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SERVING GREATER TULSA SINCE 1921

WEEK
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**SINCE THE
1921
TULSA
RACE
MASSACRE**

It's long overdue for the criminals who destroyed the Greenwood community in 1921 to be held accountable. Each week we remember a departed member of our community.

NATION
**BLACK MEN ARE SHIFTING
THE MENTAL HEALTH
NARRATIVE A13**

By ANISSA DURHAM, WORD IN BLACK

NATION
**A NEW DAWN: MICHIGAN'S
\$21.5 BILLION K-12 BUDGET AND
PROMISE A14**

By EBONY JJ CURRY, WORD IN BLACK

Thousands of Residents
In Oklahoma Remain
**WITHOUT
POWER**

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — Thousands of residents in Oklahoma and Louisiana remained without electricity Wednesday as work crews continued to repair power lines damaged by weekend storms.

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

**WEEKEND STORMS On
A3**




PHOTO ROSS JOHNSON

STATE

**LAWMAKER SEEKS STUDY ON
PROTECTING OKLAHOMA'S BALLOT
INITIATIVE PROCESS**

By KEATON ROSS, OKLAHOMA WATCH

Legislative efforts to add hurdles to Oklahoma's ballot initiative process fizzled out at the Capitol this year, but one Democratic lawmaker is concerned similar proposals will gain traction in the future.

PROTECTING OKLAHOMA'S BALLOT *cont. A6*

STATE

**SAYING EMPLOYEES 'DESERVE
BETTER,' ODVA INTERIM DIRECTOR
REQUESTS PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

By MICHAEL McNUTT, NONDOC

While trying to address a delayed and over-cost veterans home project in Sallisaw and revelations that personal identification information is being stored in datasets hosted outside of the state network, the Oklahoma Department of

PERFORMANCE AUDIT REQUESTED *cont. A7*

STATE

**AUGUST TARGETED FOR
SELECTING NEW OKLAHOMA
COUNTY JAIL SITE**

By MATT PATTERSON, NONDOC

The Oklahoma County Citizens Bond Oversight Committee is targeting August as its deadline to recommend a site location to the Board of County Commissioners for the new jail approved by voters last year, although the decision


NEW OKLAHOMA COUNTY JAIL SITE *cont. A8*

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#THE OK EAGLE
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PUBLISHER'S PAGE
The Selmon Brothers
The pride of Eufaula, these brothers dominated opposing offenses while playing football. **A4**

AD SERVICES
Jobs & Classifieds
Discover career opportunities, classifieds and time-sensitive notifications. **A11**

CHURCH DIRECTORY
Faith In Tulsa
The Eagle Church Directory is your source for finding a place to worship. **A12**


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AUDIT SHOWS OK LIKELY
MISSPENT MILLIONS

Improper oversight by state officials led to more than \$29 million in federal funds being misspent. A7

OKLAHOMA PRISONS
LOCKED DOWN

OK Department of Corrections has locked down all prisons statewide and canceled all visitations following a stabbing. A10



BIG
BONUSES,
BIGGER
RISKS: Oklahoma's
New Teacher Bonus
Program Raises
Concern

By JENNIFER PALMER AND BETH WALLIS, OKLAHOMA WATCH
BIG BONUSES, BIGGER RISKS



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Signing bonuses of as much as \$50,000 are what Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters said is needed to attract new and retired teachers to the classroom.

That's also what makes his new bonus plan a risky policy.

Schools reported more than 1,000 teaching vacancies at the start of the 2022-23 school year and used more than 4,100 emergency-certified teachers to staff classrooms. Emergency certificates allow schools to hire people with at least a bachelor's degree to fill a teaching position. Often, they have no formal training in teaching, though sometimes they are teachers certified in a different subject area.

Walters in April announced the initiative to use \$16 million in federal funds to fund sign-on bonuses aimed at drawing teachers to early elementary and special education positions for the upcoming school year.

Bonuses Are Not For Teachers Who Stayed

Only educators who did not teach last year are eligible. They have to be certified and teach early elementary or special education. Working in a rural or high-poverty district or moving to Oklahoma qualifies a teacher for a larger bonus.

At least 500 teachers have applied so far, Walters said in a public meeting May 25.

In Deer Creek Public Schools, 17 new hires qualify for a bonus under the plan.

"I'm excited about my new teacher coming from California and she's going to teach third grade. But \$50,000 is an awfully big amount for one teacher," said Deer Creek Superintendent Jason Perez.

"I would like to try to attract as many with signing bonuses as possible, and maybe we could have spread that money a little bit."

Perez said he's concerned that awarding

new or inexperienced educators large bonuses will hurt morale considering longtime educators have stuck it out through many challenges in the past few years.

Matt Riggs, the superintendent at Macomb Public Schools, a small district about an hour southeast of Oklahoma City, echoed some of Perez's concerns.

"If you've been loyal to the school district and you've stayed ... then somebody else gets to come in and get a bonus, I think it kind of makes you sit up and lament the fact that you've stayed," he said.

'We're Not a Collection Agency'

To sign up for the bonuses, applicants commit to teach for five years.

Districts are directed to claw back a prorated amount from teachers who don't fulfill that commitment. A teacher who leaves after two years would have to pay back three years of bonus money, even if they start at a new school, move out of state or stop teaching altogether.

That's because some of the money for the program is coming from federal pandemic relief funds, money the state will have to repay if unspent by Sept. 30, 2024.

The state's guidance also isn't clear about whether districts must claw back funds from teachers who leave before five years, or how they would collect if a teacher refused or was unable to pay. In one answer, the document states districts are responsible for collecting; in another answer addressing the districts' costs to collect, it says those costs would be at districts' discretion if they chose to collect payments.

"That seems like a really tough thing to pull off," said Perez, the Deer Creek superintendent. "I don't even know what leverage I would have. It's not like I can repossess their teaching certificate or their car. I don't have any of that power."

Oklahoma law prohibits teacher



A SECOND-GRADER raises her hand in class at Nichols Hills Elementary School in this 2020 file photo. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH FILE

“The federal government’s Indian boarding school policies caused unimaginable suffering and trauma that linger on in tribal communities today.”

SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN,
Democratic, Massachusetts

contracts beyond one year and doesn't allow districts to withhold teachers' pay.

Suing former employees for leaving their district is not only a daunting thought, it can be expensive.

Riggs, of Macomb, said while his district could withstand the cost this year, the district's budget has been so tight in the past that a legal expedition to clawback funds could have broken the bank.

He said that is a risk he's not interested in signing his district up for.

"That's not money coming out of our budget..." Riggs said. "Why in the world would we want to try to recoup that money on behalf of the state? We're not a collection agency."

Federal Funds, Federal Regulations

After Walters announced the program, Matt Colwell, who served as the executive director of school success at the state department's Office of Federal Programs, contacted the U.S. Department of Education to find out whether the program would meet federal regulations and what

BIG BONUSES, BIGGER RISKS cont. A9

Weekend STORM DAMAGE



DOWNTOWN TULSA PARKING GARAGE sustained significant damage during the storms. PHOTO ROSS JOHNSON

WEEKENDS STORMS *from AI*

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, less than 92,000 customers remained without power after three tornadoes northeast of the city caused extensive damage Sunday, including downed trees and hundreds of snapped utility poles.

The three tornadoes were each rated EF1 with winds between 86 miles per hour (138 kilometers per hour) and 110 miles per hour (177 kilometers per hour), National Weather Service meteorologist Joe Sellers said Wednesday.

“There was a lot of wind damage, but most of the damage was straight line winds,” Sellers said.

Thunderstorms that moved through the Tulsa area on Wednesday slowed down repair crews, Wayne Greene, a spokesperson for Public Service Company of Oklahoma, the state’s second largest electric utility provider, said at a news conference Wednesday afternoon.

“Our numbers actually bumped up a little bit,” Greene said. “But we’re making good progress again.”

At the height of the power outage on Sunday, more than 200,000 customers were without power.

