



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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On March 6, 1836, the Alamo fell to the Mexican army after thirteen days under siege. General Santa Anna launched an early morning assault on the mission; the battle lasted 90 minutes. All defenders of the Alamo were killed in the battle. The slogan “Remember the Alamo!” became a rallying cry for the Texas Revolution, which successfully defeated the Mexican army at the Battle of San Jacinto weeks later.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Golden Triangle Day at the Capitol**

This week I was thrilled to welcome a large contingent of constituents from Southeast Texas for Golden Triangle Day at the Texas Capitol. The Golden Triangle refers to the region comprising Beaumont, Orange, Port Arthur, and the counties of Jefferson and Orange. The event was organized by the Beaumont Orange, and Port Arthur Chambers of Commerce. Industry and community leaders came to Austin to showcase the importance of Southeast Texas to the state and explain the legislative agenda for the area.

## **2. Bill to ban sale of THC products heard in Senate committee**

The Senate State Affairs Committee heard testimony on Senate Bill 3 by Senator Charles Perry this week. The bill would outlaw products containing any THC, which is the psychoactive element in marijuana. A few sessions ago, a bill passed to help support the emerging hemp industry by authorizing the sale of consumable hemp, which has trace amounts of non-intoxicating delta-9 THC. However, that bill limited the amount of THC products could have to not more than 0.3% concentration - anything higher is considered marijuana. While both marijuana and hemp are cannabis plants, hemp has lower THC levels than marijuana, which is the distinction between the two. Since 2019 when the law approving consumable hemp sales passed, the state has seen a proliferation of businesses that claim to sell hemp-derived products. However, these products often have effects more similar to marijuana products and have THC concentrations well above the legal limit. This bill is an attempt to rein in an industry that has exploded across the state and many are operating illegally. The hearing extended for many hours and ultimately left the bill pending in committee.

### **3. Increase for judicial pay, accountability pass Senate Finance**

Senate Bill 293 by Senator Joan Huffman passed Senate Finance this week. The bill serves two purposes – providing a pay raise for judges across the state and strengthening judicial accountability and transparency. The bill provides a 15 percent salary increase in base pay for judges, including district judges, appellate and high-court judges, elected prosecutors, and judges with more experience in the higher salary tiers. A few weeks ago, the newly appointed Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court Jimmy Blacklock delivered the State of the Judiciary Address. One of the key points of his speech was addressing judicial pay. He pointed out that Texas ranks 48<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in judicial pay. This bill would address those concerns and help attract more high-quality candidates to the job.

The second part of the bill provides more accountability and transparency over judges by expanding the definition of judicial misconduct, enhancing the complaint process against judges, requiring quarterly reporting of district judges' duties, and modifying eligibility requirements for retired judges to serve in temporary assignments.

### **4. Battleship Texas one step closer to a new home**

The Battleship Texas Foundation announced this week the dreadnought has found a new home at Pier 15 in Galveston. The Galveston Wharves Board unanimously approved the recommendation to make the pier the iconic ship's new home. The contracts, environmental permitting, and marine and traffic analysis are ongoing, but Board approval was an important step. The Battleship is currently undergoing extensive renovations funded by the state to ensure future generations can enjoy and learn about her incredible legacy.

### **5. TPWD predicts excellent spring turkey season**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is predicting a strong spring turkey season due to an abundance of two-year-old turkeys. During 2023 and 2024, most of Texas saw a bump in production and recruitment which will ultimately temporarily expand the footprint of where the birds are found. The East Turkey Zone is comprised of 12 counties including Bowie, Cass, Fannin, Grayson, Jasper, Lamar, Marion, Nacogdoches, Newton, Polk, Red River, and Sabine. There is a one turkey bag limit for the zone and mandatory reporting is required within 24 hours of harvest. The East Zone season is from April 22 to May 14. Other zones in the state open as early as March 15. Happy Hunting!

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