

# New state laws taking effect with New Year

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COLUMBIA — New laws that take effect on New Year's Day include measures that affect South Carolina boat owners and electric cooperatives supplying power to more than 1.5 million residents.

Gov. Henry McMaster signed more than 100 bills into law over the past year. Most went into effect in 2019, including in July when the state's new fiscal calendar started. But here are a couple that are effective Jan. 1. The State reported.

McMaster signed into law new state oversight rules to better regulate electric cooperatives, which serve customers in all 46 counties. The legislation was authored in 2019 after an exclusive investigation by The State in 2018 exposed questionable practices of the Tri-County Electric Cooperative's board and led to criticism of how other small electric cooperatives were run with little oversight.

Much of what was in the bill already took effect after the governor's signature. However, some measures took effect Wednesday. For example, new rules give more authority to the South Carolina Office of Regu-

latory Staff to audit the electric cooperatives.

Prior to the legislation, state Rep. Russell Ott, D-Calhoun — the bill's lead sponsor — said "no one was there to essentially be a watchdog for the ratepayer."

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**Russell Ott**  
State representative

The new measures also give the state's utility watchdog more flexibility to look into problems at cooperatives.

"We wanted to give ORS the ability to get prepared for this requirement, and so that's why we put it off until January 2020," Ott said.

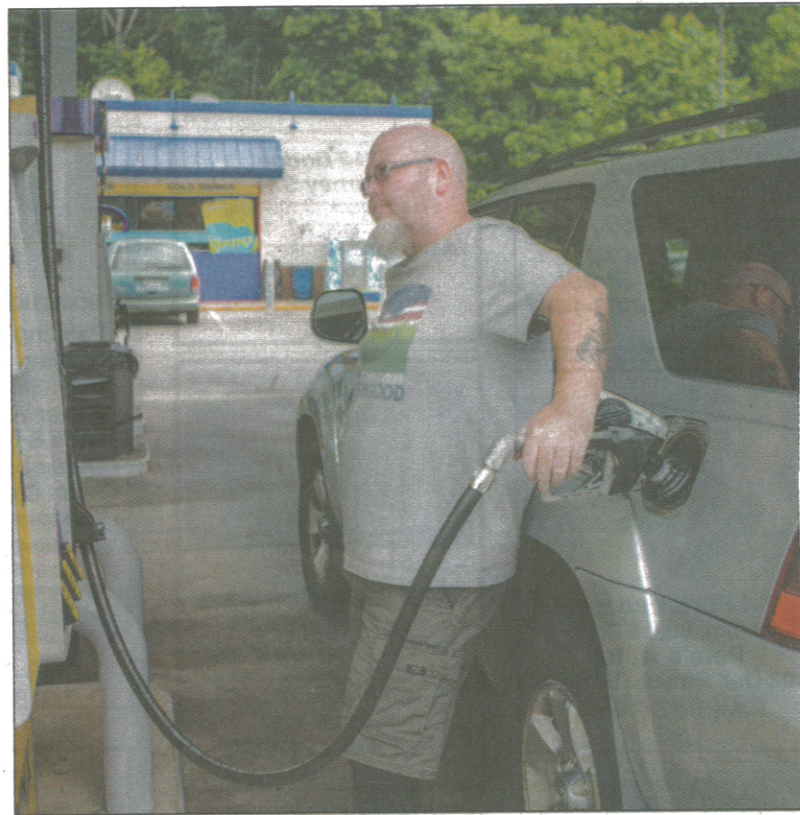
Also, a change to how South Carolina boat owners keep their vessels legal will start to

take shape in 2020.

Come Jan. 1, counties and the state's Department of Natural Resources will begin a three-year phase in of new regulations that ultimately will require boat owners to register their boat every year, instead of every three years. That registration will cost \$10 a year, rather than spending \$30 every three years, said DNR spokesman Robert McCollough.

"Just like a car," McCollough said.

In addition, South Carolinians can once again get a small slice of the money they spent at the pump over the past year when they file their 2019 state income



**South Carolinians can once again get a small slice of the money they spent at the pump over the past year when they file their 2019 state income taxes.**

taxes, courtesy of the state's 2017 gas tax law that set out to overhaul how the state pays to fix roads.

It's a fraction of what you spent, but state officials want you to save your receipts and use the I-385 tax form to claim your refund. A taxpayer can claim a credit for up to two qualifying cars.

It all goes back to the state's 2017 roads bill that state

lawmakers passed raising the state's gas tax by 2 cents a gallon every July, stretching through 2022. State transportation officials have collected nearly \$300 million since the law took effect.

More than 134,000 South Carolinians claimed the credit this past tax season, according to the state's Department of Revenue. The average savings was a little more than \$24 per return.