



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Contact: Shelby Vestal
Tel: 512-463-0103

This week we celebrate one of my favorite holidays, Thanksgiving. Enjoy food, family, and football – including the return of a historic in-state rivalry. Happy Thanksgiving!

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Comptroller announces awards for broadband programs

The Broadband Development Office (BDO) announced it has notified the first wave of awardees for its Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) II program. This represents \$580 million in funding that will connect almost 80,000 locations to high-speed broadband in 15 counties across the state. The BOOT II program is funded in part by federal Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund and by the state's Broadband Infrastructure Fund. The BDO identified two counties in each of the Comptroller's 12 economic regions that demonstrated a high-level of need, measured by percentage of unserved or underserved broadband locations. This program will ensure that eligible locations in those counties will receive internet service at speeds of 100/20 Mbps – the federal definition for broadband service. Three counties in Senate District 3 were included in the program: Liberty, Newton, and Trinity Counties. The BDO will post awardee information on their website once agreements have been signed.

2. Temple Foundation President, CEO named new Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board commissioner

This month, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) announced Dr. Wynn Rosser as the new Commissioner of Higher Education. Dr. Rosser previously served as President and CEO of the T.L.L. Temple Foundation, an East Texas-based organization dedicated to building up rural East Texas communities and alleviating poverty. During his time at the Temple Foundation, Dr. Rosser continued the foundation's commitment to education, healthcare, regional community development, and community resilience in East Texas. In his new position, he will oversee initiatives at THECB that equip students to enter the workforce, enable more students to access higher education, and build a stronger Texas economy. I would like to thank Dr. Rosser for his incredible work at the Temple Foundation and wish him success as he moves forward at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

3. Lufkin High School band wins third straight state title

The Lufkin High School Band has once again claimed a state title. This is the third win in a row for the band which performs in the military marching style and competes in that category. Military Marching is a traditional straight-line style of marching, and everyone moves in a forward direction. This differs from the corps style, in which the band generally always faces the front. Most modern-day marching bands perform in the corps style, however the largest notable military-style marching band in the nation is here in Texas at Texas A&M University. The National Association of Military Marching Bands (NAMMB) has traditionally sponsored the state contest. However, in 2020 the University Interscholastic League (UIL) decided to try hosting a Military Marching Band contest. The Panther Band won UIL state titles in 2021, 2023, and 2024 (no contest was held in 2022). Previously, the Panther Band also won NAMMB state titles in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019. Lufkin High School Band has a winning tradition, congratulations on your continued success!

4. Entergy awarded \$54 million in federal funds to enhance grid resilience

Entergy Texas was awarded nearly \$54 million in federal funding this month in a bid to enhance grid resilience particularly in the Port Arthur area. Entergy will focus the funding on a project aimed to help lessen the impact of future extreme weather events in the coastal community. The funding comes from the Department of Energy's Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) program, funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The GRIP program is aimed at enhancing the power grid and making it more resilient in the face of extreme weather.

5. DPS announces new leadership

This month, the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) announced a new director, Senior Deputy Director Freeman F. Martin. Earlier this year, current Director Steve McCraw announced his intention to retire by year-end. The Public Safety Commission (PSC) gathered this month and approved the selection of Deputy Director Martin. Martin has been with DPS since 1990, when he started as a Texas Highway Patrol (THP) Trooper in Winnie. Over the past thirty plus years, he has served as THP Corporal, Narcotics Service Sergeant in Houston, and a Texas Ranger Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, and Major in several cities across the state. He later was appointed Deputy Director of Homeland Security Operations by the PSC and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 2018. He will be sworn in at a ceremony on December 2.