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FEATURED

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The Oklahoma Eagle

REDLINING

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CORRUPTION

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OFF-DUTY OK OFFICER FIRED A  
SHOT THAT WOUNDED A MAN

The Del City officer was one of two off-duty officers who accompanied the Del City High School team to the game in Choctaw. A3

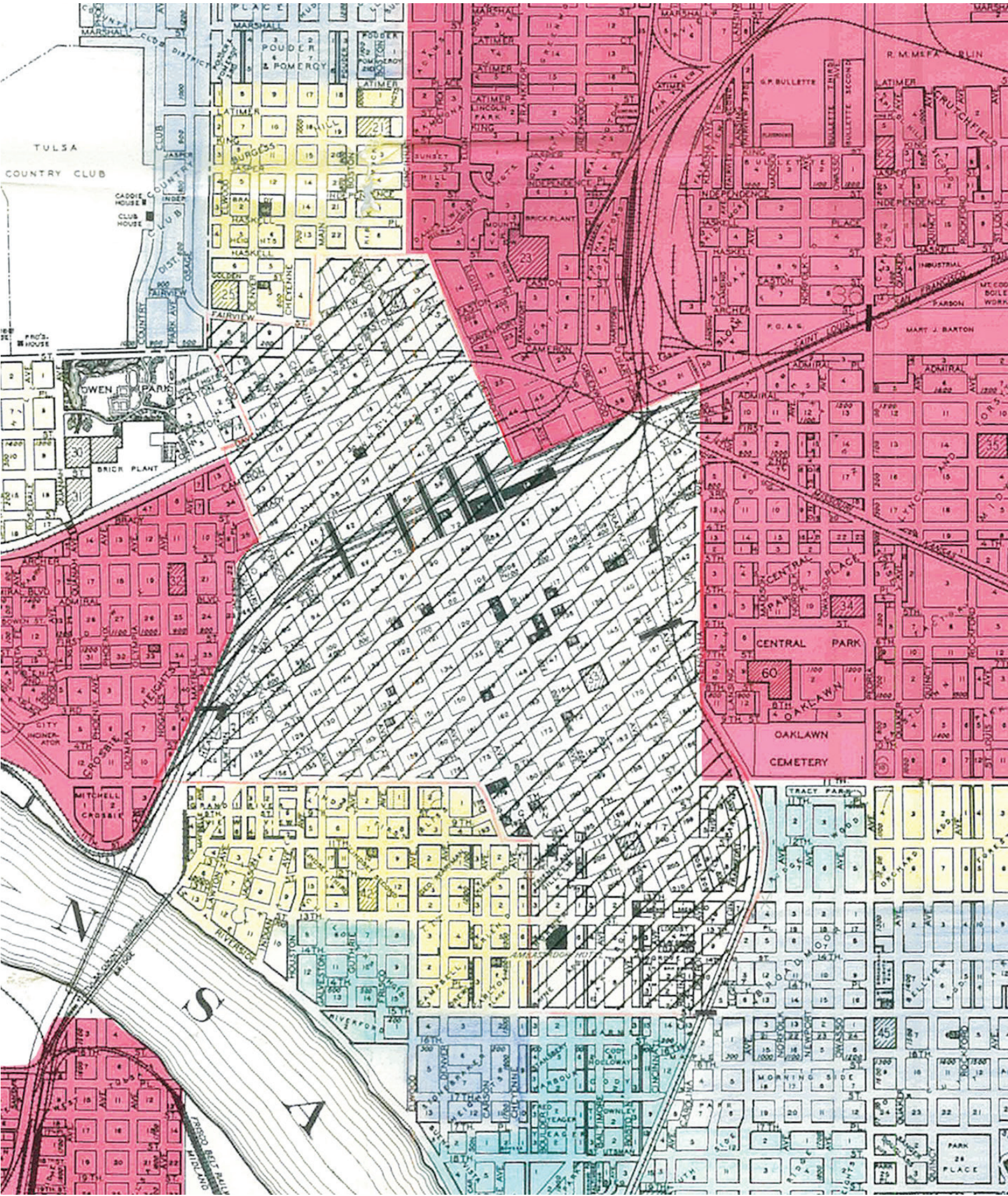


PHOTO PROVIDED

AMERICAN BANK OF OKLAHOMA  
used the illegal practice known as  
*redlining in majority-Black and Hispanic  
neighborhoods in the Tulsa area*, according  
to the Justice Department.

REDLINING from A1

Tulsa, Okla. -The American Bank of Oklahoma (ABOK) must pay \$1.15 million in an agreement with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to settle federal charges that the bank deprived Blacks and Hispanics of loan services in north Tulsa. The federal complaint case and settlement filed on Aug. 28 in Tulsa federal court, is the result of an investigation by the DOJ alleging that the ABOK has engaged in illegal “redlining” practices since at least 2017. The proposed consent agreement filed in federal court is pending court approval.

In its probe, DOJ officials also found flagrantly racist exchanges in e-mails purported sent by ABOK loan officers and executives.

Redlining is defined as the practice of denying an applicant a loan for housing in a particular neighborhood even though the applicant may be creditworthy and otherwise eligible for the loan. The term refers to a longstanding practice many mortgage lenders performed of drawing red lines around portions of a map to indicate areas or neighborhoods where they do not want to make loans. Cases dating back to the 1930s document how Oklahoma banks used redlining to deny Blacks loans to buy homes in Tulsa. The Fair Housing Act, passed by Congress in 1968, banned discrimination in real estate and mortgage lending, including racially motivated redlining.

Area of race massacre including in redlining

In the American Bank of Oklahoma case, the “redlined” areas include historically Black neighborhoods in north Tulsa that have endured the legacy of racial violence and the continued efforts of segregation and

discrimination,” according to a press release.

Those areas include the Greenwood District, where a white mob destroyed Tulsa’s thriving Black community and killed an estimated 300 Black residents of the area.

The complaint alleges that the ABOK, based in Collinsville, Okla., failed to provide home mortgage loans by designating an area of loan exclusion to Blacks and Hispanics in the north Tulsa metropolitan area. The DOJ press release said, “the complaint also alleges that bank employees, including executives and loan officers, sent and received emails on their email work accounts containing racial slurs and racist content.”

The bank neither “admits or denies any of the allegations” as stated in the Consent Decree proposed settlement. However, ABOK issued a statement agreeing to the proposed settlement to avoid the cost and distraction of lengthy litigation.

ABOK chief executive Joe Landon said in a statement that ABOK is a small community bank with \$383 million in assets. He lamented that the Justice Department referenced the 1921 Race

Massacre.

“As Oklahomans, we carry a profound sense of sorrow for the tragic events of the Tulsa Race Massacre over a century ago,” Landon said.

Racist or discriminatory emails

The complaint, filed by U. S. Attorney for the Northern District of

REDLINING cont. A8

“Remedial provisions in  
the agreement will open up  
opportunities for building  
generational wealth...”

KRISTEN CLARKE, Assistant Attorney General,  
U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## The Del City Officer “Perceived Some Sort Of Threat.”

### OKC POLICE SHOOTING *from AI*

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — An off-duty Oklahoma police officer fired a shot that critically wounded a man during a shooting at a high school football game that left a teenager dead, authorities said Monday.

The officer did not shoot the teenager, according to Oklahoma County Sheriff Tommie Johnson III, whose agency is investigating the officer’s shooting.

The teen was killed in a shooting that followed an argument between two males during the third quarter of Friday night’s game between Del City High School and Choctaw High School, said Choctaw police Chief Kelly Marshall, whose department is leading the investigation into the death. She

**The 16-year-old who died was not a student at either Choctaw or Del City.**

did not know what the argument was about or whether the 42-year-old man who was shot by police was involved in the dispute.

The Del City officer “perceived some sort of threat,” said Johnson, adding that could not comment further on what the officer perceived because of the ongoing investigation.

No arrests have been made in the teen’s death, but a person of interest was being sought, Marshall said.

The shooting sent players and officials scrambling off the field and caused panicked spectators to hunker down in the stands. Two people suffered broken bones while fleeing the gunfire, according to Marshall.

