



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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This month we remember President Lyndon B. Johnson on what would have been his 115th birthday. President Johnson was born in Stonewall, Texas in 1908 and was elected as a Congressman, Senator, and later President of the United States. His birthday is an official state holiday in Texas.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. TxDOT urges drivers to be mindful in school zones

School is back in session for most Texas students and the Texas Department of Transportation is reminding drivers to be extra cautious in school zones and around school buses to keep kids safe. Last year, there were 746 traffic accidents in Texas school zones, resulting in 23 serious injuries. The most common factors were driver inattention, speeding, and failure to yield the right of way. Also last year, there were 2,305 accidents involving a Texas school bus, resulting in seven deaths and 51 serious injuries. Speeding and driver inattention were major factors in those accidents as well. Be sure to slow down, pay attention, and follow all traffic laws to keep children safe as they head back to school this fall.

2. Texas Windstorm Insurance Association announces no rate increases

This month the TWIA Board of Directors met and voted not to increase rates for residential and commercial policies in 2024. TWIA then filed a 0 percent rate change for its annual required rate filing with the Texas Department of Insurance. The Actuarial and Underwriting Committee had recommended a 5 percent increase for residential properties and an 8 percent increase for commercial policies. An increase would require a two-thirds vote of the board, which it was unable to obtain. The Board's decision was made after receiving public comment from coastal community members, policy holders, and elected officials.

3. East Texas schools receive \$2.8 million in grants

This month the Texas Workforce Commission and Governor Abbott announced nine Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) grants totally over \$2.8 million for five Southeast Texas schools. JET grants are aimed at supporting career and technical education training programs by

providing funding to purchase and install equipment. These programs will educate more than 890 students in high-demand occupations in the region. The JET grants include:

- Angelina College: over \$348,000 to purchase and install equipment to train 76 students as electricians;
- Coldspring-Oakhurst CISD: over \$377,000 grant to train 119 students as registered nurses in partnership with Angelina College;
- Diboll ISD: received three grants totaling over \$1 million to train students in production occupations, industrial engineering, and nursing in partnership with Angelina College;
- Nacogdoches ISD: over \$130,000 for equipment to train 205 students as emergency medical technicians in partnership with Angelina College;
- Windham School District: received three grants totaling just under \$850,000 for equipment to train students as production workers, heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, and industrial truck and tractor operators.

4. New laws go into effect September 1

Many new laws go into effect on September 1 after a legislative session to line up with the new fiscal year. After the 88th Legislative Session, there are over 750 bills that go into effect this week. Some interesting new laws include:

- House Bill 25 – creates the “Wholesale Prescription Drug Importation Program” which allows the Health and Human Services Commission to contract with Canadian drug wholesalers and suppliers to bring safe eligible prescription drugs to Texas consumers at lower costs than US wholesalers.
- House Bill 1885 – allows TxDOT engineers to temporarily adjust speed limits for sections of roads or highways during road construction or inclement weather conditions, like heavy fog, ice, or rain.
- Senate Bill 379 – an exemption from sales tax for family care products, such as feminine hygiene products, adult and children’s diapers, baby wipes, maternity wear, breast milk pumps, and baby bottles.
- Senate Bill 490 – requires medical providers send patients an itemized bill prior to attempting to collect any money from the patient.

5. General Land Office announces \$10 billion for students from carbon capture storage leases

This month the Texas General Land Office announced it awarded six carbon capture and sequestration leases that will provide \$130 million in signing bonus payments for the Permanent School Fund (PSF) and over \$10 billion over the length of the 30-year lease term. The PSF is a constitutionally created fund that supports public education. The leases on state-owned land will allow these private entities to store carbon over half a million acres off the Texas coast.

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