

Weather Corner



Tonight... Mostly clear. Lows around 6. West winds 10 to 15 mph.

Wednesday... Sunny. Highs in the upper 30s. Southwest winds around 10 mph shifting to the south in the afternoon.

Wednesday night... Mostly clear in the evening then becoming partly cloudy. Lows around 14. South winds 10 to 15 mph.

Thursday... Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid 40s. Southwest winds 10 to 15 mph.

Thursday night... Partly cloudy. Lows around 19. Southwest winds around 10 mph.

Friday... Mostly sunny. Highs around 50.

Friday night... Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 20s.

Saturday... Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid 50s.

Saturday night... Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 20s.

Sunday... Mostly sunny. Highs in the lower 50s.

Sunday night... Partly cloudy in the evening then becoming mostly cloudy. A 20 percent chance of light snow and light rain. Lows in the mid 20s.

Monday... Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of light rain and light snow. Highs in the lower 40s.

Monday night... Mostly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of light snow. Lows around 18.

Tuesday... Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of light snow. Highs in the lower 30s.

Opponents of immigration take case to Supreme Court

TOPEKA (AP) — Opponents of a law allowing some illegal immigrants to pay in-state college tuition in Kansas are planning to take their fight to the U.S. Supreme Court.

A federal appeals court earlier this month refused to reconsider its decision to toss out a legal challenge after determining the plaintiffs — a group of students paying higher out-of-state tuition — hadn't proven they were harmed by the law.

Kris Kobach, an attorney for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said the group plans to ask the Supreme Court to rule on whether the plaintiffs have legal standing to challenge the law.

"We are still embroiled in legal wrangling on threshold issues," said Kobach, who is also a university law professor and chairman of the Kansas Republican Party.

In Kansas, students can qualify

for in-state tuition if they attended a Kansas high school for at least three years and graduated, or earned a general educational development certificate in Kansas.

Illegal immigrants can qualify if they meet those conditions and show they are working toward legal immigration status.

The Kansas Board of Regents said 243 students are receiving the in-state tuition under the 2004 law, including 193 in community colleges, 46 at state universities and four at technical schools or colleges.

The plaintiffs had argued that Kansas violated their constitutional rights to equal protection under the law by offering some illegal immigrants a benefit they couldn't get.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver said in August that the students had not shown that they would have benefited, even if

the law that they alleged was discriminatory was struck down. They denied a request this month to rehear the challenge.

National organizations have said the outcome of the case could affect similar laws in California, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Washington.

The law's supporters say they can help children of immigrants who were brought to the U.S. and have worked hard in high school but would not be able to afford the more expensive out-of-state tuition.

State lawmakers have failed to repeal the law several times but key legislators said they will try again when the 2008 session begins next month.

A spokeswoman for the attorney general's office said the state has paid \$163,856 to an outside law firm to defend the law.

Icy ponds wreak havoc in Wichita

WICHITA (AP) — Wichita authorities are asking parents to talk to their children about the dangers of walking across ice-covered ponds, after children fell through thin ice three different times in the last two weeks.

On Monday, two 13-year-old cousins fell through ice on a northwest Wichita pond.

They were rescued in about five minutes after an alert motorist saw the accident.

They were taken to a hospital for observation but were expected to be fine.

"They're really lucky," Wichita police Lt. Doug Nolte said. "Another few minutes..."

No one has died in the three incidents because others noticed

them fall through the ice soon after it happened, police said.

And on Christmas Eve, teens who fell through the ice were able to get out quickly on their own.

The boys involved in Monday's incident told police that other neighborhood kids had walked across the pond in recent days, Nolte said.

Temperature fluctuations that are typical in Wichita means ice can form and thaw quickly, said Ken Cook, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"It doesn't take but a few days of above-freezing temperatures to make that ice thin enough where people are falling through it," Cook said.

Capt. John McLeskey, of the Wichita Fire Department, said

children always seem drawn to ice on the ponds.

"I think they're more attracted to it because they've been locked up in the house" and they're just looking for something fun to do, McLeskey said.

"They think, 'Hey, we can go sledding or skating or just sliding.'"

With temperatures expected to reach the upper 20s Tuesday before warming up to the 40s on Thursday and 50s on Friday, more dangerous ice conditions are possible.

"With our weather warming up and cooling down, it's just unpredictable how thick that ice is," Nolte said.

So, the best advice is: Just stay off of it, Nolte said.

Energy council faces criticism

TOPEKA (AP) — Even some members of the Kansas Energy Council don't think it's been effective in helping the state set energy policy, and it's facing criticism for refusing to address global warming.

Environmentalists contend the council has made little progress toward drafting a comprehensive

energy plan for the state, settling instead for what they view as a hodgepodge of policy statements on issues such as energy production and conservation.

Others believe the council's size, 35 members, encourages industry representatives who serve on it to defend those industries.

