

WEEK 5,328 SINCE THE 1921 TULSA RACE MASSACRE

LOCAL & STATE OKLAHOMA PULLS BACK FROM INTERSTATE VOTER MAINTENANCE LIST A10 By KEATON ROSS, OKLAHOMA WATCH INTERSTATE VOTER LIST MAINTENANCE

LOCAL & STATE AT GRADUATIONS, NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS SEEK ACCEPTANCE OF TRIBAL A7 By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY, ASSOCIATED PRESS NATIVE AMERICAN GRADUATION

Public Funding Private Schools

By John Neal

REPUBLICAN LAWMAKERS in the Oklahoma legislature have pushed through a comprehensive program that will give families an incentive to send their children to private schools over public schools.

PRIVATE SCHOOL FUNDING On A3

LOCAL & STATE

'PRAYER & POLITICS': Fairview Baptist Church WALKS TIGHTROPE WITH IRS CODE

By JOE TOMLINSON, NonDoc 'PRAYER & POLITICS' On A11

ARTS & CULTURE

BOOK REVIEW: BUILT FROM THE FIRE

By JOHN NEAL, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE BUILT FROM THE FIRE On B1

LOCAL & STATE

FIVE BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS LINGER FOR LEGISLATIVE LEADERS A7

By TRES SAVAGE, NonDoc BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS

LOCAL & STATE

DOC WHISTLEBLOWER WAS FIRED AFTER REPORTING SEXUAL ABUSE, COVERUPS A2

By ASHLYND HUFFMAN, OKLAHOMA WATCH DOC WHISTLEBLOWER



PRIVATE SCHOOL
FUNDING

The new legislation will likely weaken Tulsa Public Schools and other public school systems across the state. A3

BIG BUDGET
QUESTIONS

Oklahoma Legislature has now turned their attention to hashing out other high-price decisions. A7



DR. EDDIE WARRIOR CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
AT LEAST EIGHT
RAPES & SEXUAL
ASSAULTS
Reported

DOC WHISTLEBLOWER from A1

PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES



Whitney Louis built a 15-year career as a psychologist helping incarcerated people learn how to transition back into society.

She expected to do the same when hired at Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Facility, a women's minimum security prison in Taft, Oklahoma. Instead, she was thrown into the middle of what she alleges were sexual assault coverups.

A female prisoner accused a male corrections officer of bringing her contraband in exchange for oral sex.

A woman accused a corrections officer of having a sexual relationship with her and using his state phone to take nude images of her.

A woman reported to Louis a male corrections officer opened her shower curtain and watched as she showered. Louis said she gained the trust of female prisoners through programs geared toward rehabilitation. Eventually, Louis filed a Prison Rape Elimination Act complaint that was never investigated.

"I told them there were at least eight of these rapes and sexual assaults that were happening between officers and inmates, and every one of them got to resign," Louis said. "Like there were no charges brought to them. There was no investigation."

Her allegations are documented in emails to the Office of Inspector General, which investigates crimes within the Department of Corrections.

Louis alleges that the DOC ignored multiple reports of sexual assault, including her own, which also took place at the prison. Louis applied for whistleblower protection, but was fired.

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections publishes yearly data on sexually based crimes on its website. Sexual misconduct by staff exceeded all other categories. Since 2016, there have been 72 substantiated reports of staff sexual misconduct.

In 2022, Louis reported to an Office of Inspector General agent that sexual assaults weren't being investigated. Louis created a list of names that included officers accused, witnesses and alleged victims. She gave the agent the list via email so he could contact all the women who made allegations and or witnessed the sexual abuse.

A sexual relationship between prisoners and corrections employees violates the Prison Rape Elimination Act even if it's consensual due to the power difference. Posters are hung throughout the prisons explaining that sexual relationships are illegal.

On July 7, Louis emailed Agent J. Dale Hunter a list of allegations and names of women she could remember



A sexual
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Prison Rape
Elimination
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who had made accusations. The following day, Louis emailed Hunter again. In that email, she included the 2022 dates she said a female officer had sexually assaulted her between March 20 and April 20. Louis said the officer squeezed firmly on her buttocks and laughed afterward.

Louis included additional incidents she hadn't included in the July 7 email, providing more victims Hunter could contact.

In her written statement, she said she was initially afraid to report the assault because the employee had a close relationship with Warden Greg Breslin and Deputy Warden Margaret Roper. Louis said she experienced panic attacks when encountering the lieutenant throughout the prison.

"I felt like it threw me back into when I was sexually assaulted as a child," Louis wrote, "I didn't know what to do. I felt extremely hot all over my body and felt like that little kid again that didn't have a voice."

Eddie Warrior officials reprimanded Louis for making the reports. In the letter Louis received on Oct. 12 from Laura Pittman, the director of population and programs for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, Pittman said Louis failed to report the allegations promptly.

Louis told Oklahoma Watch she didn't know the allegations were not being investigated until 2022.

"They have always felt comfortable confiding in me," she said. "I just thought things were being investigated and done appropriately."

Pittman told Louis via email an investigation found the allegations unsubstantiated.

DOC WHISTLEBLOWER cont. A6



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Private School Funding

The new legislation will likely weaken Tulsa Public Schools and other public school systems across the state by diverting millions of dollars from them. It may also disadvantage families in economically disadvantaged communities, many of whom cannot afford private schools, several educators and lawmakers have said.

PRIVATE SCHOOL FUNDING *from AI*

The Parental Choice Tax Credit Act was passed earlier this month with strong support from GOP lawmakers. It provides “refundable tax credits” from \$5,000 to \$7,500 annually for each student attending a private school or \$1,000 to families homeschooling children.

Governor Kevin Stitt has said he will sign the bill into law. State Senator Julia Kirt (D-Oklahoma City) joined other Democrats opposing the bill. “I think we are opening up a pretty dangerous road financially,” she said on the House floor. The financial funding for the Act will increase from \$150 million beginning July 1st, 2023, to \$200 million in tax year 2025 and \$250 million in 2026.

Critics also say the new statute lacks accountability and oversight. For example, it does not require private schools to obtain accreditation from the Oklahoma State Department of Education. “We are still reeling from the lack of transparency and oversight... from Epic and ClassWallet,” Rep. Melissa Provenzano told Oklahoma Watch. Provenzano, a Democrat representing Oklahoma’s 79th District, was referring to two recent cases where State supervised public funds were grossly misused.

An Oklahoma Tax Commission Impact Statement, citing the Private School Review, told legislators there were 37,668 students in private schools compared to just under 700,000 in public schools, or 5% of all students. The refundable tax credits are on a sliding scale based on income, providing up to \$7,500 to families with incomes of \$75,000 or less. The state average household income is \$57,000, so over 60% of Oklahoma families could be eligible for \$7,500 by sending their children to private instead of public schools.

Winners and losers

The new statute brings about a tilt in education that disfavors public schools. Public school systems like TPS, many of which are already struggling, are poised to be the biggest losers. Under the new program, state aid through tax credits for some private school students could exceed state aid per pupil attending public schools in some school districts, based on an analysis by the Eagle. At the Oklahoma State Department of Education website FAST FACTS, the most recent “State Aid Funding” posting was \$2.4 billion in 2021-22 for approximately 700,000 students or less than \$3,500 per student.

Grossly underfunded public schools could put to good use the \$600 million being diverted from taxpayers’ coffers to private school beneficiaries. For example, if this money were instead distributed evenly throughout Oklahoma on a per-public-student basis, Tulsa Public Schools would have \$28,000,000 more in its revenue budget over the next three years.

Low-income families will also likely suffer under the program. Wealthier families are much more likely by multiple factors than low-income families to have children attend private schools. Thus, the program seems designed to be more a subsidy for the “haves” than an opportunity for the “have-nots.”

State aid constitutes slightly less than half of Oklahoma’s public education revenue receipts, as the National Education Association (NEA) reported. But public schools may be eligible for other smaller streams of State aid outside this State Aid Formula Funding. Using Tulsa Public Schools as an example and adding in all other forms of State aid, the



State funded revenue was only \$4,100 per student for Tulsa Public Schools as reflected in the “Amended School Budget and Finance Plan 2022-23”.

Eighty percent of TPS 33,873 students are economically disadvantaged. The \$4,100 in State aid per TPS student contrasts with the \$5,000 to \$7,500 potential benefit per private school student. There are 67 private schools with over 16,000 students in Tulsa County whose families would become eligible for the refundable tax credit benefit. In addition, public schools must rely on local taxes and federal aid to achieve the Oklahoma average per pupil expenditure of \$10,951. That is still only a fraction of the U.S. average of \$15,047, as estimated in 2022 by the NEA.

Issues and concerns

The potential tax credit is gradually reduced to \$5,000 for households’ having hundreds of thousands of dollars in income. But families cannot be too rich to be eligible. An Oklahoma Tax Commission Impact Statement states the average tuition for private elementary schools is \$6,567 and \$7,620 for private high schools in Oklahoma. Fees are also eligible for the tax credits. The tax credits are for actual costs incurred or the cap amount per income bracket, whichever is less. Unless families select private schools where tuition and fees are substantially below the average for private schools in Oklahoma, families will receive the full benefit, between \$5,000 to \$7,500. If private school families have no or little Oklahoma tax liability, they will receive a refund for the difference.

The Tax Commission also expressed “administrative concerns” to the legislature about “the credit for qualified private school expenses be[ing] advanced to the taxpayer in two installments,” adding their administrative costs will exceed \$1 million in the first year alone. They also told lawmakers that “estimated claims for private school expenses are expected to total approximately \$276 million” [not \$150 million], with the same amount estimated for the second year. They did not calculate for the third year. But they also estimated home school claims are underfunded by \$56 million in the first two years.

The Tax Commission estimates there will be a shortfall of \$258 million comparing expected legitimate claims to be filed compared to the financial caps placed on total tax credits in the Act. The Commission adds this last sentence to the Revenue Impact Statement of the report: “The actual decrease in income tax revenue for F.Y. 2024 and 2025 as a result of the proposal is unknown.” These findings stoked fears among private school funding critics that more taxpayer funds must be diverted to pay for this private school gambit.

Tax incentives without income limitations

Financial aid from public funds for students attending private schools is increasing in many GOP-led states. It is taking various forms. The most common are vouchers, educational saving accounts, and tax credit programs. But few such programs in other states are as generous as the program Oklahoma is poised to enact. And fewer still have no income limitations.

A December 2021 survey by U.S. News & World Report on “school vouchers and tax relief programs” concluded that “most programs target low-income families in an effort to provide parents with additional educational choices.”

D.C. Minner: Bassist, Blues On The Move Member

By HUGH W. FOLEY, JR., THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE

At the turn of the twenty-first century, no one did more in Oklahoma to keep the blues alive among young people and adult blues fans in the state than D. C. Minner and his bassist and wife, Selby, known collectively as Blues on the Move.



A smooth vocalist and fluid blues guitarist, Minner wrote, recorded, and released his own “down home blues” after playing through thirty years as a touring blues artist. Born on January 28, 1935, in Rentiesville, Oklahoma, D. C. Minner was the only child of Clarence and Helen Pearson Minner but was raised by his grandmother Lura Drennan on family land where she operated a juke joint, speak-easy, grocery, and after-hours blues club beginning in the early twentieth century. As a youngster, Minner spent hours listening to the acoustic blues played by various traveling musicians in the club. His grandmother, Lura, promoted large gospel sings in Muskogee.

