



GRADUATED DRIVERS LICENSING ENACTED

The Legislature approved an increase in the minimum age for obtaining an unrestricted driver's license to 17 and imposed more limits on the state's least experienced motorists. Kansas becomes the 49th state to adopt a graduated license program. States adopting similar graduated licensing systems have experienced 20 to 50 percent declines in teen vehicle accidents.

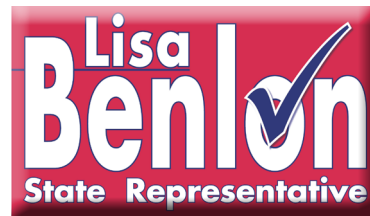
The changes apply to teens that enter the Kansas licensing system after January 1, 2010. A learner's permit is still available at age 14. A learner/driver still will have to be accompanied by someone 18 years of age or older when driving. The new law requires a learner to drive with the permit for 12 months before obtaining a restricted or full license. With a restricted license teens can drive unsupervised to and from work or school. They can carry adult passengers and siblings, but no other passengers under the age of 18. "Farm permits" are still available to drivers 14 and over. There are also restrictions on the use of cell phones by teens while driving.

In most cases, a full, unrestricted license would only be available to teens after turning 17. Full privileges might be achieved as early as the age of 16 1/2 years old if the driver completes all requirements, but there are still restrictions for a six month probationary period.

There will be a "zero tolerance" approach to drivers who violate the new restrictions, so I would advise your teens to become familiar with the new rules if they are getting licenses after January 1. Over 7,000 Kansas teens are injured or killed each year in automobile accidents. The new law will make our roads safer for young drivers and those who share the road with them. For more information, visit: www.ksrevenue.org/vehicle.htm.

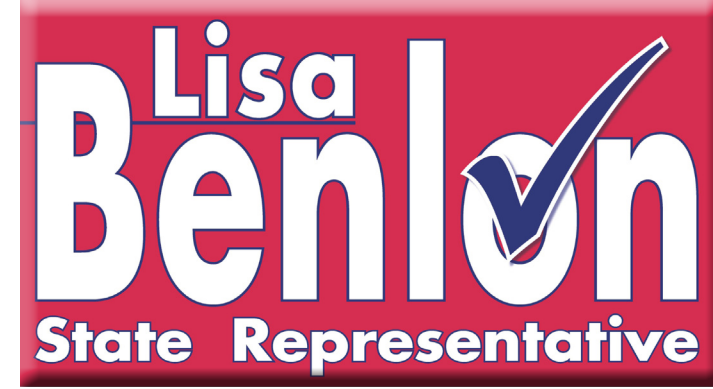
LINGERING IN PASSING LANE NOW PROHIBITED

Beginning in July, it will be illegal to drive in the passing lane. All vehicles must remain in the right lane when traveling on highways located outside city limits with two lanes of traffic proceeding in the same direction. A motorist may only drive in the left lane when passing another vehicle, preparing to make a left turn, directed by official traffic-control devices, or required by other provisions of the law. If the highway is located outside of city limits and is divided into three more lanes of traffic proceeding in the same direction, then vehicles must not travel in the far left lane unless one of the above provisions applies. These changes would not apply to emergency vehicles, law enforcement, or other official state transportation vehicles. Through July 2010, motorists will receive citations for violation of the law. Beginning July 2011, violators will be charged a \$60 fine.



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2009 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

- Taxation
- Federal and State Affairs
- Economic Development and Tourism (Ranking Member)
- Joint Committee on Economic Development and Tourism
- Special Committee on KTEC

KEEP IN TOUCH

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DEAR FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS,

It is no secret the 2009 legislative session was dominated by a budget that was the worst in many decades. Reduced revenue resulted in roughly a one billion dollar shortfall. Unlike the federal government, the State of Kansas is required to balance the state budget—we must finish each year with a positive balance. We were able to reach a compromise of budget cuts and no tax increase. In spite of the budget crisis, we passed legislation that will improve the lives of many Kansans. I have listed in this update some of the issues you have mentioned to me as important to your life.

I feel so blessed to have the opportunity to serve you. It is truly an honor and privilege to represent the people of the 22nd District in the House of Representatives. I have worked hard to ensure the priorities of Overland Park and Prairie Village were addressed in Topeka. From my prior experience in Topeka, I know the importance of working with legislators from both parties. Bipartisan negotiations worked well this year in making some very difficult votes. I am proud to report that the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce gave me a 100% voting rating for the 2009 session. I will continue to balance the needs of the business community with the public sector in the 2010 session.

On a personal note, Randy and I have two granddaughters. Delaney just turned two and Aidan is seven months old. We will be welcoming a new grandson, Cole, around the end of September. Randy and I loved our role as parents, but the grandparent role is far more enjoyable—all the love and attention, without the 24/7 responsibility.