The Del City officer was one of two off-duty officers who accompanied the Del City High School team to the game in Choctaw,

on the outskirts of Oklahoma City. Both of those officers are on paid leave, said Del City police Chief Loyd Berger.

The man remained in critical condition on Monday, Johnson said.

Marshall said seven Choctaw officers also were at the game. Five were hired by the Choctaw School District as security and two happened to attend.

The 16-year-old who died was not student at either Choctaw or Del City, according to Marshall, who said she did not know why he was at the game.

“We’ve got lots of lead coming in, lots of interviews are being conducted, our investigators are working non-stop,” Marshall said.

## Lawmakers have committed \$382 million

### BROADBAND *from AI*

Millions in broadband funding could be further delayed after some companies and board members raised concerns about duplicating efforts in areas of Oklahoma already served by internet service providers.

The Oklahoma Broadband Office, which is overseeing more than \$1.1 billion in federal funding to expand broadband throughout the state, said it will study the issue after receiving questions about applications under the state’s share of American Rescue Plan Act funding.

Lawmakers last year gave the office \$382 million to upgrade and expand broadband services under that round of federal coronavirus relief funding. Oklahoma this year received another \$797 million in federal funds under the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment program.

The rollout of the state’s broadband expansion has been beset by delays over mapping existing coverage and concerns about supply costs and enough workers to build the expansion projects. The Broadband Office searched for months for a permanent director before Mike Sanders, a former lawmaker from Kingfisher, took over in March at the recommendation of Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt.

Dozens of companies submitted applications to the Legislature in 2021 and 2022 for broadband using ARPA funding, including AT&T Oklahoma, Dobson Fiber and sever-

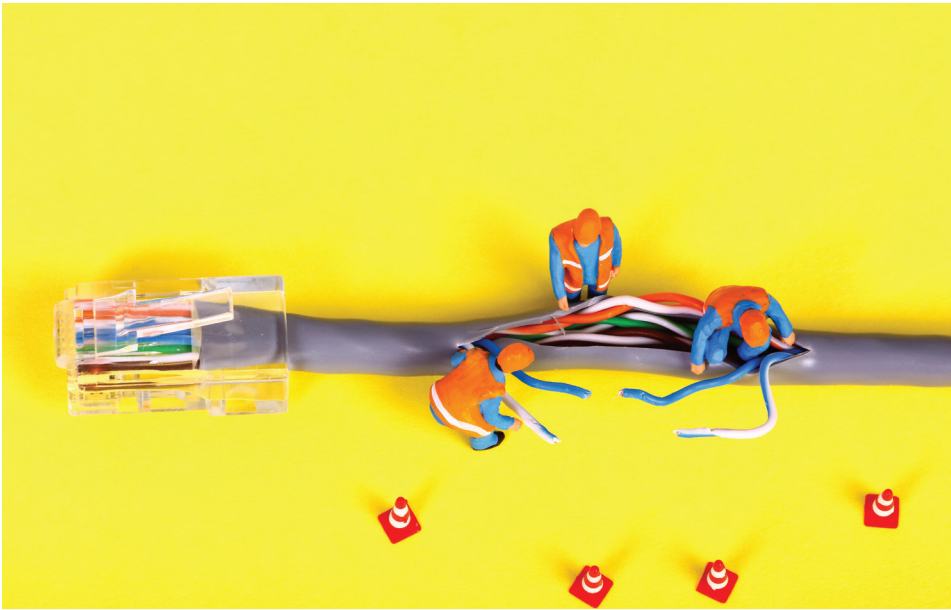


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

al electric cooperatives. The money for the ARPA projects must be allocated by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026.

The Broadband Office set up a 10-day window, which started Aug. 4, for existing companies to challenge those ARPA project applications.

But a representative of Altice USA, whose subsidiary Optimum provides service to communities like Weatherford and Poteau,

told the Broadband Governing Board the applications weren’t detailed enough to make challenges. They lacked addresses and geographic data, he said.

“We have major concerns with the ongoing ARPA process,” Altice’s Johnny Moyer said during public comments at Tuesday’s board meeting. “There is a significant portion of our network that is deemed served by the FCC that would be overbuilt. That goes

against the spirit of this program.”

The Broadband Office had not received any formal notices of ARPA challenges as of Wednesday, spokesman Tim Allen said.

In Tuesday’s meeting, board member Katy Evans Boren said she wanted additional advice on whether the Broadband Office was complying with the law as it contemplates ARPA challenges and decides on grants under the other federal funding programs.

“It’s causing me to have some unsure footing,” said Boren, an appointee of Senate Pro Tempore Greg Treat. “I want to make sure we as a board are given all information, with experts coming to talk to us, the attorney general to give us advice.”

Sanders, without giving details, said his team is reevaluating the process.

“There is nobody here who wants this very important process to be correct than myself and my staff,” Sanders said.

Earlier this month, the Broadband Office released an online map for state residents to check their broadband coverage availability and speed. A separate map, produced by the Federal Communications Commission, will be used to approve grants under the BEAD program.

PAUL MONIES has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2017 and covers state agencies and public health. Contact him at (571) 319-3289 or pmonies@oklahomawatch.org.



# Red Bird: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



Red Bird, located in Wagoner County five miles southeast of Coweta, is one of more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The Barber and Ruffin families settled in the Red Bird community before 1900, and other families soon followed. The settlement attained a post office in 1902, with A. A. White as the first postmaster. In 1889 E. L. Barber, one of the town’s developers, organized the First Baptist Church, the largest church in Red Bird. He also became Red Bird’s first justice of the peace and served as an early mayor. The Red Bird Investment Company recruited African American families

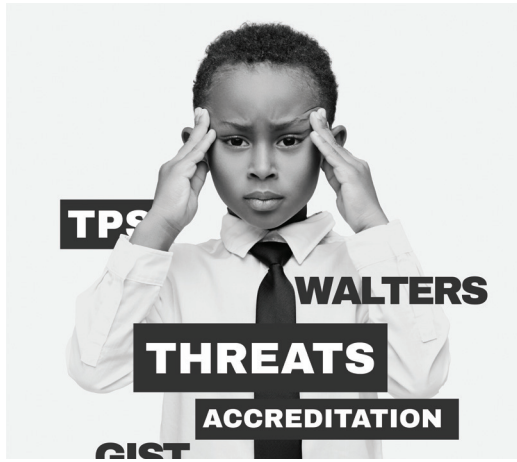
from all parts of the South to settle in the newly established town. More than six hundred people attended the grand opening at Red Bird, August 10, 1907. By 1920 Red Bird’s population was 336. In 1919 Professor J. F. Cathey, the principal of the school, planned Miller Washington High School, which flourished until 1959 when it closed for lack of students. The high school and Red Bird City Hall are both listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Sharp’s Grocery/Masonic Hall and the Red Bird Drugstore, both constructed in 1910, are the two commercial properties listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory. In 1938 I. W.

Lane, a former mayor of Red Bird, successfully challenged a law, similar to the grandfather clause, that made it difficult for African Americans to register to vote in Wagoner County. Like many rural towns in Oklahoma, Red Bird faced devastation and population decline brought about by falling cotton prices and by the onset of the Great Depression. In 1930 the population was 218. It rose and fell over the decades, reaching a high of 411 in 1950 but dropping to 310 in 1960 and 199 in 1980. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the town was steadily rebuilding, although the population stood at only 137 in 2010.

