



# My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release  
December 19, 2024  
word count: 756

Contact: Shelby Vestal  
Tel: 512-463-0103

With the holidays right around the corner, now is an appropriate time for reflection, grace, and thanks. I want to express my gratitude to each of you for continuing to allow me to advocate on your behalf. It is one of the greatest honors of my life to represent East and Southeast Texas in the Texas Legislature, and a responsibility I do not take lightly. I hope you all have a safe holiday season and a very Merry Christmas.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Bill filing for the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session begins**

November 12 marked the first day legislators could file bills for the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislature – kicking off the beginning of the next session. Since bill filing opened, members have already filed over 2,000 bills between the House and Senate. Typically, over the course of the session, members will file upwards of 7,500 bills. While most of those will not pass, we will have an opportunity to read and evaluate many of them. The 89<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session officially begins on Tuesday, January 14 at noon. Members can file bills until the 60<sup>th</sup> day of session, March 14<sup>th</sup>. After that date, members can only work on bills that have already been filed. The regular legislative session lasts 140 days and will conclude on Monday, June 2. I look forward to representing Senate District 3 once again this session and encourage constituents to reach out to my office if they have an interest in any legislation coming before the Legislature.

## **2. State Board of Education approves new instructional materials**

Last month, the State Board of Education (SBOE) approved a comprehensive list of K-12 instructional materials as part of the new Instructional Materials Review and Approval (IMRA) process. These new materials were developed and approved for statewide use as directed by House Bill 1605 from the 88<sup>th</sup> Regular Session by Rep. Brad Buckley. Districts that use materials on the approved list are eligible for an additional \$40 per student in additional funding. That bill also directed the state to develop its own high-quality instructional materials. The SBOE approved that curriculum, called the Bluebonnet Learning curriculum, which covers kindergarten through fifth grade. Using the state-developed curriculum is optional for school districts, but districts who opt to use it will receive an extra \$20 per student, so \$60 per student total. There was some disagreement surrounding the content in Bluebonnet Learning because it uses well-

known Bible stories and other Christian-based stories. However, there are references to other faiths and traditions in the curriculum as well. The approval of the instructional materials followed a months-long public comment period and open meetings that allowed public testimony.

### **3. Dementia research effort announced by Lt. Gov. Patrick**

Lt. Governor Dan Patrick announced a new initiative to help lead the fight against dementia. The Dementia Prevention Research Institute of Texas (DPRIT) will be a new research program funded by the state to support researchers and companies coming to Texas and to further their efforts. It's modeled off a similar state program the Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT). CPRIT is one of the most successful health programs ever created in Texas, and the goal is for DPRIT to be similar. Together, we can work to offer further insight into this heartbreaking disease.

### **4. ETCOG receives emergency radio infrastructure grant**

The East Texas Council of Governments announced the approval of \$1.75 million in grants awarded to East Texas governments to enhance public safety. The grants will support critical emergency radio infrastructure needs such as integrating and expanding the TxWARN system, interoperability, and VHF system upgrades. The funds are from the State Emergency Radio Infrastructure program which is facilitated by the Governor's Public Safety Office. These upgrades are critical to ensure public safety in East Texas and will help modernize emergency radio infrastructure in the region.

### **5. Leadership pledge funding to stabilize unemployment insurance fund**

Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senate Finance Committee Chair Huffman, and House Appropriations Chair Dr. Bonnen pledge to appropriate funding to stabilize unemployment insurance rates for businesses next session. Rates have been increasing due to higher wages and an evolving job market in Texas. The Texas Workforce Commission manages the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund and projected it will need an infusion of funding next year. Typically, those additional funding needs would be paid through additional assessments on businesses. By plugging the hole with state funding, businesses can keep more of their hard-earned profits and the state will keep the fee as it currently is.

###