

# ROBERT NICHOLS

## A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR NICHOLS

CAPITOL OFFICE  
P.O. Box 12068, Room E1.704  
Austin, Texas 78711  
(512) 463-0103  
FAX: (512) 463-1526  
Dial 711 for Relay Calls



COMMITTEES:  
Transportation, Chair  
Finance  
Intergovernmental Relations  
Natural Resources & Economic Development

**ROBERT L. NICHOLS**  
STATE SENATOR

*Dear friends,*

*Another session of the Texas Legislature has come and gone, and again I am proud to represent you in the Texas Senate. Because I believe you should hear directly from your elected officials about how we are working for you, I am sending you this newsletter. Inside you will find an update on issues affecting Texans.*

*Some things you may be most interested in reading include:*

- ★ *what the state is doing to help small businesses and encourage job growth,*
- ★ *how the Legislature budgeted your hard-earned tax dollars,*
- ★ *what the state is doing to improve education, and*
- ★ *how your vote on November 3 can help fund transportation infrastructure in our state.*

*Of course one document cannot answer every question or address every concern. If there is something you want to know from me, please do not hesitate to call the Capitol office or the district office closest to you. As a resident of Senate District 3, these offices belong to you. My staff and I are here to help.*

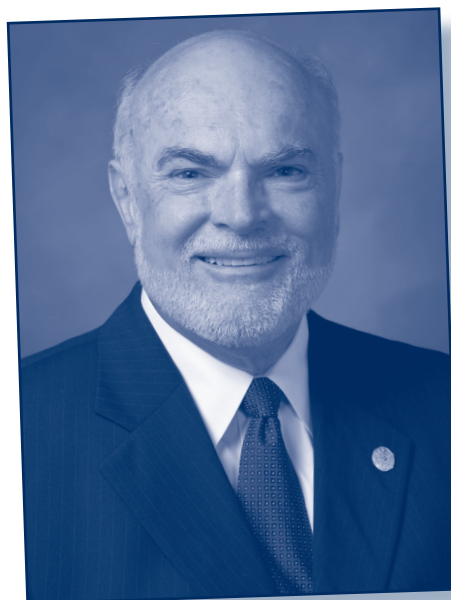
*It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to represent you in the Texas Senate.*

*Sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Lee Nichols".

*Robert L. Nichols*  
*State Senator*

*P.S. Inside you will also find information on how to get a summary of the proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution. As a voter, you will have the opportunity to approve or reject these proposed amendments during the November 3 election.*



# LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 84TH SESSION

## ★ PROPOSITION 7 - FUNDING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

As Texas' population continues to grow, we must work to ensure adequate funding is available to preserve and expand our transportation infrastructure. Two years ago, transportation planners projected the need for \$5 billion per year in additional revenues to maintain current levels of congestion. Over 80% of Texans supported a transportation funding measure in November 2014 to help close that gap, but it only took Texas partway down the road.

Funding transportation is a core function of government and the Legislature took a big step towards addressing this problem by overwhelmingly passing Senate Joint Resolution 5, a resolution I filed to dedicate funding to our state's non-tolled roads and bridges. Texans will have an opportunity to vote on this constitutional amendment, which will appear as Proposition 7 on the ballot, during the November 3, 2015 election.

Proposition 7 would invest \$2.5 billion per year to build non-tolled roads and bridges in Texas. By 2025, that amount is expected to grow to \$3.5 billion per year. The measure would constitutionally dedicate a portion of the existing state sales taxes - including taxes paid on new vehicles - to non-tolled roads and bridges, meaning no new taxes would be created. If passed by voters, this legislation will be the largest single increase in transportation funding in Texas history, without issuing debt.

## ★ PASSING A BALANCED BUDGET

Unlike the federal government, the Texas Legislature is constitutionally required to pass a balanced budget each session. With a final budget which was \$2 billion under the



*Sen. Nichols speaking at press conference with Lt. Governor Dan Patrick on the initial filing of Senate Joint Resolution 5.*

spending cap and which grew less than the rate of inflation and population growth, we accomplished this.

