



My five cents...

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

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We recently observed Presidents' Day. George Washington, who is also known as the "Father of our Country", is one that I admire the most. Through his skills, leadership and longing to live in a country of free people, he helped lay the foundation for our country's future by building a lasting democratic institution. These principles have stood the test of time and guide every decision I make as I represent you in the Texas Senate.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol this week:

1. Celebrating STAR Day

This week, we celebrated the State of the Anniversary Remembrance (STAR) Day, which was formally established by Former Governor George W. Bush in 1996, to celebrate the birthday of the State of Texas when they joined as the 28th state in the Union. In addition, we honor James Pinckney Henderson who became the first Governor of the State of Texas in 1846. The celebration takes place at 12pm each year to acknowledge the exact time the Lone Star flag of the Republic of Texas was lowered for the last time and was replaced with the U.S. flag.

To make the day even more special, I had the pleasure of welcoming the San Augustine High School Band to the Capitol as they played for this annual celebration. By partnering with Texas schools and organizations STAR Day helps to inspire a greater appreciation of the history of our great state.

2. ETCOG Reception

I was honored to be named Legislator of the Year by the East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) during their legislative reception in Austin on Wednesday of this week. The members of ETCOG provide valuable services for counties and communities. I am grateful for this honor and look forward to continue to work with them for the people of East Texas.

ETCOG is a voluntary association of counties, cities, school districts and special districts which serves Anderson, Camp, Cherokee, Gregg, Harrison, Henderson, Marion, Panola, Rains, Rusk, Smith, Upshur, Van Zandt, and Wood counties. They help to assist local governments in

planning for common needs, provide peace officer and homeland security planning, deliver rural transportation services, and assist in grant writing services.

3. First Transportation Committee Hearing

The first Senate Transportation Committee hearing was held this week. As Chair of the committee, I shared my goals for this session in working towards ensuring the State is efficient and effective in moving people and goods safely. We also heard updates from the Texas Department of Transportation, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, and the Texas Department of Public Safety. I look forward to working with the other members on the committee on ensuring a safe and reliable transportation system for the State.

4. House Appropriations Committee

In previous columns, I have shared with you the Senate Finance Committee process of hearing from each agency in the state and starting our workgroup meetings to evaluate the budget in more detail. The House Appropriations Committee has begun holding their own meetings this week in hearing from each agency.

Over the next few weeks, both chambers will finalize their own versions of the budget. Once this happens both chambers will appoint members to a conference committee, which will help to reconcile the differences between the budgets. The primary purpose, and only constitutionally required task, of the legislative session is to prepare a balanced state budget for the next two years.

Texas FFA Day

As the saying goes, everything is bigger in Texas. This holds true for the Texas FFA Association, which is the nation's largest state FFA association with over 115,000 members in more than 1,000 active FFA chapters in the state. With so many members, they made a great impression when they came to the Capitol this week. By participating in tours and workshops they had an opportunity to learn about the legislative process, as well as the history of the Texas State Capitol.

FFA members study a broad area of agriculture including landscaping, animal science, computer applications, mechanics and engineering. Through their FFA chapters they have an opportunity to develop their talents and build upon their leadership skills. These young men and women represent Texas and remind us of how important agriculture is to our state. It is always an honor to meet with this and other organizations who are training tomorrow's Texas leaders.

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