



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release  
April 17th, 2025  
word count: 752

Contact: Shelby Vestal  
Tel: 512-463-0103

This week we observed Holy Week and remember the sacrifice Christ made for us. We look forward to celebrating the resurrection this Easter Sunday. I hope you enjoy time with your families this Easter weekend.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. House, Senate name conferees on budget**

The budget has passed both chambers of the Texas Legislature. However, since each chamber passed their own version of the budget, there will be a conference committee to reconcile the differences. I am once again honored to serve as one of five Senate conferees on the budget. In the coming weeks, I will work with my House counterpart, Representative Armando Walle, to delve into articles of the budget we work on and produce a conservative, fiscally responsible budget. We will work on three budget articles: Article 6 on Natural Resources, Article 7 on Business and Economic Development, and Article 8 on Regulatory agencies. Together 36 agencies and almost \$60 billion in all funds are covered in that part of the budget. We continue to work hard on crafting a budget to best serve Texas.

## **2. ERCOT releases updated load forecast**

Last week, ERCOT presented an updated long-term load forecast to the Senate Committee on Business and Commerce. As a member of the committee, I heard from the CEO of ERCOT Pablo Vegas about the continued increase in demand the state will experience over the next six years. According to ERCOT's projections, the state could see demand surge up to 148 gigawatts. Existing load currently sits under 95 GW. That is a massive increase in demand and thus requires a massive increase in generation. Most of the new generation demand is driven by the increase in data centers coming to the state. It is the largest growth by type. Data centers require massive amounts of electricity to power since they play a critical role as the backbone of digital infrastructure. The Legislature is actively planning how best to accommodate large loads that want to connect to the ERCOT grid and incentivizing generation to meet that demand.

## **3. Bill to ban cell phone use in schools passes Senate**

The Senate passed Senate Bill 2365 by Sen. Brandon Creighton unanimously this week. The bill would require local school boards to adopt a policy prohibiting students from using cell phones during instructional time. The bill does require school boards to make exceptions for students who have special needs and require the use of a cell phone and for any health and safety requirements. Cell phones have been shown to be disruptive to classrooms, lead to adverse mental health outcomes, and affect students' attention spans. While many districts statewide have already banned cell phone use at school, it's critical that all students are focused on learning in the classroom – not their phones. I was proud to support this legislation in the Senate.

#### **4. Sales tax holiday for emergency supplies approaching**

Summer means severe weather for much of Texas. It is important to stock up on emergency supplies before the next fire, flood, tornado, or hurricane hits. Texans have the opportunity to do that tax free beginning April 26 and ending April 28. There is no limit to the number of qualifying items you can purchase, which include: household batteries, fuel containers, and flashlights priced under \$75; hurricane shutters and emergency ladders priced under \$300; and portable generators priced less than \$3,000. The Comptroller estimates Texans will save about \$2.3 million in state and local sales taxes during the tax holiday. For a list of all qualified purchases, visit the Comptroller's website at [www.comptroller.texas.gov](http://www.comptroller.texas.gov).

#### **5. Governor announces 2025 Star of Texas nominations**

Governor Greg Abbott announced the 2025 Star of Texas nominations are now open. Each year, the governor honors peace officers, firefighters, and emergency first responders who are killed or suffer serious injury in the line of duty. Private citizens who are seriously injured or killed while aiding or attempting to aid a peace officer, firefighter, or emergency first responder are also eligible to receive the award. The awards began in 2003 when the Legislature passed House Bill 1937. The bill also recognizes September 11<sup>th</sup> as Texas First Responder Day. Since then, 734 Texans have been honored. To be eligible for consideration, the incident must have occurred between September 1, 2003 and June 13<sup>th</sup> the year of the awards ceremony. A person may receive more than one Star of Texas Award. To nominate a brave Texan in your community, visit <https://gov.texas.gov/apps/staroftexas>. Nominations close on June 13, 2025.

###