



# My five cents...

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

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Monday, January 31 is the last day to register to vote in the March primary elections. To register, simply complete a voter registration application available online through the Secretary of State's website, fill it out with the necessary information, and return it to your county election office. The website to view this information is [www.VoteTexas.gov](http://www.VoteTexas.gov). Remember, the voter registration application must be completed and returned at least 30 days before the upcoming election date.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## 1. New laws now in effect as of January 1

As of the beginning of this year, 23 new state laws went into effect, most of which deal with certain tax requirements or tax-exemptions. A few new laws of note include:

- *House Bill 531* - requires landlords to provide notice to renters if the dwelling they are leasing lies within a 100-year floodplain or has flooded in the preceding 5 years before or at the execution of the lease;
- *House Bill 2730* - makes improvements to the Landowner's Bill of Rights and the eminent domain process;
- *House Bill 3961* - requires long-term care facilities to post information about the office of the state long-term care ombudsman on their websites. The ombudsman advocates for resident rights and helps protect quality of life and quality of care for residents;
- *Senate Bill 794* - This law exempts homestead taxes for veterans who are 100 percent disabled;
- *Senate Bill 911* - allows food service establishments that also hold mixed beverage permits to be classified as restaurants if alcohol sales are 60 percent or less of sales.

To see a full list of the new laws in effect as of January 1, please visit <https://capitol.texas.gov/Reports/Report.aspx?LegSess=87R&ID=effectivejan1>.

## 2. Texas Workforce Commission awards Jobs and Education for Texans grants to 5 East Texas ISDs, Lamar State College Orange

Last month, the Texas Workforce Commission announced \$10.3 million in Jobs and Education for Texans grants that went to Community, Technical, and State Colleges and Independent School Districts across the state. Of that, \$1.45 million was awarded to East Texas institutions. Five ISDs, including Burkeville ISD, Center ISD, Coldspring-Oakhurst ISD, Elkhart ISD, and West Sabine ISD, received between \$189,000 and \$328,000 grants to help purchase and install equipment to provide training in the occupations of welder, cutter, solder, and brazer. Lamar State College Orange was also a recipient of an award totaling over \$208,000 for the purchase and installment of equipment for training healthcare practitioners and technical occupations. These grants will enable area education entities to provide targeted training for our communities that will lead to employment opportunities in high-demand industries.

### **3. Texas State Hospitals and SSLC offering hiring bonuses**

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is offering up to \$5,000 in bonuses for certain health care positions at state supported living centers (SSLCs) and state hospitals across the state. Positions that are eligible for a hiring bonus included registered nurses (RN), licensed vocational nurses (LVN), psychiatric nursing assistants (PNA), and direct support professionals (DSP). New RNs can qualify for \$5,000 bonuses, eligible LVN hires could receive \$3,500, and DSPs and PNAs may qualify for a \$2,500 hiring bonus. State supported living centers provide residential services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while state hospitals provide inpatient psychiatric care for adults, children, and adolescents. State hospitals and state supported living centers serve some of our most vulnerable Texans and the people who work there deserve the utmost praise.

### **4. Texas reaches new employment high, unemployment drops**

Texas reached a new record employment high last month, breaking pre-pandemic records for employment. Texas now has over 13 million jobs. The state passed pre-pandemic record employment levels in November and that number continued to grow in December. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate fell to 5 percent. These numbers are signs of a strong economy that continues to grow despite the ongoing pandemic. Texas business owners and employees are resilient and focused on moving forward.

### **5. OSHA withdraws COVID-19 vaccine mandate for large employers**

The US Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) withdrew the vaccination and testing emergency temporary standard for businesses with 100 or more employees this week. The standard was supposed to go into effect earlier this month and required business with 100 employees or more to ensure their employees were fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or were regularly tested for COVID-19 and wearing masks. The withdrawal comes after the US Supreme Court blocked the implementation of the standard in a ruling earlier this month.

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