This biennium's budget, which accounts for the next two years in state spending, included an increase in funding for border security, approximately \$3 billion in combined additional funding for public education and higher education, \$50 million for women's preventive healthcare, approximately \$151 million in increased funding for mental health services, as well as funding for transportation. Unlike other states which have large deficits, we have more than \$8 billion in our rainy day fund, and that is expected to increase over the next two years.

## ★ CUTTING TAXES AND FEES

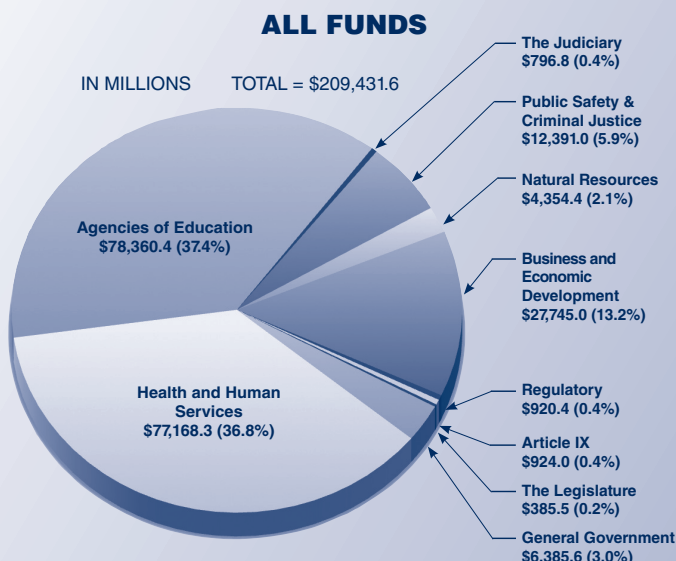
The Legislature passed over \$3.8 billion in tax and fee cuts which should go a long way in helping to sustain Texas' superior economic climate. This included reducing the franchise tax rate on Texas businesses by 25 percent and provides additional tax relief to businesses that meet certain revenue thresholds. As a former manufacturer and business owner, I can tell you how helpful this is and how it helps to spur economic growth.

If approved by voters in the November 3, 2015 election, Proposition 1 will increase the homestead exemption for school district property taxes from \$15,000 to \$25,000. The increased homestead exemption is expected to save the average Texas homeowner approximately \$120 per year.

## ★ PROTECTING OUR BORDERS

The Legislature passed a \$800 million border security package to ensure the protection of our state's borders. It includes the hiring of additional troopers and gives the Department of Public Safety (DPS) the authority to expedite the hiring of certain military veterans who have been honorably discharged, as well as hiring retired officers to assist with background checks and other duties. In addition, the operation of the Texas National Guard on the border will continue until the department can hire and train up to 250 troopers to be permanently stationed in the area.

### Summary of Conference Committee Report House Bill 1, 2016-17



Source: Legislative Budget Board, Summary of Conference Committee Report for House Bill 1, 2016-17 Biennium. [www.lbb.state.tx.us](http://www.lbb.state.tx.us)



# LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 84TH SESSION



*Sen. Nichols discusses an issue with Sen. Kevin Eltife and Sen. Joan Huffman.*

There were also measures put into place to change the conduct that constitutes a human smuggling offense as well as creating a third degree felony offense for the continuous smuggling of persons. A transnational intelligence center on the border will be established to analyze crime data and share “real-time” information about criminal activity with the various local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies on the U.S.-Mexico border.

## ★ PASTOR PROTECTION ACT

The Legislature passed Senate Bill 2065 which protects the rights of pastors to exercise their First Amendment rights. This bill provides ministers, religious organizations, and their employees the right to refuse to perform a marriage or provide goods, services or accommodations related to a marriage ceremony if the action would violate their religious beliefs. The legislation also stipulates the above mentioned individuals and organizations cannot be sued for damages, prosecuted for criminal violations or lose tax-exempt status for refusing to provide services or allow use of their facilities to same-sex couples.

I believe we should protect the religious freedoms of the citizens of Texas. During the legislative session, I received emails, letters and phone calls from over 350 people in Senate District 3 who were in support of this bill. I appreciate those who take the time to share their support and concern regarding legislation as it helps me to represent you in the Texas Senate.

