature male aoudad ram in the Trans-Pecos region. Also new this year, wild game chef Jesse Griffiths will join the draw winners of the Big Time Bird Hunt and give a private cooking lesson to the winner on the turkey hunt. Entries are available online for \$9 each or at a licensed retailer for \$10 each. The deadline to purchase is October 15 with winners announced within two weeks. Additionally, Texas hunting and fishing licenses also went on sale this month. Happy hunting!

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