



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols
by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Contact: Sydni Mitchell
Tel: 512-463-0103

As we head into the holiday season and you gather with friends and family, I want to wish you a very Merry Christmas from my family to yours.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Appointment to Texas Sunset Commission

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick has appointed me to serve my third term on the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission. To ensure our state's government remains efficient and small, state agencies in Texas are not allowed to exist indefinitely. Instead, the existence of an agency must be legislatively justified and go through the Sunset process approximately every 12 years. Over the next year, the Commission will evaluate and hear from over 30 agencies and boards to determine if they are serving the State as they should. These include the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, Texas Department of Public Safety and the Texas Military Department.

An important part of the Sunset process is hearing from the public on these various agencies. There are different ways you can get involved, including providing public comment on the Sunset Commission website and/or coming to the Capitol at the time of a hearing to provide your testimony. You can find the reports and how to provide public comment by visiting www.sunset.texas.gov.

2. Governor's Veteran Plan

On Veterans Day, Governor Greg Abbott announced his Front of the Line veterans plan. It was named this, because the men and women who serve in our armed forces deserve to go to the front of the line to receive the best care our State can provide to them. There are many different components to this plan including an option for local governments to provide property tax relief to businesses for each veteran newly hired for a full-time position, as well as for veteran entrepreneurs during their businesses first five years of operation.

Other parts of this plan include increasing funding for the Texas Veterans Commission to help with the backlog of claims at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and providing incentives to local governments to provide property tax relief to entities who provide a certain amount in

housing or substance abuse and mental health treatment services to veterans each year. The plan also includes a proposal to enhance state grants to organizations providing legal services to veterans.

3. Texas Hires First Director of Human Trafficking

A recent study done by the University of Texas estimates that Texas has more than 300,000 human trafficking victims. To help tackle and address this issue fully, Texas has hired its first ever Director of Human Trafficking Prevention. A new screening tool will be implemented for the Governor's office, the Department of Family Protective services and all of their grantees to ensure there is a comprehensive system to help combat this issue. They will also be looking at ways to improve the care and services provided to trafficking victims and how the state can partner with others to ensure a broader population is reached.

4. Memorial for Texas Soldiers

The Capitol complex has many statues and memorials on its grounds, and on December 2nd it will receive a new one. The new "Price of Liberty" monument will honor the approximately 225,000 Texas service members who have risked and sacrificed their lives since 9/11, and the families of those who have served. The monument depicts a version of a wife holding the hand of her husband as he is pulled away to war by Lady Liberty. Their daughter holds an American flag folded into a triangle, a gift handed to families of those are killed in war. This monument will join Capitol memorials to those soldiers who have died in every American war since the Civil War. For more information about the monument please visit www.texasmemorial.com.

5. Capitol Christmas Ornament

Since 1996, the Capitol has offered a unique ornament to reflect a part of the Capitol's history. These ornaments have honored the memory of the Alamo, and have highlighted the states bluebonnets, wildflowers and the Capitol building itself. The proceeds of this annual tradition go to support ongoing Capitol conservation, maintenance programs and educating the public about the history of the Capitol and its grounds.

The 2017 Capitol ornament showcases the excitement surrounding the annual delivery of Christmas trees to the Senate and House Chambers. The ornament features a coachman, his white steed and carriage carrying the trees to their respective Chambers. If you would like to buy your own ornament and have a little piece of Capitol history, you can visit www.texascapitolgiftshop.com.

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