



My five cents...

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

For immediate release
March 8, 2017
word count: 739

Contact: Sydni Mitchell
Tel: 512-463-0103

This Sunday begins daylight savings time. The Legislature is taking this very literally as we 'spring forward' into high gear with committee hearings and moving bills off the Senate floor.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. Doolittle Raiders

This week, the Senate not only acknowledged the upcoming 75th Anniversary of the Doolittle Raid on April 18, 1942, but also honored Lt. Colonel Dick Cole, who at 101 years old is the only surviving Doolittle Raider. The air raid by the United States on Tokyo, during World War II, was the first air strike to hit the Japanese Home Islands. The strike served as notice that America would defend itself after the terrible attack upon Pearl Harbor.

Three of the raiders lost their lives when they were forced to abandon their bomber, three were executed after being captured by the Japanese, five were held prisoners of war until the surrender of Japan over three years later, with one dying from injuries due to abuse and mistreatment. I encourage you to take a moment to remember the Raiders on the 75th Anniversary for their bravery and courage.

2. CPS Overhaul

In response to Governor Abbotts' emergency item, both the Senate and House Chambers have unanimously passed legislation for an overhaul of the state's Child Protective Services department. Though the pieces of legislation vary, the intent of both is clear, to ensure we are protecting the most vulnerable children in our state. The Senate's version creates a framework for CPS to partner with community based organizations on programs to help place children within the foster care system with family members. Agencies leaders are directed to look at working with faith based communities and advocate groups in devising plans to increase capacity in the foster care system. It lays out guidelines for investigations into allegations of child abuse and creates a timeline of when investigators meet children who were abused.

The House version implements many of the same things, but would move CPS from the Department of Family and Protective Services into a stand-alone agency, reporting directly to the

Governor. These two bills will head to a conference committee in the next few weeks to work out the differences between the bills.

3. National Blue Alert

It is not often you see every member in the Senate co-author a specific bill. This is true for Senate Bill 1138, which gives authority to the Texas Department of Public Safety to operate and participate in the National Blue Alert system. This statewide system, is for suspects who allegedly have caused injury or death to a law enforcement officer.

In 2008, former Governor Rick Perry signed an Executive Order which created the Blue Alert System. Senate Bill 1138 will provide long term assurance the state will continue to participate in this program. Through the Alert System, the public will receive information regarding the suspected assailant, and will help facilitate tips and leads to law enforcement.

4. Preventing Improper Student/Teacher Relationships

The Senate has passed Senate Bill 7, which lays guidelines for dealing with improper relationships between teachers and students. Under the rules of this bill, a school principal or superintendent could be charged with a felony, punishable by up to two years behind bars, if they fail to report improper teacher conduct to authorities. It would also revoke pensions from teachers convicted of felonies involving a student.

School districts would be required to create guidelines on electronic communication between students and teachers. Schools board would be given authority to fire an employee if they have been convicted of a felony. This bill, which I believe is a great step towards ensuring the well-being of our students, will now head to the House.

5. Bill Filing Deadline

Friday, March 10th is a very important day at the Capitol as it is the bill filing deadline. Each legislative session is 140 days long and the 60th day is always the last day to submit bills. Over the remaining 80 days, bills will be discussed in committees and those that pass will be sent to the House and Senate floors.

Of course, very few bills make it successfully through this process to become law and the system is designed this way on purpose. The writers of the Texas Constitution envisioned a society with small government and little infringement on citizens' rights by elected officials. Many years later, their vision is still being fulfilled.

###