



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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This week will mark the anniversary of the "Travis Letter." On February 24th, 1836, William B. Travis wrote a letter addressed "To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World" ending his letter with the powerful "Victory or Death."

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Bill filed to give teachers pay raises

Senator Brandon Creighton filed Senate Bill 26 this week which would give permanent teacher pay raises to all teachers across the state. The bill would increase teacher pay in accordance to experience and additional increases for teachers at smaller schools. Teachers with 3-4 years of experience would receive an increase of \$2,500 per year at schools of more than 5,000 students and \$5,000 at schools with 5,000 students or less. Teachers with 5 or more years of experience will receive a \$5,500 pay increase at schools of more than 5,000 students and \$10,000 at schools with 5,000 students or less. Additionally, the bill would expand the existing Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) which was created in 2019. This bill would create an additional category for teacher designations which will create additional pay. Under this legislation, the number of teachers designated would increase from 33 percent to 50 percent. Additionally, the bill would provide free pre-K for teachers' children at the district they're employed. Texas teachers deserve a pay raise and I look forward to supporting our teachers this session.

2. Bail reform bills pass Senate

This week the Texas Senate passed a package of bills reforming the state's bail system. Three bills, all by Senator Joan Huffman, will require a denial of bail to certain violent offenders and will increase accountability of bail setting. SJR 1 will ask voters to approve an amendment to the state constitution that would require judges to deny bail to any illegal immigrant arrested on suspicion of a felony offense, if the judge has probable cause to believe the suspect committed the alleged crime. SB 9 will increase judges access to criminal history and will require that bail be set by an elected judge as opposed to a magistrate for certain offenders, including those accused of the most serious violent crimes. Lastly SB 40 would prohibit any taxpayer funds from being donated to charitable bond organizations.

Senator Huffman offered SJR 1 in memory of Jocelyn Nungary, a 12-year-old girl from Houston who was allegedly attacked and murdered by two illegal immigrants.

3. FCIC successfully investigates, prosecutes card skimming

A Smith County court issued a life sentence to Fabrizio Slatineanu who illegally entered the country and was found guilty of stealing credit card information through a "skimmer," a small device that can be inserted into ATMs or gas pumps. Officials stated that Slatineanu stole more than \$280,000 from Smith County residents in a single weekend. The case was prosecuted by the Smith County District Attorney's Office. The conviction was a result of a multi-agency investigation involving the Smith County Sheriff's Office, the Tyler Police Department, the Lindale Police Department, and the Texas Financial Crimes Intelligence Center. The FCIC coordinates with law enforcement across the world to protect consumers and the Texas economy by preventing, identifying, and investigating organized financial crimes.

4. TDA launches downtown revitalization program

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) will continue a program to provide funding to improve infrastructure for economic activity within designated downtown districts or Main Street areas. Eligible applicants must be incorporated municipalities. TDA states that Downtown Districts can typically be described as a city's historic area of commerce, an economic center of the community, or the areas around a courthouse or city square. Communities can apply now and applications will be due April 3rd.

5. School safety, broadband, tax-payer funded lobbying bills filed this week

This week I filed several bills regarding a variety of issues in our district and state. Senate Bill 1262 will continue efforts from last session to improve the safety of our public schools by allowing the Texas Education Agency to commission peace officers. This added ability will ensure our public schools have access to significant safety measures. Additionally, I filed Senate Bill 1405 which will align the state's definition of internet or broadband speed with the federal standard. SB 1405 will add measures to increase accessibility to high speed internet. I also filed Senate Bill 1420 which will prohibit cities, counties, and school districts from hiring taxpayer-funded, contract lobbyists.

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