Minner’s first instrument was an old front-porch piano, and he sang in gospel quartets when he was fourteen. He left Rentiesville in 1953 for service in the U.S. Army where he learned to play flamenco guitar from two army buddies. In 1961 Minner was in Oklahoma City playing bass for Little Eddy Taylor. Soon thereafter he played bass with Larry Johnson and the New Breed, a group that played independently through early 1967, but he also made

a living out of backing up blues stars Lowell Fulson, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Jimmy Reed, and Eddie Floyd. Minner also played and led the band for two years with Freddy King, his biggest influence on guitar.

About 1965 Minner headed for California. He played in a group with Tony Matthews, long-time guitarist for Ray Charles. After moving to San Francisco in 1969 Minner met Selby, his future bass player, wife, and business partner. She had worked her way to the West Coast from Providence, Rhode Island, where she had been an art student and aspiring singer. While working the coffeehouses and clubs as an acoustic blues and folk singer over the next few years, she eventually met Minner. The two started performing together in 1976, marrying in 1979. With D. C. on guitar and vocals, Selby on bass and vocals, and a series of pick up drummers, they traveled the nation until tiring of the road life and urban hassles. Returning to Rentiesville in 1988, they opened the Down Home Blues Club. In 1991 the duo started the Dusk ‘til Dawn Blues Festival, featuring a wide roster of local, regional, national, and international blues artists.

The Minners released a series of independent recordings in the 1990s on their Texas Road Recording label. They were also extremely active with the Blues in the Schools (BITS) program, taking on residencies to give band programs and teach students how to play blues, R & B, and rock. In March 1998 they appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show. In 1999, the International Blues Foundation honored them with a Keeping the Blues Alive Award and featured them in a nationally distributed video about Blues in the Schools. In 1999 D. C. Minner was inducted into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame and in 2003 into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame.

D. C. Minner died on May 6, 2008, in Rentiesville. Selby Minner subsequently continued performing, recording, and teaching the blues in Oklahoma and around the nation. She also maintained the Down Home Blues Club’s as both a historic and active musical venue, organized the annual Dusk ‘til Dawn Blues Festival through 2017, and continued coordinating inductions and celebrations for Oklahoma Blues Hall of Fame.

THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma’s history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

D.C. MINNER, 2012.201.B0400.0553, photo by D. McDaniel, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS.

Featured Last Week



J. Kevin Ross: North Tulsa loses a fierce community advocate



Oklahoma Takes Steps To Address Childcare Scarcity



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The Oklahoma Eagle | Founded in 1921 | Vol. CII No. 20

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE is published weekly on Fridays by The Oklahoma Eagle, LLC, P.O. Box 3267, Tulsa, OK 74101. General office is 624 E. Archer St., Tulsa, OK 74120. Periodical Postage (WSPS 406-580) is paid at Tulsa, OK. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the above address. Delivery subscription rates (Continental United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands). All subscriptions may include Premium Edition issues throughout the year.
Mail Subscriber Rates: Single copy \$1 | Yearly \$52 | 2 Years \$100

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The Oklahoma Eagle

Founded in 1921

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Malcolm X’s Birthday

A Time for Celebration and Action

By DENISE ROLARK BARNES, WORD IN BLACK

MALCOLM X

In an age where the rise of white supremacy feels threateningly familiar, author A. Peter Bailey says we should learn from Malcolm’s teachings and act.



In a nation often bent towards forgetting, 85-year-old author A. Peter Bailey speaks proudly of his relationship with Malcolm X. And on May 19, what would have been Malcolm X’s 98th birthday, Bailey says honoring the outspoken Muslim leader’s legacy isn’t merely an act of remembrance.

Instead, it is a clarion call to action and learning from Malcolm’s unwavering insistence on justice, equality, and freedom for Black people.

A native son of the South, Bailey’s a veteran who offered three years of his life to the U.S. Army, and subsequently nurtured his intellectual capacities at Howard University. Yet, like so many of his generation, Bailey found himself indifferent about Malcolm, and ensnared by the web of misconceptions about him.

“What I had heard was, you know, he was a big believer in violence, and he hated white folks, and that kind of thing,” Bailey explains.

However, a fateful summer day in 1962 offered Bailey an unexpected revelation about Brother Malcolm.

Bailey says he traveled to New York City in search of an internship and found an apartment in Harlem. He moved in on a Friday. The following day, he needed a break from unpacking, so he and a friend decided to stroll down Lenox Avenue — now Malcolm X Boulevard — and explore.

As they continued down Lenox Avenue, Bailey says they saw a crowd gathering. Someone told them that Malcolm X would be speaking outside of Mosque #7, at 116th Street and Lennox. So they decided to go and hear what he had to say.

“I had never heard someone speak with such precision, clarity, and thoughtfulness,” Bailey says. “He shared so much knowledge that by the time he finished speaking, nearly three-and-a-half hours later, I had already become a supporter.”

Bailey’s admiration for Malcolm X grew so strong that when Malcolm left the Nation of Islam, Bailey became a founding member of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, a Black nationalist organization launched by Malcolm himself in 1964. Bailey also served as editor of the OAAU’s newsletter, the “Blacklash.”

When Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965, while giving a speech at the Audobon Ballroom in Manhattan, Bailey was there. He also served as a pallbearer at Malcolm X’s funeral.

Since Malcolm X’s death, Bailey has referred to May 19 as a “day of celebration.”

“We don’t talk about Malcolm’s death on May 19,” Bailey says. “Instead, we need to concentrate on Malcolm X’s teachings.”

Bailey’s assertion that Malcolm’s teachings should be the focal point of his commemoration resonates with timely urgency. In a recent op-ed Bailey wrote for The Washington Informer, he stressed that celebrations honoring the births of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King are important.

But “equally important,” he says, “is the need for us to learn from and act on the profound, productive, and inspiring guidelines the Brothers left us on how to promote and protect our health, economic, political, educational, technological, and communications interests in a country where overt white supremacy has once again become openly hostile.”

Indeed, Bailey believes that if Malcolm were alive today, he would admonish Black institutions — including churches, sororities and fraternities, social and professional organizations, and the Black Press — to establish schools to teach Black history.

“Brother Malcolm would remind us that it is our responsibility to teach our own history all across this country,” Bailey says.

And he’s put that into practice by refusing to let the truth about Malcolm X be brushed aside. In 1998, he co-wrote the book “Seventh Child: A Family Memoir of Malcolm X” with Malcolm’s nephew, Rodnell Collins.

Fifteen years later, in 2013, he penned “Witnessing Brother Malcolm X: The Master Teacher,” a memoir about the man he never befriended but who influenced his beliefs in Pan-Africanism and Black unity.

And, this year, Bailey will be releasing his third book, “Brother Malcolm X’s Visionary, Strategic Pan Africanism: Why It Enraged the U.S. Government,” and hosting a book talk in Washington, D.C., where he now lives.

So in honor of Malcolm X’s birthday, Bailey encourages people to learn as much as they can about Malcolm X.

Learn his life story and about his relationships with other leaders — including Dr. King.

Learn the meaning behind his pronouncement that Black people want justice, equality, and freedom “by any means necessary,” and learn the solutions he espoused to achieve Black unity in the U.S. and abroad.

“On his birthday, we will celebrate Brother Malcolm,” Bailey says.



SEEKING HELP, *Whistleblower protection request & retaliation complaint filed*

DOC WHISTLEBLOWER *from AI*

“The serious nature of these allegations can harm the reputation of accused staff and will not be tolerated,” Pittman wrote in the reprimand letter.

A month after reporting the allegations to Hunter, Louis asked again to be transferred to another facility. She was denied on Aug 3.

Louis filed requests for whistleblower protection and a retaliation complaint through the U.S. Department of Labor and protection from Oklahoma’s attorney general.

The labor department says an employer cannot retaliate against an employee exercising their right to be a whistleblower. Whistleblower status guarantees someone protection when they come forward with allegations of government wrongdoing. In Louis’ situation, she said the prison administration targeted her for making the reports.

Louis was fired on Jan. 10 for failing to report a prisoner’s violent dream.

On Feb. 8, a former Eddie Warrior correctional officer reported sexual assault coverups, alleging that Roper deleted nude images from an officer’s phone.

“No charges or anything was filed because they didn’t want the bad publicity,” the officer wrote. “I know she was not the only girl that happened to.”

Louis filed a complaint regarding

“The serious nature of these allegations can harm the reputation of accused staff and will not be tolerated...” - LAURA PITTMAN, the director of population and programs for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections

her termination. On March 10, 2023, Judge Colby Addison of the state’s civil service division ruled Lewis was wrongfully terminated and shall be reinstated with back pay.

“Having heard testimony and reviewed the exhibits presented, the court finds that Louis satisfied her burden of proof by establishing by a preponderance of the evidence that DOC lacked a reasonable basis to terminate her employment,” Addison wrote.

In response, DOC later claimed Lewis is among the 5% of state employees not entitled to file a complaint with the civil service division after termination, even though her termination letter stated she could.

The case went before a second judge under a motion to reconsider. Since Louis’ termination letter stated she could file a complaint, Racheal Dewberry, an administrative law judge, said the previous court ruling stands.

On May 5, Dewberry ordered DOC to rehire Louis with all back pay and full benefits. Her termination shall be expunged from her personnel record and disciplinary file.

Oklahoma Department of Corrections spokesperson Kay Thompson said the agency wouldn’t comment on rehiring Louis since there is pending litigation.

However, the agency said they take sexual abuse reports seriously and they work hard to ensure all reports are investigated.

“The referenced PREA complaints filed at the Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center in Taft, Okla., were investigated in accordance with agency and Federal policy and found unsubstantiated,” Thompson wrote in an email.

Louis said her job was to help the women succeed and to protect them. She said she doesn’t regret reporting even though she said she was retaliated against and fired.

State Rep. Justin Humphrey gave

a copy of the whistleblower rape allegation book to the state attorney general’s office. Phil Bacharach, a spokesman for Attorney General Gentner Drummond, would not confirm or deny whether an investigation was ongoing.

“Does this prove that rapes occurred?” said Humphrey, who chairs the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee. “It does not, but it is a very good document to verify that an investigation is warranted.”

The Office of Inspector General assigns agents to investigate crimes in Oklahoma prisons. That includes agents assigned to follow up with sexual assault allegations, which Louis said didn’t happen.

“They’re still department employees investigating other employees or inmates (for) any sexual case in the department,” said Humphrey, R-Lane. “And this appears to be the department covering up the department.”

ASHLYND HUFFMAN
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WHAT'S INCLUDED IN *Oklahoma’s Education Funding Package*

By JENNIFER PALMER, OKLAHOMA WATCH
EDUCATION FUNDING

Following Monday’s announcement that the House, Senate and governor have agreed on an education funding plan, legislation is moving swiftly to implement each component.

The package includes \$785 million in new funding for teacher raises, schools and other programs. It’s tied to a refundable tax credit for parents who pay for private school or homeschool with questionable oversight. The tax credit bill has been approved by both chambers but has been held over as leverage in the negotiations. On Monday, House Speaker Charles McCall said he’d release it to the governor’s desk now that an agreement was reached.

Here’s a breakdown of each component:

- **HB2901** appropriates \$500 million to the state aid formula and \$125 million to the Redbud Fund, which distributes funds for school buildings to low-property tax districts and charter schools.