Officials expected the prolonged outages in the Tulsa area to possibly last into the weekend for some residents.

City officials have set up cooling centers for residents. Tulsa was under a heat advisory Wednesday as hot temperatures and high humidity created dangerous conditions for several hours. Another heat advisory was set for Thursday. A heat wave has kept large swaths of the southern U.S. in triple-digit temperatures for the past week.

“Everybody is going to get through this together as

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, less than 92,000 customers remained without power after three tornadoes northeast of the city caused extensive damage Sunday.

“Everybody is going to get through this together as long as we remain neighborly and help one another.”

JOE KRALICEK, director, Tulsa Area Emergency Management Agency.

long as we remain neighborly and help one another,” said Joe Kralicek, director of the Tulsa Area Emergency Management Agency.

In northwest Louisiana, huge uprooted and toppled trees still littered parts of the landscape five days after high straight-line winds and a tornado tore through the area early Friday.

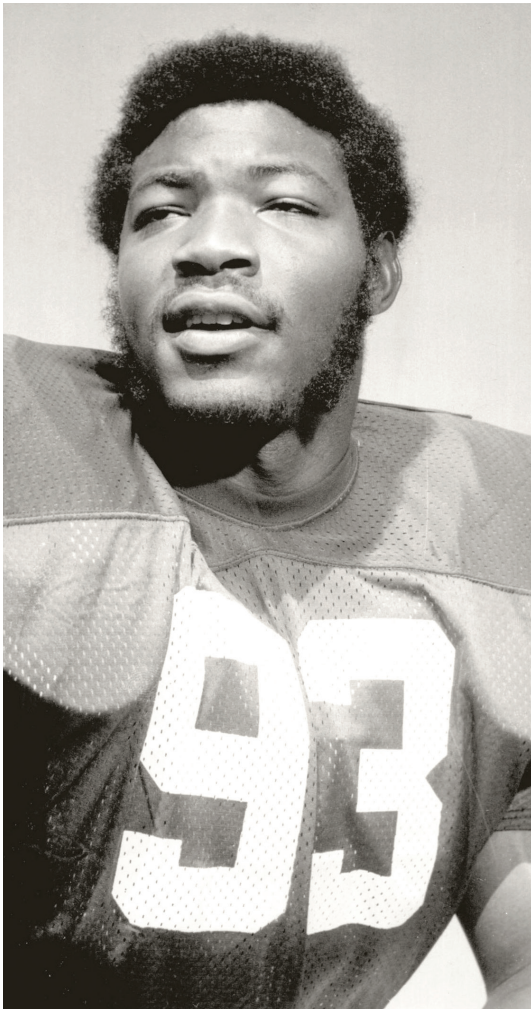
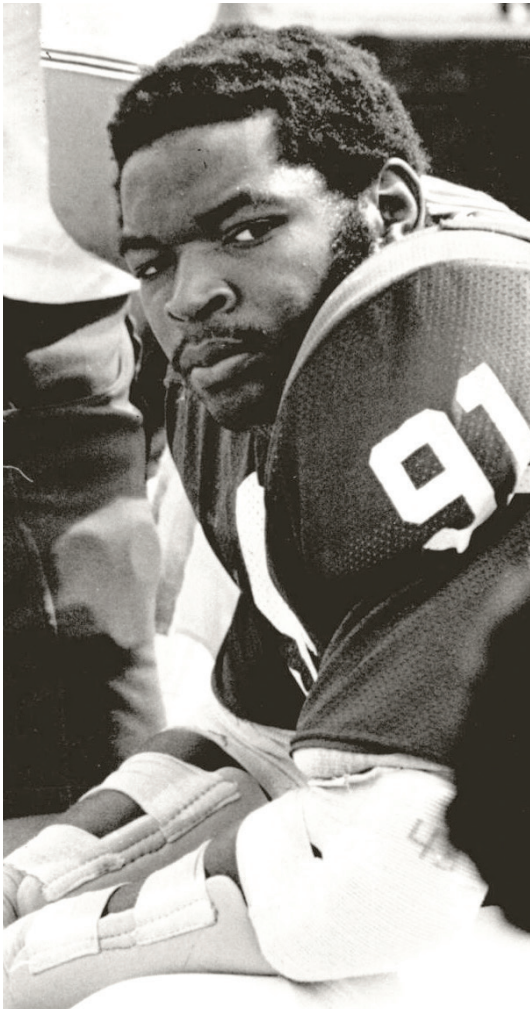
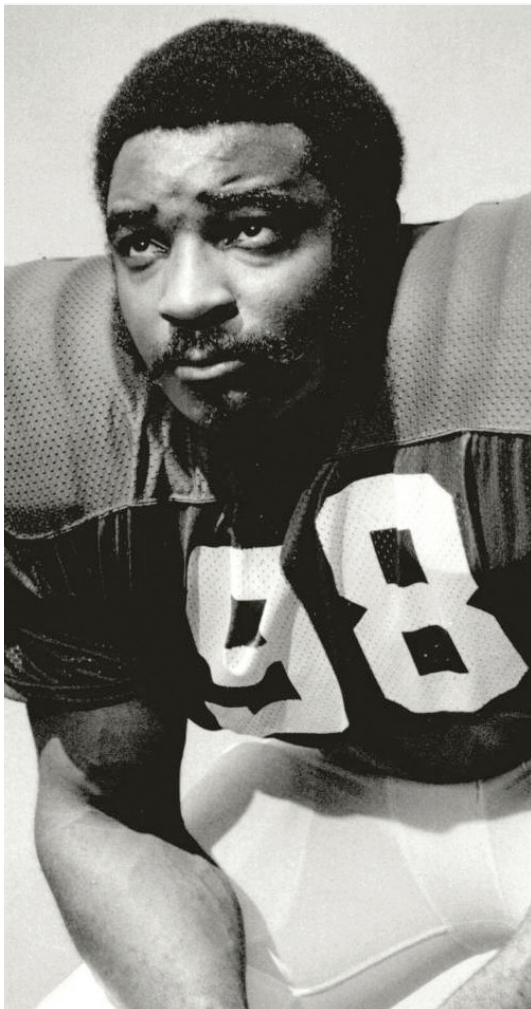
The storm had knocked out power for more than 250,000 people in the area. Electricity was restored to all but about 32,000 by Wednesday afternoon. Most were in the Shreveport and Caddo Parish area, and most were customers of Southwestern Electric Power Company, which provides much of the power in that part of the state. About 3,000 workers from multiple states were part of the repair effort.

Cooling centers for people without power or air conditioning remained open in and around Shreveport with Wednesday temperatures in the mid-90s (35 degrees Celsius) and heat indices as high as 114 degrees Fahrenheit (46 degrees Celsius).

Selmon Brothers: The Pride Of Eufaula

By LARRY O'DELL, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE

The pride of Eufaula, these brothers dominated opposing offenses while playing football at the University of Oklahoma (OU).



Lucious II (born March 15, 1951), Dewey Willis (born November 19, 1953), and Lee Roy (born October 20, 1954) Selmon, all born at Muskogee, were three of nine siblings who grew up outside Eufaula. Eufaula High School coach Paul Bell coaxed Lucious into running track in the seventh grade and eventually interested him in football. The two younger Selmon brothers, born eleven months apart, belonged to the same class and followed their older brother into football.

University of Oklahoma assistant coach Larry Lacewell traveled to Eufaula to recruit Lucious and, although he had some apprehension about the youngster’s size, he noticed the younger brothers and offered the scholarship. Lacewell hoped he would eventually have Dewey and Lee Roy wearing OU crimson. Lucious exceeded the expectations of Lacewell’s first visit, becoming an All-American and three-year starter. Dewey and Lee Roy did follow Lucious to Norman, and both skipped the freshman squad to play varsity football their first season. Lucious earned All-American honors in 1973, and

Lee Roy and Dewey achieved All-American status in 1974 and 1975, the years that Oklahoma won national championships. Lee Roy also won the Outland and Vince Lombardi trophies in 1975. All three brothers were also accomplished students, and Dewey eventually attained a doctorate in philosophy.