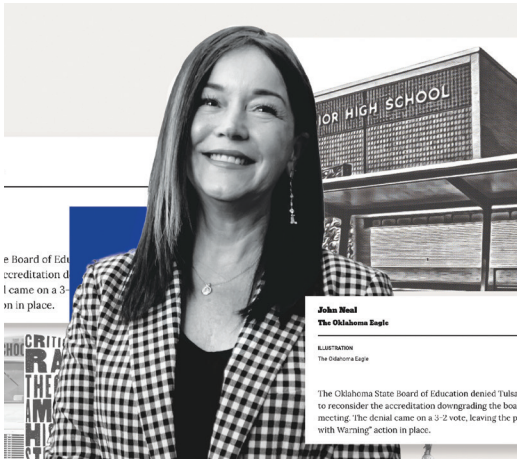
**THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY** is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma’s history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

**A SCENE IN RED BIRD.** 2012.201.B1078.0824, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS.

## Featured Last Week



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TPS Board Approves Leadership Change



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### Contact

**Letters to the Editor**

editor@theokeagle.com

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# A New Oklahoma Law Forbids State Pension Systems From Doing Business With Banks Perceived To Be Hostile To Oil And Gas Companies

OK PUBLIC EMPLOYEES PENSION *from AI*

Trustees of the Oklahoma Public Employee Retirement System voted Wednesday to take a financial exemption from a new law forbidding state pension systems from doing business with banks perceived to be hostile to oil and gas companies.

Taking the exemption means the pension system, which has more than \$10 billion in assets for retirees, won't have to divest more than 60% of its holdings from BlackRock Inc., one of the six remaining banks on a list of restricted companies put out by state Treasurer Todd Russ. The system's staff and outside investment advisors said it may cost an estimated \$10 million to divest from holdings invested with BlackRock and other banks on the list.

The trustees voted 9-1, with Russ casting the lone no vote. He said the system may be opening itself up to legal challenges by taking a fiduciary duty exemption under the Energy Discrimination Elimination Act. Russ said that exemption didn't cover trading losses or brokerage fees, which he said made up most of the estimated losses.

"The letter of the law is very explicit," Russ said after the vote. "It says for loss of asset value. I think the Legislature was wise enough to assume there would be administrative costs and those types of costs weren't enough of a barrier to keep us from divesting from these companies that are discriminating against the energy industry."

Other trustees said they thought presentations by the pension system's staff and its outside financial advisor, Verus, were persuasive enough to take the exemption. In a separate vote, trustees approved a contract change with BlackRock that would lower its management fees by an estimated \$75,000 a year.

The pension system put out several requests for proposals in July to get bids for other financial companies to take BlackRock or State Street's place should the system have to divest. Various financial and legal advisors all recommended taking the fiduciary duty exemption. More than 50 firms responded to the request for proposals.

"The opportunity for fee savings for the impacted mandates were uncertain, extraordinarily long-tailed for the system to derive any benefit, or simply did not exist," said a pension system staff memo to the board and its investment committee. "The opportunities for performance enhancement without materially changing the mandates proved elusive as well."

During the meeting, Russ said the evaluation process was incomplete and designed to stay with the status quo. He said the law requires clear and convincing evidence to take a fiduciary duty exemption.

"Until we finish that negotiation process, that's how we get those costs down," he said. "If we claim these assumptions wildly, you get stuck on those. I've got people behind me who are saying there's a lot more to this than what we're seeing."

Russ said trustees should instead ask Attorney General Gentner Drummond to give a legal opinion on what kind of investment losses would trigger the fiduciary duty exemption. Russ said his office has not asked for a formal

10B

Taking the exemption means the pension system, which has more than \$10 billion in assets for retirees, won't have to divest more than 60% of its holdings from BlackRock Inc., one of the six remaining banks on a list of restricted companies put out by state Treasurer Todd Russ.



opinion from the attorney general on that issue.

"I would be very interested in knowing what the AG's opinion is," Russ said after the meeting. "And I may not ask for that, but I'm highly suspicious that there's going to be some people out there who are going to want to know why we're not willing to divest from these bad actors."

Russ said outside interest groups or the energy industry might be interested in filing a lawsuit to force pension systems to follow the banking law.

"My remedy would be just follow the law and base it on whether there's any loss in actual asset value, which would be the portfolio," Russ said.

Russ, whose office released the first version of the restricted financial company list in May, has had policy and media support in implementing the law from a Kansas-based nonprofit, the State Financial Officers Foundation. It provides Republican state treasurers and financial officials with talking points and opinion columns targeting what they perceive to be out-

of-control climate policies approved by shareholders of publicly traded banks and financial companies.

Oklahoma is among dozens of Republican-led states that have passed anti-energy-industry discrimination laws in the past several years. Lawmakers claim the climate policies of some large banks discriminate against oil and gas interests, which are major contributors to Oklahoma's economy and tax base.

Apart from state pension systems, cities and counties are covered by the energy discrimination elimination law if they have contracts in excess of \$100,000 with banks on the restricted list.

The city of Stillwater put a project on hold after Bank of America was put on the list. Attorney General Gentner Drummond sent a letter to city officials last month saying the city could exercise an exemption in the law because the next-best bank loan offer would have cost the city an extra \$1.2 million.



IT'S TAKING LONGER THAN

expected, but residents in Clinton should once again have a hospital operating in their community soon, while those living in Woodward hope to experience a seamless continuation of hospital services during an operational transition later this year.

Plans call for the emergency room of Clinton Regional Hospital to open Oct. 30, while INTEGRIS Health has been selected to be the next health care operator for the Woodward hospital, effective Dec. 1. AllianceHealth, a private hospital management company, decided last year to stop operating both hospitals, which resulted in the Clinton facility closing and left Woodward leaders looking at other options.

Keeping each hospital open is vital for both communities, as losing one could create a domino effect of diminished health care services with physicians leaving a community and clinics and pharmacies closing. Rural hospitals in Oklahoma also stand as key economic engines and often are leading employers in their communities.

In Clinton, a city of about 8,600 people about 80 minutes west of Oklahoma City, plans are to have the hospital operating under the governance of a local board this fall. Ideally, it would fully open around Thanksgiving, said Clinton city manager Robert Johnston.

City officials are looking at the possibility of a hospital management company operating the hospital or leasing it to a larger hospital, he said.

“No decision has been made yet,” Johnston said.

In March, an urgent care clinic, managed by the private enterprise Carrus Health, opened within an adjacent doctors’ building.

“It has filled part of the medical need,” Johnston said. “Doctors and local physicians have remained in place.”

The Oklahoma State Department of Health issued a license for Clinton Regional Hospital on Aug. 1. In an email accompanying the license, Jerry Martin, administrative programs manager of the medical facilities service and protective health services of OSDH, advised Johnston that issuance of a state hospital operation license does not immediately guarantee certification by or complete enrollment with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

“OSDH has repeatedly advised various representatives for the Clinton Regional Hospital, and will continue to advise, that CRH is required to meet all applicable CMS regulations for certification,” Martin wrote.

‘We’re trying to be very good stewards’

Both Clinton and Woodward received bad news late last year from the company providing health services that it was not renewing its lease for either hospital. Last December, AllianceHealth provided Woodward officials one year’s notice of its intent to stop leasing the city-owned hospital. The same company also operated the city-owned hospital in Clinton and told city officials last year it was leaving by the end of 2022 after gradually reducing services.

AllianceHealth closed Clinton Regional Hospital on Dec. 31. But instead of transferring state and federal licenses to the city of Clinton as previous operators had done, the company canceled the permits. Reapplication for those licenses took additional time and also required the city to spend millions of dollars on upgrades to the hospital, which was built in 1973.

The city didn’t have that type of cash available. However, when the hospital was built, the city of Clinton operated it, and a fund was established to pay for long-term needs. The fund started out with about \$6 million in it, but interest and revenue over the years increased the balance to \$11.6 million.

To access money from that fund to reopen the hospital, the Clinton Hospital Authority, comprised of Clinton City Council members, must receive approval from voters.

In March, those voters demonstrated how much they value having a local hospital by giving near-unanimous support for a proposal to authorize use of the \$11.6 million to reopen Clinton Regional Hospital. The vote passed 1,221 to 81 (93.7 percent) in the Custer County community. Failure of the issue would have functionally kept the hospital closed, forcing residents to continue driving to the Weatherford hospital about 15 minutes to the east along I-40.

Since then, the CHA has been reformed, with most of the members of a hospital advisory board replacing Clinton City Council members, and the body has been making upgrades to the hospital building and buying equipment, Johnston said. About \$7 million remains in the hospital fund.

“We’re trying to be very good stewards of that available funding,” he said.