The council's refusal to deal with global warming also is notable because it's such a widely debated issue.

Also, in October, the state's top environmental regulator rejected a construction permit for two coal-fired power plants in southwest Kansas.

Accused Butler College murderer claims innocence

WICHITA (AP) — A man suspected of killing a Butler Community College student says he's innocent and another man was present when the woman was killed.

Israel Mireles told his 16-year-old girlfriend, Victoria Martens, that he got into a fight with the other man the night Emily Sander was killed in El Dorado, said Martens' mother, Sandy Martens of Hays.

Ellis County authorities have charged Mireles, 24, with aggravated indecent liberties with a child, accusing him of impregnating Victoria Martens when she was 15.

He also is charged in Butler County with capital murder, rape and aggravated criminal sodomy in the Nov. 24 death of Sander, an 18-year-old who was missing for several days before her body was found about 50 miles east of El Dorado.

Authorities allege that Mireles left a bar near El Dorado with Sander and killed her before picking up Victoria Martens at her grandmother's house in Baxter Springs and taking her to Mexico.

The case drew nationwide attention after it was discovered that Sander also led a secret life as an Internet porn model named Zoey Zane.

Mireles was arrested in Mexico Dec. 19 and is facing extradition to Kansas. Victoria Martens was with him in Mexico but has not been charged. Because Victoria Martens is considered a runaway, a hearing will be held Wednesday in Hays to determine where she will be placed, Sandy Martens said.

Sandy Martens met with her daughter on Saturday at a Wa-Keeneey juvenile facility. It was the first time she had seen her daughter since Thanksgiving, and she told The Wichita Eagle that the meeting was emotional and intense.

Based on what her daughter told her, Sandy Martens said: "Even he (Mireles) professes his innocence — that there was somebody else there. He said that he got into a fight with another man."

Sandy Martens said her daughter, whose baby is due in late January, believes Mireles is innocent.

Martens said she wants her daughter to remain with her until the baby — already named Isabelle Marie — is born. After that, Martens said, her daughter might be better off getting a fresh start with relatives out of state.

"That baby is the only thing that's helping her get through this right now," Martens said.

Physicians get a break with new congress bill

WICHITA (AP) — Physicians who invest in their own hospitals caught a break when Congress declined to pass a bill that included a series of controversial restrictions.

But supporters of physician-owned hospitals say the battle is far from over.

They are urging physician entrepreneurs to prepare to fight for their survival in 2008.

At stake is the ability for physicians to create new hospitals.

The failed bill called for a closure of a loophole in a law that allows physicians to self-refer to their own hospitals and the ability for existing physician-owned hospitals to expand.

The proposed law also restricted physicians' hospital ownership,

calling for an individual doctor to own no more than 2 percent, and limiting total physician ownership in an existing hospital to 40 percent.

"Why? Why do they keep picking on doctors?" said neurosurgeon Eustaquio Abay, a founding owner of the Kansas Spine Hospital in northeast Wichita, one of five physician-owned hospitals — with three of them being specialty hospitals — in the region.

"Why can't we engage in free enterprise? I'm afraid the public will be the loser if this continues, when our health care has deteriorated because there are no more doctors aspiring to do what's best for the patients. Doctors will close down and leave."

New mortgage system popular with seniors

WICHITA (AP) — Rising living expenses and stagnant incomes have led to a surge of borrowing by senior citizens through reverse mortgages, often-expensive loans that don't come due until the borrower moves out of the house or dies.

While reverse mortgages are helping some seniors stay in their homes longer and make ends meet, experts caution that the loans aren't for everyone.

"You have to plan on staying in the house to make it work, and you have to have a substantial amount of equity," said Randy Vickers, president of Priority Mortgage in Wichita. "If someone is doing well financially, it's not for them. The majority of what we're writing is people who are on a fixed income."

Reverse mortgages allow homeowners to draw on the equity of their house. Lenders pay the homeowners, instead of the other way around. About 90 percent of reverse mortgages are insured by the federal government, and a person has to be at least 62 years old to qualify.

In fiscal year 1990, 157 reverse mortgage loans were insured by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. By fiscal year 2007, which ended Sept. 30, that number had grown to 107,558, according to the National Reverse Mortgage Lenders Association.

"The biggest reason people get them is incomes are not keeping pace with expenses," said Justin Robinson, a certified counselor at Consumer Credit Counseling Service in Wichita.

"I've seen several people this week alone who have prescription costs that are \$200 a month. Social Security benefits aren't much for a lot of people."

Reverse mortgages can be expensive, though the costs are rolled into the loan. Robinson said fees on a \$150,000 loan can be as high as \$8,000 to \$9,000.

"You have falling equity, rising debt instead of rising equity, falling debt," he said. "When you start with this, you'll owe \$5,000 to \$10,000 more on your house the very day you sign up for it."

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