### ***How To Purchase a Texas Flag***

**If you wish to purchase a Texas flag that has been flown over the State Capitol, please contact one of my offices and my staff will be happy to assist you.**

**3x5 Nylon: \$15.25**

**3x5 Cotton: \$20.25**

**4x6 Nylon: \$22.55**

**4x6 Cotton: \$30.55**

## ★ OPEN CARRY AND CAMPUS CARRY

Some of the hottest debates this Session were associated with open carry and campus carry bills. House Bill 910 allows those who are properly licensed to carry handguns openly in a hip or shoulder holster. Property owners and businesses have the ability to prohibit persons to come into their premises with a concealed or open carried handgun if they post proper signage. This legislation goes into effect on January 1, 2016.

Senate Bill 11 allows concealed carry on a public university campus, with a provision that allows private universities to opt out. The legislation allows universities to carve out gun-free zones in locations of their choice and establish their own rules regarding where handguns are carried and how they are stored. This legislation goes into effect on August 1, 2016.

Both pieces of legislation refer only to those who have met the requirements necessary to hold a Concealed Handgun License. These include being at least 21 years old; passing state and federal background checks; submitting fingerprints to the Department of Public Safety and being free of chemical dependence, among other requirements.



*Sen. Nichols meets with Superintendents from Senate District 3.*

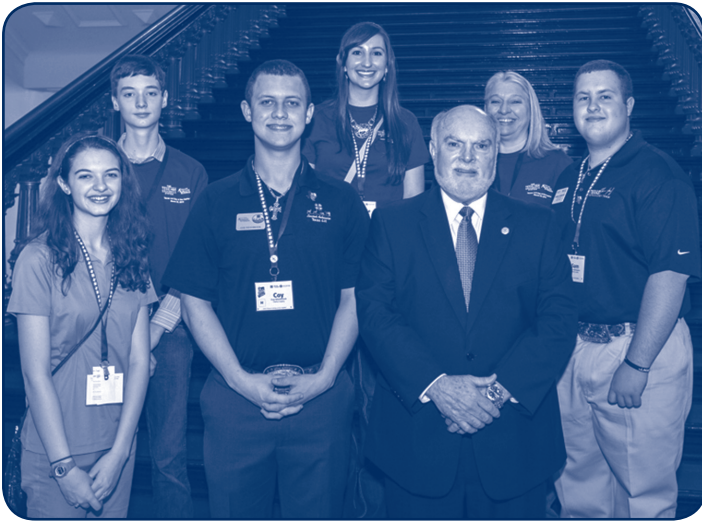
## ★ TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM

At the beginning of the legislative session, the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) estimated that its health insurance program, TRS-Care, would run out of money during the 2016 fiscal year with a \$768 million shortfall by 2017. If this money was not allocated, TRS suggested they would have to raise the premiums of more than 230,000 retirees or cut their benefits to cover this shortfall. To prevent either of those things from happening, the Legislature passed House Bill 2 which had an appropriation to fully fund TRS-Care.

To better safeguard the program, a joint interim committee was created to develop a strategy for the two healthcare plans, TRS-Care and TRS-ActiveCare, which are administered by TRS. The committee, which is made up of



# LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE 84TH SESSION



*Sen. Nichols welcomes representatives from 4-H to the Capitol during the legislative session.*

members of the Senate and House, will examine the financial soundness of both plans, the cost and affordability for eligible people and access to physicians and healthcare providers. I am pleased we were able to keep our promises to the teachers of our state as they play a vital role in molding future generations of Texans.

## ★ PROVIDING FOR THE STATE'S VETERAN POPULATION

With approximately 1.7 million veterans in Texas, it is important to ensure we are providing support to a big part of our state's population. Legislation was passed this session to create job opportunities for our veterans, exempt veteran-owned businesses from the franchise tax, and waive fees associated with occupational certification programs. The Texas Veteran's Initiative was also created, which provides \$20 million in grant funding over the next two years for Texas veteran's mental health. The state will be able to partner with communities and the private sector to support veteran's mental health.

Recognizing that women account for 11 percent of our state's veteran population, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) established a Women Veterans Initiative in 2012 to provide increased support as they transition from the military to civilian life, as well as helping them to obtain benefits and services they earned. House Bill 867 was passed by the Legislature this session to make this a permanent program under the TVC. These are important programs and will help ensure much needed services are available for those who served and made sacrifices for our country.

