



My five cents...

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

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This upcoming month we will celebrate two important holidays. The first being the Fourth of July to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. The second is National Pecan Pie Day on July 12. Pecan pie also happens to be the State Pie of Texas. So while you shoot off fireworks and eat pie, I hope it is with family and friends as I know mine will be.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Special Session

A few weeks after the 85th Legislative Session ended, Governor Greg Abbott announced there would be a special session to begin on July 18 and it could last up to 30 days. After legislation to extend the sunset date and continue important state agencies such as the Texas Medical Board and Texas Psychologists Board passes, the Governor will begin to add additional items to the call. These items will include teacher pay, property tax and school finance reform, pro-life issues and caps on local and state spending, among others. I will continue to keep you updated as we continue through the special session.

2. Vetoes

The Governor's veto period ended on June 19th and he vetoed 50 of the 1,317 bills and resolutions passed by the Texas Legislature. Many of the bills he believed to be too costly or too burdensome on Texans. Some he vetoed because the author of the bill preferred the companion bill instead. With his line-item veto authority the Governor also cut \$120 million from the state's \$217 billion budget the Legislature had set for the upcoming next two years. I am very proud of the work the Legislature accomplished this session and look forward to getting back to the district and sharing with you all that we accomplished.

3. Meeting with Superintendents

At the end of June, I had the opportunity to hold a number of meetings with school Superintendents from across Senate District 3 in preparation for the upcoming Special Legislative Session. We discussed many of the items which will be brought up during this session that are education related. These included teacher pay, administrative flexibility, school finance reform and school vouchers.

I appreciate them all for coming out and participating as it is important for me to understand how decisions made in Austin, impact our schools. Education has long been one of the most important issues the state has, and it will continue to be. Our goal is to ensure students are able to receive the best education, and be successful in their lives.

4. Penalty for Killing Livestock

Hearing about horse and cattle thieves, you may think of an old western with John Wayne or Audie Murphy. However, these thefts still present a large threat to ranchers in Texas. When a thief is caught they could face up to a third degree felony, which is punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 per head stolen.

While the killing of these animals causes the same loss to the ranchers, there is not the same penalty for killing animals as there is for theft. House Bill 2817 has been signed into law, which makes the killing of cattle, horses or bison without the owner's consent, the same penalty as livestock rustling. Livestock are often killed by nighttime hunters who believe they are aiming at another animal, or others who do it maliciously. In 2016, special rangers from the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association investigated 20 cases involving 27 dead cattle and there may be many more unreported.

5. Federal Lawsuit and Sanctuary Cities

In response to the passing into law of Senate Bill 4, many cities in Texas have filed suit against the State, stating the bill has violated the Texas and U.S. Constitution. This bill, also known as the Sanctuary Cities bill, would ban cities, counties and colleges from implementing policies to refuse to enforce federal immigration laws or they could lose funding. There is also a provision in the bill which allows officers to question the immigration status of those they detain or arrest.

The lawsuit has begun its hearings in front of U.S. District Judge Orlando Garcia in San Antonio, and is expected to be a lengthy battle. The U.S. Department of Justice has filed a statement of interest in the court case arguing that the bill is constitutional and the 10th amendment allows states the right to craft their own legislation, as SB 4 is within the state's rights.

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