



# My five cents...

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

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This week marks the halfway point in the 87th Legislative Session. We've spent the first 70 days filing bills, attending hearings, and working on the budget. Now that we're halfway through session, things will really start to pick up. We've already started voting on bills in committee and on the floor of the Senate. There's a lot going on down here in Austin and more to come!

Here are five things happening around your state:

## 1. **Senate passes Senate Bill 25**

I was proud to joint author Senate Bill 25 with 28 of my colleagues led by Senator Kolkhorst. This bill would give nursing home and long-term care residents the right to designate an essential caregiver. An essential caregiver is a family member, friend, guardian, or other individual selected by the resident for in-person visits. This bill would allow that essential caregiver in-person visitation rights that a facility could not deny. Our seniors and long-term care residents suffered from isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though well-intended, shutting down in-person visits to these vulnerable populations left many feeling isolated, alone, and helpless. This bill and the accompanying Senate Joint Resolution would guarantee that our seniors and their loved ones can maintain connection and community despite outside circumstances.

## 2. **All adults eligible for vaccine starting March 29**

The Texas Department of State Health Services announced that all Texans 16 and older will be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine starting on March 29. Providers are being asked to prioritize appointments for people 80 and older. According to DSHS, Texas has administered almost 10 million doses and they expect the vaccine supply to increase. More than 3 million people have already been fully vaccinated and 6 million have received their first dose. Opening up eligibility comes as new coronavirus cases and hospitalization rates are at lows not seen since last fall and death rates have fallen. This is all welcome news as the state begins to reopen more fully and the vaccine becomes more available.

## 3. **HHSC expanding visitation at nursing homes, long-term care facilities**

After a year of isolation, fully vaccinated residents in nursing homes and long-term care facilities will be able to receive visitors and have physical contact with loved ones as long as the facility permits it. The state announced this week that all assisted living centers, long-term care facilities, and nursing homes fall under the new rules. The Health and Human Services Commission stated the importance of visiting with friends and family and the impact it will have on residents' mental health and well-being. Before this new rule, only designated essential caregivers could visit for limited amounts of time, maintaining social distancing, and after receiving training and screening. Now, residents are free to visit with their loved ones for an unlimited amount of time, physically touch them, and facilities are not required to limit indoor visitation to designated areas.

#### **4. Governor sends letter to President Biden demanding answers on border crisis**

This week the Governor sent a letter to President Biden asking if his administration is investigating the circumstances under which a wave of migrants, including thousands of unaccompanied minors, are arriving at the border. So far this year, more than 11,000 minors have been apprehended crossing the border into Texas. From January to February, the number of apprehensions went up 60 percent. The Governor asks a number of questions of the administration, some centered around the children's safety and if they're being screened appropriately to see if any of them are victims of human trafficking. In the letter, Governor Abbott urges the Biden Administration to find human traffickers and prosecute them to prevent other children from being trafficked. The Governor has also expanded the scope of Texas' Operation Lone Star to include investigating and stopping any human trafficking that may be occurring along and over our southern border.

#### **5. East Texas bull riders dominate at Professional Bull Riding event**

Houston County native Boudreaux Campbell, 22, won his second career victory at a Professional Bull Riding event in Kansas City this week. The East Texas bull rider hit the high-marked ride of the season and top bull score for the 2021 PBR campaign. He's also the reigning Rookie of the Year. Another East Texan, Cooper Davis, 27, of Jasper County finished second in last weekend's contest. Davis is currently ranked number one in the world standings. East Texas is proud to support these two accomplished young bull riders and we wish them luck!

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