



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Contact: Shelby Conine Vestal  
Tel: 512-463-0103

We have passed the halfway point in session this week, but most of the work is before us. It is full speed ahead for the next two months until Memorial Day.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Bill establishing rural law enforcement fund passes Senate**

Senate Bill 22 by Senator Drew Springer passed the Senate this week. The bill would establish a grant program to provide financial assistance to sheriff's departments and prosecutor's offices in counties with a population of 300,000 or less. Sheriffs' departments can use the assistance grant program to provide salary increases, hire additional staff, and purchase vehicles, firearms, and safety equipment. Prosecutors' offices can use the funding to increase the salaries of certain employees and hire additional staff. The bill would provide funding assistance to 236 Texas counties. Both the House and Senate budgets provide \$350 million to support rural law enforcement through the fund. Small, rural communities have difficulties recruiting and retaining staff because of financial constraints. Senate Bill 22 would help alleviate that burden for our rural communities and help keep them safe.

## **2. Constitutional amendment requiring voters to be US citizens passes Senate**

The Senate passed Senate Joint Resolution 35 by Senator Brian Birdwell this week which proposes a constitutional amendment clarifying that non-citizens in the United State may not vote in any election. Should this bill pass the House by a two-thirds vote, then it will go to the voters this November to be added to the state constitution. The right to vote is sacred and should be protected. While other states have enabled non-citizens to vote, in Texas we will continue to ensure that only citizens are allowed to vote.

## **3. Senate Bill 15 protecting women's college sports passes Senate**

This week, the Senate passed Senate Bill 15 by Senator Mayes Middleton, which would ensure the sanctity of women's sports at the collegiate level. Over the past several years, it has become apparent that some men who identify as women unfairly compete in women's sports. Men have many physiological advantages over women which creates an unequal playing field in women's sports. This bill would require collegiate athletes to compete on the team according to their

biological sex, as stated on their birth certificate. It does create an exception for athletes to compete on teams of the opposite gender if there is no team offered for their gender. Women deserve to be able to fairly compete at the collegiate level against other women. Now the bill goes to the house for consideration.

#### **4. Senate passes bill, constitutional amendment to set protocol for emergency powers**

Senate Bill 1104 and its accompanying Senate Joint Resolution 58, both by Senator Brian Birdwell, passed the Senate this week. This bill and constitutional amendment will rebalance the legislative and executive responsibilities during a disaster or emergency. It sets the framework for protocols for legislative checks on executive power. These checks can only happen when the legislature is in session for 140 days every two years. However, disasters are unpredictable and can happen at any time. This bill would require the Governor to call a special session if he or she wanted to extend a disaster declaration past thirty days if the declaration affects 50 percent or more of the state's population, the declaration affects 2/5 or more of the counties, or the declaration affects 2/3 of the counties in 3 or more trauma service regions. Once convened, the legislature would have the opportunity to give advice and consent on extending the declaration. The legislature could terminate or renew the order. These bills will ensure there is balance between branches of government during a disaster without encumbering a uniform response.

#### **5. Nichols bills heard in committees, floor**

This week I had multiple bills heard in various committees and on the floor. Here is a list of highlights:

- Senate Bill 505 was voted out of the Senate this week. It would create parity for road-use between electric vehicles and regular vehicles by raising the registration fee for electric vehicles. This will ensure that the highway fund remains whole for years to come.
- Senate Bill 1305 was heard and voted out of the Senate Committee on Water, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs this week. This bill would transfer ownership of the Central Heights Water System to the Angelina and Neches River Authority.
- Senate Bill 1054 was heard in the Senate Committee on State Affairs. It clarifies the process for challenging a constitutional amendment election when the amendment passes.

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