



My five cents...

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

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On July 4th, we will celebrate our nation's freedom. That day in 1776, after the Declaration of Independence was signed, marked the birth of the United States of America as an independent Nation. I hope you are able to celebrate with fireworks, friends and family as I know I will be.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Sam Houston Regional Library

Texas is full of great museums which show the history of our great state. One of those is the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center which resides in Senate District 3. They recently celebrated their grand reopening after it was remodeled and new exhibits were added. Permanent exhibits showcase General Sam Houston as President of the Republic of Texas, and photographs, videos and items show the history of the area's cattle, timber, and oil industries.

The newest exhibit, Atascosito: the History of Southeast Texas, explores the history of Liberty, San Jacinto, Chambers, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Newton, Orange, Polk and Tyler counties from prehistoric times, early settlement periods, Republic and Civil War eras, economic growth and the modern era. To find out more information about the Sam Houston Library and its exhibits, you can visit <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/shc/index.html>.

2. Preventing School Violence

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick created the Senate Select Committee on Violence in Schools and School Security, to address new school safety measures in the hopes of preventing future tragedies like the one that happened in Santa Fe. The committee, which has already had its first two hearings earlier this month, will study the most efficient and effective way to improve the infrastructure and design of Texas schools to help reduce security threats. They will also look at school security options and resources to see what improvements could be made. They will recommend strategies to early identify and intercept high risk students.

Some of the recommendations from Governor Abbotts proposed school safety plan will also be under review. These include expanding the existing School Marshal Program, which allows school districts, private schools and junior colleges to appoint a school marshal for their schools.

Other proposals include increasing mental health training, and raising the age at which parents are responsible when their children have access to loaded weapons. To read and learn more about this plan you can visit <https://gov.texas.gov/>.

3. Texas Bullion Depository

Texas has opened the nation's first state-run gold depository. It will be temporarily housed in Austin until a larger permanent facility is built in Leander. This depository will be used to store gold, silver, platinum, rhodium and palladium, in a fully insured facility. Any U.S. citizen hoping to use the facility can set up an account online and either ship or personally deliver the metals to the site. The metals will then be tested for purity, and pictures taken which will show up in their account. To open an account or find out more information about the depository you can visit <https://www.texasbulliondepository.gov/>.

4. Comptroller Unclaimed Property

Did you know one in four Texans have unclaimed property from forgotten bank accounts, utility refunds and more? Banks and other entities make an effort to reunite this money with its owners, but if they cannot after a certain period, state law mandates the assets be turned over to the Comptroller's office. The Comptroller's Unclaimed Property Division works diligently to give Texas citizens back what is truly theirs. Approximately, \$2 billion in unclaimed property has been returned to its rightful owners in Texas.

You can go to the Comptroller's website at <http://www.cpa.state.tx.us/up/> and type in your name or the names of family and friends to see if you or someone you know has money waiting to be claimed. You can also call toll free at 1-800-654-FIND (3463).

5. Protect Your Community

The Department of Public Safety has introduced the iWatchTexas app, which will help Texans report potential crimes, terrorism or threats to school safety. The app can be downloaded from the App Store for Iphone users and Google Play for Android users. Reporting a threat can take less than five minutes, and reports are reviewed by analysts with the law enforcement after they're submitted. Suggested suspicious activity could include strangers asking questions about building security features and procedures, unusual chemical smells or vehicles left in no parking zones at important buildings. All reports submitted will remain confidential. An important note is the app is not to be used to report emergencies, such as those seeking immediate help, who instead need to call 911.

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