After college Lucious played in the World Football League for the Memphis Southmen. After one season he returned to OU as an assistant coach. In 1995 he left the Sooners and became the linebackers coach for the National Football League’s Jacksonville Jaguars.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers selected Lee Roy as the first pick of their new franchise and the first selection in the 1976 National Football League (NFL) draft. While Lee Roy was with the Buccaneers, the league named him All-Pro six times, and he became the first Tampa Bay player to have his number retired. For thirteen years he held the club’s team record for quarterback sacks, before Warren Sapp broke it in 2000. In 1986 Lee Roy retired from football because he had injured his back. Two years later he was inducted into the College Football

Hall of Fame. He also became the first former OU football player elected to the NFL Hall of Fame. In 1993 the University of Southern Florida hired him as associate athletic director and then promoted him to athletic director in 2001. In 2000 he opened Lee Roy Selmon’s restaurant in Tampa, Florida, which has an expressway named in his honor. He died on September 4, 2011.

In the second round of the 1976 draft Tampa Bay selected Dewey, making the Selmon brothers the first two picks of their organization. Dewey played for the Buccaneers until 1982, and then the team traded him to the San Diego Chargers. After one year with the Chargers Dewey returned to Norman and worked as an oil and gas consultant. He served on the Norman Housing Authority board, and in 1993 he opened his own construction business.

In 1988 the Selmon brothers began marketing their Selmon Brothers Fine Bar-B-Q Sauce. Their older brother, Charles, developed the sauce for his Selmon Brothers Bar-B-Q restaurant in Wichita, Kansas. Brothers Chester and Elmer also lived in that city at the end of the twentieth century.

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.

(LEFT) LUCIOUS SELMON (2012.201.B1160.0531, (CENTER) DEWEY SELMON (2012.201.B1160.0413), (RIGHT) LEE ROY SELMON (2012.201.B1160.0435) Oklahoma. Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

Featured Last Week



All The Fixins: Welcome To Black Wall Street’s New Eatery



TPD Defy Department Policy By Hiding Internal Investigation



Educators Nationwide Pledge to Teach Truth in Schools

The Oklahoma Eagle

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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS OVER

The Time for Reparations Is Now

By **ROGER HOUSE**, WORD IN BLACK
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION from AI

After the Supreme Court's decision, we must urgently refocus on an agenda for equitable restitution addressing slavery and Jim Crow's economic toll.

Affirmative action was a promise to deliver economic justice to Black America that fell short. It was envisioned as an array of “helping hand” policies for the descendants of enslaved people designed by the authorities that had enslaved them. It offered a slow walk to restitution based on fair access to schools, loans, jobs, and housing.

The Supreme Court decision on college admissions upends the promise. By a vote of 6 to 3, the court rejected the programs at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina as unlawful.

The decision involves the admissions processes at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina, the flagship institutions of private and public education. The cases share a common petitioner: Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), a group whose members believe that the consideration of race in college admissions — even to correct historical wrongs of racism — is unconstitutional.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority, agreed that the “admissions programs lack sufficiently focused and measurable objectives warranting the use of race, unavoidably employ race in a negative manner, involve racial stereotyping, and lack meaningful end points.”

The decision returns Black America to a crossroads of restitution for the wrongs of slavery and Jim Crow. Since the decades after the Civil War, the challenge has been to find pathways to economic justice. One strategy has looked to individual and class-action claims for reparations, another to the promise of affirmative action and inclusion.

The Shrinking of Affirmative Action

Since the 1930s, Black leadership has embraced government and company employment tools to break down historic barriers of race. Such policies worked to open doors in government offices, defense factories, and the armed services during World War II and afterward. By the 1960s, civil rights leaders expressed confidence that “affirmative action” policies could deliver a measure of economic justice.

From the start, however, the reliance on administrative tools as a primary means of restitution was stifled by persistent legal challenges, political opposition, and negative court decisions. Critics have promoted the alternative policy of a “colorblind” approach—though it has failed to address the historic and systemic inequities.

The Supreme Court decision on the Harvard and UNC admissions programs will affect the way students apply to colleges and universities and, ultimately, the number of Black students enrolled in the schools with the most resources.

The Quest for Reparations

Since the Civil War, Black Americans have initiated claims for restitution for the unjust enrichment from slavery. Understand that more than 90% of Black Americans are related to the original 400,000 Africans brought to America as commodities of labor. The pool grew to more than 4 million by the Civil War, and their bodies made America great.

America became an economic powerhouse from the institution of slavery, according to authors Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman in “Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development.” Africans were the primary assets of

national wealth as commodities for work, sale, rent, and childbirth. They helped to build the industries of agriculture, shipping, manufacturing, railroads, publishing, finance, and insurance.

In addition to slavery, people have initiated claims for restitution for the unjust enrichment from Jim Crow, the laws and practices of racial subjugation. The loss of wages, farmland, family wealth, and markets for business stretched nearly a century and even excluded Black workers from transformational government programs like Social Security.

Among the notable claims for restitution in recent years was the 2002 lawsuit by attorney Deadria Farmer-Paellman. She filed a class action in federal court against financial institutions with ties to slavery. The claim received a degree of validation in the proceedings.

Attorney Patricia Muhammad explored appeals to the International Criminal Court in the book, “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Forgotten Crime against Humanity as Defined by International Law.” In 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights concluded that the U.S. was among the states that owe reparations to the descendants of enslaved people.

In recent years, private actors have tried to find ways to wrest back stolen wealth, as documented by Ta-Nehisi Coates in his famous essay for The Atlantic, “The Case for Reparations.” Family claims have been made to recover the value of lost farmland, business, and homes. State and local institutions have also explored pathways to restitution, such as a California task force on reparations.

The Days Ahead

As the dust from the Supreme Court decision settles, Black political leaders would be prudent to explore a new agenda of restitution for the unjust enrichment from slavery and Jim Crow.

Any agenda should encourage reliable structures for filing claims. And it should prioritize the distribution of awards in the areas of pensions, workforce development, affordable housing, debt relief, health insurance, and youth recovery.

The agenda should also seek new ways to gain access to the resources — educational, employment, and contracting — to the upper-tier schools, most of which were enriched under slavery and Jim Crow. One approach is the reparation initiative by students at Georgetown University.

To be clear, the Black community will gain more from an agenda that directs investments to HBCUs and programs at community colleges and urban public colleges that serve large numbers of their students.

Beyond the question of financial wholeness, the demand for reparations for slavery and Jim Crow has cultural merit as well. Randall Robinson, in “The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks,” argued that the demands for reparations have roots in the dignity of Black America.

ROGER HOUSE is associate professor of American Studies at Emerson College and the author of “Blue Smoke: The Recorded Journey of Big Bill Broonzy” and “South End Shout: Boston’s Forgotten Music Scene in the Jazz Age.” A version of this commentary first appeared in The Daily Beast.



PHOTO ADOBE STOCK

The POWER TO SHAPE THE PUBLIC POLICY OF OKLAHOMA

PROTECTING OKLAHOMA'S BALLOT *from AI*

Rep. Mickey Dollens, D-Oklahoma, announced he's seeking an interim study on preserving and defending the state's method of direct democracy. While not every state gives voters the right to modify the constitution, it's important to protect a process that gives voters the power to act on issues when their representatives don't, Dollens said in a news release.

