



My five cents...

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

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Happy New Year! During this legislative session, as a way to help you keep up with important issues, I will be writing this column once a week to share things I hope are of interest to you which are happening at *your* Texas Capitol each week.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. **86th Legislative Session Begins**

The 86th Legislative Session has begun. Set to last 140 days during odd-numbered years, the session is the time the Texas Legislature has to pass a two-year budget and address existing and proposed new laws. The Senate has also adopted the rules which will be used to govern the senate body throughout the upcoming session. The only change made to the rules this session was to increase the standing senate committees from 14 to 16, and adding committees on Property Tax and Agriculture. We will hopefully know soon which committees each member will serve on and we can begin to hold hearings.

2. **Swearing in**

On January 8, I was sworn in for my fifth term as State Senator for Senate District 3. It has and continues to be one of the greatest honors of my life to represent you in the Texas Legislature. Part of the oath of office all members of the Legislature take, calls for us to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of our great state. This is a great reminder that in the busyness and stress of session, legislators should never stray from the guiding principles of our Constitution. I take this pledge very seriously and strive to represent and serve the people of East Texas to the best of my ability. My office belongs to the people of Senate District 3 and I encourage you, if you are able, to come by and visit. You can also reach out to us about any issue that may interest you by emailing Robert.nichols@senate.texas.gov or calling 512-463-0103.

3. **Revenue Estimates**

The primary purpose, and only constitutionally required task, of a legislative session is to prepare and pass a balanced state budget for the upcoming two fiscal years. To provide the Legislature

with a guideline as to what revenue is available, State Comptroller Glen Hegar released his Biennial Revenue Estimate. He estimates \$119.1 billion in state revenue will be available for general-purpose spending in the two-year budget period, beginning on September 1st. The Legislature uses this estimate as a guideline while preparing the state's budget.

While this is an increase in available funds from the last two year budget, the Comptroller was 'cautiously optimistic' that revenue growth would continue to grow, due to falling oil prices and uncertainty in various markets. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate to ensure we are able to find greater efficiencies in our state budget, making sure to get the most out of every state dollar.

4. Working with House Members

Within Senate District 3 there are 10 House Districts. As we represent many of the same individuals, my office works closely with the House offices all year round to ensure we are able to effectively advocate for the people we represent at home. We are blessed to have such great House members to represent East Texas.

Each session, I make it a priority to work with each state representative to discuss issues they are working on, as well as to share my goals for the next few months. As I am sure you understand, working with the House is important because no bill can be passed by a single chamber. Close coordination ensures that the voice of East Texas is heard loud and clear in our state's legislature.

5. Last Sunset Hearing

This week the Sunset Advisory Commission held its final meeting to make recommendations for reforming state agencies. The Commission voted on recommendations for agencies including the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association, Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners, and the Texas Board of Professional Land Surveying. All of the recommendations the Commission has voted on over the last year will now be drafted into bills, to be considered by the Legislature. Each legislative member of the Commission will be assigned a number of these bills to carry as we continue through session. I look forward to continuing to work on these important pieces of legislation to ensure our state's government is working as efficiently as possible.

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