



My five cents...

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

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This upcoming month we will celebrate two important holidays. The first being the Fourth of July to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. The second is National Pecan Pie Day on July 12. Pecan pie also happens to be the State Pie of Texas. So while you shoot off fireworks and eat pie, I hope it is with those close to you, as I know mine will be.

Here are five things happening around your state:

1. **Operation Connectivity**

Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) have launched a statewide initiative called Operation Connectivity. The purpose of this initiative is to provide online connectivity solutions and device solutions for school districts, families and students in Texas. Lack of access to broadband internet has long been an issue in many parts of the state, especially within rural areas. However, as many students are studying from home now due to COVID-19, the lack of resources has become even more apparent. I have been asked to serve on the Policy and Advocacy Workgroup, where our goal is to determine the changes needed in federal and state laws and regulations related to connectivity. I have and will continue to do my part in advocating for the needs of Senate District 3, which I represent.

2. **Work-Search Requirements**

In March, due to COVID-19 and the restraints it placed on businesses and employees, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) temporarily removed the work-search requirement to qualify for unemployment. Beginning on July 6, TWC will reinstate this requirement, which is a federal requirement. To qualify for unemployment benefit payments, an individual must prove they have engaged in at least three work-search activities. Those who are self employed, must show proof they have taken at least three steps to reopen their businesses. Individuals may utilize online resources to search for a new job, and do not have to take the first job offered to them. You can find jobs posted and other resources at www.workintexas.com.

3. **DPS Appointment System**

Select Department of Public Safety (DPS) offices have reopened across the state, but they are currently only providing services for the following:

- Applying for an original Texas driver license or identification card (ID)
- Applying for a Texas learners license
- Driver license services requiring a skills exam, and;
- Applying for a commercial driver license (CDL) or taking a CDL skills exam

If your driver license, ID, or CDL expired on or after March 13, 2020, you will be granted a waiver for the expiration date up to 60 days after DPS notifies the public their offices have resumed normal operations. If you qualify for any of the services listed above, you can visit the following link to schedule an appointment and/or to find if your local DPS office has reopened www.dps.texas.gov/driverlicense/appointments.htm. You may also find information on renewing your license online.

4. Operation Safe Open

The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) under 'Operation Safe Open' is monitoring businesses to ensure that they are following safety protocols including monitoring indoor capacity and enforcing social distancing measures for large groups of customers. At the beginning of June, the state allowed bars to open to 50 percent capacity and restaurants to 75 percent, as long as they abided by the state health guidelines which include social distancing between customers. If TABC determines that establishments are in violation of these measures and a threat to public health and safety, they could have their license suspended for 30 days on the first violation, and up to 60 days on their second violation. In the first three days of the operation, 12 establishments across the state had their licenses suspended. To find out more about these violations and the guidelines restaurants and bars must follow, please visit www.open.texas.gov.

5. Nursing Homes

Throughout this pandemic, many Texans have been separated from their loved ones who reside in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and state supported living centers. If you or your loved ones are having difficulty finding out information during this time, or have concerns about their quality of life, a Long Term Care (LTC) ombudsman is available to you. LTC ombudsmen are volunteers or employees of an agency that is free standing from the care facility. Their services are free and confidential and there to serve Texans in need. To find an ombudsman for a nursing home and assisted living facility you can call 1-800-252-2412. For those living in a state supported living center you can call 1-877-323-6466.

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