## ★ PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY PRE-K

During his State of the State address at the beginning of session Governor Greg Abbott listed early childhood education as one of his emergency items. As a result, the Legislature passed House Bill 4, which establishes a grant program and sets aside \$130 million over the next two years for public school districts to

improve the quality and accountability of the state's pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) programs.

While each school district may determine the best way to use the grant money for their individual programs, they must implement specific teacher training, meet new curriculum requirements and increase parental involvement to qualify for the grant funding. The state currently funds half day Pre-K programs which are geared towards students from low-income, non-English speaking, foster and military families. I supported House Bill 4 after meeting with Superintendents in the 101 school districts within Senate District 3 who shared with me the positive impact Pre-K programs have had for students at their schools. With this additional funding, school districts will be able to provide a high quality program for students across our state.



*Sen. Nichols with John Wayne's family on Senate floor after sponsoring a resolution making Mr. Wayne an Honorary Texan.*

## ★ TRANSPARENCY IN STATE CONTRACTING

Following concerns regarding recent contracting practices with one of Texas' biggest state agencies, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 20, of which I was a co-author, which will strengthen the contracting practices across the state. This legislation requires the heads of state agencies to certify contracts worth more than \$1 million to ensure they are competitively bid. There are also stricter restrictions on the conflict of interest between agencies and contracted vendors by requiring the agency to increase the number of competitive bids on a contract as the price increases.

It also requires all state agencies to retain records related to contracts for at least seven years after the expiration of the contract. Former state employees involved in contract negotiations with a company are now prohibited from taking a job with that company for two years. As the state relies heavily on contracting for the delivery of services throughout our state, it is important to ensure we are able to keep track of the contracts the state is currently pursuing. We must ensure we are utilizing the state's funds responsibly and providing transparency for all throughout the contracting process.

## SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS, SENATE DISTRICT 3

First elected to the Texas Senate in 2007, Robert Nichols represents 19 counties including the greater part of East Texas and Montgomery County.

Nichols serves as Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee and serves on the Finance, Intergovernmental Relations and Natural Resources and Economic Development Committees. He is a member of the Legislative Audit Committee and a former Vice-Chairman of the Sunset Advisory Commission.

During his five sessions as a state senator, Nichols authored and passed legislation to protect landowners' rights, increase educational opportunities in East Texas and reform transportation policies. He has also worked to reduce Medicaid fraud, and promote free-market principles. He was designated as a Top Legislator by Texas Insider, a Champion of Free Enterprise by the Texas Association of Business and a Courageous Conservative by the Texas Conservative Coalition.

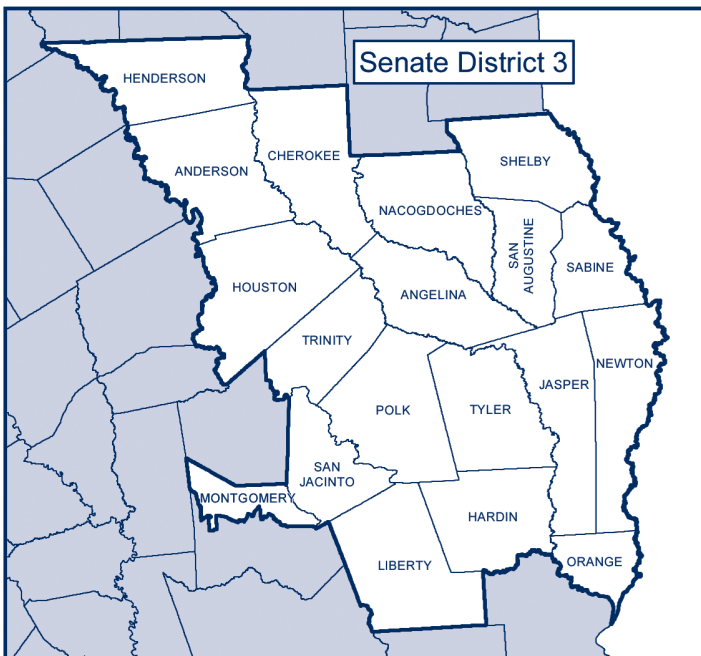


*Sen. Nichols addresses his colleagues regarding transportation funding.*

Before running for Senate, Nichols served as transportation commissioner for eight years where he established a reputation for increasing efficiency without compromising quality.

