



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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There are only 45 days left in the Legislative session and it certainly shows. The days at the Capitol are getting longer and bills are making their way through the process.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Broadband grant applications due in May

The Comptroller's Office is now accepting grant applications to the Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) program, which focuses on funding broadband infrastructure projects. The state was allocated \$363.8 million through the federal Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund to build critical infrastructure projects that would expand access to high-speed internet. The Broadband Development Office will distribute the funds through a competitive grant process. Applicants may include a commercial service provider, including electric or telephone cooperatives, a non-commercial service provider, or a partnership between any of those entities. Applications are due May 5 and must be submitted through the Broadband Development Office's online application system.

2. Teachers Bill of Rights passes Senate

Last week the Senate passed Senate Bill 9 by Senator Brandon Creighton. The bill is designed to support teachers and add a salary bonus for teachers over the next year. Teachers in larger districts would receive a \$2,000 raise while teachers in smaller, generally more rural areas would receive a \$6,000 raise. It establishes and provides funding for mentor programs and the Texas Teacher Residency Partnership Program, which would provide residency positions to student teachers to work with classroom teachers. It provides for a grant program to reimburse districts who want to rehire a retired teacher. It increases funding for the Teacher Incentive Allotment and provides bouses of up to \$36,000 for high-performing teachers. The bill provides access to pre-kindergarten classes for children of educators if the district offers those classes. Senate Bill 9 provides protections for teachers and supports them in handling students who have been removed from their classroom. The Teacher Bill of Rights is designed to help and support Texas teachers who dedicate their time, energy, and effort to educate the next generation of Texans. We appreciate them and all the work that they do.

3. Senate passes bill to enhance education on living donor registry passes

Senator Kelly Hancock filed Senate Bill 1249 in part based on his personal experience. The bill would establish and provide educational resources to Texans regarding the living organ donor registry. Senator Hancock has personal experience as a recipient of a kidney transplant. Senator Hancock was diagnosed with a rare kidney disease that he has lived with for more than half his life. Last summer, his condition became more critical and members of his family got tested to see if they were a match. His son-in-law was the best fit for surgery and donated his kidney. The bill would allow Texans to access information regarding registering with a living donor registry at driver's licenses offices and other facilities as well as establishing the Living Organ Donor Education program at the Department of State Health Services. The bill passed unanimously out of the Senate, and I was proud to support the bill.

4. Ban on teaching Critical Race Theory passes Senate

This week the Senate passed Senate Bill 16, by Senator Hughes, which would ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory in any form in higher education institutions. Last session, the legislature passed a measure to ensure that Critical Race Theory was not being taught in K-12 public schools. It became apparent that elements of CRT were being taught at Texas' universities as well. The bill would prohibit faculty from compelling or attempting to compel student to adopt a belief that any race, sex, or ethnicity or social, political, or religious belief is inherently superior to any race, sex, ethnicity, or belief. It is important that our institutions are committed to fostering an environment that promotes intellectual diversity and academic freedom.

5. Bill requiring ALERRT training for peace officers coming to the floor

Senate Bill 1852 by Senator Pete Flores will be coming to floor in the next few days, and it will greatly enhance our public safety. The bill would require all new peace officers in the state to complete 16 hours of active shooter response training developed by the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center (ALERRT) at Texas State University in San Marcos. ALERRT training is considered the gold standard in active shooter response, and it is imperative that all our law enforcement officers are equipped with the necessary training for those situations. Minutes save lives in active shooter scenarios and the proper training is essential.

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