

ROBERT NICHOLS

A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR NICHOLS

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ROBERT L. NICHOLS
STATE SENATOR

Dear friends,

The 86th Legislative Session has come and gone, and I am proud to continue to represent you in the Texas Senate. As it is important that you hear directly from your legislators on how we are working for you, I am sending you this newsletter which will provide an update on what the Legislature accomplished this session.

Some things you may be most interested in reading include:

- ★ *how the state is ensuring school districts have adequate funding and resources they need to educate our students*
- ★ *what the state did to improve broadband internet access in rural areas*
- ★ *how the state is recovering from and preparing for future natural disasters*
- ★ *how the Legislature is providing meaningful property tax reform*

Of course, one document cannot answer every question or address every concern. If there is something you want to know from me, please do not hesitate to call the Capitol office or the district office closest to you. As a resident of Senate District 3, these offices belong to you, and my staff and I are here to help.

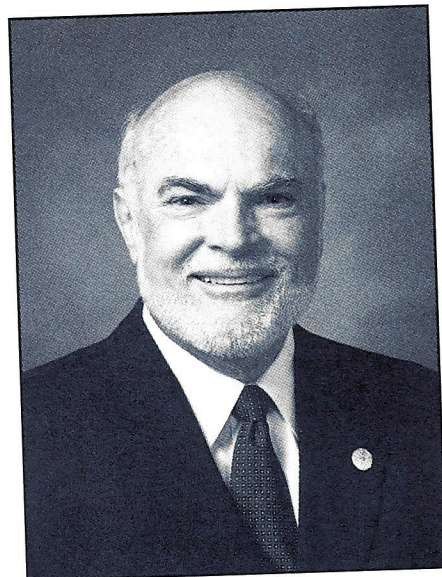
It has been and continues to be one of the greatest honors of my life to represent you in the Texas Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Lee Nichols".

Robert L. Nichols
State Senator

P.S. Inside you will also find information on how to get a summary of the proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution. As a voter, you will have the opportunity to approve or reject these proposed amendments during the November 5th election.



LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 86TH SESSION

★ PROPERTY TAX REFORM

One of the top priorities of the Texas Legislature for the 86th Session was to provide property tax reform for Texans. The Legislature accomplished this by passing Senate Bill 2, also known as the Texas Property Tax Reform and Transparency Act. This bill requires cities, counties, and other taxing entities to seek voter approval before levying 3.5 percent more property tax revenue than was levied the previous year. Community colleges, hospital districts, and entities with the lowest rates (2.5 cents per \$100 valuation, or less) must seek voter approval before they can pass more than an eight percent revenue growth annually. It also creates a disaster provision which allows those entities in a disaster-declared area to utilize an eight percent voter-approval rate for two years if values return to pre-disaster level. If they do not return, they can use the rate for three years.

An online database will be created which will help property owners to understand how these proposed rate changes would affect their tax bills, as well as make it easy and accessible for them to comment on the proposed tax increases using an automatically generated form. The database would also include information regarding the dates for public hearings on the proposed increase in local tax rates. I am pleased with the work the Legislature did in providing more transparency for Texans and giving them a voice and control over how their tax rates are set.



Sen. Nichols and Rep. Cody Harris with Neches ISD volleyball team who were being honored for winning the 2018 State Championship.

★ FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS

The Senate and House unanimously passed House Bill 3, the school finance reform bill, on one of the last days of the legislative session. This bill includes \$6.5 billion for public education, while increasing the state share of education funding from 38 percent to 45 percent. This includes raising the base funding per student from \$5,140 to \$6,160. A portion of this funding must be used to give salary

increases and benefits to teachers, librarians, nurses and counselors, with a smaller portion to be used to give raises to all other school district employees. It fully funds Pre-K for the state's most needy children, increases the amount of money used to educate low-income students, improves dyslexia programs, and provides funding for high-needs and rural school districts that need help incentivizing teachers to work there.

Approximately \$5.1 billion was included in the bill to lower school district tax rates eight cents statewide in 2020 and 13 cents in 2021, on average. School districts with property values growing 2.5% or more per year would have their tax rates automatically decreased to keep their tax revenue growth in line. It also reduces recapture payments by school districts. I am proud to be a part of a legislature that put our students first and ensured they are given the education they deserve and need.



Sen. Nichols with Texas Farm Bureau representatives from Senate District 3.

★ TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM

At the beginning of the legislative session, the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) was struggling to ensure it was financially sound. Under current state law, the Legislature does not have the ability to approve an increase in the monthly payments retired teachers receive, unless TRS is 'actuarially sound' or financially healthy and able to pay off its debts in less than 31 years. To address this, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 12, which will shore up the state's TRS pension system. In addition to its regular funding, the state is contributing an additional \$1.11 billion from the Economic Stabilization Fund to go towards the pension fund to ensure it remains actuarially sound.

