



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Contact: Shelby Vestal  
Tel:512-463-0103

On March 2nd, 1836 The Texas Declaration of Independence was signed at Washington-on-the-Brazos. This Sunday will mark 189 years since the Republic of Texas declared itself an independent nation.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Finance committee hears bill regarding Dementia Prevention Institute**

This week the Senate Finance Committee will hear Senate Bill 5 and Senate Joint Resolution 3, both authored by Senator Joan Huffman. The bill and accompanying resolution will create the Dementia Prevention Research Institute of Texas (DPRIT). The institute will enhance and support research into the causes, prevention, and treatment of dementia and related disorders. The bill and resolution would create a \$3 billion fund to support and expedite innovation in dementia research over the next 10 years. The institute will award grants to create, attract, and expand research capabilities of eligible institutions of higher education and other public and private entities. DPRIT follows a model created several session ago for the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT), an incredibly successful model to attract the best and brightest researchers to the state to develop innovative cancer treatments. I am excited to work on legislation to combat this growing issue.

## **2. Teacher pay raises pass Texas Senate**

On Wednesday, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 26 authored by Senator Brandon Creighton. SB 26 approves across the board raises for Texas teachers. The bill will help recruit and retain teachers in both rural and urban schools. In rural areas teachers with five or more years experience may receive up to a \$10,000 raise. In districts with more than 5,000 students, teachers with five or more years experience may receive up to a \$5,500 raise. This bipartisan effort will also expand the Teacher Incentive Allotment, which allows raises to be granted based on student performance.

### **3. Senate bill filed to end courier services at Texas Lottery Commission.**

Senate Bill 28 by Senator Bob Hall was heard in the Senate State Affairs Committee this week. The bill seeks to end Lottery ticket sales over the Internet, including via mobile devices. Existing statute already prohibits the sale of tickets via telephone, but this bill clarifies that includes over the internet. In recent years, the rules at the Lottery Commission were changed to allow for "courier services." These services allow buyers to order tickets via an app. The third party would then in turn purchase tickets from a ticket retailer and deliver them electronically to the buyer. This bill will implement necessary safety measure to reduce the risk of fraudulent activity connected to the Texas Lottery. The lottery is a sizable source of revenue for our state, and this added safe guard will ensure the ethical operation of the system. In addition, the governor has called on the Texas Rangers to investigate fraudulent activity at the Lottery Commission and with Lottery ticket sales connected to these courier services.

### **4. Bill filed providing affirmative defense for a landowner to disable a drone**

Representative Jeff Leach filed House Bill 2916 this week, which would allow landowners to shoot down unmanned aircraft over their property. The bill provides an affirmative defense for shooting down a drone or unidentified flying object. For the bill to apply, three criteria must be met: the object must have been on property "owned or legally occupied by the person," it must be shot using a firearm "legally possessed by the person to disable, damage, or destroy an unmanned aircraft that the person did not authorize to be on or over the property," and that the person has not been "prohibited from discharging the firearm" by the penal code, or policy governing the use of the property. It is a crime to knowingly or recklessly- destroy, damage, or tamper with another person's tangible property, however under the proposed legislation, if a person can prove the three criteria have been met, it could reduce or void criminal or civil liability.

### **5. Scam texts targeting Texans posing as toll road**

Texas drivers have experienced a surge in fraudulent texts claiming that they have unpaid tolls. The most widely received text, which impersonates the Texas Department of Transportation, states that the driver has unpaid fees and can avoid any late penalties by paying their fee within the next twelve hours. Often, these texts include a link which appears to be to "TxTag" and is signed from the "Toll Roads Team." TxDOT has reminded customers that they do not send text messages about unpaid tolls. If TxDOT needs to reach a customer, the message will likely be sent from a 22498 number, but any legitimate messages will not be in reference to unpaid bills. TxDOT is working to take down the fraudulent websites impersonating their operation.

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