The licensing process with the Oklahoma State Department of Health took longer than expected because AllianceHealth not only terminated the Medicare agreement and state license but did not cooperate with the CHA to transfer the license, Johnston said. As a result, it took longer to clarify



WESTERN OK HOSPITALS *from AI*

KEEPING EACH HOSPITAL OPEN IS VITAL FOR BOTH COMMUNITIES, AS LOSING ONE COULD CREATE A DOMINO EFFECT OF DIMINISHED HEALTH CARE SERVICES WITH PHYSICIANS LEAVING A COMMUNITY AND CLINICS AND PHARMACIES CLOSING.

ALLIANCEHEALTH. Plans to reopen the former AllianceHealth hospital in Clinton, Oklahoma, are underway in 2023. PHOTOS TRES SAVAGE

whether the hospital could be licensed as is or would require millions of dollars in updates to comply with provisions of newer facilities.

“Over many months, the Oklahoma State Department of Health has worked diligently with the city of Clinton and clearly communicated the requirements of opening their local hospital,” said Erica Rankin-Rily, OSDH public information officer, in an emailed statement. “OSDH has been consistent and clear on the process, never wavering on the actions that must be taken to ensure patient safety and meet the regulatory responsibilities required of the OSDH.”

With a state license now in hand, the city can begin the process to reopen the hospital.

The next step is for the hospital to be surveyed by an accreditation organization to reinstitute the agreement between the hospital and Medicare. The hospital will also need to rehire employees because it was unable to retain staff as the length of the closure grew. Supplies and equipment will also have to be restocked.

“A number of things need to be done before we can reopen,” said Ken Baker, chairman of the CHA, in a statement. “But having the license allows us to start the process. We expect the rest of the process to be much smoother.”

The license issued by OSDH is for a 22-bed facility. The hospital previously had 56 beds. At one time, it employed 200 people. Officials said the Clinton Regional Hospital probably will reopen with about 50 employees, a staffing number that may eventually increase to about 100.

“Having accessible health care is a critical part of a healthy population,” Mayor David Berrong said in a statement. “We are proud of the work that has been done by so many and the unwavering support of the community to make this happen.”

The city operated its hospital for the first 25 years of its existence, but then the city hired outside operators. Different private companies operated the hospital the past 12 years.

AllianceHealth, which runs hospitals in Durant, Madill, Ponca City and Woodward, has been shrinking its footprint in Oklahoma. In 2020, the company relinquished operations of the Midwest City hospital. Last year, it ended its operations of a medical facility in Seminole and announced it would not renew the lease for the hospital in Woodward when it expires Nov. 30, 2023.

When INTEGRIS Health announced it was acquiring operations of the Woodward hospital, it also announced it was taking over the Ponca City hospital from AllianceHealth.

“We have a dedicated and skilled team of providers who have and will continue to provide safe, quality care for our patients,” Chris Mendoza, chief executive officer of AllianceHealth Ponca City, said in the INTEGRIS press release.

“We’ll work closely with the leadership of INTEGRIS Health to support a smooth integration with their organization.”

Smooth transition expected at Woodward hospital

Woodward city manager Shaun Barnett said INTEGRIS Health, the largest Oklahoma-owned nonprofit health system in the state, will begin operating the Woodward hospital effective Dec. 1. Until then, AllianceHealth will continue to run the hospital and deliver health care services for patients, he said.

Barnett said the partnership with INTEGRIS Health will establish Woodward as a regional source for health care services. Woodward, a city of nearly 12,000 people about 125 miles northwest of Oklahoma City, is the largest city in a nine-county area.

“The city owns the building and INTEGRIS will take that over,” he said. “They will be transitioning the operations of the hospital, including staff. Most won’t even see the difference when it switches over. So, everything will operate as is.”

Identifying a new provider was a top priority and of utmost importance for the benefit and assurance of the community, dedicated health care professionals, staff and support personnel, Barnett said.

“At no point will the hospital close during the transition” he said. “Everything will still continue to function. Behind the scenes will be all the transition.”

The 87-bed hospital offers inpatient and outpatient services, as well as medical and surgical procedures.

“INTEGRIS Health’s mission is partnering with people to live healthier lives. We are thrilled to partner with the city of Woodward to advance our mission by serving more lives in the western part of our state,” Timothy Pehrson, INTEGRIS president and CEO, said in a statement.

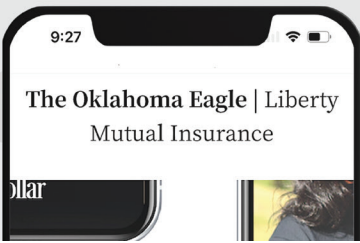
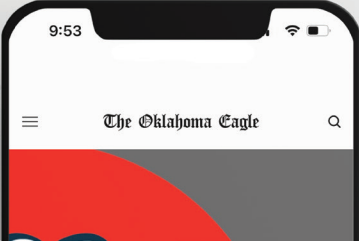






PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

REDLINING *from A2*

Oklahoma Clinton J. Johnson, describes and quotes from emails which the filing describes as “racist or discriminatory.” The emails purport to have been sent or received from loan officers and bank executives. In one e-mail, entitled “Proud to be White,” the sender used racial slurs, including the “N word” and refers to a geographic area in Tulsa as a “ghetto” that is the “most dangerous place to live.” Another e-mail attributed violent crime to Black people and made other negative associations.

One email stated, “Multiculturalism: what a perfect method to kill our language, culture, country, and way of life.” Others said immigrants should “get a place to lay [their] head, get a job, and “live By OUR Rules!” One was quoted as saying, “If you think Mexicans and Muslims and other foreigners [sp] will eventually fit right in then you are as big a part of the problem as they are.”

Investigative findings: Lending discrimination

During the 2017-21 period examined by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company [FDIC] and referred to the Justice Department for investigation, all the bank branches and loan offices were in majority-white neighborhoods. The American Bank of Oklahoma’s lending area included seven counties, 236 census tracts, and approximately 900,000 residents in the Tulsa area.

According to the investigation, ABOK outreach, advertising, and loan efforts were non-existent in the 26 census tracts that were majority Black and Hispanic in the Tulsa lending area. “Beginning in 2014 or earlier... ABOK delineated its assessment area in the Tulsa MSA to exclude all of the majority-Black and Hispanic census tracts.” This exclusion area “contains the neighborhoods destroyed during the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre”, the complaint adds.

Using “ABOK’s own data,” the Justice Department found that of the 1,736 mortgage applications in the Tulsa lending area, only 14 came from Black and Hispanic majority census tracts. And of the 1,527 residential mortgage loans from 2017-21, only nine were from these census tracts, and “only one loan was made to a Black or Hispanic borrower.” Johnson, releasing a press statement while making the complaint filing, said, “American Bank of Oklahoma engaged in the illegal practice of redlining and failed to serve the diverse members of the Tulsa community as they attempted to purchase homes.”

The settlement: Community benefits

The American Bank of Oklahoma, a state-chartered bank founded in 1998, has 11 physical locations in Oklahoma, five of which are its primary focus in the Tulsa lending area. The Bank’s all-white Board of Directors and its Chief Executive Officer admitted no wrongdoing but agreed to the proposed Consent Order through their attorneys. It will require the signoff of the Northern District of Oklahoma Court. It contains the following provisions targeting benefits to the Black and Hispanic majority areas of north Tulsa:

- Provide a loan subsidy fund of at least \$950,000, specifically for residents of these minority neighborhoods
- Establish a loan production office in the north Tulsa area with two mortgage loan officers dedicated to serving the neighborhoods
- Spend \$100,000 toward developing community partnerships providing access to services that increase access to credit.
- Outlay an additional \$100,000 for advertising, outreach, and community education
- Host at least six consumer education seminars per year over the five-year term of the Consent Decree

Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clark of DOJ’s Civil Rights Division commented on the settlement: “This agreement will help expand investment in Black communities and communities of color in Tulsa and increase opportunities for home ownership and stability,” she said. “Remedial provisions in the agreement will open opportunities for building generational wealth while focusing on neighborhoods that bear the scars of the Tulsa Race Massacre.”