This funding will also enable the Legislature to provide retirees with a one-time "13th check" beyond the monthly allocation they currently receive. Our teachers play a vital role in molding future generations of Texans and we have made a promise to them that we must keep in ensuring their pension system remains financially sound and stable.

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 86TH SESSION

★ PASSING A BALANCED BUDGET

The only thing the Texas Legislature is constitutionally required to do each session is pass a balanced budget. As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, I am happy to share that we accomplished this task and passed a \$250 billion budget which will account for the next two years of state spending. For the first time in many sessions, the Governor did not exercise his line-item veto powers and signed the budget exactly as it was passed by the House and Senate. The budget includes \$94.5 billion for public schools and universities; an increase of 16 percent from the previous biennium's budget; \$806 million for school districts affected by Hurricane Harvey; additional funding for the prevention, investigation and prosecution of human trafficking related activities; and an increase in funding for all Child Protective Services functions.



Sen. Nichols and Rep. Ernest Bailes with representatives from the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce.

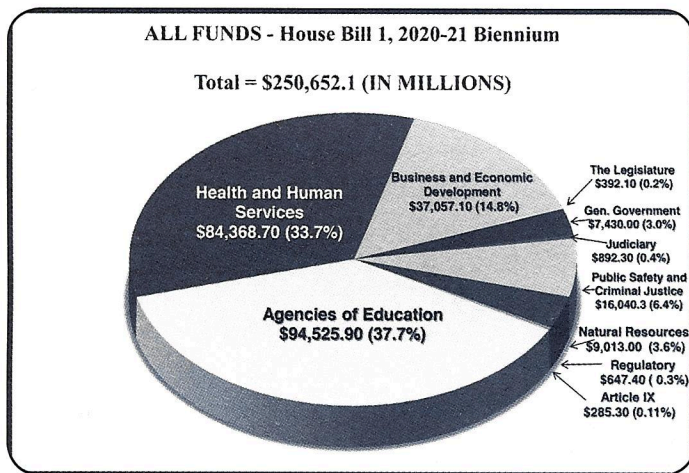
★ PROVIDING BROADBAND FOR RURAL AREAS

Beyond shopping online or watching Netflix, high speed internet has become essential for everyday life and for businesses; from sales and ordering supplies, to logistics, medical recording, training and educational materials. There are large areas of rural Texas that do not have access to high speed internet or even cell phone coverage, many of them within Senate District 3.

Senate Bill 14, which I authored, was signed into law by the Governor. This bill will help increase access to broadband internet for rural areas in Texas. This will be done with the help of Texas Electric Cooperatives (Co-Ops). These Co-Ops are member-owned non-profits, that have over 300,000 miles of distribution lines throughout rural Texas. By utilizing their existing electricity infrastructure, they will have the ability to deploy broadband to the members they serve, if the members ask for these services and it is viable for the area. This will help rural Texans to not only have access to high speed internet for their everyday lives, but also for their businesses.

★ DISASTER RELIEF FOR OUR STATE

Texas has suffered through many natural disasters in the past few years, some of them devastating local communities. The Legislature passed legislation aimed at bolstering the state's emergency preparedness and disaster relief programs. Senate Bill 6 requires the Texas Division of Emergency Management to establish guidelines for local officials to help in both disaster response and recovery, as well as managing debris removal. It also creates a disaster recovery loan program for those communities that suffered significant damage to their infrastructure. Senate Bill 7 establishes two new funds, the Texas Infrastructure Resiliency Fund and the Flood Infrastructure Fund, which address the effects of previous storms and to help the

