



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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One hundred and forty-three years ago this week, building commissioners for the Texas Capitol broke ground for the present-day building. Nimrod Norton and Joseph Lee turned the first shovels on February 1, 1882. The construction took six years and was dedicated in 1888.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Governor Abbott announces seven emergency items**

Last weekend Governor Abbott delivered the State of the State address in Austin. In the speech, he outlined a list of priorities he would like the Legislature to address during this legislative session. Among those priorities he listed seven emergency items. Typically, action cannot be taken on regular bills before the 60<sup>th</sup> day of session, which is also the bill filing deadline. Emergency items are distinct because the Legislature may take action on them before the 60<sup>th</sup> day of session. The governors seven emergency items are:

- Property tax relief
- Water infrastructure investment
- Teacher pay raise
- Career and technical training
- School choice
- Bail reform
- Creation of Texas Cyber Command

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate and our partners in the House on these important issues. It is critical the Legislature address property taxes, water infrastructure, and education funding this session. Work on these bills has already begun.

## **2. Bail reform bills filed, hearing next week**

This week, Senator Joan Huffman filed a slate of bills related to reforming our bail system to enhance public safety across Texas. Senate Bill 9 and the accompanying Senate Joint Resolution 17 will continue work Senator Huffman has championed over the past several legislative sessions. SJR 17 is a constitutional amendment that would allow judges to deny bail to violent offenders who pose threats to public safety. Similar measures have passed the Senate five times during other sessions. Senator Huffman also filed SJR 49 which would require the denial of bail for an illegal alien charged with an offense punishable as a felony. The Senate Criminal Justice committee is holding a public hearing next week to hear testimony related to these and several

other bail reform bills. I applaud Senator Huffman's diligence in protecting the public from violent offenders and will help to ensure these measures receive support this session.

### **3. Texas A&M to build small nuclear reactors at RELLIS campus**

The Texas A&M University System is exploring development of small nuclear reactors on its research campus in Bryan. Four companies were selected to research the possibility of building a reactor, including Kairos Power, Natura Resources, Aalo Atomics, and Terrestrial Energy. Natura Resources is currently working with Abilene Christian University and helped secure the first construction permit for a liquid-fueled advanced reactor and only the second for any advanced reactor from federal regulators. The university hopes to create an environment at Texas A&M ideal for cutting-edge technologies to demonstrate commercial viability while offering nuclear engineering expertise from the university. The university has requested \$200 million from the Legislature to upgrade necessary infrastructure at the RELLIS campus in Bryan to support a nuclear reactor.

### **4. Homestead exemption increase bill filed**

This week, Senator Paul Bettencourt filed a bill to increase the property tax homestead exemption. Senate Bill 4, on which I am a joint author, would increase the existing homestead exemption from \$100,000 to \$140,000 (and \$150,000 for seniors). Increasing the homestead exemption gives homeowners permanent property tax relief. In conjunction with property tax compression included in the state budget, homeowners could see an annual average property tax reduction of almost \$500. The bill also includes hold-harmless provisions for local school districts so districts will not feel negative financial impacts from the bill. Any shortfalls created by the exemption would be fully covered by the state. The bill, if passed by both chambers, would ultimately go to the voters for approval. Last session, the Legislature approved an increase to the homestead exemption from \$40,000 to \$100,000, which was overwhelmingly approved by voters last fall.

### **5. Bill to increase school safety allotments filed**

Senator Joan Huffman filed Senate Bill 260 which would double school safety allotments. Currently, school districts receive \$15,000 per campus in their district and \$10 per student for safety measures. This bill, which I signed on as a coauthor, would increase those allotments to \$30,000 per campus and \$20 per student. Last session, I carried House Bill 3, which established these allotments among other school safety provisions. I am excited to work with Senator Huffman to continue the important work of ensuring our schools have the resources necessary to keep our students safe.

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