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**CORRUPTION** *from AI*

IN JANUARY 2022, ROSARIO CHICO, A TELEVISION PRODUCER AND CHAIR OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE FOR THE TULSA BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE (NAACP) TOOK HER THREE CHILDREN, 12, 7, AND 6, TO A BATTERED WOMAN’S SHELTER IN ARKANSAS TO ESCAPE HER HUSBAND, CHRISTIAN VIETTI, A NURSE WHOM SHE SAID PHYSICALLY AND SEXUALLY ABUSED HER AND HER CHILDREN AND ISSUED THREATS AGAINST HER.



But in a bizarre twist of circumstance, Chico has been arrested on felony child-stealing charges by Arkansas police and will be the defendant in a jury trial that begins on Sept. 18 in Tulsa. Vietti tipped off the police, Chico alleges. Tulsa County District Attorney Steven Kunzweiler is prosecuting the case against her. Tulsa officials dropped domestic assault and battery charges without Chico having the opportunity to testify or her being informed, Chico has told The Oklahoma Eagle. If accurate, the circumstances would be a violation of Marsy’s Law. Marsy’s Law is a legal statute resulting from a national movement that seeks to ensure that victims of crime have meaningful and enforceable constitutional rights in the criminal justice system. Oklahoma voters passed Marsy’s Law in November 2018 as a ballot initiative. Many other states have also passed the statute.

Chico told her perspective on the case in detailed interviews with The Oklahoma Eagle. She feels she is a victim of corruption in the Tulsa legal system. Several other cases underscore her allegations that her case is not isolated but part of a pattern of corruption in the Tulsa judicial system.

On July 17, Chico and 20 other protesters rallied and spoke at a rally for criminal justice reform in front of the Tulsa County Courthouse against corruption in the Tulsa judicial system and for reforms in the system.

During the rally, Chico said that there were “too many cases at the Tulsa Court where there was a lack of due process; defendants in some cases were denied court reporters; evidence in many cases was not being properly reviewed; attorneys, judges and Guardian ad Litem (GALs) sometimes colluded together and did not act in the interests of justice, and some prosecutions appeared to be malicious.”

Chico also said that “victims of domestic violence and their kids were not being protected, and the D.A.’s office was turning those victims into defendants.”

Chico says that she had filed for a protective order against her husband, and her legal team contacted local law enforcement and the U.S. Attorney’s office, which advised her to go to the Mexican Consulate in Little Rock, Ark., near the shelter where local police apprehended and arrested her. Chico has said that forensic evidence confirms that Vietti sexually assaulted her children.

Since her arrest, Chico has lost custody of her children, whom she can only see under supervised visitation for four hours per week. The children live with their paternal grandmother, Jackie Vietti, a former education professor and president of Butler Community College whose attorney, Jordan Dalglish, according to Chico, worked for the campaign that got Kunzweiler elected.

Vietti’s attorney, N. Scott Johnson, represents the wife of Judge David Guten, who initially recused himself from the case but then reinserted himself. Kunzweiler contributed to Judge Guten’s election campaign, Chico alleges. The Guardian ad Litem (GAL) in the custody case, Catherine Welsh, gave money to Kunzweiler’s election campaign, and Becki Murphy, the GAL’s attorney, worked for the DA’s office.

Because of this unsettling web of personal connections, Chico is concerned that she won’t get a fair trial and believes she is being unfairly prosecuted. She says that Kunzweiler has ignored exculpatory evidence in her case. She is worried that she could go to jail and be deported and never see her children again because she is not a U.S. citizen (and is a green card holder).

### Chico and Others Speak Out

During the July 17 rally in downtown Tulsa, Chico said that hope lies in a growing movement, cutting across Democratic and Republican Party divides, which is demanding change. “This is our courthouse, funded by taxpayers, and it is supposed to work for us. Many people know about the problem and are intimidated from speaking out, but more and more people are beginning to do so.”

After the rally, Steve Kunzweiler’s office issued a statement saying that they were “proceeding forward with [Chico’s case] and that it was “improper for any party to try a case in front of the camera. That is what judges and courtrooms are for.”

Some protesters at the rally held signs demanding Kunzweiler’s resignation and that of Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Ashley Nix.

Francetta Mays, president of the NAACP’s Oklahoma Branch, referred to the current criminal justice system in Tulsa County as being broken. However, she said she was encouraged that “more and more people are speaking out against an old problem.”

Lisa Woolley, another speaker at the rally, shared that she went through personal hell after she and her husband, Bill, were falsely accused of killing their grandson in 2018, who died of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). After being acquitted of murder charges in 2021, the Woolley’s are trying to regain custody of their only living grandson, who is stuck in the foster care system, where he has been subject to abuse.

Woolley said that her experiences have caused her to see how judges don’t actually review the evidence in cases they preside over but make predetermined decisions based on the judgments of Department of Human Services (DHS) experts, even when they prove to be false, and that the best interest of kids is not often considered.

### Horror Stories of Rally Goers

Other participants in the rally told of their personal experiences that correlated with what Woolley and the others were saying.

Amber Goldschmidt, a Tulsa real estate agent, said that she was threatened with a protective order by Assistant District Attorney Ashley Nix after she began posting on social media about how Nix had ensured that her ex-husband got a suspended sentence after he had repeatedly assaulted her; Goldschmidt said she believes that the light sentence stems from the fact that Nix’s best friend is the niece of her ex-husband’s attorney.

Nix is the target of a federal lawsuit by Attorney Dan Smolen, who represents Timothy Hankins, a computer specialist who was falsely accused of rape by Nix and acquitted in court. Nix is responsible for rape prosecutions and was amazingly promoted and received an award despite having falsely accused Hankins as part of a scheme to cover up her sexual indiscretions.

Acquanita Martin, a substitute teacher and health care technician, held a photo at the rally of her son, Myron Martin, who died at the age of 40 while in solitary confinement at the Mac Allen Center in Atoka County in Springtown, Okla., on Nov. 21, 2022.

Martin was a former University of Tulsa basketball player who his mother said fell in with the wrong crowd and got a 12-year prison sentence on robbery charges. It is unknown to her why he was sent to solitary confinement. His mother said that her son “wasn’t a violent person. He was always smiling. Even in his booking photo.”

Prison authorities claim that Martin died of a methamphetamine overdose. Yet it is unclear how somebody in solitary confinement could get methamphetamines. The warden told her that the drugs had come into the jail from drones.

Martin was found brutally beaten and had been pepper sprayed. Ms. Martin sent photos of her son to Fox 23 News, showing him bruises all over his body and head. She believes it is possible that prison authorities planted drugs on him to cover up for his murder.

However, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections has said that “foul play” was not suspected in Martin’s death and that they were “waiting for a cause of death determination from the medical examiner.”

Shelly Ware runs a prison ministry in Broken Arrow. She wore a t-shirt at the rally spotlighting the case of Channen Ray Ozell Smith, who is serving a life sentence at Dick Conner Correctional facility in Hominy, Okla., even though another man, Arlen Young, confessed to the crime on his deathbed in January 2017 and said that Smith was wrongfully convicted.

Since Young’s confession, four men have come forward to corroborate it. Smith’s then-girlfriend also confirmed that Smith was 30 miles away from where the shooting that resulted in his conviction had taken place.

Another alleged miscarriage of justice occurred in the case of Angelo Vallejo, a 36-year-old Tulsan woman whose twin daughters were put in the care of her ex-husband, who physically attacked her and caused her to have a miscarriage. Vallejo fears that her kids are being continuously abused.

The same is true of another woman who attended the rally, Tara Barton, a 32-year-old Door Dash employee whose eight-year-old daughter was placed in the custody of her father, Steven Christian, who Barton says sexually molested the child.

Barton says that a doctor testified about this abuse. However, the judge in the case in Okmulgee did not acknowledge that her grandson was good friends with Christian, which may have led her to side with him.

Barton says that her daughter’s father and stepmom continuously abuse the child, and she fears for her child’s safety.

Barton’s case provides another excellent example of a criminal justice system that punishes victims and children too often. People need to become aware of abuses of power taking place and should join forces with others to institute needed reforms.