A FIFTH GRADER raised his hand on Jan. 11, 2023, at Lawton Academy for Arts and Sciences, a private school in a warehouse district. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Included is a provision that if state funding falls below this level in future years, the tax credits in House Bill 1934 will be reduced proportionately.

- **HB2902** modifies the school

funding formula by increasing the weight for low income students from 0.25 to 0.3, increasing the transportation supplement and redefining which schools qualify for the small school by increasing to 750 students.

- **HB2903** establishes of a three-year pilot program to add police officers and security upgrades to schools. Purchases can include school resource officers, cameras, gates, lighting, locks, doors, windows, security geofencing and ballistic storm shelters. Funds will be divided evenly among school districts, regardless of size, providing about \$96,000 per district each year of the program.
- **HB2904** appropriates \$150 million for the school safety program in HB2903.
- **SB1118** appropriates \$10 million over three years for a new reading program beginning in the 2023-24 school year. It will fund literacy instructional teams placed regionally across the state to support school districts. The state’s assistance will include helping students with dyslexia.
- **SB1119** raises salaries for all certified employees, including teachers, principals, supervisors, counselors, librarians and nurses (but excluding superintendents

and retired teachers.) The raises are \$3,000 for less than four years experience, \$4,000 for five to nine years, \$5,000 for 10-15 years and \$6,000 for more than 15 years. Teachers earning a salary above the minimum this year will still receive the raise if they return to that district next year. Districts that don’t receive state aid will still receive funds to provide raises.

- **SB1120** increases the number of school districts eligible for Redbud funding, and changes the fund’s revenue source from medical marijuana tax collections to state appropriations.
- **SB1121** provides six weeks of paid maternity leave to full-time public school employees employed for at least one year. Includes teachers at career techs, Department of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Corrections and Office of Juvenile Affairs. Only the person giving birth is eligible and it must be used immediately after birth.

ILLUSTRATION ADobe IMAGES



A Game of Compromise

With tumultuous education negotiations behind them, leaders of the Oklahoma Legislature have now turned their attention to hashing out other high-price decisions for the state. Several items are on the table, including tax reform, economic development, a new program to incentivize affordable housing, targeted transportation projects, and a potential new fund for the investment benefit of the state of Oklahoma.

BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS *from AI*

HOUSE BILL 2870
An Act relating to rural housing; creating the Oklahoma Housing Stability Program; establishing the Homebuilder Program; creating the Homebuilder Revolving Fund; establishing the Oklahoma Increased Housing Program; creating the Oklahoma Increased Housing Revolving Fund; providing for administration of programs by the Oklahoma Finance Agency; creating a loan program; creating a financing program; establishing program parameters; requiring certain reporting; establishing revolving fund characteristics; establishing and limiting budgeting and expenditure from funds; authorizing retention of certain administrative costs; exempting programs and funds from the Oklahoma State Finance Act; the Oklahoma Central Purchasing Act; and the Public Competitive Bidding Act of 1974; exempting funds from certain claims; providing for codification; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

Earlier this week, lawmakers announced a concurrent special session aimed at providing additional time to finalize the Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

Budget negotiations Tuesday evening ironed out some details, with additional conversations ongoing. Final decisions will ultimately rest with House Speaker Charles McCall (R-Atoka), Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat (R-OKC) and Gov. Kevin Stitt.

Asked about the situation, Senate Appropriations and Budget Vice Chairman Chuck Hall (R-Perry) said today that budget leaders have proposed “a lot of one-time expenditures that we’re discussing.” Many of those ideas have originated in the House, which has also expressed stronger support for tax cuts than the Senate.

“Now that the education piece has been settled and agreed to, those of us in appropriations can really get started in earnest on finalizing the budget,” Hall said. “I see an end in sight very soon. I would hope that in the next 48 hours or so we will have worked through the budget and will be prepared to send our recommendations to the principles, being the pro temp and the speaker of the House.”

The following article outlines five topics yet to be decided in the session’s final FY 2024 budget negotiations. Details are based on previously reported information, interviews with lawmakers, background conversations and legislation filed this year.

For two years, legislative leaders have been in a stalemate over a variety of tax cut proposals pitched by Stitt. The governor has expressed support for eliminating the state portion of sales tax on groceries, lowering the personal income tax rate by 0.25 percent and decreasing the corporate income tax rate.

McCall and House Appropriations and Budget Chairman Kevin Wallace (R-Wellston) have emphasized a desire for reductions in the personal income tax and corporate income tax rates. Treat and Senate Appropriations and Budget Chairman Roger Thompson (R-Okemah) have expressed more caution about the state budget next year and subsequent years, during which economic constriction and revenue slowdowns have been predicted.

“The governor’s very interested in tax cuts. I’m interested in a balanced budget that makes sure we are able to take care of the future. Some of our caucus members are interested in it, but I think as a whole we are interested to make sure we take care of the people of Oklahoma,” Thompson said May 9. “That conversation, to me, centers around what we are going to be spending in recurring revenue. One of those is in education, and if that allows for tax cuts to come back into the conversation, then certainly we’ll have that conversation.”

Thompson attempted to distinguish his personal feelings from the broader political calculations of Treat

BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS *cont. A8*

TRIBAL REGALIA PASSED DOWN THROUGH GENERATIONS

NATIVE AMERICAN GRADUATION *from AI*

When Kamryn Yanchick graduated, she hoped to decorate her cap with a beaded pattern in honor of her Native American heritage. Whether she could was up to her Oklahoma high school. Administrators told her no.

Yanchick settled for wearing beaded earrings to her 2018 graduation.

A bill vetoed earlier this month by Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, a Republican, would have allowed public school students to wear feathers, beaded caps, stoles or other objects of cultural and religious significance. Yanchick, a citizen of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma and descendent of the Muscogee Nation, said she hopes the legislature tries again.

Being able to “unapologetically express yourself and take pride in your culture at a celebration without having to ask a non-Native person for permission to do so is really significant,” said Yanchick, a Native American policy advocate and a former intern with the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma.

For Native American students, tribal regalia is often passed down through generations and worn at graduations to signify connection with the community. Disputes over such attire have spurred laws making it illegal to prevent Native American students from wearing regalia in nearly a dozen states including Arizona, Oregon, South Dakota, North Dakota and Washington.

High schools, which often favor uniformity at commencement ceremonies, take a range of approaches toward policing sashes, flower leis and other forms of self-expression. Advocates argue the laws are needed to avoid leaving it up to individual administrators.

Groups like the Native American Rights Fund hear regularly from students blocked from wearing eagle feathers or other regalia. This week in Oklahoma, a Native American high school graduate sued a school district, claiming she was forced her to remove a feather from her cap at a ceremony last spring.

When Jade Roberson graduated from Edmond Santa

NATIVE AMERICAN GRADUATION *cont. A10*

ILLUSTRATIONS ADOBE IMAGES



Legislators consider **PANASONIC’S REQUEST FOR A \$245 MILLION APPROPRIATION** *to address infrastructure needs.*

BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS *from A7*

and the Senate Republican Caucus.

“As far as Roger is concerned, I am not for tax cuts,” Thompson said. “I was here in 2018. I know how difficult it is to get revenue here. The people in my district are asking for services.”

Days earlier, McCall had floated the notion that a personal income tax rate reduction could either be done “permanently” or as a two-year moratorium.

“I think the one that helps Oklahomans is the cut to the personal income tax,” McCall said at a press conference May 3.

During Monday’s joint press conference announcing the education deal, Stitt fielded a question about tax cut negotiations, standing in front of McCall and Treat as he reiterated his fuzzy-math figure about the state having more than \$6 billion in “savings.”

“If not now, then when?” Stitt said. “I think with inflation, Oklahomans certainly want that (tax cut).”

If a 0.25 percent personal income tax rate reduction makes it into final budget agreements, it could include a hike in the standard deduction as a way to provide additional benefit to lower- and middle-income families.

“What that does for low-income earners is it raises the exemption that they have before they start paying their first penny of tax to the state,” McCall said May 3. “That truly is a win-win for all socio-economic classes in the state.”

What will lawmakers do for Panasonic, other economic development?

For the past two years, the Oklahoma Legislature has been asked by Stitt and the Department of Commerce to prioritize up-front funding to incentivize Panasonic to build an electric-vehicle battery plant at the MidAmerica Industrial Park in Pryor.

But various factors have complicated the issue. Now, with the governor and Commerce hoping the Legislature will approve Panasonic’s request for a \$245 million appropriation to address infrastructure needs in the Pryor area — such as a hazmat station, land prep and relocation of a stream and a rail line — the issue has been complicated by other budget negotiations.

McCall has consistently said his House Republican Caucus wants the Senate to agree to a tax cut if the state is going to dedicate more money to the Panasonic project.

Additionally, lingering frustrations from rural lawmakers about why most major economic development projects have been recruited to MidAmerica in Pryor have spurred discussions about potentially dedicating other funding to site preparation efforts around the state. To that end, lawmakers sent \$250 million last session through a new Progressing Rural Prosperity (PREP) Fund aimed at advancing industrial

“I think the one that helps Oklahomans is the cut to the personal income tax,” - CHARLES MCCALL (R-ATOKA), Speaker of The House,

Oklahoma State Legislature



sites and other economic development opportunities across Oklahoma.

The concept of an additional PREP investment — perhaps equal to the \$245 million figure proposed for Panasonic’s MidAmerica project — has been floated as a way to get rural lawmakers’ support for further incentivizing the Japanese manufacturer to select Oklahoma.

On Monday, the Legislature sent Stitt bills appropriating \$180 million to pre-fund existing incentives for the Italian energy company Enel to build a solar panel manufacturing plant in the Inola area. The company, which faced a protracted legal dispute with the Osage Nation regarding a wind facility project on tribal land, is expected to announce its \$1.8 billion plant after Stitt signs the Legislature’s incentive package.

Additionally, Woodside Energy — an Australian energy producer that has proposed building a hydrogen energy plant in the Ardmore area — is seeking roughly \$50 million in additional support for its project.

Lawmakers have yet to reveal legislation regarding that request.

More than \$250 million floated for housing program

In an effort to decrease Oklahoma’s affordable housing shortage, legislative leaders are debating what could be a roughly \$265 million investment to incentivize residential developments aimed at increasing the state’s supply of housing units.

While negotiations over how much money the state could dedicate to such a program have occurred behind closed doors, one bill considered earlier this session outlined the concept at hand.

HB 2870, by Wallace and Hall, would create the Oklahoma Homebuilder Program and the Oklahoma Increased Housing Program in an effort to create more affordable housing in rural and urban areas. The bill would create a revolving fund incentivizing developers to build single-family and multifamily affordable homes across the state of Oklahoma.

As proposed in HB 2870 — which made

it through the House but did not receive a Senate floor hearing by a prior policy deadline — the Oklahoma Homebuilder Program would be administered by the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency. The program would provide loans to homebuilders with interest rates as low as zero percent to build single-family homes of 2,200 square feet or less. The Oklahoma Increased Housing Program would allow developers to apply for gap financing to build single-family and multifamily housing, and it would also allow first-time homebuyers to apply for grant assistance in making down payments on a home.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Oklahoma has a shortage of about 81,600 homes available for extremely low-income renters. Housing limitations across the country have spurred policy discussions in many states, including Colorado where this year’s legislative session concluded with a major land-use bill to overhaul housing development rules falling apart.

