



My five cents...

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

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Soon we will celebrate Texas' Independence Day. Set on the anniversary of the signing of Texas' Declaration of Independence from Mexico, it is a reminder of our state's rich history. After the declaration of independence was signed, Texas operated as a stand-alone Republic for 10 years, before joining the United States.

While Texans are proud Americans, we hold on to much of the individual spirit from our time as a separate nation. The bravery and courage of our Texas' founders continues to inspire our state today through their legacy of freedom, self-reliance and ingenuity.

Here are five things happening around your state this month:

1. FEMA Funding

Texas is expected to receive just over \$1 billion in hazard and flood mitigation funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) by the end of the summer to help communities rebuild from the damage caused by Hurricane Harvey last year. Half of that funding is currently available right now for cities and counties which were affected by Harvey. The funding can be used to cover everything from buying out flooded buildings and homes, retrofitting houses and buildings to withstand hurricane winds, storm surge protection programs, building new seawalls and restoring sand dunes. The Texas Department of Emergency Management has been instructed to expedite the distribution of funding once communities or cities send in their applications and they are approved.

2. Protecting Texans

Governor Abbott has announced a new initiative to better protect people from human trafficking. The "Preventing Crime, Protecting Texans, Punishing Criminal" plan includes allocating \$22 million to the Department of Public Safety to create regional squads which will help train local law enforcement in recognizing and investigating human trafficking cases. He also suggests in the plan that \$14 million should be allocated to address and clear the state's backlog of sexual assault evidence kits. Other proposals in the plan include a 'do-not-hire' registry for school employees placed on probation or who have been convicted of an improper relationship with students.

3. Texas Women's Hall of Fame

In 1984, the Texas Governor's Commission for Women established the Texas Women's Hall of Fame to honor women who have accomplished significant achievements in areas such as arts, business, health, science, education and community service. It includes former First Ladies, entrepreneurs, athletes, artists and many more. Nominations are now being accepted for 2018 and are open to any native or current resident of Texas, living or deceased, who have made a significant contribution to the State of Texas. Texas Women's University in Denton, currently houses the permanent exhibit which salutes these women. I encourage you to visit https://gov.texas.gov/organization/women/texas_womens_hall_of_fame to learn more about the Hall of Fame and to submit a nomination form.

4. DPS Reversing Decision

Last December, the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) made a controversial decision to cut the positions of over 100 law enforcement officers to make up for a budget cut. These older troopers were employed under an agency program which allowed them to retire and then be rehired with the ability to collect retirement benefits and salary. While this program was discontinued in 2013, many of these troopers had been rehired before then. After the decision was made, many associations and many within the Capitol, came out against this decision as they believed it unfairly targeted older officers.

Recently, DPS rescinded that decision, and have allowed the troopers, which are employed under the retire/rehire program, to continue on in their current positions. They would also offer reinstated jobs to any officers who may have already left the Department due to the impending layoffs.

5. Get Appointed

One aspect of state government that many are not aware of is gubernatorial appointments. The Governor of Texas makes approximately 3,000 appointments during a four-year term. These include appointments to state boards, commissions, and councils which advise the Governor on specific agencies and policies. Some of those include the Animal Health Commission, the Soil and Water Conservation Board and the Texas Pharmacy Board.

During my time in the Senate, and having served on the Senate Nominations Committee for six years, I understand the impact state boards have on Texas. Because of this, I want to encourage more Senate District 3 constituents to apply for these positions. Our communities in East Texas are blessed with many individuals whose expertise and backgrounds could benefit our state as a whole and I encourage you to get involved. For an application and more information, please visit www.governor.state.tx.us/appointments.

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