



My five cents...

A weekly column from Sen. Robert Nichols
by Sen. Robert Nichols, Senate District 3

For immediate release
January 28, 2021
word count: 754

Contact: Shelby Conine
Tel: 512-463-0103

The third week of session is coming to a close. The Redistricting Committee has been meeting every day this week to hear testimony from the public and Senate Finance will start meeting next month.

Here are five things happening around the state this week:

1. Texas Gun and Ammo Sales Rise

Gun and ammo sales are skyrocketing in Texas again this year. Some retailers said their sales doubled in 2020 when compared to 2019 and they're struggling to keep inventory on the shelves. According to a National Shooting Sports Foundation report, there were about 5 million new gun owners in 2020 nationwide. Manufacturers are saying they have enough orders to fill the next three years of production. One man who has been in the gun industry for six years said, "People can buy ammo and shoot ammo faster than they can make it."

2. Southeast Texas Regional Operations Center Vaccine Website

The Southeast Texas Regional Operations Center (SETROC) has created a new website to allow residents in a five-county region to sign up to be notified when there are COVID-19 vaccines available. The regional operations center serves Orange, Jefferson, Hardin, Jasper, and Newton Counties.

There is a four-step process involved for citizens who want to get vaccinated. First, complete the sign-up form on the SETROC website. That web address is <https://vaccine.beaumonttexas.gov/>. After signing up, you will receive a confirmation email. Importantly, just signing up does not mean you have an appointment. The next communication you receive from SETROC will inform you that you are eligible to schedule a vaccination appointment. This will come as an email and an automated phone call. You can return to the above web address to schedule your appointment and complete necessary paperwork. After you receive the first dose of the vaccine, you will receive a card indicating an approximate time when your next dose is due. A few days prior to that date, you'll receive another email and automated phone call to schedule your second

appointment. We are working to stand up additional vaccine hubs throughout East Texas as quickly as providers are able to source more vaccines.

3. Driver's License Expiration Waiver Ends in April

The Texas Department of Public Safety is reminding Texans that the waiver that allowed people to put off renewing their expired driver's licenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic is set to expire April 14. If you are driving with an expired license make an appointment to renew your license or renew your license online. Many Texans can use the online renewal process, an easy and safe option that doesn't require you to ever set foot in an office. Currently, driver's license offices are operating on an appointment only basis, so DPS is encouraging Texans to make an appointment as soon as possible to avoid fines or other penalties. You can make an appointment online at <https://dps.texas.gov/DriverLicense>.

4. Cleveland Hospital Selected as COVID-19 Vaccine Hub

Texas Emergency Hospital in Cleveland has been selected as a vaccination hub by the Texas Department of State Health Services. The first shipment of vaccines were set to arrive at the hospital last week. Vaccines are still being prioritized for Phase 1A and Phase 1B of the roll out. Phase 1A includes frontline healthcare workers, residents at long-term care facilities, home health workers, and first responders. Phase 1B includes persons 65 and older, or 16 and older with chronic medical conditions. The vaccine is being provided free of cost. To schedule an appointment please call 281-806-7370 or 281-806-7380.

5. Senate Budget Proposal Highlights

Last week, Senate Finance Chairwoman Jane Nelson filed SB 1, the Senate's base budget. This is the first step in the legislative process for developing the states budget for the next two years. As filed, the bill appropriates \$251.2 billion in All Funds and \$119.7 billion in General Revenue. The bill funds public education and the changes made to the school finance formulas last session including \$3.1 billion to fund enrollment growth and \$1 billion in state aid related to property tax compression. There is also \$8 billion allocated for mental health funding across 24 state agencies, including \$19.5 million to maintain operations for the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium. The Texas Department of Transportation would receive \$30.4 billion to address the state's transportation needs, including \$26.4 billion dedicated for highway planning, design, construction and maintenance. This is a great starting point for the budget process and I look forward to working on the budget as a member of the Senate Finance Committee this session.

###