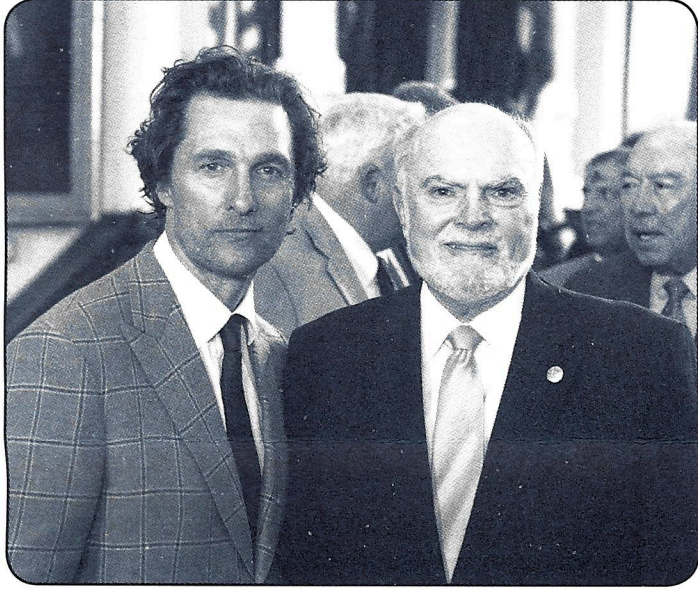


★ PROTECTING OUR STUDENTS

In recent years, our country and our state have witnessed tragic shootings and loss of life in our schools, including Santa Fe High School. In an effort to prevent these tragedies from happening in the future, multiple bills were passed this session that were geared towards school safety. Senate Bill 1, the main school safety bill, instructs school districts to implement multi-hazard emergency operation plans, requires certain training for school resource officers, and ensures all school district employees are trained to respond to emergencies. It also establishes threat assessment teams to help identify those students who may be potentially dangerous and determine how to intervene before they can become violent. Additionally, \$100 million was also allocated to school districts to purchase school safety upgrades such as doors with push bars, security systems, and metal detectors. Other bills include measures to increase mental health training educators and other school professionals receive and help improve students' access to mental and behavioral health services.

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 86TH SESSION

state prepare for future flooding and disasters. Senate Bill 8 creates the state's first flood plan, which gives representatives from each flood planning region in the state the ability to submit a plan for consideration in the state's master flood plan.



Sen. Nichols with Matthew McConaughey, who visited the Capitol to honor his former high school football team on their Championship.

★ RED LIGHT CAMERAS

Red light cameras have long been a contentious topic in the Legislature, as critics of these cameras believe they violate the U.S. Constitution and cause accidents as people abruptly stop to prevent running through an intersection. Red light cameras take a photograph of a vehicle entering an intersection after the light has turned red and then issue a \$75 ticket to the owner of the vehicle. Bills to do away with red light cameras have been passed out of the Senate many times in previous sessions but have never made it through the House.

This session was different with the passage of House Bill 1631, which will ban these cameras going forward. However, you may see them around for a little while longer as there is a grandfather clause that allows local governments to honor their current contracts until their end, without the option to renew them. Local and state officials cannot prevent drivers with an unpaid red-light ticket from renewing their vehicle registration.

★ PROTECTING OUR RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES

Our state has been and is diverse with people from every country, culture, and belief. To ensure each of these individuals and those that own businesses in our state are protected, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 1978. This bill provides protections for people and businesses who have donated to, supported, or

are affiliated with a religious organization. It prevents governmental entities from retaliating against individuals or businesses for these affiliations. A governmental entity is the state and any of its agencies, including a state judicial agency and any political subdivision of the state such as a city or county. Specifically, SB 1978 ensures that Texans who serve their communities, bid to contract with the state, take out a loan, or apply for benefits will not be denied simply because of their association with a religious group.

★ DRIVER'S RESPONSIBILITY ACT

As of January 2018, approximately 1.4 million Texans had suspended licenses for not paying surcharges as part of the Driver's Responsibility Program. This program, which was created in 2003, authorizes the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to assess surcharges to an individual based on certain traffic offenses including Driving While Intoxicated (DWI), driving without insurance, or driving without a license. These charges can range from \$100 for a few traffic infractions to \$2000 for driving while intoxicated. If a driver is unable to pay the fee within 105 days, their drivers license is suspended. Critics of this program believe this program leaves low-income drivers with costly bills, without their drivers licenses, and in a cycle of debt. To address these concerns, the Legislature passed House Bill 2048 which will eliminate this program and eliminate the surcharges assessed to drivers. Drivers licenses suspended only because of a failure to pay a DRP surcharge will be reinstated. Individuals who drive while intoxicated after the program is eliminated, will face additional fines up to \$6000.



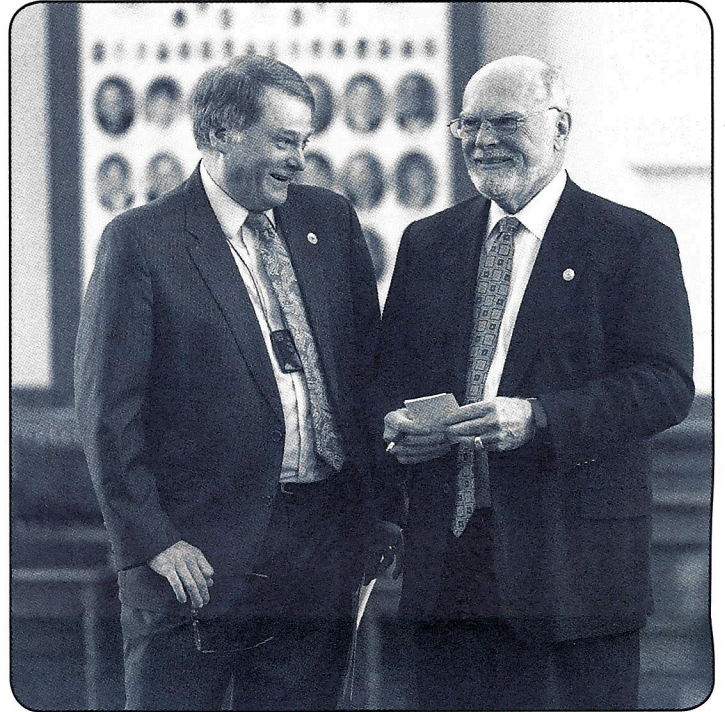
Sen. Nichols with Phil Crenshaw, who was honored by the Senate as the last living chaplain's assistant to serve in World War II.

SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS, SENATE DISTRICT 3

First elected to the Texas Senate in 2007, Robert Nichols represents 19 counties including the greater part of East Texas and Montgomery County.

Nichols serves as Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee and serves on the Senate Finance, Administration, Intergovernmental Relations, and Business and Commerce Committees. He is a member of the Legislative Audit Committee and previously served as Vice-Chair of the Sunset Advisory Commission.

During his seven sessions as a state senator, Nichols authored and passed legislation to protect landowners' rights, increase educational opportunities in East Texas, and reform transportation policies. He has also worked to reduce Medicaid fraud and promote free-market principles. He was designated as a Top Legislator by Texas Insider, a Champion of Free Enterprise by the Texas Association of Business, a Courageous Conservative by the Texas Conservative Coalition.

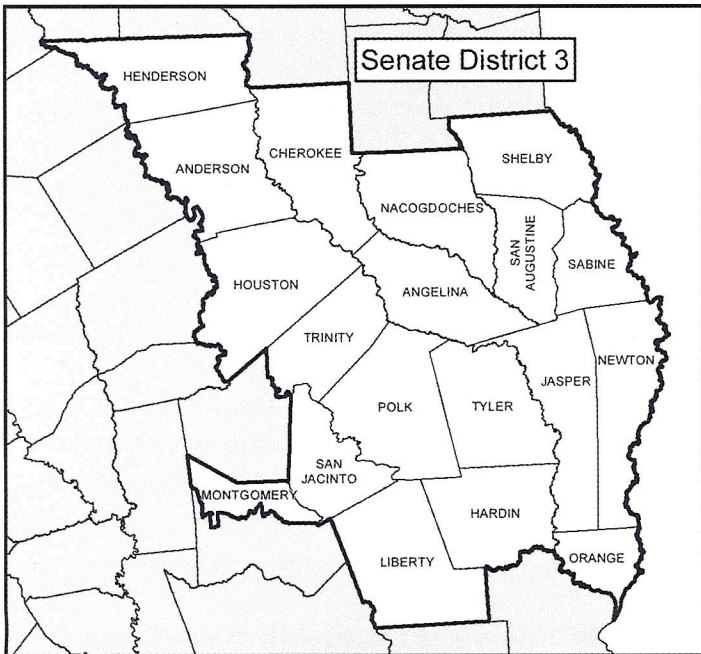


Sen. Nichols with Sen. Birdwell on the Senate Floor.

Before running for Senate, Nichols served as transportation commissioner for eight years where he established a reputation for increasing efficiency without compromising quality.

Nichols is a businessman from Jacksonville, Texas. In his hometown, he served on city council, was elected mayor, built four successful manufacturing facilities, earned 32 U.S. patents, and created more than 900 jobs for East Texas families.

Working his way through college by selling fireworks and ironing clothes for other students, Nichols earned a bachelor's degree from Lamar University in 1968. He married his high school sweetheart, Donna, and they are the proud parents of three children: Brittney, Joshua, and Collynn'rae. He is a member of the First United Methodist Church in Jacksonville.



Texas Constitutional Election

This fall, Texans will have the opportunity to vote on 10 amendments to the Texas Constitution. The last day to register to vote in this election is October 7, 2019. Early voting begins October 21 and continues through November 1. Election Day is November 5, 2019.

To view a summary of these amendments please visit:

<http://bit.ly/2019ConstitutaAmendments>. To ensure you are registered to vote, please visit www.votetexas.gov.

Copies of the summary will also be available in all of Senator Nichols' district offices. Or, if you prefer, you may contact any of his offices listed on this document and staff will gladly send you a copy.

SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS

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Cancer Information Service	(800) 4-CANCER
Child Support Hotline	(800) 252-8014
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Governor's Assist. Hotline	(800) 843-5789
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Social Security Administration	(800) 772-1213
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WIC Hotline	(800) 942-3678
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