



# My five cents...

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

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As the last days of summer are fast approaching and you are trying to fit in one last vacation, why not look at some of the exciting destinations in Texas? You can visit the Texas Travel Guide online at [www.traveltex.com](http://www.traveltex.com) to find a compilation of attractions and places to stay all across the state, including your Texas State Capitol.

Here are five things happening around your state:

## 1. Redistricting Committee

I am honored to be appointed by Lt. Governor Patrick to serve on the Texas Legislature's 2021 Redistricting Committee. When the 2020 decennial U.S. Census is released, the committee will use that information to redraw the boundaries for Texas Senate and House districts, as well as U.S. Congressional districts. We are required by the Texas Constitution to complete this job by the next legislative session, which will begin January 2021.

If the Legislature is unable to adopt a redistricting plan by the end of the session, the Legislative Redistricting Board, a five member body of statewide officials including the Lieutenant Governor, House Speaker, Texas Attorney General, Comptroller and the Land Commissioner have 90 days to adopt a plan. I am grateful to the Lt. Governor for this appointment and look forward to working with all of my colleagues on this very important task.

## 2. Dogs On Patios

On many days throughout the year Texans can enjoy a meal with family and friends, including their canine friends, on a restaurant patio. Currently, restaurants have to comply with stringent rules to allow their patrons to bring dogs with them, often including an application and a fee. Senate Bill 476, also known as the 'Fido-Friendly Outdoor Dining Act, will go into effect on September 1. This bill lets restaurants allow dogs on their patios without having to pay a fee. A sign stating dogs are allowed must be posted at the entrance; no food can be prepared on the patio; and pets must be able to get to the outdoor area without walking through the restaurant interior; they must be on a leash and not sitting on a chair.. As a proud dog owner myself, I was happy to co-author this bill.

### **3. Unclaimed Property**

Did you know one in four Texans have unclaimed property from forgotten bank accounts, utility refunds and more? Banks and other entities make an effort to reunite this money with its owners, but if they cannot after a certain period, state law mandates the assets be turned over to the Comptroller's office. The Comptroller's Unclaimed Property Division works diligently to give Texas citizens back what is truly theirs. Approximately, \$3 billion in unclaimed property has been returned to its rightful owners in Texas.

You can go to the Comptroller's website at <http://www.cpa.state.tx.us/up/> and type in your name or the names of family and friends to see if you or someone you know has money waiting to be claimed. You can also call toll free at 1-800-654-FIND (3463).

### **4. Bills Effective September 1st**

While many bills passed during the 86th Session went into effect the day they were signed by the Governor, most did not. Many are delayed until September 1st of the legislative year, or until the next year to give state agencies and the public time to become aware of new laws or changes to current law. It also marks the beginning of the fiscal year and the new budget cycle, which is important to note as some bills require funding to be put into action.

There are 820 bills which go into effect on September 1, 2019. Some of these you might recognize, such as Senate Bill 6 which helps provide guidelines for local communities in dealing with natural disasters, or House Bill 234 which makes the sale of lemonade and other beverages by children legal without a permit.

### **5. Tax Free Weekend**

As the beginning of the school year draws near, it's time to start thinking about back to school shopping. Timed to help families during back-to-school shopping, the annual sales tax holiday will provide customers the ability to buy clothing and school supplies priced under \$100 without paying state or local taxes.

This year, it will be held on August 9-11th. The law exempts most clothing, footwear, school supplies and backpacks priced under \$100 from sales and use taxes. The law also allows layaway purchases of these items to qualify for the sales tax exemption. It's a great time to get prepared for the upcoming school year while saving some money in the process.

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