



My five cents...

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

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The first official day of fall came this week on September 22. With it came a welcome cold front across the state and a beautiful Harvest Moon. Fall brings cooler weather, leaves changing colors, and this year another special session.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. **Third special session begins**

The Legislature convened for our third special session this week. There were five items originally on the call including redistricting, appropriating federal funds from the American Rescue Plan, legislation regarding eligibility for teams in UIL athletics, legislation about vaccine mandates for local governmental entities, and legislation on dog restraints. This week the governor added two additional items to the call: property tax relief and a constitutional amendment related to bail reform. The Senate has successfully passed many of these priorities already, including property tax relief, dog restraint legislation, and a bill about youth sports. In the coming weeks, we'll tackle the remaining items on the call. It's been an exciting summer in the Capitol and our work continues this fall.

2. **Senate, State Board of Education proposed redistricting maps released**

Last week, Senator Joan Huffman, chair of the Redistricting Committee, filed two proposed legislative redistricting maps for the Texas Senate and the State Board of Education. The committee, of which I'm a member, will be holding public hearings this Friday, September 24 at 10 am and Saturday, September 25 at 9 am to discuss the proposed maps. Redistricting is one of the most difficult tasks the legislature takes on, but also one of the most important. These maps will shape the political landscape for the next 10 years. To see the proposed maps, please visit <https://dvr.capitol.texas.gov/>. If you're interested in participating in these hearings, you can come to Austin to testify in person or submit written testimony to the committee. You can submit written testimony through the public comment portal on the committee website at <https://senate.texas.gov/cmte.php?c=625>. To watch committee proceedings, visit <https://senate.texas.gov/av-live.php> at the time of the event to watch live. You can also access the archives of redistricting hearings and all of the submitted public testimony on the Redistricting Committee's webpage.

3. COVID-19 antibody infusion center launches in Livingston

The Texas Division of Emergency Management in conjunction with Polk County, the City of Livingston, CHI St. Luke's Memorial -Livingston, and Polk County Office of Emergency Management launched a new COVID-19 therapeutic infusion center in Livingston. The center uses Regeneron's monoclonal antibodies to treat outpatient cases of COVID-19. Importantly, patients need a referral from a doctor to receive the treatment. This treatment is available at no cost to the patient. This new center ensures that East Texans have access to high quality treatment options at no cost. The Regeneron treatment is shown to be successful in decreasing the severity of a patient's symptoms, which greatly decreases the chance of hospitalization. There are also more than 200 private health providers across the state who provide the antibody infusion treatment. To find a provider near you, visit meds.tdem.texas.gov.

4. Army Corps of Engineers, General Land Office unveil Costal Spine plan

This month the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Texas General Land Office released a final study that recommends a \$28.87 billion system of levies and other features to shore up the Texas coast against storms. The study, known as the Coastal Texas Protection and Restoration Feasibility Study, recommends a combination of coastal storm risk management and ecosystem restoration. The Coastal Spine, as it's called, is broken into three groupings:

- a coast-wide ecosystem restoration plan to restore degraded ecosystems that buffer communities and industry on the coast;
- a coastal storm risk management system on the lower coast that includes beach restoration on South Padre Island;
- the Galveston Bay Storm Surge Barrier System on the upper coast that will reduce damage to communities, critical infrastructure, waterways, and other existing structures from storm surge.

The system will increase resiliency along the coast and is adaptable to future conditions, including sea level change. Once this plan is approved by the USACE chief, it will be recommend to Congress for authorization and funding.

5. TX Facilities Commission okays contract for border wall

Last week, the Texas Facilities Commission announced the final approval of a contract for the Texas border wall. The project will be managed by Michael Baker and Huitt-Zollars Joint Venture. They will handle due diligence, budgeting, construction oversight, scheduling, reporting, and project communications. The project will focus on various locations in Texas and partner with local land owners.

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