



My five cents...

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

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One hundred and thirty-three years ago this month, the present Texas Capitol was formally dedicated. On May 16, 1888, the dedication ceremony was held with a service, parade, and a celebration to mark its opening. Over 20,000 people attended the week of festivities. There were military displays, concerts, drill team competitions, and fireworks. Senator Temple Houston, Sam Houston's youngest son, accepted the building on behalf of the state.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. **Texas launches mobile vaccine team**

This week the Governor, Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), and the Texas Military Department (TMD) announced the launch of the State Mobile Vaccination Team Call Center. The call center will allow businesses and civic organizations with 10 or more employees, visitors, or members to schedule a visit from a state mobile vaccine team to vaccinate those who voluntarily choose to be vaccinated. Homebound Texans can also call the hotline to request a vaccination team visit their home. These teams are made up of members from the Texas National Guard and coordinated by TDEM. This innovative program will increase access to vaccines across the state, especially in underserved areas. The phone number for the hotline is 844-90-TEXAS.

2. **Governor signs House Bill 1195 exempting PPP loans from franchise tax**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government provided loans through the Paycheck Protection Program to help small businesses whose operations were impacted by the pandemic to keep their workers on their payroll. These loans were also eligible for loan forgiveness under certain circumstances. Normally, the businesses receiving PPP loans or grants would still be taxed on the amount of money received as part of its total revenue subject to the franchise tax. To remedy that, Senator Kelly Hancock sponsored and Governor Abbott signed House Bill 1195. Under this bill, businesses who received these loans will not have to pay franchise tax on the funds they received. This bill reflects our commitment to the recovery and support of our small businesses.

3. Texas named best state for business by leading CEOs

The nation's leading CEOs have once again named Texas the "Best State for Business." This is the 17th year in a row that Texas has won the designation in a survey conducted by Chief Executive Magazine. The rankings are determined by CEOs' assessment of each states' tax policy and regulatory climate, talent pool size and availability, and quality of life. Coming in second was Florida, followed by Tennessee, North Carolina, and Indiana. California was once again ranked at the bottom. Texas has no corporate or personal income tax, which CEOs and business leaders look at carefully when deciding to start a business or move their company. People know Texas is the best place to start or lead a business.

4. Turkey super stocking program seeks to boost East Texas turkey population

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department created a program to reestablish the population of eastern wild turkeys in East Texas. According to TPWD, rapid changes in habitat and unregulated harvest of the eastern wild turkey near the turn of the 20th century led to such a severe depletion that the turkeys were eliminated from the area. In 1979, TPWD began releasing wild eastern turkeys they had trapped in other states to the area. Now, the agency has started "super stocking" the turkeys. The program began in 2014 and continues to this day. Super stocking means releasing a large number of birds in a specific area so they have a better chance of establishing a population. The department said they've released close to 1000 birds at 12 locations over the past seven years. The success in those areas has led to the expansion of the program, and this year they released over 100 birds in three locations. The eastern turkey hunting season runs until May 14th and is only allowed in 13 East Texas counties.

5. Texas receives \$15.8 billion in pandemic aid, more for counties and cities

The most recent round of pandemic stimulus funding brought in billions of dollars for Texas and local governments, including cities and counties. This money comes with less restrictions on what it can be used for and some of it will go directly to smaller cities for the first time. It can be used to fill holes in municipal budgets; hire government employees including teachers, police officers, and firefighters; and fund housing, mental health services, and other government programs. It can also go toward some infrastructure projects, such as expanding broadband.

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