



# My five cents...

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

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Texas Independence Day is celebrated on March 2nd and commemorates the creation of the Republic of Texas in 1836 after our declaration of independence from Mexico. Sixty men signed the Texas Declaration of Independence including the legendary Sam Houston, who would go on to be president of the Republic of Texas, a US Senator after Texas joined the United States, and later the governor of Texas. His birthday also happens to fall on March 2nd.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## 1. **Governor Abbott announces end to statewide mask mandate, other pandemic restrictions**

The governor announced a new executive order that rescinds most of his earlier pandemic-related orders, including the statewide mask mandate and restrictions on business capacity. Businesses may make their own decisions about mask requirements, capacity limits, and other safety measures in their establishments. If COVID-19 hospitalizations rise above 15% of the hospital bed capacity in any of the state's 22 hospital regions, a county judge within that region may implement additional health safety strategies. These new orders go into effect next week on March 10. This all comes as the state is administering almost 1 million vaccines a week. By the end of March, the goal is for every senior who wants a vaccine to be able to get one. Additionally, teachers have been included in the group now eligible for the vaccine.

## 2. **Data Privacy bill filed**

This week I filed SB 15, a bill dedicated to ensuring your private, personal information stays private. Over the interim, I found out that governmental entities are selling, disclosing, and allowing the resale of personal information, in particular the information attached to motor vehicle records and drivers licenses. That information includes your name, address, and driver's license number. The bill I filed fixes that by restricting the disclosure of personal information to essential government agencies, and forbidding re-disclosure or resale of personal information to entities such as marketing and technology companies. This bill has been named as one of the Lt. Governor's priorities this session, and I'm hopeful it will be signed into law.

### **3. Texas Parks and Wildlife saves sea turtles from frigid waters**

Thousands of sea turtles were rescued from freezing waters by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and other organizations during the winter storm event last month. The Texas Game Wardens pulled at least 141 sea turtles out of the water and onto the decks of the PV Murchison in the Brownsville Ship Channel. The sea turtles become "cold stunned" in the water, meaning they become lethargic and unable to move into deeper water. This can result in stranding or drowning. The TPWD and other organizations transported the turtles to a proper facility to be cared for until the water temperature warms and they can be safely returned back to the ocean. A big thanks to our game wardens and other officials for watching over our nautical friends!

### **4. Texas wins Governors Cup for ninth year in a row**

Site Selection Magazine announced that Texas won the Governor's Cup for the ninth year in a row, a new record. The Governor's Cup is awarded to states with top performance for job creation and capital investment. It's based on any new or expanded corporate facilities in the state. Texas has seen growth and continued investment from large businesses and industries despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Several large companies are moving their headquarters to the state and investing in new campuses and offices for that move. I'm proud to live in a state that attracts job creators, innovators, and entrepreneurs; Texas continues to foster a business environment that empowers people to succeed.

### **5. TCEQ says nearly 12 million Texans were on a boil water notice due to winter storms**

Nearly 12 million Texans were put under a boil water notice during the winter storm last month due to water levels dropping dangerously low. That means roughly 1 in 3 Texans had no access to clean water. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said approximately 590 public water systems in 141 counties were reporting disruptions in service, leaving Texans with no potable water after enduring days of freezing and below freezing temperatures. The water quality issues were related to a lack of electricity at water treatment plants, frozen and broken water lines, and residents dripping faucets to prevent pipes from bursting. This is just another facet of the crisis the winter storms threw us into. The legislature is working diligently to solve these problems and ensure our electric grid is reliable and can endure extreme weather events.

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