



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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On May 8, 1945 the Allied forces celebrated Victory in Europe Day after the defeat of Nazi Germany. During the war, more than 1,500,000 military personnel came to Texas for training. There were 142 major military installations across the state, and more than 750,000 Texans served in uniform during the war.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Stephen F. Austin State University enters compact with area community colleges

Stephen F. Austin (SFA) has created expansive partnerships with surrounding institutions for an expedited transfer process. Students are guaranteed admission to SFA when transferring from institutions within the Lumberjack Transfer Alliance. SFA has partnered with 17 universities from the region, and three (soon to be four) of the universities are part of the Lumberjack Transfer Alliance. East Texas schools who have entered the partnership include: Angelina College, Panola College, Tyler Junior College, and soon Kilgore College. We are fortunate to have so many quality institutions of higher education in East Texas. The collaboration of these schools will undoubtedly benefit our communities and workforce.

2. Bill to allow hunting of invasive sheep from a helicopter passes

Senate Bill 1245 by Senator César Blanco, which has passed both chambers, would allow hunters to use helicopters to hunt aoudad sheep west of the Pecos River. Aoudad sheep, also known as Barbary sheep, were imported to Texas in the 1950s from Northern Africa to provide additional hunting game. Since their arrival, aoudad have proven to be difficult to keep fenced and in recent years, researchers have learned aoudad can carry mycoplasma ovipneumonia (MOV). MOV is a pneumonia-causing bacteria that can be transmitted between animals through shared water sources. As aoudad populations have surged, native species have suffered. By adding aoudad to the list of animals that can be hunted from a helicopter, we can better protect the posterity of native species.

3. Agreement reached between chambers on property tax relief

Legislation is moving forward to put \$51 billion toward relieving property taxes in the next biennium. This week, the House Ways and Means Committee advanced proposals that have passed

out of the Senate on significant tax breaks. The proposal will increase tax breaks for homeowners, cut taxes for older and disabled Texans, and increase the inventory tax exemption for businesses. Senate Bill 4 raises the homestead exemption from \$100,000 to \$140,000. Additionally, Senate Bill 23 raises the homestead exemption for 65+ and disabled Texans from \$10,000 to \$60,000. Collectively, these residents will be eligible for \$200,000 in property tax relief. House Bill 9 passed out of the Senate Local Government Committee this week which would exempt up to \$125,000 of businesses' inventory from taxation by any taxing entity. I was proud to coauthor both SB 4 and SB 23.

4. Effort to end Texas Lottery Commission following scandal

As we reach the last few weeks of the legislative session, the Legislature contemplates the future of the Texas Lottery Commission. Lottery couriers, or services that facilitate online purchasing of lottery tickets, have exploited loopholes in the format of the lottery by printing physical lottery tickets at licensed retail stores and then sending digital scans of the tickets to customers. This has increased sales to out-of-state customers and minors via digital methods. This year the Lottery Commission is under review by the Sunset Advisory Commission. The Sunset Commission reviews the "nuts and bolts" of agencies every 12 years to determine if the agency is operating at peak efficiency. As allegations of fraud have surfaced, a critical review of the Lottery Commission is especially important. The Texas Lottery generates about \$2 billion for schools annually. Ensuring the ethical operation of the lottery and addressing potential corruption will be essential if the Legislature continues the Texas Lottery.

5. Accepting scholarship applications for Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program

As a state senator I have the honor of appointing one student each year to receive the Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program (TASSP) initial conditional scholarship award. The scholarship is available to eligible graduating high school seniors who will be working to complete a baccalaureate degree and become a member of the Texas Army National Guard, Texas Air National Guard, Texas State Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Merchant Marines or pursue a commission in any branch of the armed services of the United States. If you live in Senate District 3 and are interested in this scholarship, please send the required material to robert.nichols@senate.texas.gov. **Applications must be received no later than July 15, 2025.** For questions please call my Jacksonville office at 903-589-3003. **For more information and details on the application please visit www.hhloans.com.**

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