Your opinion on issues is very important to me. I appreciate the communication many of you have had with me, and I encourage our communication to continue. To help, I have been working on a web page since session began. Unfortunately, there have been kinks that have been difficult to work through. Watch for my website to be launched soon. It will be www.lisa.benlon.com. Log on and sign up for regular e-mail updates. You can reach me by phone at 913-268-4326, or by e-mail at lisa.benlon@yahoo.com.

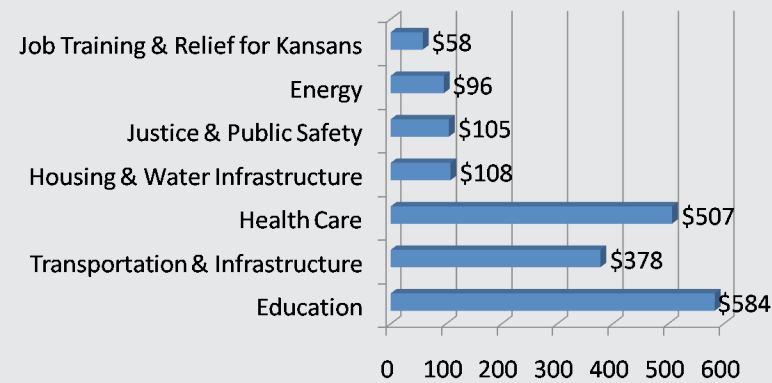
Sincerely,

Lisa Benlon,
District 22 State Representative

FEDERAL STIMULUS DOLLARS WILL HELP KANSAS IN DIFFICULT ECONOMIC YEAR

There has been a great deal of focus on the federal stimulus bill recently signed into law by President Obama. For Kansas, this aid was a lifeboat during a budget year that otherwise would have drowned us. Every state service took a cut amid the current financial crisis, but the funds we received from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Federal Stimulus Dollars in Kansas (in millions)



prevented devastating reductions, and will in turn help avert damaging, long-term effects that would have resulted from those additional reductions. ARRA not only saved the Legislature from being forced to consider a tax increase, it allowed for tax breaks and helpful tax credits that will get the economy back on track.

In addition to helping shore up Kansas' budget gap, ARRA is providing for a number of transportation projects and competitive grants in a variety of fields that will both save and create jobs in the public and private sector.

Governor Parkinson has launched a new web site which includes information on ARRA as it pertains to Kansas: www.governor.ks.gov/Recovery.

BIPARTISAN COALITION REACHES BUDGET COMPROMISE

As a result of a national economic recession, the Kansas Legislature spent the entire 2009 session grappling with a devastating budget shortfall.

It is never easy to cut programs and services, but the financial crisis we faced this year was severe and immediate. Several proposals surfaced throughout the session to shore up the budget gap, but many of them failed to embrace a spirit of "shared sacrifice" and cut too deeply into public schools and services for the disabled. It took a significant amount of time and compromise to finalize a budget that included provisions that were important to both sides of the aisle. Although we were forced to make difficult cuts, the budget we approved was the best choice for Kansas families and communities. I am very proud of the Legislature's good-faith effort to protect our most important investments as much as possible.

Unfortunately, most states are struggling with declining revenues, and Kansas is no exception. The economic condition of the country will likely create the need for additional allotments before the next session. We are at least, however, working from a budget that keeps our priorities in order and allows us to preserve essential services, rather than eliminate them altogether. Ultimately, how we maintain a positive ending balance is just as important as the bottom line itself. We have a responsibility to protect Kansas families and taxpayers who rightfully expect safe communities, strong public schools, and resources for those in need. These are our most important and strategic investments that will cost the state more in the future if not adequately provided for now.

Looking ahead, we must stay committed to a bipartisan spirit of compromise for 2010. The next session will require even more painful decisions. The FY 2011 budget can only be balanced with a reasonable mix of cuts and revenue enhancements. Everything will have to be on the table.

EFFORTS TO ENACT KANSAS CLEAN INDOOR AIR ACT CONTINUE

At the Legislature's request, the Kansas Health Policy Authority unveiled a series of legislative proposals in 2007 to overhaul the state's health care system. Providing clean indoor air for all working Kansans emerged as a major component of those recommendations. This proposal received little support last year, but began to resonate during the 2009 session.

Not only did the Clean Indoor Air Act pass out of committee, it passed the Senate at a bipartisan vote of 26-13. The bill would have prohibited indoor smoking in public places and within certain distances from public buildings. In an effort to ease concerns of some business owners, some exemptions were included, such as: casinos, private clubs, tobacco shops and designated hotel rooms. Unfortunately, the chairman of the House Committee on Health and Human Services maneuvered the proposal in an effort to "kill" it for the year. The Senate used a legislative procedure to revive the bill, but it stalled again in the House late in the session.

As a former employee of the American Cancer Society and public servant, I am more passionate than ever about public health and safety. Secondhand smoke has been irrefutably declared a dangerous health threat. Additionally, smoking has been repeatedly confirmed as a precursor to numerous costly, life-threatening and fully avoidable health problems. In turn, this further burdens a health system that is already weighed down.