Nichols is a businessman from Jacksonville, Texas. In his hometown he served on city council, was elected mayor, built four successful manufacturing facilities, earned 32 U.S. patents, and created more than 900 jobs for East Texas families.

Working his way through college by selling fireworks and ironing clothes for other students, Nichols earned a bachelor's degree from Lamar University in 1968. He married his high school sweetheart, Donna, and they are the proud parents of three children: Brittney, Joshua, and Collynn'rae. He is a member of the First United Methodist Church in Jacksonville.



## Texas Constitutional Election

This fall, Texans will have the opportunity to vote on 7 amendments to the Texas Constitution. The last day to register to vote in this election is October 5, 2015. Early voting begins October 19 and continues through October 30. Election Day is November 3, 2015.

To view a summary and analysis of these amendments please visit: [http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/const\\_amends.htm](http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/const_amends.htm). To ensure you are registered to vote you can visit [www.votetexas.gov](http://www.votetexas.gov).

Copies of the summary will also be available in all of Sen. Nichols' district offices. Or, if you prefer, you may contact his Capitol office at (512) 463-0103 and staff will gladly send you a copy.



# SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS

## DISTRICT 3 OFFICES

### CAPITOL

P.O. Box 12068  
Room E1.704  
Austin, Texas 78711  
FAX: (512) 463-1526

### MONTGOMERY

15260 Hwy. 105 W.  
Suite 230-H, Box 5  
Montgomery, Texas 77356  
FAX: (936) 588-7391

### NACOGDOCHES

202 E. Pilar St.  
Suite 309  
Nacogdoches, Texas 75961  
FAX: (936) 564-4252

### LUFKIN

2915 Atkinson Dr.  
Lufkin, Texas 75901  
FAX: (936) 699-4988

### JACKSONVILLE

329 Neches St.  
Jacksonville, Texas 75766  
FAX: (903) 589-3003

E-mail: [robert.nichols@senate.state.tx.us](mailto:robert.nichols@senate.state.tx.us)

The Texas Senate is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

PRSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 2468  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

## SENATOR ROBERT NICHOLS

P.O. Box 12068 Austin, Texas 78711

## HELPFUL TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

General Help & Services  
Cancer Information Service  
Child Support Hotline  
Consumer Protection Hotline  
Governor's Assist. Hotline  
Elections Division  
Social Security Administration  
Lawyer Referral Service  
Crime Victim Clearinghouse  
Immunization Hotline  
Medicaid Hotline  
WIC Hotline  
Nursing Home Complaints  
Rehabilitative Services  
Injured Worker Hotline  
Child Care Information  
Unemployment Hotline

2 - 1 - 1  
(800) 4-CANCER  
(800) 252-8014  
(800) 621-0508  
(800) 843-5789  
(800) 252-VOTE  
(800) 772-1213

(800) 252-9690  
(800) 848-4284  
(800) 252-9152  
(800) 252-8263  
(800) 942-3678  
(800) 458-9858  
(800) 792-1109  
(800) 252-7031  
(800) 862-5252  
(800) 558-8321

## GOVERNMENT RESOURCES ONLINE

Texas Senate  
[www.senate.state.tx.us](http://www.senate.state.tx.us)  
Texas House of Representatives  
[www.house.state.tx.us](http://www.house.state.tx.us)  
Secretary of State  
[www.sos.state.tx.us](http://www.sos.state.tx.us)  
Texas Comptroller  
[www.window.state.tx.us](http://www.window.state.tx.us)  
Texas Legislature Online  
[www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us)  
Texas Governor  
[www.governor.state.tx.us](http://www.governor.state.tx.us)  
Texas Attorney General  
[www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us)  
Texas Department of Agriculture  
[www.ag.state.tx.us](http://www.ag.state.tx.us)  
Texas General Land Office  
[www.glo.state.tx.us](http://www.glo.state.tx.us)