



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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The first few bills have made it to the Governor's desk for his signature, which signals the end of session is fast approaching. Of the over 8,000 bills filed this session, just over 100 bills and joint resolutions have been sent to the governor and four have been signed into law.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. House Bill 4 passes the Senate

This week the Senate passed the Texas Data Privacy and Security Act which sets standards for the collection and use of consumer data. The goal of the bill is to maximize both the utility of the rights provided to consumers and interoperability with other states to minimize compliance costs for businesses. This bill ensures that Texans have the right and the ability to control their personal data. It regulates the collection, use, processing, and treatment of consumers' data by businesses, creates new bill of rights for Texans online, allows the Attorney General to impose penalties, and provides safety and security online. The rights guaranteed to Texans under this bill include the right to know when personal data is being collected, to access to personal data and receive it in a readable format, to correct and delete personal data, to opt out of the collection and sale of personal data, and to be protected from retaliation or discrimination for exercising these rights. Protecting Texans private information in the digital age is important and something I've been passionate about for several years. I was proud to support this legislation.

2. School safety legislation heard in Senate Education Committee

This week, the Senate Education Committee held a hearing on House Bill 3 which was authored by Representative Dustin Burrows and I am sponsoring in the Senate. This bill will include elements of the bill I authored, Senate Bill 11, and another school safety bill, House Bill 13 by Representative Ken King. It includes an increase to the school safety allotment, school safety review teams and support at education service centers, establishing the Office of School Safety and Security at TEA, consequences for noncompliance with school safety regulations and rules, yearly intruder detection audits, in depth reviews by TEA on safety procedures, a TEA-approved registry process for school safety vendors, mandatory countywide school safety meetings for counties of a certain size, and many other provisions. This bill is extensive and wide-ranging. It has many components that together, I believe, will improve the safety environment of schools in

our state. I look forward to continuing to work with my House and Senate colleagues to craft a meaningful piece of legislation.

3. Stephen F. Austin State University advances forestry, agriculture department upgrades

This week the SFA Board of Regents awarded a contract to plan and design new facilities for the forestry and agriculture departments. Currently, those departments are housed in a building that is over 70 years old. This was the first phase of the \$80 million project. Funding will come partially from funds appropriated during the 87th Legislature and partially from the University of Texas system, which will be adding \$35 million. The agriculture and forestry colleges at SFA are some of the best in the nation. This investment will continue the legacy of excellence well into the future.

4. Bridge City teacher awarded prestigious TEA fellowship

Bridge City High School teacher Hannah Landry has been selected by the Texas Education Agency for the Teacher Leadership Fellowship. The fellowship consists of a program designed to strengthen teacher leadership pathways at the state level and increase opportunities for teachers. It is a highly selective program, and it is a honor to be chosen. Over the course of the program, teachers will develop their leadership skills, collaborate with educators across the state, and provide timely input to TEA staff on initiatives and programs. Congratulations to one of our own for this achievement!

5. Itemized billing for health care passes House

This week the Texas House passed Senate Bill 490 by Senator Bryan Hughes and sponsored by Representative Caroline Harris. This bill would require hospitals to send a written itemized medical bill to a patient after providing a service when they request payment, but before sending the patient to collections. Allowing patients to have visibility into the cost of services provides crucial patient protection measures and allows patients to check that the final bill is accurate. Since the House made an amendment, the bill will come back to the Senate to either concur with the amendment or go to a conference committee to work out differences.

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