I respect every individual's right to make his/her own choices about health, but others should never be put at risk as a result of those personal decisions. We have already enjoyed the benefits of public smoking restrictions in Johnson County, as well as several other cities/counties in Kansas. It is time to reflect the priorities of our communities and put this law into place at the state level. I will continue to work across the aisle to advance this initiative in 2010, to ensure all Kansans have the right to work and live in smoke-free air.

HEALTH CARE EXPANDED TO 8,000 CHILDREN

In 2008, the Legislature made a promise to provide more Kansas kids with health care at a price their parents could afford. This year I was proud to support a budget amendment that delivers on that promise. HealthWave (the state children's health insurance program) can now help 8,000 more uninsured Kansas children get the early care they need to keep childhood illnesses from becoming costly, long-term problems. This is an important step toward keeping Kansas children healthy and offers a lifeline for Kansas families struggling in this economy. Additionally, the measure will help hospitals and health care clinics by lessening the burden of uncompensated care. In turn, this helps keep private insurance premiums down.

Economists agree that our country's economic status will not improve until health care becomes more affordable and accessible to all citizens. Some of America's health problems require a federal response, but helping uninsured children gain access to affordable care is a preventive measure we can take on the state level, while saving significant cost to all stakeholders. Learn more at: www.kansashealthwave.org/.

LOCAL OPTION BUDGET BILL HELPS SMSD SCHOOLS

After a year of painful but unavoidable budget cuts, I was eager to support Senate Bill 84. It will help many school districts stay afloat during the next fiscal year. Local option budgets (LOBs) ensure the preservation of local funding, even if state aid is reduced. Normally they are calculated using the base state aid per pupil (BSAPP). A district can utilize up to an additional 31% of its BSAPP to supplement state funding of the school district budget.

Senate Bill 84 permits school districts to base their LOBs off of the 2008-2009 funding levels, which are higher than the reduced levels of 2010. This allows school districts to temporarily increase their LOBs to help fill in the funding gap due to our tough economic times. This bill will keep local school districts from experiencing even greater budget cuts because of state action.

In addition, Senate Bill 84 amends the current cash-basis law to protect school districts that receive general state aid payments after June 30th. If a district's expenditures exceed current revenues due to the late receipt of general state aid, the district will not stand in violation of the cash-basis law. Since the June special education and regular school district payments were delayed until after the end of the June 30 fiscal year this year, the provisions of SB 84 were used immediately.

KELSEY'S LAW TO HELP LOCATE MISSING PERSONS

The parents of murdered teenager Kelsey Smith pushed for legislation this session that will require telecommunication companies to release GPS information on missing persons. In 2007, Smith was abducted while returning to her car in a Johnson County parking lot. She was brutally raped, murdered, and abandoned at a nearby lake. Unfortunately, it took days to find Smith's body because telecommunications companies could not immediately release GPS information associated with her cell phone. Once authorities received the information four days later, her body was located within 45 minutes.

Kelsey's Law clarifies Kansas statute to allow for the disclosure of location information to law enforcement agencies. It allows cell phone carriers to establish their own protocols for disclosing call location information, and would require the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to collect and distribute contact information for cell phone carriers. The change will require a request for location information prior to its release to a law enforcement official or agency, specifying that the request is in an instance where there is danger of death or serious injury. No cause of action may be taken against a cell phone provider who releases information in compliance with this act.

This change in state law would probably not have saved the life of Kelsey Smith, but it will help expedite future searches for missing persons and hopefully prevent similar tragedies.



ENERGY SETTLEMENT REACHED

The question of whether to approve legislation that would allow Sunflower Electric Company to construct two coal-fired power plants in Holcomb was again a dominant issue this year. Late in the session, Governor Mark Parkinson negotiated a settlement that resolved the pending lawsuit.

Sunflower will be allowed to build one coal plant (rather than two) under stricter guidelines, and in exchange for the most aggressive renewable energy legislation passed in Kansas history.

House Bill 2369 allows for net metering for privately owned utility infrastructure. This will enable consumers to generate their own electricity from renewable sources such as wind or solar power. It requires unprecedented carbon dioxide mitigation that should, over time, make statewide CO2 emissions neutral through the advancement of renewable alternatives (Previous proposals allowed for 11 million tons of CO2 emissions, with no mitigation). Additionally, the bill requires 20% of electricity be produced by renewable sources by 2020. This removed a major barrier to private investment in wind and solar energy in Kansas. The renewable portfolio standard has already paved the way for the first wind component manufacturing plant to be located in Hutchinson, creating 400+ jobs.

I am encouraged by these clean energy components. I voted against the initial coal plant proposals, but I supported the final negotiation.

I commend our new governor for his quick action and leadership. That is never an easy feat in government, especially when addressing controversial issues. I am confident that we have finally committed to substantive renewable energy policy. Hopefully this will set Kansas on the right course for clean, alternative energy development, benefiting our state for many years to come.