



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Contact: Shelby Vestal
Tel: 512-463-0103

This month the Legislature began our Second Called Special Session. We again have 30 days to complete the items on the Governor's call.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. Redistricting maps pass both chambers, head to Governor

This week, both the House and the Senate officially passed House Bill 4, which updates the US Congressional maps in Texas. These new maps reflect Texans' voting preferences. The new maps rework districts in East Texas so that there are five members of congress representing the region rather than the current seven. The bill now heads to the Governor's desk for final approval. If signed, the maps will go into effect on the 91st day after the last day of the special legislative session. To learn more about the new maps and see what they look like, including if your representative has changed, visit <https://redistricting.capitol.texas.gov>.

2. Various flood recovery measures pass, Legislature honors victims

Last week, both the House and Senate passed legislation relating to flood mitigation, response, and recovery while honoring the victims of the Fourth of July floods and their families. The Senate Disaster Preparedness Committee held a hearing on legislation and invited the families of victims to testify about their experiences. Families of the 27 victims at Camp Mystic recounted the aftermath of their horrific ordeal and advocated for changes to state policy around summer camp safety.

Senate Bill 1 by Senator Charles Perry would ensure that summer camps cannot build cabins or house campers within a floodplain. It also requires camps establish emergency procedures for a variety of events including a lost camper, fire, flood, severe injury, or death. Those procedures must be part of a mandatory safety orientation before each camp session begins. Further, each camp must be equipped with a radio capable of providing real-time weather alerts issued by the National Weather Service and install an emergency warning system at the camp that is capable of alerting campers and counselors to an emergency.

3. Legal defense for human trafficking victims passes Legislature

Senate Bill 11, by Senator Tan Parker, passed both chambers this week and is headed to the Governor's desk. The bill would provide an affirmative defense for human and sex trafficking victims who commit a crime under force, fraud, or coercion from their trafficker. Under current law, young victims can be prosecuted for crimes they assisted in or committed with or for their trafficker. Often traffickers will force their victims to commit these crimes. When a victim has a criminal record, it can make it even harder for them to leave their trafficker. This will help victims of human trafficking leave their abusers without a criminal record and ensure they can take the next steps to a new life.

4. New laws go into effect September 1

September 1 is the day that most of the bills passed by the Legislature go into effect. While over a thousand bills were passed, around 750 will go into effect over the weekend. Here are some of the new laws to be aware of:

- Senate Bill 7 – This bill, by Senator Charles Perry, creates a framework for funding water projects throughout the state through the Texas Water Development Board. It accompanies a constitutional amendment voters will have the opportunity to vote on this fall to allocate \$1 billion each year for 20 years to the Texas Water Fund to combat the state's looming water crisis.
- Senate Bill 17 – This bill, by Senator Lois Kolkhorst, will ban governments, companies, and individuals who reside in China, North Korea, Russia, and Iran from owning land or property in Texas. US citizens or permanent residents are not part of the ban.
- Senate Bill 835 – This bill, by Senator Angela Paxton, bans the use of nondisclosure agreements in sexual assault and human trafficking cases. It also voids existing nondisclosure agreements in those cases. The bill, named "Trey's Law," is named for Trey Carlock, who died by suicide in 2019 after signing an NDA related to abuse he suffered as a child by a camp counselor.

5. New World Screwworm protection facility announced

The US Department of Agriculture announced a \$750 million investment to build a facility in Edinburg, Texas to combat the spread of the New World screwworm. The facility will sterilize New World screwworm flies and prevent their reproduction. There are no facilities in the US that currently produce sterile screwworm flies, instead relying on facilities in Panama for the flies. The new facility will be able to produce 300 million sterile flies per week.

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