While affordable housing needs exist across Oklahoma, major cities have faced some of the biggest strains. A Tulsa study said \$2.5 billion of investment is needed over the next decade to meet the area’s housing demand. In Edmond, city government has faced a decade’s worth of political gridlock over new housing developments, with the Edmond Chamber of Commerce and others expressing concern that workers in retail, restaurant, hospital and other sectors currently cannot afford to live in a city that has an average home price of \$450,000.

Oklahoma City faces similar concerns, as well as a growing homeless population. In March, the OKC City Council voted to select the Oklahoma City Housing Authority as its operating partner for a homelessness project in MAPS 4, which includes about \$55 million for the purpose of building and renovating affordable housing. City leaders hope the \$55 million can leverage more than \$400 million in federal funding and other revenues.

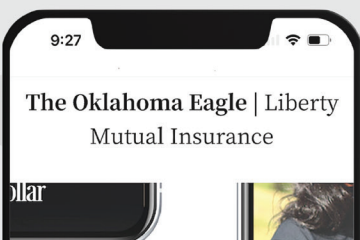
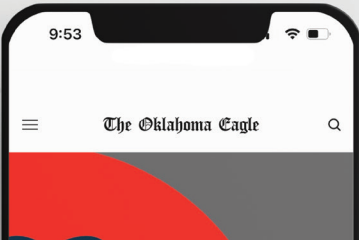
At town hall on homelessness held Tuesday night in OKC, Dan Straughan, director of the Oklahoma City Homeless Alliance, said the city has historically enjoyed a more affordable housing market than other large cities around the country. But as people move into those homes and inflation keeps rising, the city is not maintaining its affordable housing, he said.

BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS *Cont. A9*

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BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS *from A8*

“We’re starting to lose that,” Straughan said. Targeted transportation investment being negotiated

House and Senate budget leaders are negotiating a potential one-time appropriation to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation for road and infrastructure improvements in areas of the state that have seen or are preparing for major economic development.

While the House has proposed a \$200 million figure for that budget item, Senate budget leaders are seeking more clarity on project parameters and are looking at a lower number.

“I think we’ve got to discuss how is the money going to be used? What is going to be the population size of the counties where it can be used?” Thompson said today. “There’s still some details (to work out).”

Thompson confirmed that the House has requested \$200 million for transportation investments, but he said he is “not there yet” on that amount.

“I’ll know before the day is out,” Thompson said regarding his preferred number.

Hall, the Senate budget vice chairman, said the additional ODOT appropriation could be for projects “outside of the eight-year plan.”

“I think there could be some discretionary funds related to ODOT,” Hall said. “I know that we’re trying to make some potential funding available for those communities that have experienced some quick economic growth in the state as a result of our successful efforts for business development.”

Thompson pointed to the Enel project as a potential example of an area — Inola in Rogers County — as an example of a community that will need improved transportation with the arrival of a new manufacturing facility.

Meanwhile, a \$5 million request has also been floated for mass transit needs. If approved, the money could help draw down additional federal funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act approved by Congress in 2021. There are 37 public transit agencies in the state, including rural, urban and tribal agencies.

Asked Wednesday if he knew details about the House and Senate conversations over the proposed one-time ODOT appropriation increase, Stitt said he did not know the details.

“I’m not involved in anything on the transportation (funding discussions),” Stitt said.

Lawmakers discuss two ways to leave a ‘legacy’ investment

Generally speaking, House and Senate leaders share a philosophical priority: Dedicating some amount of money — as much as \$1 billion — of state carryover funds to a new fund for the investment benefit of the state of Oklahoma. The devil, however, remains in the details.

In February, Treat filed SB 1101 to create a 10-member Legacy Investment Board and an “Oklahoma Legacy Fund” to invest

House and Senate leaders share a philosophical priority:
Dedicating some amount of money — as much as \$1 billion — of state carryover funds to a new fund for the investment benefit of the state of Oklahoma.

funds designated by the Legislature for the financial benefit of the state. One proposed use for the fund would be to create a recurring revenue stream that could offset an income tax rate reduction, which Sen. John Michael Montgomery (R-Lawton) has supported.

“If the objective is tax cuts and to pay for tax cuts, the idea is to get that interest and investment income off of it quicker and do that for tax cuts,” Montgomery said. “Say we came in and dropped \$600 million in it, you wouldn’t get a tax cut until we get to \$1.1 billion, as it’s written.”

But House budget leaders have floated their own idea for such a fund that would allow major state agency construction projects to be financed at a zero percent interest rate. Referred to as “self-financing,” the idea was outlined in a March memo from House fiscal director and counsel John McPhetridge.

“Oklahoma is currently in possession of a large amount of non-recurring revenue; which could prove problematic in future budgets if fully plowed into the operational budget of the state. In an effort to avoid increasing the operating budget of the state in an unsustainable manner, the state could instead isolate such funding into a revolving fund and implement a capital and infrastructure budget,” McPhetridge wrote to Wallace in the memo. “By doing so the state could cash finance capital projects from the fund, and reimburse the fund for future use, with appropriations similar to those that would have been required for debt service, had the project been financed through traditional debt instead of cash.”

Wallace embraced the idea and introduced it to the Senate during budget negotiations. While Senate budget leaders initially had questions about the idea — arguing that bond debt is important to maintain the state’s overall bond rating — discussions increased in subsequent weeks.

“The fund is designed to reduce financing costs, primarily interest costs, which are increasing in the current interest rate environment, but the fund also provides liquidity options due to its flexibility,” McPhetridge wrote. “The Legislature through internal policy and appropriations controls the reimbursement schedule for the fund. For this reason the Legislature can spread out reimbursements to the fund, (the state reimbursing itself), over any

BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS *cont. A10*

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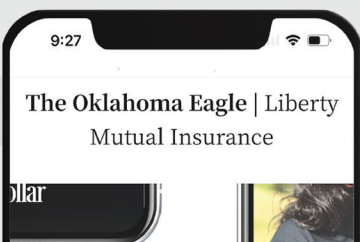
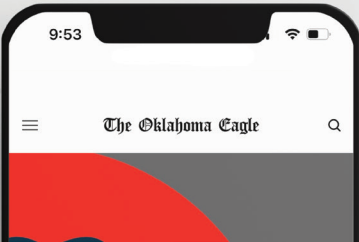
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(TOP) ILLUSTRATION ADOBE IMAGES

(MIDDLE) **THE OKLAHOMA STATE CAPITOL** is located at the intersection of North Lincoln Boulevard and Northeast 23rd Street in Oklahoma City.
PHOTO **MICHAEL DUNCAN**

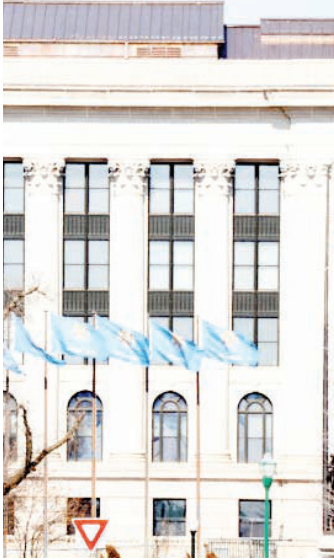
LEGISLATORS CONSIDER A BALANCE OF SELF- & MARKET FINANCING

BIG BUDGET QUESTIONS from A9

time period, five, 10, 30 years, etc. and vary reimbursement schedules as needed. Additionally, if the state experiences economic downturns in the future, the state can pause/suspend reimbursements to the fund and expenditures from the fund for a period of time, allowing for the more immediate use of such funds as operational budget resources, during such downturn.”

For Fiscal Year 2024, “total rent payments financed through the state budget is estimated to cost” about \$179 million, with roughly \$55 million of that amount constituting “interest and financing fees,” according to McPhetridge’s memo.

“My thoughts are varied,” Thompson, the Senate’s budget chairman, said in an interview earlier this session. “We appropriate money back to the agencies to pay the bonds. We set it aside, they borrow the money, we appropriate them money to pay back. It does create a fund for us to do capital improvements. I’m not against that. But we do need a certain element of bonding out there for our bond rating.”



Wallace said the state could still seek market financing on certain projects to preserve Oklahoma’s bond rating, and he argued that the self-financing idea pitched by McPhetridge would somewhat insulate the state as interest rates fluctuate.

“We could capitalize our own projects and not go to the bond market. Bond rates are going up anyway, so it’s going to cost more money to do things. But we can self-finance with approval by the Legislature, just like we give bonding authority,” Wallace said in April. “[If] we are self-funding, agencies still have to pay it back. We (would) still back the bonds from the state on any projects we give the agencies authority to go bond.”

Thompson said he wanted to “respect” Wallace’s idea, but he also expressed support for Treat’s proposed Legacy Fund. Both ideas have featured about \$1 billion as an initial cap level of funding.

“I’m not sure we can do both of those unless there are just smaller numbers in each one of them,” Thompson said. “I’m not anti- either one of them, but I just want to make sure we have enough money to take care of the needs of the people of Oklahoma.”

WILLIAM W. SAVAGE III (TRES) has served as the editor in chief of NonDoc since the publication launched in September 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and covered two sessions of the Oklahoma Legislature for eCapitol.net before working in health care for six years. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor.

WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE NATIVE

NATIVE AMERICAN GRADUATION from A7

Fe High School, the same school attended by Yanchick, she would have liked to wear a beaded cap and a large turquoise necklace above her gown. But it didn’t seem worth asking. She said a friend was only able to wear an eagle feather because he spoke with several counselors, consulted the principal and received a letter from the Cherokee Nation on the feather’s significance.

“It was such a hassle for him that my friends and I decided to just wear things under our gown,” said Roberson, who is of Navajo descent. “I think it is such a metaphor for what it is like to be Native.”

When Adriana Redbird graduates this week from Sovereign Community School, a charter school in Oklahoma City that allows regalia, she plans to wear a beaded cap and feather given by her father to signify her achievements. “To pay tribute and take a small part of our culture and bring that with us on graduation day is meaningful,” she said.

In his veto message, Stitt said allowing students to wear tribal regalia should be up to individual districts. He said the proposal could also lead other groups to “demand special favor to wear whatever they please” at graduations.

The bill’s author, Republican state Rep. Trey Caldwell, represents a district in southwest



AMRYN TOM reacts after graduating from Cedar City High School on Wednesday, May 25, 2022, in Cedar City, Utah. Tom is wearing an eagle feather given to her by her mother and a cap that a family friend beaded. PHOTO **AP**
PHOTO/**RICK BOWMER, FILE**

Oklahoma that includes ancestral land of Kiowa, Apache and Comanche.

“It’s just the right thing to do, especially with so much of Native American culture so centered around right of passage, becoming a man, becoming an adult,” he said.

Several tribal nations have called for an override of the veto. Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said the bill would have helped foster a sense of pride among Native American students. Muscogee Nation Principal Chief David Hill said students who “choose to express the culture and heritage of their respective Nations” are honoring their identity.

It means a lot that the bill was able to garner support and make it to the governor, Yanchick said, but she wishes it wasn’t so controversial.

“Native American students shouldn’t have to be forced to be activists to express themselves or feel celebrated,” she said.

A *Rejection* OF VOTER OUTREACH

By **KEATON ROSS**, OKLAHOMA WATCH

INTERSTATE VOTER LIST MAINTENANCE from A1

Let’s talk about voter list maintenance. The routine government function of making sure voter rolls are clear of people who have died or moved away isn’t a particularly exciting subject, but it’s important that it is done well. Though election fraud is exceptionally rare in Oklahoma, the likelihood of someone being able to cheat the system increases when ineligible voters linger.