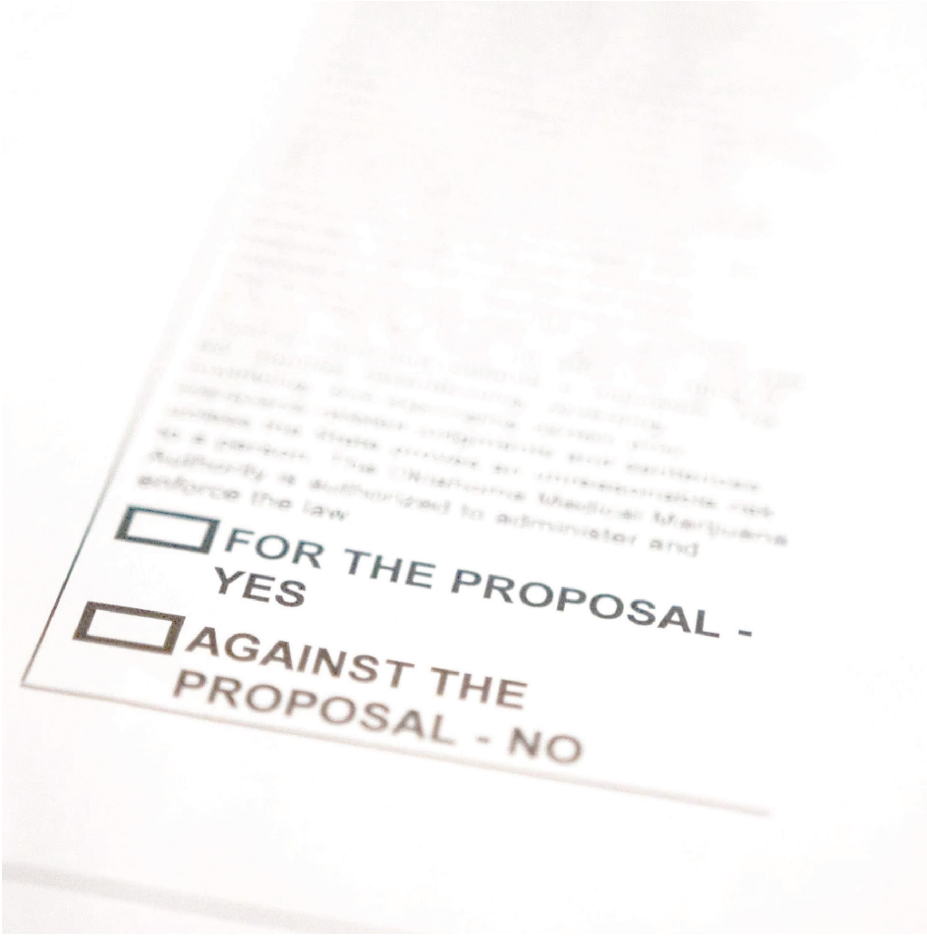
"Oklahoma has a proud history of citizen-led initiatives that have driven significant policy changes," Dollens said. "The power to shape our public policy includes the citizens of Oklahoma, extending beyond solely elected officials and special interest groups."

Following the narrow passage of the Medicaid expansion question in 2020, several rural Republican lawmakers filed resolutions seeking to raise the threshold for initiative petitions to pass or set additional requirements for signature collection, such as requiring a percentage of signatures to be collected in every congressional district or county.

In statements and media interviews, these lawmakers cited concerns that the process is tilted in favor of voters in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa metro areas. Republican lawmakers in Ohio and Missouri have pushed for similar restrictions over fear that voters could overturn abortion restrictions.

Because the ballot initiative process is enshrined in the state constitution, the Legislature does not have the independent authority to change most aspects of the initiative petition process. It can, however, vote to put a constitutional amendment to a statewide vote of the people. That happened in Florida in 2006, when voters approved an amendment raising the threshold for constitutional amendments to pass from 51% to 60%.

Rep. Mickey Dollens, D-Oklahoma, announced he's seeking an interim study on preserving and defending the state's method of direct democracy.



STATE QUESTION 820 proposed bringing recreational marijuana to Oklahoma. With 95% of the votes counted Tuesday night, Oklahomans rejected the measure by a margin of 61.7% against to 38.3%. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Lawmakers have some oversight over the administrative process of how an initiative reaches the ballot. For instance, the Legislature passed a bill in 2021 requiring organizers to include a fiscal impact statement and identify a potential funding source if it affects the state budget.

In February, organizers feared a bill raising the threshold for signature verification would prompt costly legal challenges and thwart efforts by grassroots groups. That measure cleared the Senate and stalled in the House.

House and Senate leadership typically takes up interim study requests in early July. Last year, Senate Pro Tem Greg Treat approved 41 of 60 requests while House Speaker Charles McCall granted all 82 requests submitted to his office. Study sessions are typically scheduled from August through November.

Though interim studies don't generate formal votes or policy recommendations, they often offer a glimpse at issues lawmakers intend to prioritize in the coming session. Lawmakers who request the study are tasked with inviting speakers and setting the stage for discussion, which occasionally leads to concerns of bias or that relevant topics have intentionally been omitted.

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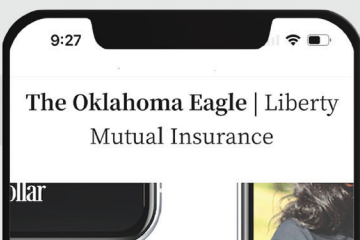
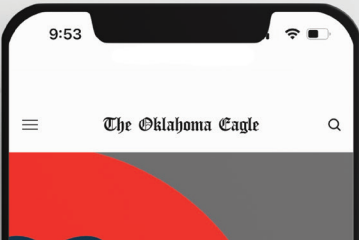




PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

ODVA’S LEADERSHIP DEMANDS Performance Audit

“I’ve never taken over the leadership of an organization without an audit to review the many aspects of the company.”

— GREG SLAVONIC, ODVA interim executive director



OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREG SLAVONIC exits the building following a Veterans Commission meeting Friday, May 12, 2023. PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

PERFORMANCE AUDIT REQUESTED from AI

Veterans Affairs’ new executive director has requested a performance audit from the State Auditor and Inspector’s Office.

ODVA interim executive director Greg Slavonic, hired by the Oklahoma Veterans Commission in March, asked this morning that the special audit cover the period from Jan. 1, 2021, through Dec 31, 2023. A previous audit of ODVA from 2018 identified a litany of office culture concerns that Slavonic and current members of the Veterans Commission say have lingered over the last five years.

Slavonic’s request for an audit comes just ahead of his 14th week as interim executive director, a position he accepted March 10 after the Veterans Commission terminated former ODVA director Joel Kintsel and former deputy director Sarah Lane. Kintsel took over in the wake of a damning 2018 state audit.

“I’ve never taken over the leadership of an organization without an audit to review the many aspects of the company,” said Slavonic, a retired rear admiral and a former undersecretary of the U.S. Navy. “Since I did not have the opportunity for an orderly turnover from ODVA senior leadership due to terminations or resignations, my ability to gain an insight into the agency and ask questions was not possible. This audit will provide objective insight into the agency and identify past discrepancies for corrective action.”

Kintsel, who had stopped attending commission meetings prior to his termination, had argued that three members of the Veterans Commission had been improperly appointed by Gov. Kevin Stitt, whom he unsuccessfully challenged in the June 2022 Republican primary for governor. Kintsel alleged massive “corruption” by Stitt’s administration, including unverified claims that an ODVA computer was improperly accessed by the Office of Management and Enterprise Services, and he clashed with new members of the Veterans Commission installed by Stitt throughout 2022.

Meanwhile, those commissioners heard a report Feb. 16 from the state’s chief information officer that veterans’ personal identification information is being stored in datasets hosted outside of the state network. Kintsel did not attend that Veterans Commission meeting, nor others in January.

At one meeting, other ODVA staff members were left to answer questions about the delayed and over-cost Oklahoma veterans home project in Sallisaw, which has since received about \$21 million in supplemental funding from the Legislature owing to issues with the original architect and agency cost estimates. Kintsel’s absence from that meeting infuriated several ODVA staff members, who had already been irked by Kintsel’s leave of absence in 2022 to run for governor.

‘Dedicated staff of ODVA deserve better’

After taking over the agency, Slavonic’s administration conducted an employee survey in April as part of an effort to identify and improve responsiveness to employee concerns. At its May 12 meeting, the Veterans Commission received preliminary results of the survey as well as statistics showing that the agency had seen 647 resignations and 108 terminations over the prior year.

