



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 celebrate Thanksgiving this coming month, I am thankful for the opportunity to represent East Texas in Austin as your State Senator. I hope this holiday for you is filled with family, friends and lots of pumpkin pie.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. 1st Day to File Bills

In preparation for the 86th Legislative Session, my office and others have begun to work on drafts and will be able to begin filing bills on November 12. Many of the ideas we get for legislation come from those in the district who have presented issues affecting themselves or their community. Not all problems constitute the need for a new law, but on the *rare* occasion one is necessary, my office is ready to work with you on those issues. I intend to file legislation which addresses the concerns of Senate District 3 as well as the state. I will keep you updated as we continue in the process for the upcoming session and look forward to working for you in the Texas Senate.

2. School Safety

The Texas Education Agency has been awarded two \$1 million federal grants to address school safety. These grants, distributed through the Department of Justice, were authorized by the STOP School Violence Act passed earlier this year. The purpose is to increase school security and provide adequate training for teachers, staff members and students in the hopes of preventing future tragedies from happening in Texas schools.

One of the topics I heard repeatedly on my recent Superintendent tour was regarding school safety, and their hope that the State Legislature will be able to provide adequate funding for school districts to use to secure their campuses as they see fit. Over the past three years, the school districts within Senate District 3 have spent approximately \$25 million dollars in securing their campuses through various means. I will be working with my colleagues in the Legislature to ensure we are providing adequate funding to ensure the safety of our students.

3. Starting the Budget Process

Over the past month, state agencies and universities presented their Legislative Appropriations Requests (LAR) to the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees, Legislative Budget Board as well as the Governor and Lt. Governor's staff. These LAR's give the agencies a chance to discuss their budget request for the next two years, as well as to present exceptional items for projects requiring additional funding beyond their regular budget.

These hearings are just the beginning of creating the state's budget for the next two years. All of the information will be put together and presented to the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees to begin reviewing, as well as hold hearings during session. The primary purpose, and only constitutionally required task, of a legislative session is to pass a balanced state budget for the upcoming biennium. As a member of Senate Finance, I will work hard to help pass a balanced budget while limiting unnecessary spending.

4. Voting in Texas

As I write this column, early voting has begun and Texas has set a record for voter turnout in a midterm election in Texas. In the 2014 midterm election, 240, 653 Texans in the state's 15 largest counties cast ballots in person or by mail on the first day of early voting. This year, in those same counties, 576,416 Texans cast their vote. Early voting ends on Friday, November 2, and Election Day is Tuesday, November 6.

Don't forget to bring an approved form of ID, including your Drivers License, Concealed Handgun License, Passport, Personal or Military ID or Citizen certificate. If you do not have any of these forms of identification, you can fill out a Reasonable Impediment Declaration at the poll and provide a supporting document such as your pay check, birth certificate, bank statement or utility bill. To find out more information on approved identification or where you can vote please visit www.votetexas.gov or call 1.800.252.VOTE (8683).

5. Hunting Season

A favorite fall activity in East Texas has begun and will continue through the upcoming new year. Whether you are into archery, rifles, doves, duck or deer there is no better time to visit the Piney Woods and enjoy some of the best hunting opportunities in Texas. You can visit the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department website for specific hunting season dates statewide and by count, as well as any updated hunting regulations for this year by using the following link <https://tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual/hunting/>.

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