



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Early voting has begun! Be sure to check with your county clerk's office to find out where polling locations are open near you. Early voting started October 24 and ends November 4. Election Day is November 8.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Nichols completes meetings with district superintendents

I spent the past several weeks travelling around the district meeting with school district leaders to discuss issues relating to education ahead of the next legislative session. My biennial superintendent tour takes me to most counties in the district to meet with most of the almost 100 superintendents in Senate District 3. Superintendents were encouraged to attend the meetings and bring whomever they wished to join the discussion. While each district is unique, there were common issues across districts that were discussed in most of the meetings. Some of those issues include school funding, school safety measures, issues with truancy and discipline, teacher shortages, and mental health supports for students. Superintendents also mentioned their concern over the growing push for a school voucher system. Education is the most important issue that the Legislature works on, and it's imperative to get input from our school leaders on the education agenda. I would like to thank all of the superintendents and other staff who attended and participated in these meetings. You all do incredible work every day and we appreciate you!

2. Stephen F. Austin State University receives responses from four university systems on affiliation

This month, the SFA Board of Regents published responses from four university systems interested in potential affiliation between SFA and one of the systems. Texas A&M University System, Texas State University System, Texas Tech University System, and The University of Texas System all have made contact with the Board of Regents expressing a desire to have SFA join their systems. As part of the ongoing discussions, each of the four systems submitted responses to a list of questions developed by representative campus groups. These groups then evaluated each system's response and submitted a report reflecting their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of each system. The Board of Regents Subcommittee tasked with evaluating affiliation is also reviewing the responses. The Board of Regents will hear presentations of these reports at a board meeting at the end of the month and anticipate making a decision about affiliation before

the end of the fall semester. If you would like to read the responses from each system, they are available at <https://www.sfasu.edu/about-sfa/board-of-regents/university-system>.

3. Three East Texas schools receive school safety grant

Diboll ISD, Westwood ISD, and White Oak ISD have all received a total of over \$920,000 to improve school safety measures. The funding stems from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which was passed by Congress and signed into law earlier this year. The law allocated \$100 million to the Department of Justice grant program for school districts to invest in security programs and technology. The aid in the bill goes toward investments in children and family mental health services, protections for victims of domestic violence, funding for school-based mental health and supportive services, and telehealth investments meant to increase access to mental and behavioral health services. The bill also allocated an additional \$200 million to help schools with training for students and faculty and other violence-prevention efforts.

4. T.L.L. Temple Foundation awards \$2 million grant to Texas Association of Community Colleges

The Texas Association of Community Colleges' Texas Success Center is the beneficiary of The T.L.L. Temple Foundation's \$200 million grant to help align education to workforce needs in East Texas. The grant will be distributed over five years and will enable TACC to strengthen, scale, and expand guided pathways into a regional talent pipeline for postsecondary degrees and credentials in high demand, high wage career fields. This grant funding will increase alignment between industry needs and educational opportunities, as well as access to educational opportunities for rural East Texans.

5. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department announces new executive director

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recently named David Yoskowitz as the new Executive Director. He previously served as the senior executive director and Endowed Chair for Socioeconomics at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Yoskowitz spent much of his career as a leader at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, but his research also took him to other places in North and Central America, including Cuba, Nicaragua, Belize, El Salvador, and Mexico. He earned a Ph.D. in Economics and an M.A. in Economics from Texas Tech University and a B.S. in Economics and Finance from Bentley College.