Slavonic told commissioners that many ODVA staff members had not received compensation increases for six or seven years.

“There were many comments about employees feeling they were being bullied. Possible harassment issues,” he said.

Veterans Commission Vice Chairman Sid Ellington said commissioners would be launch “lunch and learn” meetings with staff to improve communication and cultural concerns “so that we mitigate what has been described repeatedly in the survey as toxic leadership and retaliatory actions.”

“We’re going to try to get a handle on that,” Ellington said. “Many people who filled out the survey (...) were worried about retaliation. That’s a leadership issue, and we’ve got new leadership in place.”

In his press release Tuesday announcing the ODVA audit request, Slavonic said it is his “duty” to create a better environment for agency employees.

“The hardworking and dedicated staff of ODVA deserve better,” he said. “It’s my duty to deliver on that promise.”

The Veterans Commission is scheduled to meet in a special meeting at 8:30 a.m. Thursday, June 22, at the Vezey Veterans Complex, 2132 NE 36th St., Oklahoma City.

In Slavonic’s press release Tuesday, he noted that the Performance Audit Services group within the State Auditor and Inspector’s Office conducts performance audits in accordance with government auditing standards. The release said performance audits provide “an objective and systematic examination of evidence to provide an independent assessment of the performance and management of a program against objective criteria.”

In a special audit report released in August 2018, former State Auditor Gary Jones stated: “This is the third audit released on the ODVA in the last five years and is probably the most troubling. The issue, really, comes down to management style, common decency, respect for its mission, and the potential impact on patient care.”

MICHAEL MCNUTT became NonDoc’s managing editor in January 2023. He has been a journalist for nearly 40 years, working at The Oklahoman for 30 years, heading up its Enid bureau and serving as night city editor, assistant news editor and State Capitol reporter. He is an inductee of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. Most recently, he served as communications director for former Gov. Mary Fallin and then for the Office of Juvenile Affairs. Send tips and story ideas to mcnutt@nondoc.com

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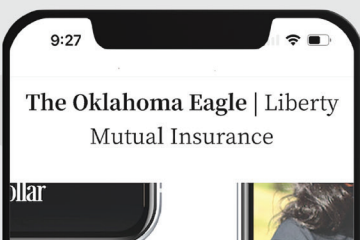
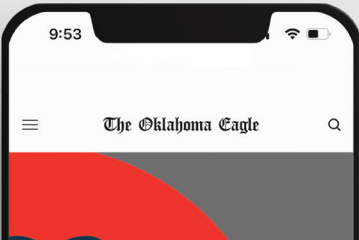




PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Bond funding for the \$300 million facility was approved by county voters in June 2022 following years of community discussion about the need for a new jail to replace the troubled facility that has been marred by problems since it opened in 1991.

NEW OKLAHOMA COUNTY JAIL SITE *from AI*

could come as early as July.

The committee is currently evaluating 10 sites for the new jail. Bond funding for the \$300 million facility was approved by county voters in June 2022 following years of community discussion about the need for a new jail to replace the troubled facility that has been marred by problems since it opened in 1991. The Oklahoma County Jail has seen a rash of detainee deaths in recent years that has outraged many in the community.

At a meeting today, the August target date was revealed during a discussion among committee member Xavier Neira, Chairman Steve Mason and county engineer Stacey Trumbo about the project’s architect and potential contractors.

Global design firm HOK has been selected by the committee as the architectural firm to design the new jail. That firm has designed buildings in the United States and around the world, according to its website.

Previously, HOK had also been hired to study options for a new county jail in 2021. At the time, those options included refurbishing the current building. Ultimately, HOK recommended to the county that it build a completely new facility.

“I guess what I’m sensing is that we’d like to make a recommendation in August,” Mason said to fellow committee members.

Neira, who has construction industry experience, replied.

“I think we make our recommendation earlier, but it’s up to Stacey’s team to decide the right timing to coincide with the architect’s work,” Neira said.

Current site to be revisited

While the committee is looking at 10 potential sites for a new county jail, its current location is not among them. However, at the suggestion of a member of the public, the committee is going to take at least a cursory look at building the jail on the old site near downtown that currently has a relatively small footprint because of its tower design.

During the public comment portions of recent committee meetings, a number of residents of northeast OKC have urged the committee to consider somewhere other than their side of town for the new jail.

Tuesday, northeast OKC resident Gina Sofola urged the committee to take one more look at possibly locating the jail on its current property.

“I think that you have brilliant minds that are here who can come up with a solution logistically and economically and one that does not impact any community,” she said. “As I’ve said earlier, wherever you locate this, someone is going to be angry, someone is going to be

concerned. You are now creating a relocation situation, you are creating a transportation issue. All of the services that are necessary for the daily operation of the county jail are here downtown.”

Trumbo, the county engineer, appeared to pour some cold water on that idea when asked by members of the committee if the current site should be included in the evaluations.

“It’s been looked at about three times since 2011 by professionals, and the consensus has always been to go to a new green-field site to get the one-story concept,” Trumbo told the committee. “The one-story concept needs 25-plus acres just for the incarceration itself, and everything around it would get us to 50 plus acres, and you don’t have that. You have about eight (acres downtown). So that is the downside to that site.”

Neira, who owns a real estate and development consulting firm, said a blank slate makes things less complicated.

“From a construction perspective, it is a lot easier to work with a green field than to try to retrofit a space with the logistics and everything that entails from a construction perspective (that) would drive the cost up,” he said. “I think it’s fair to review the previous analysis, but purely from a construction perspective, it is easier to go with a green-field site.”

Committee member Sandino Thompson said there was some brief conversation about the current site early in the process, but more could be done to educate members of the public on why it may not be the best option.

“I think we should look at it again,” Thompson said. “I recall early on in the process there were some preliminary considerations about the existing site vs. a new site. I think once we have the architect on board, we can do a better job of educating the public the way some of us have been educated as far as what kind of features would be most conducive to dealing with the challenges we have from a corrections standpoint.”

MATT PATTERSON has spent 20 years in Oklahoma journalism covering a variety of topics for The Oklahoman, The Edmond Sun and Lawton Constitution. He joined NonDoc in 2019.

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Oklahoma has been under extra scrutiny following a federal audit of its \$40 million Governor’s Emergency Education Relief funds, which found **at least \$650,000 in misspending** under a program intended to help low-income families with school supplies.

BIG BONUSES, BIGGER RISKS *from A2*

responsibility the state would have for the teachers who don’t fulfill their five-year commitment.

Colwell said he’s concerned the large stipends will not meet the federal standard of reasonableness, which states are required to consider and provide documentation of to prevent misuse of federal funds.

For example, if a 75-student school district requested federal funds to purchase school buses, one or two might be reasonable but five buses would not, unless it could show the district is so spread out they need to run five routes at once.

Colwell says the department may struggle to justify the bonuses as reasonable because it historically hasn’t provided recruitment incentives over \$2,500, and state law caps incentive bonuses at 50% of a teacher’s salary.

If auditors deem the bonuses not reasonable, the state could have to repay the full amount to the federal government with interest, Colwell said. The state could also have to repay funds for teachers who breach the five-year commitment.

Colwell sent those concerns to his supervisor and other top administrators at the department May 17.

“Leaving this program as-is places [the Oklahoma State Department of Education] and Oklahoma taxpayers at an increased risk,” he wrote.

A week later, Walters fired Colwell for forwarding those concerns to the state attorney general and a state representative, according to Colwell and a federal wrongful termination lawsuit he filed against Walters and Matt Langston, the department’s chief policy advisor.

“The whole time, I was trying to do the right thing,” he said. “I was also trying to protect the state Department of Education and trying to protect Superintendent Walters. Like, ‘Hey, don’t do something that could potentially come back to haunt you later, especially around federal funds.’”

At the time, the department was late rolling out its accountability system, and Colwell said the U.S. Department of Education was pressing that issue with the state. He feared another red flag.

