



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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On February 24, 1836, William B. Travis wrote his famous letter from the Alamo. He wrote the defenders would never “surrender or retreat” and ended with the iconic line “Victory or Death.”

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Governor Abbott announces emergency items

Last week, Governor Greg Abbott gave his State of the State address. In that address, he listed his seven emergency items that he is asking the Legislature to address this session. Emergency items identified by the Governor are special because the Legislature can begin to address and vote on them immediately rather than waiting the requisite 60 days for passing normal legislation. The seven items the governor identified include cutting property taxes, ending COVID-19 restrictions, expanding school choice, school safety, continued bail reform, border security, and combatting the fentanyl crisis. Outside of his emergency items, the governor mentioned several other priorities including increasing infrastructure funding, creating new economic development tools, and mandatory minimum sentences for illegal gun possession by criminals, among other things.

Now that the Governor’s emergency items have been established, the Legislature can begin working on these issues. Committees should also begin meeting in the next few weeks and the bill filing deadline is on March 10.

2. Bill filed to move Stephen F. Austin State University to the UT System

This week, I filed Senate Bill 1055 which would formally place SFA within the UT System and sets up a framework for that to happen. The bill directly names the university as Stephen F. Austin State University, a member of the University of Texas System. It was important to the community that the university retain its name, colors, and mascot as part of its identity. An important note about the legislation as filed, the caption reads that the bill is “abolishing Stephen F. Austin State University.” I’d like the community to know that language is necessary for SFA to be eligible to receive certain funds in the UT System. This bill will not alter SFA’s current presence or change much on a day-to-day basis for students and faculty. The transition to the UT System will take place over the summer at the direction of the UT Board of Regents. Both universities are excited about the transition and are working together to ensure a seamless transition. This is an exciting time for both SFA and the surrounding community.

3. Senate Finance work groups announced

The Senate Finance Committee Chair Senator Joan Huffman announced work groups for Senate Finance this week. In the Senate, the Finance Committee breaks the entire budget down by article and assigns groups of senators to go through them line-by-line to make decisions on agencies and their appropriation requests. This session I am honored to again chair the work group on Articles 6, 7, and 8. Those articles cover agencies that relate to natural resources, business and economic development, and regulatory agencies. Joining me in our work group are Sen. Royce West, Sen. Charles Schwertner, and Sen. Charles Perry. Together we will oversee billions of dollars in appropriations. I look forward to working with my colleagues on making recommendations to the rest of the Finance Committee and Chair Huffman.

4. Texas A&M Forest Service offering grants for volunteer firefighter recruitment

The Texas A&M Forest Service announced last week that it is offering new Volunteer Recruitment Resources grants design to help rural volunteer fire departments recruit and retain firefighters and enhance public safety. Eligible departments can apply for reimbursement of all of the total costs for recruitment up to \$3,000. Those allowable uses include reimbursements for banners, mailouts, billboards, and other promotional items. The fund has a total of \$300,000 in federal funds available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Eligible departments must serve a rural area with a population of 10,000 people or less, must be certified by the Texas Division of Emergency Management and have a National Incident Management System, must not be debarred, suspended or declared ineligible, and must be comprised of at least 80 percent volunteer personnel.

5. Texas ranked first in Aerospace Manufacturing Attractiveness

Texas once again came in first as the best state for Aerospace Manufacturing Attractiveness, according to PwC. In the publications ninth ratings report, the rankings considered key variables such as cost, labor, infrastructure, industry, economy, and tax policy. Texas ranked number one in tax policy and economy and number two in industry. Rounding out the top five were Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, and Indiana. Texas is already home to several space-related organizations like Blue Origin, Space X, and NASA.

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