



My five cents...

A monthly column from Sen. Robert Nichols

by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

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Next week, voters will make their voices heard in the Texas primaries. Don't forget to make a plan to vote on March 5!

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. TEA announces opening of Texas Student Heroes Award nominations

This month, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) announced that nominations for the annual Student Heroes program are open. The program recognizes Texas public school students in prekindergarten through high school who do an outstanding volunteer service that benefits their fellow students, schools, or communities. One student from each of the 15 State Board of Education districts is recognized. Nominations can be submitted by anyone, including school personnel, other students, parents, or community members. To nominate a student, fill out the nomination form on TEA's website and include a brief essay submitted by the nominator describing the student's work. For questions, please email heroes@tea.texas.gov or call the SBOE support office at (512) 463-9007.

2. William B. Travis' letter returns to the Alamo

This month, the Texas General Land Office (GLO) announced that the original letter from Travis written at the Alamo pleading for back up and aid will return to the Alamo for a month to be displayed. The letter is on loan from the Texas State Library Archives Commission to the Alamo Exhibit at the Ralston Family Collections Center from February 23 through March 24. This comes just in time for Texas to celebrate Texas Independence Day on March 2. Because of the brave sacrifices of the men who paid the ultimate price defending the Alamo, Texas went on to win the war for independence from Mexico and the Republic of Texas was born. We celebrate that independence 188 years later. Viewing this historic document, which famously declared 'Victory or Death,' is a remarkable opportunity for the public to enjoy.

3. Comptroller marks Unclaimed Property Day, \$4 billion in unclaimed property

On February 1, the Comptroller joined other states' unclaimed property administrators to celebrate the fourth annual Unclaimed Property Day. Unclaimed property includes things such as forgotten utility deposits or other refunds, insurance proceeds, dividends, mineral royalties,

dormant bank accounts, and abandoned safe-deposit boxes. The Comptroller's Office reported it has returned more than \$4 billion in unclaimed property since the program began in 1962. The state currently holds more than \$8 billion in cash and other valuables through the program. The average value of an approved claim is more than \$1,000. To check to see if you have Unclaimed Property, visit www.ClaimItTexas.gov.

4. Wildfire rages in the panhandle, already one of the worst in state's history

This week, Governor Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 60 Texas counties in response to the ongoing and widespread wildfires. The Texas Panhandle is facing losses to life and property as over a million acres have burned. These fires are already considered the worst in state history. The largest active fire is the Smokehouse Creek Fire, which started in Hutchinson County. Firefighters from across the state have been deployed to the region to help contain the fires, as well as the Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas Division of Emergency Management, and other emergency response personnel. Our prayers are with our West Texas friends during this difficult time.

5. Texas School Safety Center releases District Audit Report on safety and security in school districts

This month the Texas School Safety Center (TxSSC) released the 2020-2023 District Audit Report (DAR). The purpose of the DAR is to provide key results of the safety and security audits completed by school districts over the three year period. To be clear, this is a self-assessment completed by districts and submitted to the TxSSC for review. The report reflects insights developed from those audits on an aggregate level. The findings in this report highlight districts ongoing commitment to safety – 99.4% of districts reported completing audits for all of their instructional facilities during this cycle, 99.7% of districts reported having a school safety and security committee, and 98.7% of districts reported adopting a multi-hazard emergency operations plan for use in their district's facilities. However, there were some key findings that need improvement, namely only 35.8% of districts had not reported their safety and security audit results to their district's board of trustees and only 40.5% of districts reported conducting an active threat exercise, including an active shooter simulation during the 2020-2023 audit cycle. While much has been done over the past several years to improve school safety, these audit reports show that there are still improvements to be made.

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