New laws coming in Kansas

Sunday starts new regulations for child safety, seat belts, taxes, obeying the speed limit.

By DAVID KLEPPER
The Star’s Topeka Correspondent

Better bust out those child safety seats because, starting Sunday, you’re risking a ticket in Kansas if you chauffeur young children without one.

For a year, police have issued only warnings to drivers who fail to put children ages 4 to 7 in child safety seats. That grace period is at an end, however, and violators now face fines of $60.

Children who weigh more than 80 pounds or are taller than 4 feet 9 inches are exempt from the law.

It’s one of several changes in Kansas law that go into effect Sunday, the start of the state’s fiscal year.

The laws range from making English the state’s official language to tax breaks for business and the elderly.

All told, 147 laws go into effect Sunday. Here are a few of the new laws, and whom they might affect:

- Going cruising? Better buckle up: Youngsters 14 to 17 must now wear a seat belt at all times and can be ticketed even if they haven’t committed another moving violation.

Warning citations will be issued until the end of the year. After that, police can issue a $60 fine. For the lead-footed, a new law will double the fines for speeding in school zones on state highways.

- Like to address your city council in Pig Latin? Better brush up on English, because it’s now the state’s official language.

The law, designed to protect

and promote the tongue made famous by Shakespeare, is largely symbolic. It won’t prohibit any government from offering services or information in other languages.

- Think you pay too much in taxes? Businesses will see reductions in the franchise tax as part of a five-year phaseout.

Seniors on fixed incomes will get help, too: Social Security retirement benefits will now be exempt from state taxes, and some homeowners older than 55 will see a bigger property tax refund. Lawmakers also raised the refund that can be claimed under the state’s earned income tax credit.

- University maintenance: The state’s regent universities like the University of Kansas and Kansas State can start fixing those old laboratories and plaster cracks, thanks to $50 million they’ll get in the new fiscal year. It’s part of a larger university maintenance package.

- Want your old name back? A new law will make it easier for divorced women to reclaim their maiden name by streamlining the legal process.

- Scrap metal: You’ll have to show identification when selling large amounts of scrap metal. It’s part of an effort to curb metal thefts, which police say are tied to methamphetamine addiction.

- Quiet on the set! Movie-makers who set their films in Kansas will get tax credits.

- No hunting and fishing for deadbeats: Parents who fail significantly behind on child support payments will be denied hunting and fishing licenses.

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KU LOCKS IN TUITION FOR INCOMING FRESHMEN

The university sees the fixed plan as a way to determine college costs.

By JONATHAN KEALING
The Kansas City Star

Lawrence | As an incoming freshman, Brittany Cisler of Lea-
wood can project almost to the dollar what she and her parents will pay the University of Kansas for a four-year education.

Under a fixed-rate tuition plan approved Thursday by the Kansas Board of Regents, Cisler and her fellow freshmen from Kansas will pay a guaranteed rate of $213 per credit hour over their first four years of college.

To graduate in that time — which KU leaders hope to encourage — a student would need to take 16 hours each semester, for a total semester cost of $3,408.

“There are rarely moments of spontaneous applause at new-student orientation,” KU Provost Richard Lariviere told the regents. “But when we talk about the tuition compact, that’s one of them.”

Out-of-state students will pay $560 per credit hour, or $8,960 per semester.

KU leaders are quick to point out that this is not a tuition discount plan, but rather a way to plan college costs. The university has also locked in course fees — additional charges for classes offered in some professional schools — and required campus fees, which provide for services like student health and recreation.

While those costs are not the same year-over-year, they are already determined for the next four years.

Housing contracts can be locked in for two-year periods.

Lariviere said that between tuition, fees and housing, in-state students can determine the cost of 80 percent of their education, if they were to graduate in four years. The remaining 20 percent would include travel, entertainment, and food and drink not purchased through a campus plan.

Out-of-state students could determine 90 percent of their costs.

“This is the kind of innovation we want all of you to consider, based on the needs of your population,” Regent Christine Downey-Schmidt told the assembled university presidents.

“This isn’t something we’re going to force on all of you, but you all should consider innovative ways to serve your populations,” said Downey-Schmidt, who was elected chairwoman of the regents on Thursday.

Returning KU students, as well as students who transfer in this fall, will face increased tuition, though at rates lower than freshmen. They’ll pay $3,116.80 for a 16-hour semester.

Freshmen who start in 2008
will pay a different fixed tuition rate for their four years.

Lariviere said that one goal of the four-year plan is to encourage students to graduate in four years. According to data from KU's Office of Institutional Research and Planning, only 29 percent of KU undergraduates complete their degrees in four years.

Parents and students assembled for new-student orientation Thursday backed up those statistics. Many said they planned to spend more than four years at KU.

"If they give you four years, that's a good thing, and then we'll pay what we have to for the rest of the time," said Mary Neal of Topeka, whose daughter, Anne, will start at KU in the fall.

Anne Neal said that she'd heard of the program, but didn't think it would provide much incentive to finish on time. Her parents are paying for her tuition.

Students who take more than four years to complete their degree, including those in one of four programs that require five years to complete a bachelor's degree, will pay the fixed rate for four years and the standard rate thereafter.

For the Cislers, the guaranteed tuition was a big plus. Their son, Bryan, will be a senior in the fall and has experienced double-digit tuition increases each of his first three years.

"When Bryan was enrolling, I called and asked if they had a guaranteed tuition plan," said Joy Cisler, Brittnie's mother. "We're not necessarily big on budgeting, but it will help protect us against those kinds of big increases."

Incidentally, Brittnie Cisler does not expect to graduate in four years, either.

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Area students graduate from KU

LAWRENCE — More than 4,280 candidates were eligible for degrees at the May, 20, 2007 at the University of Kansas this spring. Students receiving diplomas are listed below by name, parent name (if provided), major or majors, high school name or high school city.

Arkansas City
• Ryan Christopher Cramer, son of Lynn Cramer, bachelor of science/business/marketing, Arkansas City High School.
• Charlotte Corinne Husley, daughter of Pam Smith, bachelor of arts/psychology, Arkansas City High School.
• Erin Elaine Kendrick, doctor of medicine, Arkansas City.

Cedar Vale
• Brit L. Nesmith, daughter of Elizabeth Avery, master of social work, Augusta High School.

Oxford
• Hyriam James Fleming, son of Mary Fleming, doctor of pharmacy, Winfield High School.
• Andrew Charles Short, son of Don and Sharon Short, bachelor/general studies/geography, Oxford High School.

Sedan
• Jeffrey Stephen Sizemore, son of Mary Warren, master of business administration, Sedan High School.
• Alissa Nicole Bauer, daughter of David Bauer and Cyndii Gardner, bachelor of science/journalism, Winfield High School.
• Zachary S. Coble, son of Van Coble, bachelor of arts/applied behavioral science and bachelor of arts/political science, Winfield High School.
• Jordan Tyler Condit, son of Bill and Bonnie Condit, bachelor of arts/East Asian languages and cultures, Winfield High School.
• Kyndel Dru Lanning, daughter of Ladonna Lanning, bachelor of science/social work, Winfield High School.
• Joshua Scott Winegarner, son of Graydon and Crystal Winegarner, bachelor of arts/English, Winfield High School.