The Oklahoma State Election Board sends address confirmation notices to inactive voters every two years and obtains state health department death reports monthly in an effort to keep the rolls updated. But getting quick information on someone who has moved or died out-of-state can be difficult.

To improve this process, the Legislature in 2021 approved a bill authorizing Oklahoma to join the Electronic Registration Information Center. The D.C.-based organization uses a sophisticated software system to compare voter rolls and motor vehicle records from several states and identify duplicate registrations.

ERIC also leverages this technology to identify people who are eligible but unregistered to vote, which member states are required to notify. This program has proved successful in



PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

states like Colorado, where registration among its voting-eligible population increased 8% four years after joining the organization.

While Oklahoma seemed poised to join ERIC a few years ago, the state has reversed course on partnering with the organization. A bill that’s close to reaching Gov. Kevin Stitt’s desk would set several new requirements for any multistate organization the state joins, including that they must not require outreach to eligible but unregistered voters. That would effectively bar Oklahoma from joining ERIC, the only active organization of its kind in the U.S.

In my latest story, I examine several factors at play in this decision, including cost concerns, data privacy fears the ripple effect of decisions made in other states. Some Republican states, including Iowa, Ohio and West Virginia, opted to pull out of ERIC earlier after member states rejected several of their proposed changes.

Have thoughts or questions about this story? Or another story idea you think Oklahoma Watch should look into? Let me know at Kross@Oklahomawatch.org.



Prayer & Politics

FAIRVIEW BAPTIST CHURCH

Walks Tightrope with IRS Code

PRAYER & POLITICS from AI

Fairview Baptist Church senior pastor Paul Blair invited recent mayoral candidate Brian Shellem to speak to his congregation before the April 4 election, but his church may have violated the spirit of IRS tax code by encouraging the congregation to vote for Shellem and donate to his campaign. Shellem spoke during two different Sunday services at Fairview Baptist Church on March 5. At the services, he chronicled his path to living in Edmond and discussed his then-pending lawsuit against Edmond Public Schools. Eventually, he promoted a campaign event. Former Oklahoma Rep. Dan Fisher, a teaching pastor at Fairview Baptist Church, encouraged parishioners to cast their ballots for Shellem and donate to his campaign.

“Thank you for all you are doing,” Fisher told Shellem before turning to Fairview’s congregation. “I know that he probably needs help in knocking on doors and just encouraging people to vote for him come early April.”

Established in 1998 and located at the intersection of Danforth Road and Sooner Road in Edmond, Fairview Baptist Church is considered a 501(c)(3) organization under federal law. Such organizations are prohibited “from engaging in any political campaign activity,” according to the IRS website.

More specifically, revenue Rule 2007-41 of the Internal Revenue Code provides:

Organizations that are exempt from income tax under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code as organizations described in section 501(c)(3) may not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

According to the IRS website, “violating this prohibition may result in denial or revocation of tax-exempt status and the imposition of certain excise taxes.” However, the IRS has largely abdicated its authority to enforce such violations.

While participating in a political campaign is prohibited, IRS code does allow for churches and other 501(c)(3) organizations to participate in a limited about of lobbying, including advocating for or against ballot measures and issues in the political arena. Nonpartisan voter education activities and church-organized voter registration drives are legal.

According to the IRS website, when a candidate is invited to speak at an event, there are three factors in determining whether an organization participated or intervened in political campaign activity:

- Whether the organization provides an equal opportunity to participate to political candidates seeking the same office;
- Whether the organization indicates any support for or opposition to the candidate (including candidate introductions and communications concerning the candidate’s attendance);
- Whether any political fundraising occurs.

Fisher: ‘I’d vote for you, buddy. Right now.’

At Fairview Baptist Church on Sunday, March 5, Shellem spoke during both the early service and the late service, describing his background and priorities. At one point, he said a local news publication claimed he did not believe in the separation of church and state.

“I said, ‘I think you’ve got it all wrong.’ Our Constitution says we should not have a state-run church. We shouldn’t have a church-run state, but that does not mean our government is absent from God,” Shellem said.

Continuing the conversation on religion and politics, Fisher told the congregation that Fairview Baptist Church is mixing the two.

“You know, you’re right. We all kind of get worried about, ‘Well, are we gonna mix politics and religion and all that?’ Of course, we are,” Fisher said. “I mean, how in the world would your religious beliefs not affect how you vote? Of course,” Fisher said.

Fisher, a 2018 gubernatorial candidate who represented District 60 as a Republican member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 2012 to 2016, continued by saying he would vote for Shellem if he lived in Edmond.

“We don’t want a state-run church, and as he said, we don’t want a church-run state. But we want Christians being salt and light, and the only way you can do that is to talk about these issues, and so I am honored,” Fisher said. “Even though I don’t live in Edmond, I wish I did, because I’d vote for you, buddy. Right now.”

‘Prayer and politics’

In the late worship service March 5, Shellem encouraged the Fairview congregation to attend his campaign event called “prayer and politics.”

“I would hope that you can come to this event this Thursday,” Shellem said. “It’s prayer and politics. We’re going to be praying for our city. We do need to raise money.”

Shellem added that he would not solicit donations at the campaign event.

“This is not the area where we’re going to be raising money. You can come. We’re going to pray for our leaders. We’re going to have some time of worship,” Shellem said.

But Fisher encouraged the congregation to donate to Shellem’s campaign.

“Now friends, understand something — men like him will not get elected if people like us don’t go do it, and men like him will not get elected if people like us don’t help to fund his campaign,” Fisher said. “You cannot run these campaigns on best wishes and hopes. You gotta have some money to be able to do it. He has to buy yard signs. He has to put together all kinds of flyers and all these things.”

Although finance reports filed with the City of Edmond do not show Fisher donating to Shellem’s campaign himself, Fisher told the congregation to “step behind” Shellem.

“So, guys, this is an opportunity for us to do what we claim we’re trying to do. This church is always claiming we want to stand in the gap. Well, here’s an opportunity for us to do this very thing. Step behind this guy,” Fisher said. “Brian, thank you so much. God bless you, and I’m praying for a great victory very, very soon.”

Multiple text messages and voicemails left for Dan Fisher went unreturned prior to the publication of this story.

‘Mayor Darrell Davis loves traffic jams!!!’

Ahead of Edmond’s April 4 municipal election, a slate of political signs local candidates were posted near the boundary of the church’s property and the street easements on the west and north sides of Fairview Baptist Church.

Beyond signs supporting Shellem and other Edmond candidates, a neon green sign proclaimed, “Mayor Darrell Davis loves traffic jams!!!” Davis, Shellem’s opponent, was reelected to his second term on April 4.

Joseph Thai, an associate dean at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, said Fisher’s use of conditional clauses from the pulpit may allow the church to skirt by IRS code. But Thai said he believes that Fairview Baptist Church’s actions, particularly regarding the campaign sign opposing Davis, violate the intention of the law.

“I think it’s semantics whether it violates the letter of the law, though in my view it violates the spirit,” Thai said.

Since 2001, Fairview Baptist Church has been led by senior

PRAYER & POLITICS cont. A12



According to IRS code, pastors are allowed to endorse candidates publicly on a personal level.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

PRAYER & POLITICS *from. All*

pastor Paul Blair, a former Oklahoma State University football player who played offensive line for the NFL's Chicago Bears (1986, 1987) and Minnesota Vikings (1990).

For many years, Blair has faced criticism for blurring the lines between political activity and proselytization at his church. He lost elections for the Oklahoma State Senate in 2014 and 2016. In 2016, Blair was defeated in a GOP runoff election by eventual Sen. Adam Pugh (R-Edmond) in Oklahoma's SD 41 race.

Ahead of the 2016 election, a media consultant for Blair's campaign created controversy by endorsing Blair while announcing a football scrimmage at Edmond Santa Fe High School. An Edmond Public Schools district representative apologized for the incident, noting that Oklahoma law prohibits using school resources for political purposes.

After he lost the GOP runoff to Pugh, Blair expressed bewilderment over his defeat, touting his conservative credentials and saying during his concession speech: "We may not get a lot of respect in Edmond, but we get a lot of respect across the country."

Asked May 3 about Shellem's March visit and the alleged violations over the phone, Blair said he has always been "very open" with his congregation about his religious and political beliefs. He said he is not concerned about the IRS taking action against his church.

"Not even the least bit worried about it," Blair said. "Never heard from the IRS in 22 years of ministry. I've gotten dirty phone calls from Barry Lynn, but couldn't care less, Barry Lynn is just an upset individual."

During the 2008 presidential election, Blair said he and 32 other pastors across the country — working with the Alliance Defending Freedom — each endorsed their preferred candidate and sent a letter to the IRS self-reporting the action.

"We sent them transcripts, video, audio — never ever heard from the IRS," Blair said.

According to IRS code, pastors are allowed to endorse candidates publicly on a personal level. Blair donated \$1,000 to Shellem's campaign in January, according to Shellem's contributions and expenditures report.

After being read Revenue Rule 2007-41, Blair said, "That's actually not true," claiming churches are "immune" from taxation.

"In 2012, the IRS actually released quietly a statement where they said the IRS does not grant churches tax exemptions. Churches are immune from taxation," Blair said. "We are in no violation of the law. The government has no authority to tax the church. We don't give up our rights for free speech when we enter the doors."

Blair's claim is only partially true. Churches that meet requirements of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code are automatically considered tax exempt, but the IRS does hold the authority to remove that designation.

Asked for the referenced IRS statement, Blair emailed an article from Liberty Counsel, an organization which has come under fire for anti-LGBT discrimination.

Davis, the incumbent Edmond mayor who defeated Shellem in April, said he was not invited to speak at Fairview Baptist Church during the recent election cycle.

Asked if he invited Davis, Blair said he would allow Davis to speak at his church, if he "lined up theologically."

"I'd be happy to let Darrell come up and give his opinion about abortion and LGBT and where he stands on issues as well. I'd be happy to have that happen. In fact, we've gone down and talked to him before," Blair said. "I just disagree with him."

'I wish he would have stuck with football'

Randel Shadid, who served as Edmond mayor from 1991 to 1995, said Paul Blair has preached politics for years. Asked about Fairview Baptist Church, the former mayor unloaded.

"I've known Paul for quite a while. I wish he would have stuck with football and stayed out of the ministry because, in my opinion, that type of basically white Christian nationalist is the worst thing that can happen for Christianity," Shadid said. "The morphing of the Republican Party and the fundamentalist Christians is not doing the country any good, and it certainly isn't doing Christianity any good."

Shadid said the church has posted political signs along its property during election cycles for several years. Shadid believes the IRS should revoke Fairview Baptist Church's tax-exempt status.

"They oughta come down on him and make all donations to his church non-tax exempt," Shadid said. "But the IRS don't ever do anything."

Shadid said he is being "anti-Christian" himself with his comments about Blair.

"With the things they do, it's hard not to feel aggravated and say things about them that are judgmental. My view of Christianity is, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Those are the basic teachings of Jesus Christ," Shadid said. "They are so removed from those that it's embarrassing to my philosophy of Christianity that they would call themselves Christians."

"I've always said when Paul gets to the gates of heaven and St. Peter meets him, he'll say, 'Job not well done my loyal but misguided servant.'"

