



My five cents...

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

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This month Texans celebrate National Hunting and Fishing Day on September 26. Hunters and anglers alike are encouraged to enjoy the outdoors and continue Texas' long tradition of hunting and fishing. This day was designated by Congress in 1971 to honor hunters and anglers for their commitment to conservation. Every year, this day is celebrated on the fourth Saturday in September. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is encouraging outdoorsmen to invite others along for their outdoor adventures. TPWD offers resources for those new to the sport and ready to venture into the field or the water for the first time.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Superintendents Tour

For the past several weeks, I've travelled the district meeting with school superintendents. There are over one hundred school districts in Senate District 3 and, before every legislative session, it is my intention to meet with as many superintendents as possible to get a local perspective on the needs of our schools. After meeting with all of the superintendents, I have a comprehensive list of policy issues and reforms to focus on during session. I appreciate all of our superintendents and teachers who are working so hard to keep schoolchildren safe during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Meeting with our superintendents gave me a better understanding of how schools are navigating these challenges. It's my belief that education is and will always be the number one issue for the state legislature. The education of the next generation is one of our highest priorities and I will always treat it as such.

2. Texas unemployment rate drops for fifth consecutive month

The US Department of Labor announced that the unemployment rate in Texas has fallen to 6.8 percent, making it five straight months of decline in unemployment. After the coronavirus pandemic hit in mid-March, the unemployment rate in Texas soared to 13.5%. As the economy and businesses have begun opening up again, more jobs have become available and Texans are going back to work. While unemployment rates are high compared to pre-pandemic levels, this is a sign our economy is getting back on track.

3. Texas Historical Commission makes decision on Alamo Cenotaph

In a 12-2 vote, the Texas Historical Commission denied the city of San Antonio's request for a permit to relocate the Alamo Cenotaph. The plan, which is part of a larger renovation and re-imagining of the Alamo battleground, would have moved the Cenotaph from its current location at the northern end of the Alamo Plaza to a location several hundred feet south of where it currently resides. The Cenotaph was constructed in the 1930s and stands 56 feet high. Also known as "The Spirit of Sacrifice," it features carved figures of Alamo defenders and the names of those who died at the Battle of the Alamo.

4. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department awards park grants

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department awarded \$15.7 million in local park grants across the state. These grants will help fund projects that create and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities. Three cities in East Texas were recipients of grants – Buffalo, Center, and Sulphur Springs. Buffalo and Center each received \$150,000 while Sulphur Springs received \$750,000. Proposed developments include playgrounds, walking trails, picnic facilities, landscaping, and other recreational projects. The grants are allocated to local government entities and are sourced from state and federal funding. Once funded, all sites created or rehabilitated using the grants must be dedicated as parkland in perpetuity and be open to the public.

5. Texas Sunset Advisory Commission hearing

This month the Sunset Advisory Commission held a hearing in Austin to hear and review presentations on several state agencies. The task of the Sunset Advisory Commission is to look closely at the need for and performance of state agencies. They have the power to recommend abolishing state agencies. I served on the Sunset Advisory Commission for six years and, during that time, we eliminated 15 state agencies - saving the state millions annually. The sunset process is designed to continually examine government for efficacy and efficiency and have the opportunity to shrink government where possible. Roughly 130 entities are subject to sunset review on a rotating basis. Each agency is typically up for review every twelve years. This year nineteen agencies are under review. At their most recent hearing, the commission heard testimony about seven of those agencies. To see a list of all state agencies up for review this year and to read about the commission's findings, visit www.sunset.texas.gov.