**Editor’s Note:** *Jeremy Kuzmarov is a Tulsa-based writer and editor. This article is the part of an occasional series Kuzmarov is reporting and writing for the Oklahoma Eagle.*



# Efforts To CLOSE THE TALIHINA VETERANS HOME HAVE RESUMED

By MICHAEL McNUTT, NonDoc | **VETERANS HOME CLOSURE** from BI

The Veterans  
Commission  
voted to close  
the Talihina  
facility before  
the new  
building at  
Sallisaw opens  
because the  
agency is losing  
\$500,000 a  
month.

After a brief pause owing to concerns raised by some Oklahoma legislators, efforts to close the Talihina Veterans Home have resumed with the goal to have residents out of the 102-year-old facility by Oct. 31 and so that it can be closed by Dec. 1.

Eleven residents remain at the Talihina Veterans Home, down from 36 just two months ago, according to Greg Slavonic, executive director of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs. Five of those residents want to stay as long as possible there, Slavonic told members of the Oklahoma Veterans Commission during a meeting today. He said seven of the remaining residents have indicated they will go to one of the other six state veterans homes, while the two others will go either to a private nursing home or live with family.

A new nursing and residential veterans home being built in Sallisaw will eventually replace the Talihina Veterans Home and add bed capacity to the ODVA's system. Originally, that facility had been proposed to open last month, but construction delays and complications with an architect have pushed back its completion to at least November 2024. Getting necessary federal regulatory approval to open the new home could take another three months.

When the Oklahoma Veterans Commission voted unanimously during a special meeting June 22 to close the Talihina Veterans Home, 36 residents were living there. Of the 25 who have since left, 23 have moved to other veterans homes in the state, Rob Arrington, director of homes, told commissioners Monday. All 36 have the option to move to the Sallisaw Veterans Home when it opens.

The Veterans Commission voted to close the Talihina facility before the new building at Sallisaw opens because the agency is losing \$500,000 a month at Talihina owing to low occupancy and high contract employee costs. The Talihina Veterans Home at one time had an occupancy rate of 175 veterans.

However, days after the commission's June 22 vote, Slavonic said he was summoned by Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat (R-OKC) for a meeting to discuss the timeline of the Talihina Veterans Home closure. Others in the meeting were Sen. Warren Hamilton (R-McCurtain) and Sen. Paul Rosino (R-OKC), as well as Secretary of State and Native American Affairs Brian Bingman and Secretary of Military and Veterans Affairs John Nash. Following the meeting, Slavonic decided to pause the facility's closure.

The senators said there were caught off guard by the closure occurring his year, Slavonic said, and there was some confusion over state law involving its closure. SB 1814, which was passed and signed into law in 2022, struck a provision from a 2018 law that stated the Talihina Veterans Home "shall continue until such time as operations are transferred" to the veterans home being built in Sallisaw.

"It's not like this was new to anybody, it's just that we accelerated it," Slavonic recalled after Monday's meeting. "We wouldn't be in this situation if Sallisaw would have already opened. It was supposed to have already opened."

It ultimately was decided the Veterans Commission acted correctly by interpreting the 2022 law as giving it authority to close the Talihina Veterans Home instead of waiting until the new nursing home opens, Slovanic said.

## Talihina still losing about \$500,000 a month

At the June 22 special meeting, commissioners were told that ODVA would need additional funding next year if the Talihina home were to remain operational until the agency's new Sallisaw Veterans Home is ready to open. Commissioners expressed reluctance to do that after lawmakers granted their last-minute request in May for an \$11.6 million appropriation increase to cover anticipated operating losses.

Lawmakers also approved about \$22 million in one-time funding for the Sallisaw construction project, which has been delayed more than a year by complications with an architect and subsequent cost overruns. In 2018, the agency and its governing commission initially agreed to close the Talihina Veterans Home only after the new Sallisaw center was completed, as specified in the 2018 law.

But a special study into the operations of the Talihina Veterans Home showed it was causing ODVA to lose \$500,000 a month. Commissioners were told that maintaining the Talihina Veterans Home, which was built in 1921 in the wooded hills just west of what became Lake Carl Albert, would require ODVA to ask legislators to appropriate \$9 million over the next 18 months.

Despite having only nine residents, the Talihina Veterans Home losses are still running about \$500,000 a month, Slavonic said Monday.

The ODVA has offered 77 reduction-in-force packages to employees at the Talihina Veterans Home. So far, 39 have accepted the offer. The deadline to accept the RIF package is Sept. 15. The veterans home also has contracted employees who provide nursing and medical care work, and those numbers are also dwindling.

Employees will still be needed at the center once all the residents leave, Slavonic said. Tasks for those employees will include distributing equipment and vehicles to other centers and dealing with a large volume of paper files and health records. The agency will seek guidance on which records need to be digitized and which others can be destroyed.

"We need to get a feel of what can be destroyed and what we can maintain and where we're going to maintain them," he said. "We don't know what is left undone when all the residents leave. You're going to have to winterize the facility. There will be ongoing maintenance to make sure that we don't have other

maintenance issues by totally shutting everything down."

The ODVA is working with the Office of Management and Enterprise Services on finding a buyer for the Talihina Veterans home property, he said.

## Interim removed from Slavonic's title

In other action Monday, commissioners voted 5-0 to make Slavonic the agency's executive director.

Slavonic was hired in March by the Veterans Commission as interim executive director.

A former undersecretary of and rear admiral in the U.S. Navy, he was hired in March by the Veterans Commission after it ended its standoff with previous ODVA executive director Joel Kintsel. The Veterans Commission fired him after he had refused to attend meetings because he insisted some commissioners were "illegitimate" appointees.

Commission Secretary Sidney Ellington said Slavonic has been a good administrator and leader for the agency.

"He calmed everything down," Ellington said.

Commission member Kevin Offel agreed.

"He's done an excellent job of righting the ship," Offel said.

Nash, the Cabinet secretary, complimented Slavonic for his leadership and communication skills, saying Slavonic calls him regularly to update him on agency issues.

"Director Slavonic is a rare leader," Nash said. "It's been a pleasure to work with him."

Slavonic said he would like to complete the closing of the Talihina Veterans Home as well as see the completion of the Sallisaw Veterans Home and work to get pay raises for agency employees.

"There are good employees that work here, and I just think they weren't treated right," he said.

Commissioners also voted unanimously to authorize Slavonic to hire a certified public accountant to review the agency's finances from the 2018 fiscal year through the 2023 fiscal year, which ended June 30. The agency also earlier requested a performance audit from the State Auditor and Inspector's Office from January 2022 through December 2023.

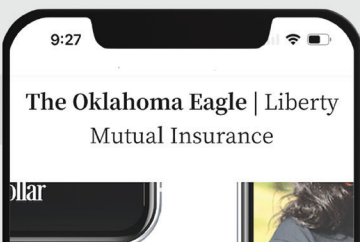
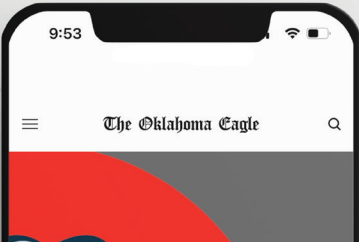
Ideally, the financial reviews will help explain why the Sallisaw Veterans Home project came up short \$22 million and why the agency needed a cash infusion of about \$10 million toward the end of this year's legislative session, Slovanec said.

"When I leave, I can hand off hopefully a clean audit from a performance standpoint, an equipment standpoint and a financial standpoint," he said. "I didn't have that luxury."

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Monday Worship - 6:00pm  
Wednesday Bible Study - 5:00pm

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

Pastor Ruthie I. Howard

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

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Sunday Morning  
Worship - 10:45

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

Rev. John W. Anderson

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P: 918-587-1428  
F: 918-587-0642  
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

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8:30 am

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10:00 am

Wednesday  
Bible Study  
6:00 pm

Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

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Sunday School  
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Sunday TV  
Worship  
11:00 a.m.

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Sunday Morning Worship  
11:00 a.m.

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Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.  
Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.

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Wednesday Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.