Oklahoma has been under extra scrutiny following a federal audit of its \$40 million Governor’s Emergency Education Relief funds, which found at least \$650,000 in misspending under a program intended to help low-income families with school supplies.

Colwell said funding for the bonus plan is coming from a portion of the American Rescue Plan to address learning loss, and those programs are required to be evidence-based. Colwell questioned whether incentivizing inexperienced educators to fill the most challenging classrooms would meet that requirement.

For instance, pre-K through third-grade teachers who are Oklahoma residents with less than three years of experience are offered \$15,000 and those with three to four years of experience can receive \$25,000. But there’s no bonus for those with five or more years of experience unless they work in a rural or high-poverty school district, in which case they could receive \$50,000.

Other Programs Avoid Problematic Clawbacks

Similar programs reward new teachers without clawing back funds.

Participants of Inspired to Teach can earn up to \$25,500 over nine years: \$1,000 to \$2,500 scholarships while in college and \$4,000 yearly stipends once they start teaching.

State Rep. Mark McBride, R-Moore, said one detail he wanted to get right when creating Inspired to Teach was avoiding a need to clawback funds.

“It’s a pain and hard to get it done,” McBride said.

Like the sign-on bonuses, Inspired to Teach participants commit to teaching for five years. But if at any point they change course, they don’t have to repay what they have received, according to the state Regents for Higher Education, which administers the program.

At North Carolina’s Guilford County Schools, a clawback mechanism was in place for the district’s previous sign-on bonus program. Alan Hooker, the director of recruiting for the district’s human resources department, said it wasn’t a good policy.

The district of 70,000 students switched to a different program, Better Together. Teachers are eligible to receive up to \$20,000 with payouts in installments. Depending on the bonus type, teachers are required to commit to the district for two or three years.

“If something were to happen that was beyond their control and they have to leave us, they won’t have to pay back this exorbitant amount of money, to put them in another predicament,” Hooker said.

State Department of Education spokesman Justin Holcomb said Oklahoma’s program wasn’t set up in installments because it is a true signing bonus and the agency wanted eligible teachers to receive the bonus upfront.

Rocky Rollout Leaves Leaders With Questions

Research suggests signing bonuses improve teacher retention, and Oklahoma’s teacher shortage underscores the importance of getting the program right.

But district leaders said the continued lack of guidance or value of input from stakeholders is frustrating. It’s an

issue that’s become an ongoing theme for the Walters administration. In a recent survey by StateImpact Oklahoma, 150 of 190 respondents said they hadn’t spent any time directly interacting with Walters, who took office in January.

Asked if superintendents, educators or policy experts had any involvement in designing the program, Holcomb responded:

“The stakeholders are the tax-paying people of Oklahoma. Ultimately, this administration’s actions and decisions are derived from their input and the needs of their children,” the statement said. After asking for more clarity, a second statement was sent: “Superintendent Walters speaks to superintendents, educators and policy experts on a daily basis. But the ultimate stakeholders are the people of Oklahoma.”

Deer Creek’s Perez said the program rollout probably would have gone smoother if the department first collected input from district leaders. Perez’s district informed new hires who were eligible for the program, and several signed up. The teachers began asking Perez whether they will get the bonus and when, and he didn’t know how to answer.

“When you’re talking about dealing with people, especially new people to your district, they want to feel secure,” Perez said. “They want to know that they’ve got strong leadership that has their back, that’s going to give them good guidance. And when your only answer is ‘I don’t really know,’ that doesn’t really instill a lot of confidence.”

Holcomb said the department is reviewing applications and will reach out to teachers and their districts in the coming weeks. He expects bonus dollars to be distributed near the start of the school year.

The Education Department has provided a seven-page FAQ about the plan, but district leaders say they still have unanswered questions and cannot get the department to respond.

JENNIFER PALMER has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2016 and covers education. Contact her at (405) 761-0093 or jpalmere@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter @jpalmersOKC.

BETH WALLIS is the education reporter for StateImpact Oklahoma — a collaboration of NPR member radio stations around the state. She received her degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma in 2021 after teaching band at an Oklahoma public school for five years. Email her at beth@stateimpactoklahoma.org or follow her on Twitter: @walliswrites.

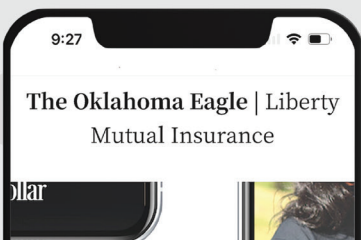


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

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Audit Shows

Oklahoma Likely Misspent Millions In Federal Relief Funds

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Improper oversight by state officials led to more than \$29 million in federal funds being misspent that may have to be repaid to the federal government, Oklahoma Auditor & Inspector Cindy Byrd said Tuesday.

By SEAN MURPHY, ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUDIT, MISSPENT MILLIONS from AI

Byrd's office released a scathing audit of about \$14 billion in spending made by the state in fiscal year 2021, most of it in the form of COVID-19-relief funds.

"Oklahoma has systemic issues that make me very concerned for taxpayers," Byrd said in a statement following the release of the 250-page audit. "If the federal government decides the state must pay back these questioned costs, you and I will end up paying the bill."

"If that happens, gross mismanagement and lack of compliance and oversight will be to blame."

Oklahoma is not alone in having questionable oversight of COVID-19 relief funding. An Associated Press analysis found that fraudsters potentially stole more than \$280 billion in federal pandemic-relief funds, making it the greatest gift in U.S. history. The analysis found another \$123 billion was wasted or misspent, making a combined loss of 10% of the \$4.2 trillion the U.S. government has so far disbursed in pandemic relief aid.

In Oklahoma, the audit of about \$1.1 billion in federal funds through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act of 2020 (CARES) to mitigate the effects of the pandemic found more than \$12.2 in questioned costs, which refers to spending that failed to align with the objectives of the grant.

The audit found the state also failed to properly oversee more than \$376 million of expenditures for the Emergency Rental Assistance program aimed at helping households pay rent or utilities during the pandemic. The audit determined the administrator of the funding, Community Cares Partner, a program of Communities Foundation of Oklahoma, charged the program \$1.6 million in excessive management fees.

Because of the administrative overcharge, many Oklahomans who applied for ERA awards were denied assistance because the unallowable charges were kept by the foundation, Byrd said.

A message left Tuesday with a spokesperson for Communities Foundation of Oklahoma was not immediately returned.

The audit also targeted more than \$8 million in questioned



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

expenditures designated for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief fund, or GEER, which was designed for governors to help meet the needs of educating students during the pandemic.

The program offered 5,000 families \$1,500 each to spend at designated retailers, but the audit found the state didn't place any restrictions on what families could purchase.

"We found that \$1.7 million was spent on various non-educational items such as kitchen appliances, power tools, furniture and entertainment," Byrd said.

Kate Vesper, a spokesperson for Gov. Kevin Stitt, said in a statement Tuesday that his office maintains the position that "a negligent out-of-state vendor should be held accountable

to recover the federal taxpayer dollars in question." But federal auditors rejected that argument after it released a report on the same program last year. Federal auditors said at the time that the state did not take advantage of an available internal control option offered by ClassWallet, the contractor hired to administer the program.

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond said the audit report, particularly with respect to the GEER funds, was "deeply troubling."

"A number of concerning items from the audit will require further investigation," Drummond said in a statement. "I refuse to tolerate what amounts to a pervasive culture of waste, mismanagement and apparent fraud."

OKLAHOMA PRISONS LOCKED DOWN

Following Inmate Stabbing In Northeastern Oklahoma

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

PRISONS LOCKED DOWN from AI

HOMINY, Okla. (AP) — The Oklahoma Department of Corrections has locked down all prisons statewide and canceled all visitations following a stabbing at a medium security prison in northeastern Oklahoma.

"It was inmate on inmate," department spokesperson Kay Thompson said Saturday. "We're still trying to sort everything out and we're going to be on statewide lockdown until at least Monday."

Thompson said she could not release further information about the stabbing because of the ongoing investigation into the incident at the Dick Conner Correctional Center in Hominy, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) northwest of Tulsa.