Dan Fisher teaches the Johnson Amendment

During an hour long "Bible study" Wednesday night at Fairview Baptist Church — also known as Liberty Church of Edmond — Fisher discussed the concept of separation of church and state and the Johnson Amendment, which he stated was "unconstitutional."

"Pastors are not bound by the Johnson Amendment. It doesn't even mention pastors," he said. "Now, should churches officially endorse candidates? I think probably not, but this church doesn't."

Fisher claimed that no church had ever lost their tax-exempt status for participating or intervening in political campaign activity, but he offered advice in the event that a church is challenged by the IRS.

"I've told pastors what they can do is dissolve that church, reconstitute it under a different name and start all over again. How many different names could you come up with for a church? Well, quite a few," Fisher said. "What I'm saying is — churches that are running around afraid of the IRS are only giving them power that they really don't have. If the church would stop running and start standing, you would be amazed at what would happen to the IRS."

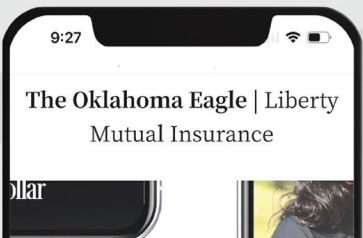
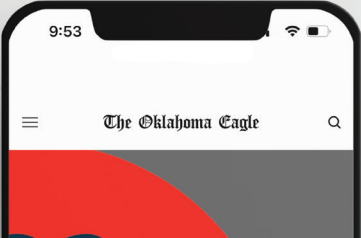
In 1995, the IRS revoked the tax-exempt status of a New York church for placing full-page advertisements in USA Today and the Washington Times on Oct. 30, 1992, four days before the 1992 presidential election. The ads opposed candidate Bill Clinton, citing his support of abortion, gay rights and the distribution of condoms to teenagers in public schools.

Fisher told the congregation that the IRS only revoked the church's "tax-exempt advance letter" and not its tax-exempt status.

"That letter, that's all it is. It's just a letter, and that's the worst the IRS was able to do — they revoked that letter. Well what does that mean? It means absolutely nothing," Fisher said. "Even though they lost that letter, they never lost its non-tax status."

Toward the end of Wednesday night's lesson embedded above, Fisher referenced Shellem's March visit, stating that the church did not endorse him.

"We've had a reporter tailing Paul and myself for weeks since we allowed Brian Shellem to speak here — who was the conservative candidate for mayor of Edmond — and he's trying to interview us because he says we violated the Johnson Amendment by allowing him to speak," Fisher said. "Do you ever remember us having a vote that morning after he spoke to officially endorse him as Liberty Church of Edmond? No."



**THE LION KING
COMES TO TULSA**
Tulsa Performing Arts Center (TPAC)
will host a Broadway favorite this
summer.

B2

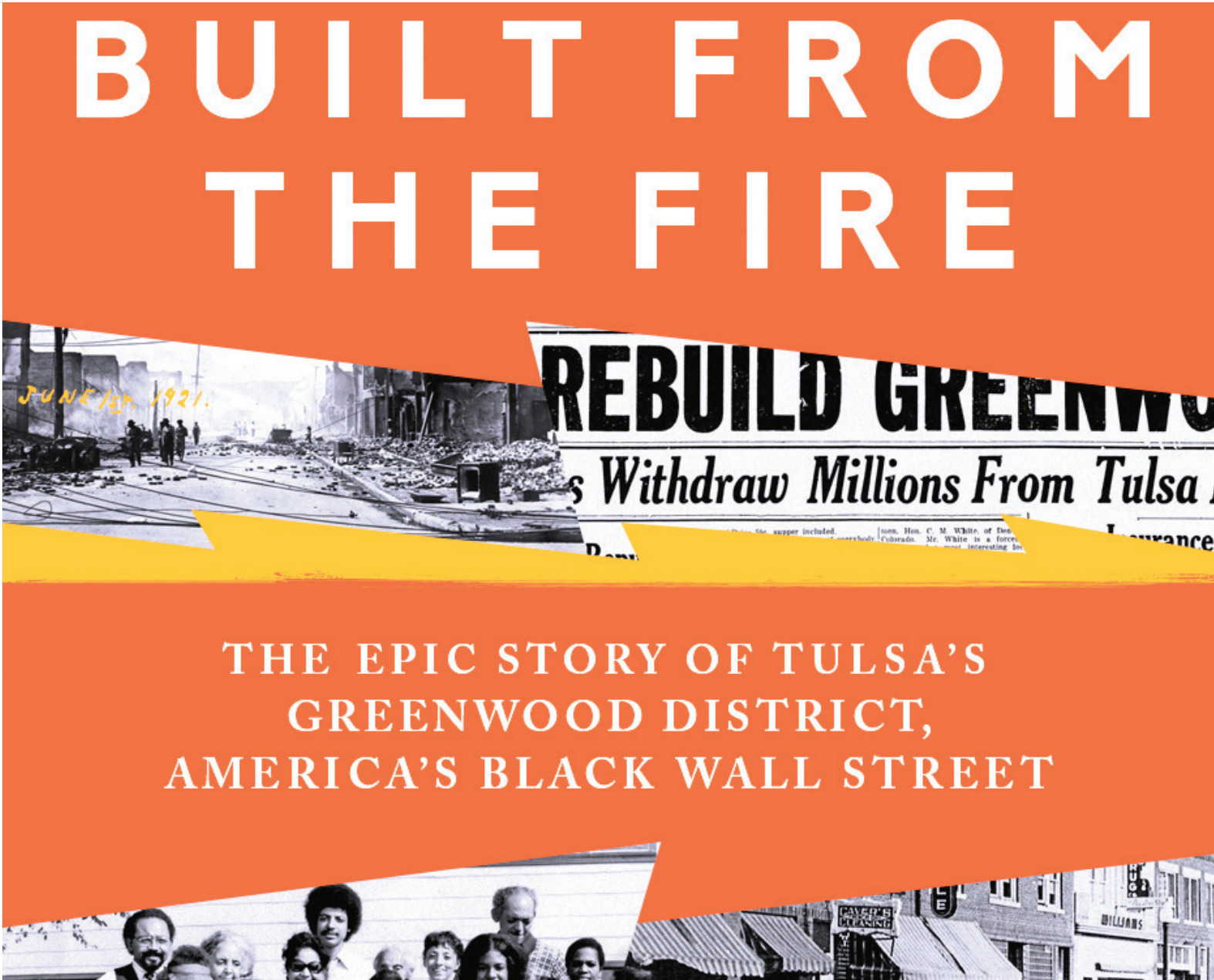


**Tulsa Performing
Arts Center**
June 2023

FEATURE

BOOK REVIEW: BUILT FROM THE FIRE

BUILT FROM FIRE *from AI*



BUILT FROM THE FIRE. In National Magazine Award–finalist Victor Luckerson’s essential new book, **BUILT FROM THE FIRE: The Epic Story of Tulsa’s Greenwood District, America’s Black Wall Street** (Random House; Hardcover), Luckerson moves beyond the mythology of Black Wall Street to tell the story of an aspirant black neighborhood that, like so many others, has long been buffeted by racist government policies. PHOTO **THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE**

The 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre brought forth an abundance of research, scholarship, and new history of the tragic event. But Victor Luckerson lays out in a very readable fashion and fascinating detail the entire history of the city’s historic Greenwood District. Luckerson is a Tulsa-based journalist and author whose research and writing have appeared in The New Yorker, Time Magazine, and other national publications. In **BUILT FROM THE FIRE**, he reflects on the sweep of the 20th-century history of the struggles of African Americans in this country through experiences of the Greenwood District.

Luckerson tracks the linear history of all the many contributors to Greenwood’s rich heritage in parallel with the experiences of the Goodwins, a prominent Black Tulsa family. J.H. Goodwin made the trek to Oklahoma along with thousands of others to escape Jim Crow in the Deep South. Oklahoma was frequently called the promised land or the “Eden of the West.” At the turn of the century, they were joined by over 20,000 freedmen from area tribes in Oklahoma who, too, sought financial success and freedom from oppression.

But southern whites also migrated, bringing with them the racism and institutions of Jim Crow. Luckerson explains these early 20th-century tensions and conflicts in a national context leading to the bloody Red Summer of 1919 with riots in more than thirty cities and later the Tulsa Race Massacre. He chronicles the bloody event through word of mouth, written narratives of those who survived it, and the partial biographies of some who did not. Greenwood leaders then rallied around a slogan attributed to J.W. Hughes, principal of a destroyed elementary school, “I’m am going to hold what I have until I get what I’ve lost.”

But the struggle to rebuild was more complex and less robust than portrayed in other historical accounts, according to Luckerson. This was because Tulsa civic leaders, real estate, and insurance companies failed their stated commitments, threw up numerous obstacles, and sought the land for their own purposes. As the author characterizes the people of Greenwood’s predicament, “Even if Tulsa’s white businessmen could not buy up Greenwood outright, they found methods to profit off the neighborhood’s misfortune, one way or another.”

But despite these and other obstacles - including zoning redlining that severely limited mortgage loan opportunities and the Great Depression - an entrepreneurial class was emerging and would push the recovery forward. Ed Goodwin Sr., son of J.H. Goodwin, rose to be a key leader in this effort. When he gained complete control of the Oklahoma Eagle in 1938, he turned the focus of the community to financial investment and success, trying “to thread the needle between celebrating the accomplishments of the black elite and support the black working class through efforts such as labor advocacy.” As a result, he later reflected, “I began to realize how important a newspaper could be.”

Luckerson writes that the overarching theme for the newspaper then and to the current day is civil rights. Oklahoma was center stage in the struggle for education, access to public and privately owned accommodations, and many other initiatives, per the author. For example, the renowned Oklahoma civil rights leader, Clara Luper, staged a sit-in and successfully desegregated Katz

drugstore in Oklahoma City before the famous sit-in protests in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Luper, Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King Jr. all made destination stops in Greenwood, and Marshall “keyed into the state’s civil rights struggles.” Ed Sr. graduated from law school in 1958 and used his lawyer status to aid the movement while championing it through the Oklahoma Eagle. When Clara Luper led a large “Freedom Parade” in North Tulsa in 1964 and was arrested, “her attorney strode into the jailhouse: Ed Goodwin Sr.,” and “Luper walked free that afternoon.”

The twin scourges of urban renewal and the crosstown expressway are discussed in Luckerson’s book. Efforts by whites to portray these as potentially positive developments for Greenwood initially created confusion and ambivalence. “By granting black people an illusion of control and a modicum of money, city leaders ended up more effectively controlling them.” But as is well known today, these were overwhelmingly destructive forces for the Greenwood District. The author says, “The Crosstown Expressway did the first half of the legwork, and urban renewal and Model Cities finished it.”

And instead of revitalizing Greenwood as leaders had promised, “In 1986, the Tulsa Urban Renewal Authority gifted two hundred acres of land to the state university system....” The Authority also committed to selling the empty land just west of the Deep Greenwood storefronts to the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce for retail and residential development.

But a few months later, Tulsa Mayor Kathy Taylor abruptly announced that the Greenwood site would instead be the home of the new Drillers stadium [baseball team]” “By the time Tulsa’s grand revitalization was finished, there would be no way to tell where downtown Tulsa ended, and Greenwood began.”

