



My five cents...

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

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Happy New Year! I hope your holidays were filled with family and good food, as I know mine were. The next time you hear from me we will have begun the 85th Legislative Session, which is set to last 140 days during odd-numbered years. During this time, the Texas Legislature must pass a two-year budget as well as to address existing laws and consider new legislation. It has been an honor to serve as your state Senator since 2007, and I look forward to this next year and working together to make a difference for our state.

During session, I will be writing this column weekly to keep you up to date on what is going on at your State Capitol.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. Electoral College at the Capitol

Members of the Texas Electoral College met in the House Chamber of the Texas Capitol on December 19th. The Electoral College, which dates back to the late 1700's, meets after every presidential election to cast the final vote for president and vice president. Our Founding Fathers created the College as a way to create a middle ground between letting Congress and the voters nationwide elect the president. The collected votes are put into a mahogany box which is then sent to D.C. to be read to both house of Congress. Once the votes are read aloud they official and final.

2. Sunset Hearing

This month the Texas Sunset Commission held a two day hearing, which was their second to last meeting before the 85th Legislative Session. The first day recommendations were voted on for the Texas Board of Chiropractic Examiners, Texas Board of Nursing, Texas State Board of Podiatric Medical Examiners and the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners. We also heard testimony and discussed the best steps to ensure the Behavioral Health Boards in Texas have the necessary structure and resources to not only serve their licensees but also the public effectively. These boards include the Licensed Professional Counselors, Social Worker Examiners and Marriage and Family Therapists. The Commission also heard testimony and

discussed the Texas Medical Board and the Texas Department of Transportation on the second day.

3. Helping Foster Children

Governor Greg Abbott's criminal justice division recently announced an \$8 million grant issued to the Department of Family and Protective Services to provide specialized care and services for 500 foster children who are considered the most difficult to find permanent homes. Many of these children have been victims of crime and have been placed in psychiatric hospitals and residential treatment centers. These children will receive individualized medical care and mental health therapies in a less restrictive and more appropriate setting at four different sites in the state. I believe this is a successful step towards ensuring the children in the states foster care system are receiving the care they need and deserve.

4. Texas African American History Memorial

Recently, the first Texas African American History Memorial was unveiled on the grounds of the Texas Capitol. The monument, made from bronze and granite, is 27-feet high, 32-feet wide and depicts Juneteenth, June 19, 1865, when hundreds of Union troops arrived in Texas and announced the freedom of slaves in the United States. It also highlights the African American contributions in state history such as cattle, cotton, oil labor and space exploration. Funding for this monument came from private donations and state funding. To learn more about the memorial you can visit www.taahmf.com.

5. Get Involved in Session

I believe ensuring accessibility and transparency are some of the most important things a Legislature can do. It is a positive way for members to remain accountable to the people they serve. One way we are able to do this is by providing many resources online. You can utilize these important resources during the upcoming legislative session by visiting **www.capitol.state.tx.us**. Through this site, you will be able to view a live stream of Senate and House committee hearings as well as watching both chambers when they are in session.

Another tool available is being able to look up bills by subject and keyword, review bill analyses and learn about the possible fiscal implications of a bill. You may also sign up to receive e-mail notifications when bills of interest to you are assigned to committee and then advance through the legislative process. By keeping abreast of happenings in your State Capitol, you ensure accountability and integrity for all Texans.

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