



My five cents...

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

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Students have gone back to school and we will soon celebrate Labor Day saying goodbye to the summer. I hope that you have a safe and enjoyable weekend with your friends and family.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. School Funding

The Senate Education Committee met earlier this month to discuss how to improve the efficiency of public schools in Texas. Following direction from the Lieutenant Governor, through an interim charge released last fall, the committee examined ways of changing our current school funding system to a performance-based funding system. This would mean schools districts would be funded based on the performance of the students instead of the current system of attendance-based funding. There was a lot of discussion on how this could negatively affect smaller, poorer districts compared to larger, wealthier districts.

In the next few weeks I will be meeting with each of the Superintendents from the 101 school districts within SD 3 and I look forward to discussing how this proposal will affect their schools and our students. I have and will continue to represent the best interest of the school districts in SD 3 in the Legislature.

2. Sunset Commission Hearing

This month, the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission met to continue its work of reviewing various state agencies and boards. The Sunset Commission is charged to ensure state agencies are meeting their mission and purpose by making recommendations for which state agencies should be continued, and how they can operate more efficiently and better serve the public.

During this meeting, myself and other members of the Commission heard testimony and reports relating to the Railroad Commission of Texas and Texas' Employee Retirement System (ERS). We also voted on recommendations to improve various boards and agencies, including the State Bar of Texas, the State Board of Pharmacy, the Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Examiners, the Board of Law Examiners, the Dental Board and four river authorities. These recommendations will now become legislation which will be considered by the Legislature in the

85th Legislative Session. If you are interested in more details about the Sunset Commission's work, I encourage you to visit www.sunset.texas.gov.

3. Combating Zika

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission has announced women who are pregnant or are 10 to 45 years old and are eligible for Medicaid can obtain prescribed mosquito repellent through the Medicaid program. The repellent is one part of Texas' effort to combat the Zika virus spreading throughout the state. There have been 94 cases reported in our state.

The Department of State Health Services has also prepped eight Zika Response Teams that will be ready to deploy if local transmission of the virus is detected. The teams will assist local governments with providing education and response to a local outbreak. The Zika virus is a dangerous public health threat and if you would like more information, please visit the www.texaszika.org.

4. Gold Depository

During the 84th Legislative Session, the Legislature approved a bill which authorized the Texas Comptroller's Office to create the first bullion depository in Texas. Over the past year, the Comptroller's office has been working on guidelines for the depository which will be able to hold deposits of gold and other precious metals from financial institutions, cities, school districts, businesses, individuals and countries. When the system is fully operational, users will be able to open accounts similar to checking or savings accounts at traditional banks.

Texas currently pays approximately \$1 million a year to store its gold at a depository in New York. Businesses are currently sending in their proposals to the Comptroller's Office to share how they would operate and build the depository. The State will make a decision on which company will operate the depository and begin working on the facility by December 1, 2016.

5. Mission Dolores

Approximately 20 miles west of the Texas-Louisiana border, was a Spanish mission called Mission Dolores built in 1721 in what is now San Augustine County. While there is no historic above-ground remains of the mission, the site tells an important story about the history and relationship of Texas' earliest settlers with the Native Americans. Recently, the Texas Historical Commission began operation of the Mission Dolores State Historic Site. The site includes a visitors center, camp ground, picnic area and a museum. The museum will provide opportunities for visitors to learn about Spanish history in Texas and the legacy of San Augustine in Texas history. To learn more about Mission Dolores and its history you can visit www.visitmissiondolores.com.

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