The Dick Conner Correctional Center also has a minimum security prison on its grounds and houses about 1,200 inmates, according to the Department of Corrections website.

In September 2021, prisons statewide were locked down following what authorities said were gang-related attacks that injured several inmates at six of the department's 21 prisons, including the Dick Conner Correctional Center.



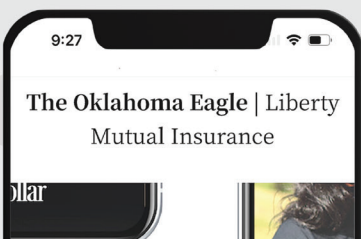
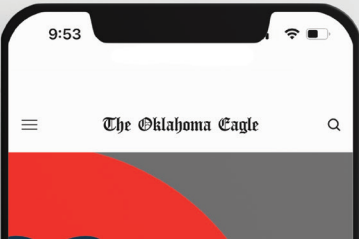
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NOTICE

Published in The Oklahoma Eagle:
June 16 and 23, 2023

NOTICE TO BIDDERS
SEALED BIDS FOR
PROJECT NO. 2036N8113Z,
2036N9045Z, 2036N9052Z

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to an order by the Mayor of the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma, sealed bids will be received in Room 260 of the Office of the City Clerk, City of Tulsa, 175 E. 2nd Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74103 until 8:30 a.m. the 14th day of July, 2023 for furnishing all tools, materials and labor and performing the work necessary to be done in the construction of the following:

PROJECT NO. 2036N8113Z, 2036N9045Z, 2036N9052Z
Non-Arterial Street Rehabilitation Maintenance Zone 8113, 9045, 9052

The entire cost of the improvement shall be paid from Account No.
2 0 3 6 N 9 0 4 5 Z . S t r e e t s .
NArRh.b.4283.42833122-541106; 2036N9045Z.
Streets.NArRh.b.4282.42823122-541106;
2 0 3 6 N 8 1 1 3 Z . S t r e e t s .
NArRh.b.4282.42823122-541106; 2036N9052Z.
Streets.NArRh.b.4282.42823122-541106

A MANDATORY Pre-Bid Conference is scheduled for Monday, June 26, 2023 at 9:30 a.m. and will be held through video conferencing with Microsoft Teams, invitation presented on the City of Tulsa's website at this link: <https://www.cityoftulsa.org/government/departments/engineering-services/construction-bids/>

Attendance at the Pre-Bid Conference is MANDATORY. Bids will not be received from contractors who did not attend the Pre-Bid Conference.

Bids will be accepted by the City Clerk from the holders of valid pre-qualifications certificates from the City of Tulsa in one or more of the following classifications: A or C

Drawings, specifications and contract documents for construction of said public improvements of the said project have been adopted by the Mayor of said City. Copies of same may be obtained at the Office of the Director of Engineering Services at the City of Tulsa Engineering Services, 2317 South Jackson, Room 103, North Building, for a non-refundable fee in the amount of \$50.00 made payable to the City of Tulsa by check or money order.

Contract requirements shall include compliance as required by law pertaining to the practice of non-discrimination in employment.

The overall aspirational Small Business Enterprise utilization goal for this project is ten (10) percent.

Attention is called to Resolution No. 18145 of August 23, 1988, requiring bidders to commit to the goal of employing on the project at least fifty percent bona fide residents of the City of Tulsa and/or MSA in each employment classification.

Attention is called to Resolution 7404 of November 8, 2006, requiring bidders, their subcontractors and their lower-tier subcontractors to hire only citizens of the United States.we

The City of Tulsa itself is exempt from the payment of any sales or use taxes, and pursuant to Title 68 O.S. Section 1356(10), direct vendors to the City are also exempt from those taxes. A bidder may exclude from his bid appropriate sales taxes, which he will not have to pay while acting for and on behalf of the City of Tulsa.

A Certified or Cashier's Check or Bidders Surety Bond, in the sum of 5% of the amount of the bid will be required from each bidder to be retained as liquidated damages in the event the successful bidder fails, neglects or refuses to enter into said contract for the construction of said public improvements for said project and furnish the necessary bonds within thirty days from and after the date the award is made.

The bidder to whom a contract is awarded will be required to furnish public liability and workmen's compensation insurance; Performance, Statutory, and Maintenance bonds acceptable to the City of Tulsa, in conformity with the requirements of the proposed contract documents. The Performance, Statutory, and Maintenance bonds shall be for one hundred percent (100%) of the contract price.

All bids will be opened and considered by the Bid Committee of said City at a meeting of said Committee to be held in the City Council Room of City Hall in said City at 9:00 a.m. on the 14th day of July 2023.

Dated at Tulsa, Oklahoma, this 16th day of June 2023.

(SEAL)
Christina Chappell
City Clerk

NOTICE

Published in The Oklahoma Eagle:
June 16 and 23, 2023.

NOTICE TO BIDDERS
SEALED BIDS FOR
PROJECT NO. 2036N9050Z

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PROJECT NO. 2036N9050Z NON-ARTERIAL STREET REHABILITATION MAINTENANCE ZONE 9050

The entire cost of the improvement shall be paid from Account No. 2036N9050Z.Streets.
NArRh.b.4281.42813122-541106
2036N9050Z.Streets.
NArRh.b.4283.42833122-541106

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Dated at Tulsa, Oklahoma, this 16th day of June 2023.

(SEAL)
Christina Chappell
City Clerk

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The Oklahoma Eagle publishes news and announcements for churches currently listed in *The Oklahoma Eagle's* Church Directory. For information, please call our office at (918) 582-7124

Church Of The Living God

1559 E Reading St. Tulsa OK
(918) 584-3206

Minister RJ Smith

Sunday school - 9:30am
Sunday Worship - 10:45am
Monday Worship - 6:00pm
Wednesday Bible Study - 5:00pm

CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

1962 N. Sheridan Rd.
(918) 834-4747

Pastor Ruthie I. Howard

Sunday School
10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship
11:00 a.m.
Bible Study & Prayer Wednesday 7:00 p.m.
For Transportation (918) 402-6027

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(918) 230-3022

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GTOMi

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Traveling Outreach Ministries
609 E. Zion Street
Tulsa, Oklahoma
Elder Julius W. Bland
Sr., Pastor
918-810-3882

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MOHAWK FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391

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Sunday Morning
Worship 11 a.m.

Bible Study
Wednesday
7 p.m.



Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr.
Pastor

Gethsemane Baptist Church

727 East 56th St. North
(918) 425-6613

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School
9:00 a.m.

Church Services
11:00 a.m.

Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

Rudisill Regional Library
1520 N Hartford Ave.
Tulsa OK 74106
(918) 409-4899

Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons

Sunday Worship: 1pm
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p
"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

123 E. 59th St. North
Ph: (918) 425-2077

Pastor Rick Bruner

Sabbath School (Saturday)
9:30-10:45 a.m.
Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal
Wednesday 6:00 p.m.

"The Seventh Day Is Still God's Sabbath"

Northside Christ Gospel Church

3101 N. M.L King Jr. Blvd.
Tulsa OK
(918) 625-2374

Sunday School - 10 am

Sunday Morning
Worship - 10:45

Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm
Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm
Wednesday worship - 8pm

Rev. John W. Anderson

VERNON AME CHURCH

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F: 918-587-0642
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

Sunday
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Worship Service
10:00 am

Wednesday
Bible Study
6:00 pm

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Prayer Line:

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Morning

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Bible Study

Noon and 7:00



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Church School
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Worship
11:00 a.m.

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**A NEW DAWN:
MICHIGAN'S \$21.5
BILLION K-12
BUDGET**

Budget contains a significant funding increase for those students often deemed 'at risk'.

A14

“ You are seen, you are heard, and you are valued.”