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Morning Worship 10:45  
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Black women are less likely than women from other racial groups to carry a pregnancy to term — and in Harris County, Texas... when they do, their infants are about twice as likely to die before their 1st birthday as those from other racial group. **A13**



# WHY THIS TEACHER SPENT \$4,200 ON CLASSROOM SUPPLIES

By MAYA POTTIGER, WORD IN BLACK  
**CLASSROOM SUPPLIES** from A1



From pencils and notebooks to tables and chairs, low-paid teachers are shelling out big bucks for necessities their schools won't provide.

**WHEN** she graduated from college, Kayla Gamble had a typical request: Money. But Gamble, who had just earned her teaching degree, wasn't putting the money toward a well-deserved trip or new apartment furniture or even saving it for bills. Instead, she needed it to fund her classroom. "You're starting from scratch," Gamble, a fourth-grade teacher in the Atlanta area, says. She started out putting the funds toward the "bare necessities," like storage and other bigger items she'll need year after year. But, she says, "that money goes away pretty quickly." "I slowly stocked up, even trying to be creative and using, basically, colored paper to decorate my room," Gamble says. "I wasn't necessarily going super hard trying to be like the Pinterest or Instagram teachers. I'm not spending all of my money."

**What Teachers Are Buying**  
So what are teachers buying for their classrooms? For Gamble, it's "basically everything that you see." Tables and chairs, flexible seating (cushions and soft surfaces), and even basics like pencils, glue sticks, and cleaning supplies. Gamble says she's spent at least \$200 on Clorox wipes. This holds up with the experience of teachers nationwide. The most common request among teachers is basic classroom supplies, according to a 2023 DonorsChoose survey. This means things like paper, pencils, and cleaning supplies. They also request things that address students' basic needs: Personal items like snacks, warm clothing, and hygiene products. Teachers were least likely to report needing technology. And, though she asks for parents to help out, Gamble works in a Title I school, which means low-income students are at least 40% of the enrollment. "Parents are more working class, so it's a little bit harder to get them to participate, especially donating," she says. Kandice Taylor, an eighth-grade science teacher in Jackson, Mississippi, also works at a Title I school, but she has a different shopping list. Every year, Taylor has to not only purchase new lab materials with a limited shelf life, like chemicals and food materials, but also replace easily broken supplies, like ramekin cups. Not only does Taylor purchase all of the lab supplies her students need, she's also had to buy tables and chairs for her classroom. Her school only provided desks for

her classroom, "and I do not feel that you can do science in a desk," Taylor says. "Science is not something that you can do with pencil and paper, and that's how they expect you to teach it," Taylor says. "But that's not the type of teacher that I am. And that's not how you can actually learn."

**Teachers Annually Spend Hundreds on Classroom Supplies**  
On average, teachers spend \$687 of their pocket money on classroom supplies, and the number rises to \$714 for teachers of color, according to the DonorsChoose survey. And, the survey found, teachers are spending more post-pandemic. But Gamble and Taylor have far exceeded that heading into the 2023-2024 school year. Though Gamble has gotten lucky this year with internet-goers purchasing between \$1,000-\$2,000 worth of items off her wishlist, she's still spent money on snacks and smaller things. And Taylor has already spent \$4,200 before school even started — far exceeding her usual \$3,000 due to needing to replace larger classroom items. In terms of items on Gamble's wishlist, people are helping out by buying necessities, like extra paper and composition notebooks. "All those things just add up and eat away at our salary," Gamble says. "We're Just Doing Our Best to Make Sure Every Kid Has Enough" When it comes to out-of-pocket spending, it's about "how truly committed you are to a child's education," Taylor says. For Taylor, it's important to get the materials to help with a student's critical thinking, help facilitate learning with them, and help them be accountable for their own learning. "I believe in giving a child my best," Taylor says. "So it's not unusual [to spend this much], but it's not a typical thing, either." Teachers try to do memorable things throughout the year and make sure kids feel special and seen. One of the ways Gamble shows her students she cares is by putting together birthday bags, which are filled with candies, fidget toys, and other things she knows they like. "A lot of my kids, their parents are immigrants, they're working class. A lot of them don't do a lot for their birthday," Gamble says. "They come into class in the morning, and they have a cute little bag just for them. I feel like it's the least I can do." "We're just trying to do our best with what we have," Gamble says, "and to make sure that every kid has enough."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KANDICE TAYLOR



# Dangers & Deaths Around Black Pregnancies SEEN AS A ‘COMPLETELY PREVENTABLE’ HEALTH CRISIS

By SANDY WEST, WORD IN BLACK | **PREGNANCY DANGER** from A12

**TONJANIC HILL** was overjoyed in 2017 when she learned she was 14 weeks pregnant. Despite a history of uterine fibroids, she never lost faith that she would someday have a child.

But, just five weeks after confirming her pregnancy, and the day after a gender-reveal party where she announced she was having a girl, she seemed unable to stop urinating. She didn’t realize her amniotic fluid was leaking. Then came the excruciating pain.

“I ended up going to the emergency room,” said Hill, now 35. “That’s where I had the most traumatic, horrible experience ever.”

An ultrasound showed she had lost 90% of her amniotic fluid. Yet, over the angry protestations of her nurse, Hill said, the attending doctor insisted Hill be discharged and see her own OB-GYN the next day. The doctor brushed off her concerns, she said. The next morning, her OB-GYN’s office rushed her back to the hospital. But she lost her baby, Tabitha Winnie Denkins.

Black women are less likely than women from other racial groups to carry a pregnancy to term — and in Harris County, where Houston is located, when they do, their infants are about twice as likely to die before their 1st birthday as those from other racial groups. Black fetal and infant deaths are part of a continuum of systemic failures that contribute to disproportionately high Black maternal mortality rates.

“This is a public health crisis as it relates to Black moms and babies that is completely preventable,” said Barbie Robinson, who took over as executive director of Harris County Public Health in March 2021. “When you look at the breakdown demographically — who’s disproportionality impacted by the lack of access — we have a situation where we can expect these horrible outcomes.”

In fact, Harris County ranks third, behind only Chicago’s Cook County and Detroit’s Wayne County, for having the highest totals of what are known as excess Black infant deaths, according to the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. Those three counties, which also are among the nation’s most populated counties, account for 7% of all Black births in the country and 9% of excess Black infant deaths, said Ashley Hirai, a senior scientist at HRSA. That means the counties have the largest number of Black births but also more deaths that would not occur if Black babies had the same chance of reaching their 1st birthdays as white infants.

No known genetic reasons exist for Black infants to die at higher rates than white infants. Such deaths are often called “deaths of disparity” because they are likely attributable to systemic racial disparities. Regardless of economic status or educational attainment, the stress from experiencing persistent systemic racism leads to adverse health consequences for Black women and their babies, according to a study published in Women’s Health Issues journal.

These miscarriages and deaths can occur even in communities that otherwise appear to have vast health care resources. In Harris County, for example, home to two public hospitals and the Texas Medical Center — the largest medical complex in the world with more than 54 medical-related institutions and 21 hospitals — mortality rates were 11.1 per 1,000 births for Black infants from 2014 through 2019, according to the March of Dimes, compared with 4.7 for white infants.

The abundance of providers in Harris County hasn’t reassured Black pregnant patients that they can find care that is timely, appropriate, or culturally competent — care that acknowledges a person’s heritage, beliefs, and values during treatment.

Regardless of income or insurance status, studies show that medical providers often dismiss Black women’s questions and concerns, minimize their physical complaints, and do not offer appropriate care. By contrast, one study of 1.8 million hospital births spanning 23 years in Florida found that the gap in mortality rates between Black and white newborns were halved for Black babies when Black physicians cared for them.

In 2013, Houstonian Kay Matthews was running a successful catering business when she lost the daughter she’d named Troya eight months and three weeks into pregnancy.

Matthews hadn’t felt well — she’d been sluggish and tired — for several days, but her doctor told her not to worry. Not long afterward, she woke up realizing something was terribly wrong. She passed out after calling 911. When she woke up, she was in the emergency room.

