



# My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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This weekend we celebrate President's Day, honoring all US presidents. The holiday originally celebrated George Washington's birthday on February 22. It became a federal holiday celebrated on the third Monday in February in 1968.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## **1. Homestead exemption increase passes Senate**

This week, the Senate passed Senate Bill 4 and Senate Joint Resolution 2 by Senator Paul Bettencourt which builds on efforts of the past several sessions to provide more property tax relief to homeowners across the state. The measures 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 buying down property tax rates, homeowners could see an annual average property tax reduction of almost \$500. Last session, the Legislature approved an increase to the homestead exemption from \$40,000 to \$100,000, which was overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2023. I was proud to co-author and vote for these bills and look forward to working with our partners in the House on providing lasting property tax relief.

## **2. Prayer in schools, Ten Commandments bills filed**

This week two of Lt. Governor Dan Patrick's priority bills were filed in the Senate. Senate Bill 10 by Senator Phil King would require every classroom in the state to display a copy of the Ten Commandments. Schools would not be required to purchase posters described in the bill, but would need to display them if donated to the district.

Additionally, Senator Mayes Middleton filed Senate Bill 11, which aims to protect prayer in schools by allowing the school board to adopt a policy that would require campuses to provide an optional period of prayer and reading of religious texts. Parents would have to consent to allowing their student to participate in the prayer time and the period could not be a substitute for instructional time. Allowing districts the flexibility and local control to reflect what they believe is best for their communities enables our schools to support students in all aspects of their lives.

## **3. Hundreds of National Guard troops helping Border Patrol in Laredo**

More Texas National Guard troops are on their way to Laredo to assist the US Border Patrol in enhancing border security. Over 300 members of the Texas National Guard will be performing immigration officer duties under the supervision of US Customs and Border Protection officials. They will not be operating independently. Border Patrol will still be leading the effort and assisting with any apprehensions. The Trump Administration has made securing our southern border a top priority since Inauguration Day. Resources have surged to the area to support operations at the southern border to ensure public safety.

#### **4. Texas has more top tier research universities than any other state**

The American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching released a report this week detailing the number of Tier 1 research universities in each state. Texas led all states with 16 universities achieving Tier 1 status. California had 14 and New York had 12. Tier 1 research universities are those that spend at least \$50 million in total research spending and award at least 70 research doctorates annually. This year, only 187 institutions were given a Tier 1 designation. Tier 1 status can attract more students, faculty, researchers, and resources. The education groups last released updated classifications in 2022. At that time, Texas, California, and New York were all tied with 11 institutions each. The five additional universities added in Texas include Baylor College of Medicine, Southern Methodist University, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, and the UT Southwestern Medical Center. Building a robust system for postsecondary education helps the Texas economy continue to grow and attract talented students from within the state and across the nation.

#### **5. New York Stock Exchange opening Texas operation**

This week the New York Stock Exchange announced it will move one of its electronic exchanges from Chicago to Texas. The reincorporated entity will be the NYSE Texas and will allow companies to list their stocks in Texas. The New York Stock Exchange said in a news release it aims to cater to the growing number of companies headquartered in Texas. Our business-friendly policies are attracting an ever-growing number of businesses to relocate here. This news comes on the heels of the Texas Stock Exchange filing its registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission with a goal of opening early next year.

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