



My five cents...

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

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The Speaker of the House recently announced member assignments for House committees. Now that both chambers have their organizational processes in place and bills are being referred, we are getting down to business.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. Convention of States

During his State of the State address, Governor Abbott called for a convention of states to amend the U.S. Constitution and named it one of his emergency items for this session. A convention of states is a gathering of the state legislatures, for the purpose of proposing amendments to the U.S. Constitution. This is made possible through Article V of the Constitution which was created to provide the states with a tool to stop potential abuses of power by the federal government. Two-thirds, or 34, of the state legislatures must pass similar resolutions for a convention to happen.

This week the Senate State Affairs Committee will begin to hear bills which call for a convention of states. These bills will establish the authority for the Legislature to determine the requirements and appoint delegates to attend the convention. They also focus on imposing fiscal restraints on the federal government, limiting the power and jurisdiction of the federal government and limiting the terms of office of federal officials and members of Congress.

2. Finance Workgroups

Senator Jane Nelson, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, has announced workgroup assignments for the committee. As the budget has eleven distinct parts, Senator Nelson has divided these up into four workgroups to ensure the members are able to fully examine the details of the budget. Each workgroup will then present their findings to the committee as a whole.

I have been named Chairman of one of the workgroups which covers areas such as transportation, and regulating agencies like the Public Utility Commission and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality as well as natural resources. I am grateful to Senator

Nelson for giving me this opportunity for a second time and look forward to working with the members to determine the state's budget for the next two years.

3. Sunset Bill Assignments

In previous columns, I have shared with you the Sunset process, where the Sunset Advisory Commission evaluates and renews the authorization for state agencies. After more than a year of hearings, the Sunset Advisory Commission makes recommendations which are incorporated into legislation for each agency. These bills will be divided among the members of the Commission, in both the House and Senate. I will be sure to keep you updated as to which bills I will file soon. I encourage you to take part in the legislative process and come to the Capitol to testify on these or any other bills when they are heard in committee.

4. Transferability Workgroup

As a way to save money, many students choose to take their core classes like math and science at a local community college before transferring to a four-year institution. However, many times when a student seeks to transfer these courses, they realize they will not work for their chosen degree program. This may cause a student to take more courses than they needed to originally, and in turn may cost them more than they anticipated.

A special workgroup has been appointed in the Senate Finance Committee to address the problem of transferability between schools. The workgroup is meeting with community colleges and universities, as well as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to find a solution to this problem. Helping students to succeed in their education is an important step towards ensuring the future of our great state.

5. Alabama-Coushatta Day

This week I had the pleasure of welcoming the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe to Austin for their very first legislative day at the State Capitol. The Tribe, which is a Federally recognized tribe, are descendants of both the historic Muscogee and numerous tribes of the Creek Confederacy. At the suggestion of Sam Houston, in 1853, the Tribe Chiefs held a meeting at the home of Samuel Rowe to express their interest in settling on land. In February of 1854, the Texas Legislature passed the "Act for Relief of the Alabama Indians." This act along with a donation of land, provides the Tribe with the majority of the acreage on which they reside today in Polk County. I am honored to represent the Tribe in the Senate, and look forward to continuing to work for and with them.

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