



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release
July 27, 2023
word count: 750

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Summer is in full swing, but back to school is right around the corner. Be sure to stay cool during these hot Texas days!

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Property tax relief measures passed, signed by Governor Abbott

This month, the Texas Senate and House of Representatives came together and made a deal to deliver property tax relief to homeowners across the state. The \$18 billion package is the largest tax cut in Texas history. Senate Bill 2, by Senator Paul Bettencourt and Representative Morgan Meyer, includes an increase in the homestead exemption from \$40,000 for most homes to \$100,000. It will go into effect on this year's property tax bill if the accompanying proposed constitutional amendment is passed by the voters in November. The bill also includes \$7 billion for the reduction of school district maintenance and operations tax rates statewide. Senate Bill 2 also includes a 3-year pilot project for non-homesteaded property valued at \$5 million or under to receive a 20% circuit-breaker on appraised value increases. It also includes a change to County Appraisal District boards of directors to include 3 county-wide, elected director positions in counties with a population of 75,000 or more.

The accompanying legislation Senate Bill 3, by Senator Paul Bettencourt and Representative Charlie Geren, includes a doubling of the franchise tax exemption for businesses from \$1.23 million to \$2.47 million. An estimated 67,000 businesses will no longer pay a franchise tax. It also eliminates a "nuisance-tax" for 1.7 million business owners who previously had to file no-tax-due forms for franchise taxes. I was proud to co-author and vote for both bills and thrilled that the Governor signed the package.

2. Lamar State College Port Arthur opens new industrial training facility

This month Lamar State College Port Arthur opened a new \$6 million, 33,000 square foot industrial training facility that has been in the works since 2018. The facility will train to be soon-to-be electricians, pipe fitters, or other essential workers, including training for jobs at the nearby petrochemical facilities. Courses can range in length from one to six months and at the end of each course students will receive certificates, which may open doors to new job

opportunities. The space was once used as a National Guard armory and was converted using federal and city grants.

3. TxDOT, law enforcement launch Operation Slow Down

This month, TxDOT teamed up with law enforcement to urge drivers to “Be Safe. Drive Smart.” – a speeding awareness campaign aimed at saving lives. According to TxDOT, speed was a contributing factor in more than 162,000 roadway crashes in Texas in 2022, resulting in 1,469 deaths. It is the number one factor contributing to roadway crashes in Texas. Safe driving goes beyond just observing the speed limit. It also means matching speed to road conditions if there is bad weather or road construction, slowing down and allowing for more space to stop when traffic is heavy, and watching for road signs indicating reduced speed limits ahead. Operation Slow Down and “Be Safe. Drive Smart.” are both components of #EndTheStreakTX, an effort to end the streak of daily deaths on Texas roadways. The last deathless day on Texas roads was November 7, 2000.

4. Texas drawn hunt applications open for 2023-2024

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) opened applications for their drawn hunt permits program for the 2023-2024 season. The program, which issues permits for drawn hunts on both public and private lands statewide, issues almost 10,000 permits in more than 60 high quality hunt categories. Hunts available include white-tailed and mule deer, pronghorn, turkey, alligator, and dove and guided packages for exotic species and bighorn sheep. Last year there were more than 278,000 applications. Application fees range from free to \$10, depending on the hunt category. Applications are due by the 1st and 15th of each month between August 1 and November 1. A full list of categories, maps, and deadlines can be found online at <https://tpwd.texas.gov/>.

5. SFA hosts rural economic development forums

Stephen F. Austin State University Center for Applied Research and Rural Innovation and the Texas Forest Country Partnership hosted forums on Rural Economic Development this month in San Augustine County and Polk County. Future forums are planned in Nacogdoches County, Angelina County, Trinity County, and Newton County throughout early August. The forums include discussions on workforce, economic development, education, industry, and community needs. I was happy to attend the forum in San Augustine and discuss important topics facing business owners and the community.

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