But all this did not prevent new leaders in the Greenwood District from emerging to oppose the status quo and fight for progress. Luckerson highlights some of the efforts of Oklahoma House Representative Regina Goodwin, City Councilor Vanessa Hall-Harper, and Tulsa Mayoral candidate Greg Robinson. Tiffany Crutcher, too joined the Greenwood justice efforts after the wrongful slaying of her brother Terence Crutcher by Tulsa police. Others also took up the fight for reparations and the search for the remains and proper reinternment of the victims of the Tulsa Race Massacre. And in 2022, the Oklahoma Eagle marked its one-hundredth anniversary, among the country’s oldest Black-owned and managed newspapers and under a leadership team that included M. David Goodwin, managing editor Gary Lee and executive principal Ross Johnson.

Luckerson’s **BUILT FROM THE FIRE**, an epic history of Greenwood, places the Tulsa Race Massacre in a full historical context, viewing it as a deadly inflection point in an over the one-hundred-year struggle for progress against the forces of oppression. Like other Black communities throughout the country, the greater their success became, the more likely white supremacist forces would rise against them in backlash, with more oppression and violence.

For students of Tulsa and American history, Luckerson’s book is a must-read.

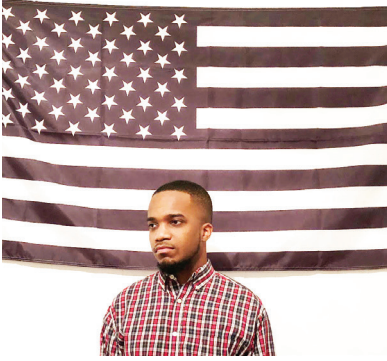


PHOTO PROVIDED

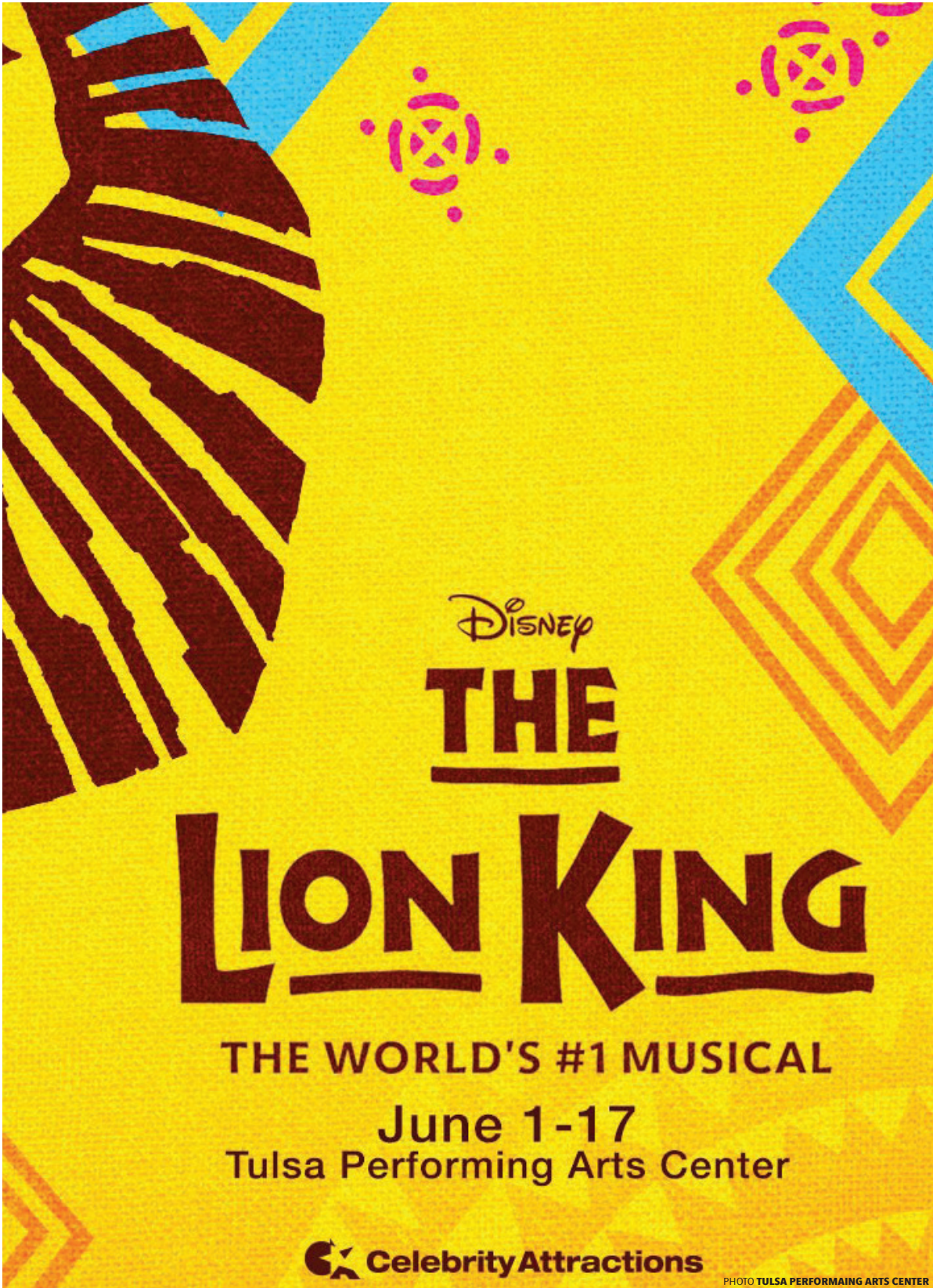
The SERENGETI COMES TO LIFE At TPAC In June

By KIMBERLY MARSH

The Lion King tells a powerful, timeless story from the lions’ perspective about the balance of nature and the interconnectedness of all living beings within a community - the circle of life.



Dates: Program run dates are June 1 - 17, 2023.	Location: Tulsa Performing Arts Center, 110 E 2nd St, Tulsa, OK 74103.	Showtimes: Tuesdays through Thursdays at 7:30 pm, Fridays at 8 pm, Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.
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The award-winning musical score by songwriter Elton John is combined with strong vocals, masterful puppetry, elaborate costumes, and mesmerizing dance and acrobatic movements as the cast fully embraces the meaning the circle of life has for all of nature.

At its heart is the Lioness Nala, who is a fierce protector and provider and a potential mate for the future king, Simba. She symbolizes the continuation of the pride’s lineage and the importance of maintaining a strong and healthy pride for future generations. The community is torn apart by power and greed in a mutiny that leads to a warring brotherhood, the death of their leader King Mufasa and Nala’s ultimate exile and division of the pride.

The upcoming stage production of Disney’s Lion King will be staged in Tulsa June 1-17 at the downtown Performing Arts Center, sponsored by Celebrity Attractions. Actor Khalifa White takes center stage in the show her dream role, playing Nala as one who feels a sense of duty and responsibility for the well-being of her pride and the future of Pride Rock.

White, who spoke to The Oklahoma Eagle from a tour stop in Madison, Wisconsin, said she connects with Nala’s sense of duty and can draw on her experience of leaving her community. Nala is a leader of a close-knit community where each member has a role and contributes to the well-being and balance of the ecosystem.

White said she is grateful for the opportunity to be part of a professional community for the last ten years and for having a positive impact on inspiring others to pursue their dreams,

“Since I knew the role existed, I wanted to be Nala,” White said, following in the footsteps of her role model, Heather Headley, who played the part on Broadway. Headley’s drive to originate new roles has inspired White as well.

White began her role as Nala performing at Disney’s Hong Kong Park, where she started understanding how to tap into her full potential. White aspires to originate roles.

“I would love to be on a Broadway cast album. It’s like a checklist of mine. And, more specifically, I would like to originate roles or a role that’s a developed character with a story I connect to.”

Ultimately, The Lion King underscores the idea that a strong community is built on trust, respect, and shared values. It encourages viewers to recognize their communities’ values and roles in nurturing and preserving them. By portraying the lion pride as a symbol of unity and interdependence, the story reminds us of the profound connections we share with others and our responsibility to support and uplift one another.

White said she was particularly moved by the show’s first five minutes. She said the so-called “Circle of Life” scene never ceases to

amaze her.

“I love to watch it whenever possible,” she said, adding that the show itself is magical and incomparable in its setting and atmosphere and a beautiful way to introduce the audience to the diverse array of animals.

“It’s unlike anything I’ve ever seen in musical form,” she said. “You’re going to feel different coming out than when you come in.”

For more on Khalifa White, see her official website at khalifawhite.com

The Lion King will play at the downtown Performing Arts Center at 102 E. 2nd Street in Tulsa Tuesdays through Thursdays at 7:30 pm, Fridays at 8 pm, Saturdays at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. from June 1 to June 17. There will be 1 p.m. matinees on Thursday, June 1, and Thursday, June 15. Tickets may be purchased at the Tulsa PAC Box Office and online at CelebrityAttractions.com. Call the Tulsa PAC Box Office at 918-596-7111 for more information.

Over 100 million people worldwide have experienced the awe-inspiring visual artistry, awarding-winning music, and uniquely theatrical storytelling of one of Broadway’s most breathtaking and beloved productions. The Lion King is a show for all ages, filled with giraffes strutting across the birds swooping over the cast and gazelles leaping through the air. The entire Serengeti comes to life as Pride Rock slowly emerges from the mist.

Winner of six Tony Awards®, including Best Musical, The Lion King brings together one of the most innovative creative teams on Broadway. Tony Award®-winning director Julie Taymor brings to life a story of hope and adventure set against a fantastic backdrop of stunning visuals. The Lion King also features the work of Tony Award®-winning choreographer Garth Fagan and some of Broadway’s most recognizable music, crafted by Tony Award®-winning artists Elton John and Tim Rice.

Performed over its lifetime in nine different languages (English, Japanese, German, Korean, French, Dutch, Spanish, Mandarin, and Portuguese), productions of THE LION KING can currently be seen on Broadway; London’s West End; Paris; Hamburg; Tokyo; Madrid; on tour across North America and the U.K. & Ireland, with a separate production touring internationally, for a total of nine shows running concurrently across the globe. Having played over 100 cities in 24 countries on every continent except Antarctica, THE LION KING’s worldwide gross exceeds that of any film, Broadway show, or other entertainment title in box office history.

TRUMP
INDICTMENTS

Prosecutor suggests any indictments in Trump election investigation would likely come in August.

B4



The Atlanta
Prosecutors
Investigation

FEATURE

The Wine Industry Is OVERWHELMINGLY WHITE

This Black Winemaker Wants To Change That

By BRIA OVERS, WORD IN BLACK



PHIL LONG, founder of Longevity Wines, estimates less than 1% of all wine brands are Black-owned. He's working to increase that number. PHOTO RON ESSEX

Winemaking is one of the oldest crafts in human history, with evidence from historians and archeologists going back as far as 6,000 B.C.

In the United States, Black folks didn't enter the industry until the late 1800s. With 15 years in the business, Longevity Wines is one of less than a hundred Black-owned wineries in an overwhelmingly white industry.

When asked about the challenges of starting a winemaking business, Winemaker Phil Long, who co-founded Longevity Wines, and is president of the Association of African American Vintners, says the biggest challenge was getting a foot in the door.

"We are such a small percentage of the entire landscape of what this industry is," he tells Word In Black. "You're starting out as a new generation of wine that's never been there before. The people have never heard of you, your name, your background. The wine business is extremely challenging."

As of January 2023, there are over 11,500 wineries in the United States. However, pinpointing the number of Black-owned wines is difficult, and Long estimates less than 1% are Black-owned.

The industry's history and legacy is extensive, and Black folks have long been barred from participating.

