



# My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release  
October 31, 2024  
word count: 747

Contact: Shelby Vestal  
Tel: 512-463-0103

The holidays are fast approaching and we're busy gearing up for the next legislative session. It will be here faster than we know it!

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Texas Veterans Commission awards over \$1.4 million in grants to 8 East Texas organizations**

Last month, the Texas Veterans Commission presented over \$1.4 million to eight East Texas organizations that provide services for veterans and their families. Those grants include:

- A \$300,000 grant for financial assistance to Cass County;
- A \$70,000 grant for financial assistance to the Deep East Texas Council of Governments;
- A \$230,000 grant for home modifications to Northeast Texas Habitat for Humanity;
- A \$145,000 grant for transportation programs to Rise-Resource Information Support and Empowerment;
- A \$145,000 grant for peer support services to Sabine Valley Regional MHMR Center;
- A \$100,000 grant to the Salvation Army – Lufkin;
- And a \$180,000 grant for financial assistance to Trinity County.

These funds are critical to providing direct services to veterans. In total, TVC approved 181 grants statewide that total over \$44 million. The funds are generated primarily from the Texas Lottery Commission's games designed specifically for veterans support. Texans can also donate when registering their vehicles or getting a hunting or fishing license. These funds will help nearly 42,000 veterans, their dependents, and surviving spouses. It's imperative we as a state continue to support those who bravely served our nation and their families.

## **2. TX Space Commission launches \$150 million spaceflight exploration, research, development program**

The Texas Space Commission has opened grant applications for \$150 million of funding available for businesses and nonprofits looking to fuel the budding Texas space industry. The Space Exploration and Aeronautics Research Fund (SEARF) is designed to support projects related to several areas of space exploration or spaceflight including emerging technology related

to human spaceflight, research involving any aspect of space exploration or spaceflight, workforce training, curation of post-mission materials, and development of infrastructure useful or necessary for the establishment of a spaceport. There is no deadline to apply and the commission will consider applications as they come in. To learn more or apply, visit [www.space.texas.gov](http://www.space.texas.gov).

### **3. Neches High School named Blue Ribbon School**

This year, the US Department of Education announced that Neches High School is a Blue Ribbon School. They were nominated in the Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing School category. The national Blue Ribbon Schools program awards high-performing schools and schools that are making great strides in closing achievement gaps. Overall, 356 schools were recognized in 46 states, with 31 of those schools in Texas – the most of any participating state. The National Blue Ribbon Schools program is one of the Department of Education’s longest-running recognition programs. The program began over 40 years ago as a way to highlight the best schools in the country and to share best practices from those schools. The two categories include “Exemplary High Performing” public schools which have the state’s highest high school graduation rates and the highest achieving students in English and math and “Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing” public schools which have made the greatest advances in closing student subgroup achievement gaps in English and math over the past three to five years. Congratulations to all the teachers, students, and administrators at Neches High School for such a wonderful achievement and recognition!

### **4. Texas Stock Exchange announces leadership**

Late last month, the Texas Stock Exchange officially announced its leadership team, a critical step forward as the exchange plans its launch. The leadership team is composed of professionals with experience in market structure, regulation, and corporate governance and draws on both public and private sector backgrounds. The exchange plans to file a registration to operate as a national securities exchange in the coming months with the goal of opening for trading in 2025.

### **5. Texas DPS reminds drivers inspections changes coming soon**

The Texas Department of Public Safety is reminding drivers of upcoming changes to the state’s Vehicle Safety Inspection Program that eliminates most vehicle safety inspections. Beginning in January, non-commercial vehicles will no longer need a vehicle safety inspection before registration. While the state will no longer require a safety inspection, several counties will still require emissions tests for vehicles registered in those counties. Emissions tests are required in major metropolitan areas, including Brazoria, Collin, Dallas, Denton, El Paso, Ellis, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Johnson, Kaufman, Montgomery, Parker, Rockwall, Tarrant, Travis, and Williamson counties. Bexar County will be adding an emissions test requirement in 2026.

###