BLACK MEN Are SHIFTING The MENTAL HEALTH Narrative

By ANISSA DURHAM, WORD IN BLACK



FERNANDO BRANCH. PHOTOS COURTESY

Black men experience daily feelings of anxiety or depression, but stigma keeps them from seeking mental health services

Men are told to be tough. If they cry, they are labeled as crybabies. Black men are expected not to express their feelings. But what happens when this cycle of toxic masculinity prevents Black men from getting mental health help? According to the American Psychological Association, only 26.4% of Black and Hispanic men between the ages of 18 to 44 who experienced daily feelings of depression or anxiety accessed mental health services.

A few factors contribute to the low rates of Black men getting mental health services. For example, when Black men seek help, they prefer a Black psychologist — but only 4% of psychologists are Black. And due to the history of this country, mistrust toward the medical and mental health systems influences Black men's reluctance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Fernando Branch, 41, says he had a difficult time navigating the isolation. His family encouraged him to see a doctor, but he disagreed. Then, that's when his 12-year-old daughter said, "Dad, you're a little on edge. Maybe you should get checked out." He took his daughter's advice and went to see a Black doctor who diagnosed him with depression.

"I felt this level of vulnerability, in the sense that, wow, this can happen to me too," he says. "I started thinking, how many men that look like me are navigating some form of depression."

Shortly after, he connected with other Black men on social media to start conversations on mental health. In 2022, Branch founded the Colorado Men of Color Collaborative, a space for men to support social-emotional well-being, network, and mentoring. As the executive director, he says the collaborative exists to be a safe haven for Black male mental health.

"I was raised in the South, I wasn't raised to go to the doctors," he says. "You went to the doctor when you're literally on deathbed. The whole idea of preventative care wasn't part of my life structure, it also wasn't part of my community."

In 2018, Black adults aged 18 or older experienced higher rates of sadness and feelings that everything is an effort. This is why Black men like Branch are working to shift the narrative of mental health and wellness.

Branch, like many Black men, intrinsically struggled with stigma and bias about mental health spaces. His trauma told him that mental health spaces

were not safe for him as a Black man. Now at 41, he's helping to create those safe outlets.

Jeremy Eddie, 37, is the co-founder of the Colorado Men of Color Collaborative. He says his own mental health journey has been challenging. In part because Black men don't talk about mental health enough.

Growing up, he dealt with a lot of traumas. Eddies' mother passed away when he was seven. "I would come home, and she was not there." Later, his stepmother passed away when he was 21. Both of those experiences became huge triggers for him.

Forced to have tough conversations with his father and brother, this eventually prompted him to get mental health help himself. But Eddie says when Black men hear the words mental health, they often think, 'Am I crazy?' He encourages folks to shift the question to 'Are you OK?'

"When I think of stigmas I faced, I didn't want to be judged. If I'm crying, are they going to think less of me," he says. "Because that is the stigma, men aren't supposed to cry. But now I say forget that. If you have some emotions, get them out. It's OK for other men to see you get emotional."

Mental health care isn't exclusive to therapy. The duo says at their collaborative, they've become more intentional about the support they offer. For Black men to heal, it could be healing circles, family support, financial literacy, and social norm and support — beyond the classic forms of talk therapy clinicians offer.

Shifting The Narrative of Mental Health, Wellness

Keenan Hart, 32, is the president and chief innovation officer of Fransis, a text-based mental wellness solution that he started in 2021. As a biracial Black man, he says growing up he could see the different approaches to healthcare that the white and Black sides of his family took.

"I saw the classic issues in my family of anxiety, PTSD, substance use disorder, and a lot of addiction in my family," Hart says. "We never really knew what it was like to access traditional resources like a mental health therapist or a counselor."

Not everyone can afford to or has the resources to see a psychologist or licensed clinician. In 2020, Black adults aged 18 or older received mental

MENTAL HEALTH NARRATIVE cont. A14

Talking About MENTAL HEALTH CAN BE DIFFICULT FOR ANYBODY

MENTAL HEALTH NARRATIVE from A13



health services at lower rates than white adults.

“Being raised by an African American father who didn’t have the skill sets or the vocabulary to talk about things like anxiety, stress, or feeling like I was inferior or insecure,” Hart says. “I never was taught how to deal with these emotions that I experienced as a young child.”

Prior to starting Fransis, he started a telehealth company to help increase access to mental health services in Nevada. But he soon realized due to stigma in the Black community, folks were still having a hard

time going to see a therapist or counselor.

In his entrepreneurial journey, the ups and downs of being told no started to impact Hart’s personal confidence. So, he started posting one positive message on social media every day. Which is now the foundation of his wellness company. For folks looking for an alternative to mental health services, Fransis subscribers receive one positive text message a day.

“I realize that my job as an African American man is to try and push our family lineage and our culture forward by having conversations around positivity,

encouragement, mental wellness, and what those things represent and how they impact our daily lives,” Hart says.

Black Men Deserve...

Talking about mental health can be difficult for anybody. But shifting the language to what Black men deserve can highlight the areas of support they need. Word In Black asked each of the men interviewed for this story what they think Black men deserve.

“We deserve to feel comfortable in our own skin,” Hart says.

“Black men deserve better right now from

the media — from our politicians, and from the workplace,” Eddie says. “We deserve better access to health care.”

“I think Black men deserve community support to say that they are loved. Not the touchy-feely type of love — the emotional, I see, I care for you, I want what is best for you type of love,” Branch says. “We’re human. We’re not superhuman. I don’t think our humanity is always treated in that way.”

A New Dawn: Michigan’s \$21.5 Billion K-12 Budget and the Promise it Holds for Black Students in Detroit

The budget contains a significant funding increase for those students often deemed ‘at risk’ of falling short of academic goals.

By EBONY JJ CURRY, WORD IN BLACK

A NEW DAWN from A13

In a landmark decision that is reverberating with optimism and a renewed sense of hope, the Michigan Legislature passed a groundbreaking \$21.5 billion budget for K-12 education. This isn’t just another budget though. It contains a significant funding increase for those students often deemed ‘at risk’ of falling short of academic goals.

This is the first education budget since Democrats took full control of the Legislature and governor’s office this year and reflects a mission to address significant the downward learning curve during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among the state’s most vulnerable students.

Under the approved budget, which now heads to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, districts will receive more money in the upcoming school year for economically disadvantaged students, English language learners and students who receive special education.

This pivotal action didn’t just occur. The winds of change have been brewing for years, gathering strength with every voice raised in protest and every stride taken in advocacy. This isn’t a victory for Michigan alone; it’s a victory for the marginalized, the overlooked, and those burdened with the label of being “at risk.”

The new budget is a clear testament that we’re done labeling these kids and are ready to begin aiding them instead. It is an investment in our future that couldn’t have come at a better time.

Right in the heart of this crucial change is Detroit – a city that has persevered and thrived despite the odds. And the Black students of Detroit are not just spectators

in this movement – they are at its core, driving it forward, ready to make the most of the opportunities this budget seemingly represents.

This isn’t just about providing the tools for a quality education; it’s about changing lives. This funding increase shines a ray of hope on Black Detroit students who’ve been pushed to the fringes for far too long. It tells them, “You are seen, you are heard, and you are valued.”

As we chart this new course, it’s important to remember that change, though promising, isn’t instantaneous. It’s a marathon, not a sprint. But the critical element is that we’ve started moving in the right direction, and that’s half the battle won.

There will be obstacles ahead, but there’s a newfound resilience now. Detroit’s Black students are more than just a demographic; they are a powerhouse of potential. And this budget is a testament to the belief that every student, regardless of background or circumstance, has the right to an excellent education.

What we’re witnessing is more than a simple shift in policy; it’s a seismic shift in mindset. A \$21.5 billion investment that tells our children they are worth every penny, every effort, and every hope.

In Detroit and across Michigan, this budget is a beacon of change that, if implemented thoughtfully, could drastically alter the future trajectories of our children, especially those ‘at risk’. Let’s harness this momentum, continue pushing for equity, and in doing so, ensure that every child has an opportunity to shine.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

To amplify our core value of equity, through journalism and editorial” is the cornerstone of our continued success.