Wine came to the Americas in the pockets of the Europeans that immigrated here. For Black folks entering the industry now, Long says the difference is "we didn't even have pockets."

Phil and his late wife Debra Long started Longevity Wines in 2008, based in Livermore Valley, California. What began as a fun hobby in their garage is now a family-owned, award-winning business with over a dozen wine options, including Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Blanc, and Chardonnay.

Their first wine was a 30-gallon barrel of Syrah, a rich red wine they stored in their garage. After running out of space, the duo knew it was time to move upward and onward.

When they were ready to launch, they had about 12 of those 30-gallon barrels in what became a custom-built, climate-controlled barrel room.

"At that point, they were just homemade wines we could drink and share with friends, but we can't sell" because of laws around the sale of homemade wine, Long says. "In order to keep following that passion of creating wine, the only way we were going to do it is to sell it. So we jumped in."

Even after starting Longevity Wines, Debra and Phil continued with their full-time jobs.

Debra was the Office Manager for the Danville Chamber of Commerce and became interim President and CEO in 2011. Phil was the Creative Director for a point-of-purchase display firm in Northern California.

Eight years into their business venture, Debra was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and passed away in 2019.

Longevity Wines' branding, both on the bottles and in their wine-tasting room, is heavily inspired by Phil and Debra's life together and the legacy they built. Today, Long runs his business with his son, Phil Long Jr., annually producing about 3,500 cases made with local grapes.

Diversifying the Wine Industry

Long has been president of AAAP for the last three years. His focus is generating more awareness for Black-owned wineries and winemakers.

The big question Long seeks answers to is, "How do we get to the point where the people who are making the wine look like the people who are drinking the wine?"

He knows from first-hand experience the barriers to entry in the wine industry, and it's his mission to create more opportunities for young Black folks and other minorities. Long projects that with each new winery, the overall percentage of minority-owned wines will shrink.

As a young man, Long didn't know much about the wine industry. And he's not alone.

"So if I don't know, how many people don't really know this is an opportunity for them," he says. "That's why we work so hard to reach the younger generation and try to provide them with the means to learn about it."

Being educated and doing "homework," as he calls it, is another piece of the puzzle of starting and growing a wine business.

"They see the pot of gold, but they don't see the work to get to the pot of gold," Long says. "So first and foremost, do your homework and educate yourself above everything."

AAAP provides scholarships for Sonoma State University students and Wine & Spirit Education Trust students at Napa Valley Wine Academy.

"We've got to grow that number, and the bottom line is we have to start educating the younger population that is going to come up and replace us," Long told Word In Black.

That applies to his business as well.

He's working to create a generational business for his family to continue, Long says. "Creating a brand that's timeless is absolutely huge."

Growing Longevity Wines

In grocery stores nationwide, hundreds, if not thousands, of wines line aisles and shelves. This is another challenge of the winemaking business — standing out on those crowded shelves.

"Making wine is the easy part," Long says. "Selling wine is the hard part."

Long and Longevity Wines partnered with Bronco Wine Company in 2019. This helped him scale the business nationwide and sell his products in supermarkets, restaurants, bars, and more.

Bronco Wine Company is another family-owned wine business founded by the Franzia Family in 1973. Their portfolio of wine companies has 125 businesses, including Longevity Wines.

Through the partnership, Longevity Wines produces about 50,000 cases each year.

Although the partnership has helped, there's more to running a successful business. He doesn't believe in the common saying, "If you build, they will come." That relies on chance instead of hard work.

His perspective is to convince stores to want to make space for new products on their shelves. Having a solid marketing strategy helps with this.

However, the best way to stand out in the crowd, Long says, is a great product.

"You have to have good juice, and there's no way around that."

The industry's history
and legacy is extensive,
and Black folks have
long been barred from
participating.

Prosecutor SUGGEST ANY INDICTMENT IN TRUMP ELECTION INVESTIGATION WOULD LIKELY COME IN AUGUST

By Kate Brumback
Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The Atlanta prosecutor investigating whether then-President Donald Trump and others broke the law while trying to overturn his 2020 election loss in Georgia seems to be suggesting that any grand jury indictments in the case would likely come in August.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis sent a letter Thursday sent a letter to county Superior Court Chief Judge Ural Glanville indicating that she plans to have much of her staff work remotely for most days during the first three weeks of August and asking that judges not schedule trials and in-person hearings during part of that time. Copied in on the letter are 20 other county officials, including Sheriff Pat Labat, the court clerk and top leaders.

“Thank you for your consideration and assistance in keeping the Fulton County Judicial Complex safe during this time,” Willis wrote in the letter, first reported by The New York Times.

Willis last month wrote local law enforcement leaders advising them that she intended to announce charging decisions in the case between July 11 and Sept. 1. Thursday’s letter seems to narrow that window. In the

earlier letters she advised law enforcement to prepare for “heightened security,” noting that the announcement of charges “may provoke a significant public reaction.”

For more than two years, Willis and her team have been scrutinizing actions Trump and others took as they tried to overturn his narrow loss in Georgia to Democrat Joe Biden.

She wrote in the letter to Glanville that she plans to reduce the staffing in her office by about 70% on most Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays — the days when grand juries meet in Fulton County — between July 31 and Aug. 18. But she said her “leadership team, all armed investigators” and some other staff would continue to be on site during the remote work days.

Willis noted that most judges will be attending an annual state judicial conference from July 31 to Aug. 4, and she asked that they not schedule trials or in-person hearings the weeks of Aug. 7 and Aug. 14. But she said her office will be present and ready to go for any in-person proceedings during that time. If in-person hearings are scheduled when most of her staff is working remotely, she wrote, they would be handled by senior leadership.

The Georgia investigation is one of



FULTON COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY FANI WILLIS poses for a portrait, Wednesday, April 19, 2023, in Atlanta.
PHOTO AP PHOTO/BRYNN ANDERSON

The Georgia investigation is one of several that threatens the former president as he campaigns to regain the White House in 2024.

several that threatens the former president as he campaigns to regain the White House in 2024.

A Manhattan grand jury in March indicted him on 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up hush-money payments to a porn actor during the 2016 presidential election. Federal grand juries in Washington are investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to undo the results of the 2020 presidential

election and the potential mishandling of classified documents by Trump at his Florida estate.

A federal jury in New York recently found Trump liable for sexually abusing advice columnist E. Jean Carroll in 1996, awarding her \$5 million.

The Oklahoma Eagle

Arts
Culture
History
Education
Business
Faith

A black and white photograph of a person's face and upper body. The person is wearing thick-rimmed glasses and a denim jacket over a striped shirt. They are looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is blurred.

The Oklahoma Eagle

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DOLLAR GENERAL
LITERACY
FOUNDATION

CHURCH DIRECTORY

BIKES in Greenwood

Photos by Sam Levrault Media



PHOTOS SAM LEVRULT MEDIA

BLACK WALL STREET RALLY, an annual motorcycle event in Historical Greenwood District, invites attendees from across the nation to gather for two days of live music, sound competitions, bike shows, panels, and other live entertainment.



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2023 GRANT RECIPIENTS

Toward addressing disparities rooted in white supremacy and systemic racism, the Commemoration Fund is proud to announce 2023 grants in support of:

1ST STEP MALE DIVISION PROGRAM, INC.

Purchase of a new 10-person van to transport program participants to daily classes, counseling sessions, court appearances, and supportive activities.

THE BAIL PROJECT

Support for the Tulsa-affiliate of this national organization that provides voluntary community-based pretrial support and bail assistance for people who cannot afford bail.

BEHEARD MOVEMENT

Support for mobile resource center to provide showers, haircuts, and laundry services for people experiencing homelessness.

BIRTHRIGHT LIVING LEGACY

Support for grassroots effort providing fatherhood programming and family support.

CASA DE LA CULTURA

Support for engaging programs designed for the preservation, promotion, and advancement of the Latinx culture and arts.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES TULSA

Support for Immigration Legal Services, a nonprofit clinic offering removal defense and assistance to asylum seekers.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CONNECTION

Grant funds for a pilot program benefiting Latinx patients diagnosed with diabetes or prediabetes.

CROSSOVER COMMUNITY IMPACT

Support for StreetLeader Program, offering employment opportunities for teenagers in North Tulsa.

DOWNTOWN TULSA PARTNERSHIP

Grant funds for PopUp Downtown, an initiative to match under-represented entrepreneurs with commercial space.

EAST TULSA MAIN STREET

Support for community engagement and business support programs in the Tulsa Global District.

FOUNDATION FOR TULSA SCHOOLS

Support for CHAMPS Male Mentoring Program to serve Black and Latinx students with a culturally informed lens.

GUIDING RIGHT INC.

Grant funds for BePrEPARED, an effort to raise awareness of PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) and reduce the risk of HIV for Black women in Tulsa.

J.A.M.E.S. INC.

Support for case management and scholarship opportunities for adolescent parents.

JEWISH FEDERATION OF TULSA

K-12 field trip support for Sherwin Miller Museum’s exhibit that invites students to explore the role of white supremacy in the Jewish holocaust and the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

LA COSECHA

A purchase of a forklift and other capital improvements to distribute food primarily to economically under-resourced Latinx residents in Tulsa.

LEADERSHIP TULSA

Funding for expansion of the after-school development program focused on building the next generation of diverse civic and community leaders.

MEALS ON WHEELS OF METRO TULSA

Support for food distribution, language translation, and development of strategic relationships in East Tulsa.

MET CARES FOUNDATION

Grant funds for The Hometown Collective, an initiative to provide North Tulsa high school students with internships within in-demand industries.

NEW HOPE OKLAHOMA

Program support to interrupt the cycle of incarceration through after-school programs and summer camps for children of justice-involved parents.

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS INC.

Funding for the FreshRX ‘Food is Medicine’ designed to improve health metrics for people living with Type 2 diabetes in North Tulsa with locally-sourced fresh foods.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INSTITUTE OF OKLAHOMA

Support for training in restorative practices designed to reduce trauma, dehumanization, and recidivism in schools and organizations.

SPEAKS 4 YOU, INC.

Grants funds to offer comprehensive scholarship literacy resources to underserved students of color.

SUPPORTERS OF FAMILIES WITH SICKLE CELL DISEASE, INC.

Support for a comprehensive continuum of care for Sickle Cell Disease which impacts Black people at disproportionate rates.

THEATRE NORTH

Support for a long-established North Tulsa, Black-led theatre program that stages and presents plays reflecting the Black experience.

THUNDER FELLOWS

Funding to build new opportunities in sports, entertainment, and technology for Black high school and college students in the Tulsa area.

TRI-CITY COLLECTIVE

Support for this award-winning professional broadcast journalism effort that engages the local public on issues important to communities of color.

TULSA BIKE SHARE

Grants funds toward repair, recovery, and replacement of damaged bikes in Greenwood, Kendall Whittier, and the Phoenix District.

TULSA CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Funding to extend STEAM Pathways to a multi-event in-school model in North Tulsa elementary schools.

URBAN CODERS GUILD

Support for a creative after-school tech-training program for middle and high school students of color to develop a more inclusive tech ecosystem.

WOMEN EMPOWERING NATIONS

Support to relaunch the Girls Leading Our World Tulsa project to provide leadership and career development programming to Black high school girls.



Commemoration Fund Board and Staff

Learn more about the Commemoration Fund board at [CommemorationFund.org](https://www.commemorationfund.org)