



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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This week we welcomed the Texas Forestry Association (TFA) to the Texas Capitol. TFA, which has been active since 1914, has members in a variety of fields including logging, consulting, conservation, planting, and prescribed burning. We were proud to have this group (including Smokey the Bear) join us for a day at the Capitol!

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Senate Bill 16 passes Senate to stop non-citizen voting

This week the Senate passed SB 16 by Senator Bryan Hughes, which would require Texans to provide proof of citizenship in order to register to vote in state and local elections. Senator Hughes shared that between 2021 and 2024 DPS removed 6,500 non-citizens from voter registration rolls. There are two primary ways to register to vote – either when you renew your driver's license with a DPS office or by mail application. Most voters register through a DPS office. This bill would require that applicants present proof of citizenship, such as US passport, birth certificate, citizenship papers for naturalization, or a federal ID issued by immigration authorities, when registering for the first time. For those registering by mail, a driver's license number, official ID number, or the last four digits of a Social Security number must be provided. As a coauthor of this bill, I am confident that this will improve the integrity of our state and local election systems.

2. Senate Bill 22 creates opportunity for movie industry in Texas

This week the Senate Finance Committee passed SB 22 by Senator Joan Huffman out of committee. The bill seeks to enhance funding for the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program. The program launched in 2007 to lure film production to the state with both partial reimbursements and tax breaks. Projects were eligible if more than half the cast and crew were Texas residents and the majority of production occurred within the state. The program has proved to be financially beneficial with \$2.5 billion dollars of economic impact and 200,000 jobs brought to the state. However, other states have launched similar programs that have proved to be more competitive. SB 22 will dedicate \$500 million each biennium for the next decade to enhance the program. Testimony from actors and native Texans Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson shed light on what improvements will increase the film industry's presence in Texas. SB 22 will bring billions of dollars to the Texas economy and give Texas a prominent place on the silver screen.

3. Senate Bill 8 creates partnership between sheriffs, federal ICE agents

On Tuesday, the Senate passed SB 8 which will increase the cooperation of local sheriff offices and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The 287(g) program is an initiative by ICE for counties to identify and detain illegal immigrants. Currently, only 35 Texas counties participate in the program. SB 8 will mandate that counties with a population over 100,000 participate in the program. Also included in the proposed legislation, grants will be available to smaller counties that wish to participate. The 287(g) rule has three programs. The primary program, known as the jail model, trains jailers to identify immigration status within ICE's system. Another program is the Warrant Service Officer program, which trains officers in issuing administrative warrants to hold an inmate in ICE custody within a local jail. Lastly, the Task Force program trains local law enforcement and deputizes officers to exercise limited immigration authorities in the course of their regular duties.

4. SJR 4 will raise cap on Rainy Day Fund

In 1988, the Texas Legislature created the Emergency Stabilization Fund (ESF) commonly known as the "rainy day fund." The fund is a reserve that the state has available in economically volatile times. Currently, the state constitution caps the maximum balance at 10 percent of General Revenue. The comptroller projects to reach this cap in 2026, which will cause \$5.6 billion to "spill over" back into General Revenue. Instead, the proposed resolution would raise the cap on the ESF from 10 to 15 percent for the maximum biennial balance, capturing the spill over in what is functionally the state's savings account. The creation of the ESF and continual support through constitutionally-dedicated funding safeguards the fiscal prosperity of our state.

5. 3.5 magnitude earthquake detected in Nacogdoches

Friday night, residents of Nacogdoches County reported feeling a tremble that felt like a storm hit. The US Geological Service confirmed a 3.5 magnitude earthquake just southwest of Lake Nacogdoches. Deputies and local fire departments responded immediately concerned about potential gas line breaks. No injuries or significant damage have been reported.

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