



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols
by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release
March 2, 2017
word count: 738

Contact: Sydni Mitchell
Tel: 512-463-0103

Almost two months into the legislative session, the Legislature is approaching the first of many deadlines, including the last day to file most bills. As of this writing, more than 1,500 bills are filed in the Senate and more than 3,000 have been filed in the House. I expect these numbers will continue to increase during this last week of filing.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. Homestead Exemption for Surviving Spouses

The Senate Finance Committee has approved and sent to the Senate floor Senate Bill 15, which would provide a property tax exemption for the surviving spouse of a first responder who has been killed in the line of duty. This exemption would be made available for all surviving spouses, regardless of the date of the first responders death, as long as they were married at the time and have not remarried. These individuals should be honored for their bravery, sacrifice and willingness to protect Texans.

2. Article V Convention of States

This week the Texas Senate approved legislation to call for Congress to convene for a Convention of States. Senate Joint Resolution 2 calls on all the states in the Union to consider constitutional amendments to impose a balance-budget requirement on Congress, set term limits for federal officials and members of Congress, as well as to favor state's rights over federal jurisdictions. It also includes an opportunity for states to ratify a U.S. Supreme Court decision, if that decision overturns existing law. The Senate also approved legislation which defines the qualifications for delegates to a convention, including how they are able to vote. A total of 34 states will have to pass similar legislation for a convention to be called. Including Texas, there are now currently nine states which have passed resolutions.

3. Fall Back, Spring Forward or Neither?

I am sure a lot of us have forgotten to Fall back or Spring forward with our clocks, causing not only panic and stress, but also making us miss an important event. If Senate Bill 238 and House Bill 2400 pass the Legislature, we may not have to worry about that anymore, as these bills will

abolish daylight savings altogether. If passed, Texas would be on Central Standard time year-round, starting in November.

Proponents of doing away with the time change state the loss of sleep caused by the lost hour causes physical and emotional stress on individuals. Critics of the bill state that it would mean it would get darker earlier in the evening, causing people to use more power than they have in the past. I will continue to keep you posted as these bills go through the legislative process.

4. Sunset Bill Assignments

I wanted to update you on the continuation of the Sunset process. After about a year of review and hearings, the Sunset Advisory Commission makes recommendations which are incorporated into legislation for each agency. These pieces of legislation will continue through the Senate and House, like all other bills.

As a member of the Sunset Advisory Commission, I will be filing bills for several agencies including the Executive Council of Physical and Occupational Therapists, the Texas Department of Transportation, Palo Duro River Authority of Texas, Sulphur River Basin Authority and Upper Colorado River Authority. As these bills continue through the legislative process, I encourage you to take part and come to the Capitol to testify on these or any other bills when they are heard in committee.

5. Texas Independence Day

This week, we celebrated Texas' Independence Day and had the opportunity to view the original 1836 Texas Declaration of Independence from Mexico document, which was displayed in the Senate Chamber. Set on the anniversary of the signing of Texas' declaration of independence from Mexico, Texas Independence Day is a reminder of our state's rich history and the legacy of freedom we must still protect. After the declaration of independence was signed, Texas went on to operate as a stand-alone Republic for 10 years until it joined the United States by a vote of the people.

While Texans are proud Americans, we still hold on to much of the individual spirit from our time as a separate nation. As Texas faces a number of challenges this year, it is good to reflect on the courage and bravery exhibited by our founders. They left a legacy of freedom, self-reliance and ingenuity that still inspires our state today.

###