



My five cents...

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

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The pace in Austin is getting a little more frantic this week, as members have to be in three or four places at one time. Many times we have to be in one committee to hear testimony, present a bill in a different committee and cast a vote in a third. It's a busy time under the pink dome of the Capitol.

Here are five things happening at your Capitol:

1. Hot or Not?

Kolaches, croissants, and cinnamon rolls are things many of us can't turn down. However, did you know when you visit your local bakery you could pay sales tax on your heated kolache on a plate, versus no sales tax on a cold kolache? Current state law results in identical items receiving different treatment depending on the temperature of the item and if it is served with a utensil.

House Bill 4054, which has passed out of the House and will soon be heard in the Senate, would address this issue by making all baked goods equal and exempt from sales tax. This will help business owners to be able to operate without fear of being in violation of state law.

2. Sanctuary Cities

Governor Abbott has signed Senate Bill 4, also known as the Sanctuary Cities bill, into law. Entities, such as cities, counties and colleges, would be banned from implementing policies to refuse to enforce federal immigration laws. Entities would be denied state grant funds, if their law enforcement agencies failed to honor requests from Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to hand over immigrants in custody for possible deportation.

There is also a top-down provision in the bill, which means that an entity in violation, could lose their state grant funds and cause every entity under them to lose their funds as well. This was one of Abbott's priorities which he listed as one of four emergency items at the beginning of this legislative session.

3. Vehicle Inspections

We have all faced that last minute struggle of rushing to get our cars inspected before the sticker expires. Recently, the Texas Senate passed Senate Bill 1588 which would eliminate the state's vehicle safety requirement, which has been in place since 1951. Commercial vehicles and those living within a county which requires emissions test, such as Harris and Dallas counties, would still be required to get their vehicles inspected.

The federal government ended the program requirement in 1976, and since then states have chosen if they would have the program. Studies have shown that vehicle safety inspections have no definite impact on reducing accident or fatality rates. Currently, 35 states do not require annual vehicle inspections.

4. Kickapoo Indians

During the 17th Century, the Kickapoo Indian tribe were forced westwards from the Midwest by a series of 'Indian removals' which caused many of the Tribe to be killed. They eventually settled in Eagle Pass, on the Texas/Mexico border, which now serves as their main reservation in the United States. Many of their traditional Native American religious practices include hunting and feasting on white-tailed deer in celebration of baptisms, funerals and other religious rituals as a way to preserve their culture. However, because of current laws, they are often not able to hunt the deer year-round and as such, they are not able to conduct these ceremonies.

Senate Bill 880 is working its way through the Senate chamber and would allow the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to issue a license to a documented member of the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas, allowing them to hunt antlerless white-tailed deer any day of the year for religious and ceremonial purposes. They would be restricted to the two counties surrounding their reservation.

5. Panic Week

The end of session clock is ticking away and members are starting to get nervous (or panic) about whether their bills will successfully make it through to the end. As a way to limit government, the Texas legislative process is set up in a way that kills more bills than are passed. By May 29th, which is the end of this legislative session, around four of every five bills will have failed.

This week the House passed its important deadline of the last day they could consider that chamber's bills, as they must now move onto hearing Senate bills. In the next week, all bills must be passed out of both chambers committees to realistically have time to be heard and pass out of the Senate and House chambers.

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