None of the medical staffers would talk to her, she said. She had no idea what was happening, no one was answering her questions, and she started having a panic attack.

“It kind of felt like I was watching myself lose everything,” she recalled. She said the nurse seemed annoyed with her questions and demeanor and gave her a sedative. “When I woke up, I did not have a baby.”

Matthews recalled one staffer insinuating that she and her partner couldn’t afford to pay the bill, even though she was a financially stable business owner, and he had a well-paying job as a truck driver.

She said hospital staffers showed minimal compassion after she lost Troya. They seemed to dismiss her grief, she said. It was the first time she could remember feeling as if she was treated callously because she is Black.

“There was no respect at all, like zero respect or compassion,” said Matthews, who has since founded Shades of Blue Project, a Houston nonprofit focused on improving maternal mental health, primarily for Black patients.

To help combat these high mortality rates in Harris County, Robinson created a maternal child and health office and launched a home-visit pilot program to connect prenatal and postpartum patients with resources such as housing assistance, medical care, and social services. Limited access to healthy food and recreational activities are barriers to healthy pregnancy outcomes. Studies have also shown a connection between evictions and infant mortality.

For Hill, not having insurance was also likely a factor. While pregnant, Hill said, she had had just a single visit at a community health center before her miscarriage. She was working multiple jobs as a college student at the time and did not have employer-provided medical coverage. She was not yet approved for Medicaid, the state-federal program for people with low incomes or disabilities.

Texas has the nation’s highest uninsured rate, with nearly 5 million Texans — or 20% of those younger than 65 — lacking coverage, said Anne

Dunkelberg, a senior fellow with Every Texan, a nonprofit research and advocacy institute focused on equity in public policy. While non-Hispanic Black Texans have a slightly better rate — 17% — than that overall state level, it’s still higher than the 12% rate for non-Hispanic white Texans, according to census data. Health experts fear that many more people are losing insurance coverage as covid-19 pandemic protections end for Medicaid.

Without full coverage, those who are pregnant may avoid seeking care, meaning they skip being seen in the critical first trimester, said Fatimah Lalani, medical director at Houston’s Hope Clinic.

Texas had the lowest percentage of mothers receiving early prenatal care in the nation in 2020, according to the state’s 2021 Healthy Texas Mothers and Babies Databook, and non-Hispanic Black moms and babies were less likely to receive first-trimester care than other racial and ethnic groups. Babies born without prenatal care were three times as likely to have a low birth weight and five times as likely to die as those whose mothers had access to care.

If Hill’s miscarriage reflects how the system failed her, the birth of her twins two years later demonstrates how appropriate support has the potential to change outcomes.

With Medicaid coverage from the beginning of her second pregnancy, Hill saw a high-risk pregnancy specialist. Diagnosed early with what’s called an incompetent cervix, Hill was consistently seen, monitored, and treated. She also was put on bed rest for her entire pregnancy.

She had an emergency cesarean section at 34 weeks, and both babies spent two weeks in neonatal intensive care. Today, her premature twins are 3 years old.

“I believe God — and the high-risk doctor — saved my twins,” she said.

## TWEETS:

“This is a public health crisis as it relates to Black moms and babies that is completely preventable,” Barbie Robinson, head of @hcphtx, told @\_SandyWest.

Houston’s Harris County ranks behind only Chicago’s Cook County and Detroit’s Wayne County for what are known as excess Black infant deaths. @\_SandyWest reports on the problem.

KFF Health News, formerly known as Kaiser Health News (KHN), is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs at KFF — the independent source for health policy research, polling, and journalism.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KFF HEALTH NEWS





# Fields Shares Release Of New Book, "Going Back To T-Town: The Ernie Fields Territory Big Band," At NABJ Convention

Carmen Fields, author of "Going Back to T-Town: The Ernie Fields Territory Big Band," participated in a multi-city tour, including Oklahoma City and Tulsa.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARMEN FIELDS

She introduced her new book, "Going Back to T-Town: The Ernie Fields Territory Big Band." It was released this year by The University of Oklahoma Press.

Former Tulsan Carmen Fields presented at the Authors' Showcase at the National Association of Black Journalists national convention in Birmingham, Ala., Aug. 2-6. At NABJ, she introduced her newly released book, "Going Back to T-Town: The Ernie Fields Territory Big Band." Fields is an award-winning journalist who currently produces and hosts the public affairs program "Higher Ground" on WHDH-TV

in Boston. A former Boston Globe reporter, she wrote the script for the PBS "The American Experience" documentary "Goin Back to T-Town" (1993). Fields is a graduate of Boston University, Lincoln University (Missouri), and Tulsa's Booker T. Washington High School. She also holds an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Salem State (MA) University.

Fields' book is available online at The University of Oklahoma Press and locally at Magic City Books.

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN

# Morgan Hosts National NABJ Awards Gala

Native Tulsan DeMarco Morgan, co-anchor of "GMA: What You Need to Know," co-hosted the Salute to Excellence Awards Gala, the closing event for the National Association of Black Journalists annual event in Birmingham, Ala., Aug. 2-6. He is also an ABC News correspondent completing reports for "Good Morning America," and "World News with David Muir." A graduate of Columbia University, Jackson State University, and Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, Morgan is former co-anchor of KCBS-TV weekday morning newscasts in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, he reported for all CBS News network broadcasts and platforms, according to the NABJ website. He was previously a co-anchor and reporter at WXIA-TV in Atlanta, a weekend evening anchor for WNBC-TV in New York, and a cut-in anchor for MSNBC.

Morgan was joined in officiating at the dinner program by Somora Theodore, meteorologist for ABC News and "Good Morning America Weekend."

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN



LEFT TO RIGHT DR. JERRY GOODWIN, SOMARA THEODORE, METEOROLOGIST FOR ABC NEWS, AND DEMARCO MORGAN, CO-ANCHOR OF ABC'S "GOOD MORNING AMERICA 3," attend National NABJ Awards Gala, Aug. 2-6. PHOTOS PROVIDED

# Norma Lee Hatcher To Celebrate 100th Birthday

Norma Lee Hatcher, a graduate of the Class of 1942 at Booker T. Washington High School, will celebrate her 100th birthday on Sept. 15, 2023. Hatcher also attended Dunbar Elementary and Carver Junior High School. Joining her to celebrate this occasion will be her sister, Clementine S. Brown from Seattle, Wash., and a host of friends and relatives.

She had five younger brothers – John, David, Floyd, Leroy, and Cornell, who will be recognized posthumously. Hatcher's home was where neighborhood kids would visit for help with their algebra and math problems. Friends and family members continue to remember her for her cooking and sense of humor.

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN



NORMA LEE HATCHER PHOTO PROVIDED



ROY S. JOHNSON receives Hall of Fame award from the National Association of Black Journalists convention in Birmingham, Ala., Aug. 2-6. PHOTOS PROVIDED

# Tulsans Recognized And Highlighted At National Association Of Black Journalists' Convention, Aug. 2-6

Former Tulsan Roy S. Johnson was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists' Hall of Fame for his contributions to the field of journalism. He is a columnist and director of content development for the Alabama Media Group/AL.com. He was also co-chair of the annual convention in Birmingham, Ala., Aug. 2-6.

On naming Johnson, a graduate of Stanford University and Holland Hall Preparatory High School in Tulsa, a Hall of Fame recipient and as co-chair of the 2023 NABJ conference, NABJ said, "Johnson's journalistic journey has focused on challenging the status quo by reporting on the issues, people, policies, and trends that affect our community the most. His career

has spanned magazines, television, and newspapers. He is the former founding editor-in-chief of Savoy and former editor-in-chief of Men's Fitness and the History Channel magazine. He was a writer and top editor at Sports Illustrated, Fortune, and Money; a reporter for The New York Times; and a sports columnist at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Johnson was a finalist for the 2021 Pulitzer Prize in Commentary and is an (Edward R.) Murrow Award winner. He co-authored 'Magic's Touch,' 'Outrageous,' and 'Aspire Higher.'"

Johnson served in his co-chair role at the convention with Michelle Miller, co-host of "CBS Saturday Morning."

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN

