



My five cents...

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

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Summer is drawing to a close and back-to-school season is here. TxDOT asks all Texans to be aware of school zones and school buses as children head back to campus. Remember to slow down for school zones and be prepared to stop for stopped school buses.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Second special session begins

This week Governor Abbott called a second special session starting on August 7. For this special session, he added several more agenda items to the call from the first special. Some of the new additions include handling federal appropriations, shifting back primary election dates for next year to the delay in census data, pre-empting local regulation of business practices, and education issues. With these additions to the call, there are now 17 agenda items we will be working on. The Senate got right to it, holding committee hearings over the weekend and into this week. I'm in Austin representing the people of Senate District 3 on these issues and ensuring their voice is heard.

2. Senate passes priority agenda items in first week

With the start of the special session, bills were filed very quickly and committees began to meet. This week I participated in a Senate Finance Committee hearing where we discussed bills to give our retired teachers a 13th check, appropriating funding for Article 10 of the budget which funds the legislature, and a supplemental appropriations bill for other priorities for this session. I also participated in a Business and Commerce Committee hearing where we discussed Senate Bill 14, which would ensure that local municipalities and counties cannot pass ordinances that mandate employment benefits or practices. On the floor this week, we voted on and passed legislation regarding bail reform, property tax relief, family violence prevention and education, banning critical race theory in schools, election integrity, and much more. Many of these bills we considered in the regular session and passed in the Senate and in the first called special. The Senate will keep working on these issues as special session continues in hopes that they will all be finally passed at the end of this session.

3. Comptroller officially opens Broadband Development Office

This month Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar announced the establishment of the Broadband Development Office (BDO) as created by House Bill 5, a bill I authored with Rep. Trent Ashby. The BDO will award grants, low-interest loans, and other financial incentives to broadband service providers who expand access to broadband service in underserved areas. The founding director of the new office is Greg Conte who has worked in the Comptroller's office for the past five years. The office will be in charge of developing a broadband accessibility map, creating and maintaining a statewide broadband plan, engaging in community outreach to encourage expansion and adoption of broadband, and a clearing house for information about federal funding or grants available to local municipalities. This office will guide our state as we navigate expansion of this essential service.

4. Cargill, Continental Grain acquire Sanderson Farms

Cargill Inc. and agricultural-investment firm Continental Grain Co. announced the agreement to acquire Sanderson Farms for \$4.5 billion this week. Sanderson Farms is the country's third largest chicken producer and has thirteen locations across the southern United States including several locations in Texas. In Senate District 3, Palestine is home to a Sanderson Farms' hatchery, processing plant, and feed mill. As a result of this transaction, Sanderson Farms will be combined with Wayne Farms, a subsidiary of Continental Grain. Sanderson Farms started as a small, family-run supply store around 75 years ago and grew exponentially into the substantial poultry operation it is today. The new company will remain committed to supporting independent American farmers and the communities in which they live.

5. Alligator snapping turtles seized in illegal trafficking case returned

Last week, twenty-seven alligator snapping turtles were released back into East Texas after being trafficked to Louisiana several years ago. The turtles were seized by Louisiana law enforcement in 2016 after they were trafficked across state lines. The turtles are a popular food item in Louisiana, where they can be harvested with a restricted limit of one per day. In Texas, alligator snapping turtles are a protected species and harvesting them is illegal. The poached turtles were held at the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery in Louisiana for the past several years where the Texas Parks and Wildlife Nongame and Rare Species program staff worked with turtle researchers to determine where they came from.

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