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A Tribute To The GAP Band's Ronnie Wilson: A Lifetime Devoted To Funk And R&B

By ASHLEY JONES
RONNIE WILSON

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N. TULSANS, AMONG MILLIONS LOSING
HEALTH INSURANCE NATIONWIDE

Most Republican state officials have a record of
opposing Medicaid participation. A10

TULSA MAN RECOUNTS SERVING 31
YEARS IN PRISON AFTER WRONGFUL
CONVICTION

In 2018, Perry Lott was released from prison,
and in early October 2023, he was finally exonerated. A7



PERFORMERS featured during the Ronnie Wilson tribute event, Big Ten Ball Room, Tulsa, Okla., Nov. 4. PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS

Celebrating The Legacy of Ronnie Wilson

RONNIE WILSON from A1

TULSA, Okla. The duo Yarbrough and Peoples brought the house down with its version of the GAP Band hit “You Dropped the Bomb on Me.” Master of Ceremonies Chuck Cissell told tales about the honoree, the late Ronnie Wilson, a stalwart Gap Band member. Dr. Lester Shaw belted out a soulful rendition of the R&B band Maze’s hit “Before I Let Go.” In response to Dr. Shaw’s performance, the crowd at the Big Ten Ball Room let go a scream or two.

That is how north Tulsa paid tribute to Wilson, one of the northside community’s music icons who made it big in the entertainment world.

The event, held Nov. 4 at the Big Ten Ballroom, 1624 E. Apache St., was filled with music, laughter, and love. It was the kind of evening that would have featured Wilson in his heyday as a musician. Wilson’s influence was palpable throughout the room nearly two years after his passing on Nov. 2, 2021. Whether it was from his family or classmates from the Booker T. Washington High School Class of 1966, the whole house smiled in remembrance of the joy and light Wilson brought to whatever room he shared his gift of music.

Linda Wilson, Ronnie’s widow, appealed to Shaw, executive director of A Pocket Full of Hope, to host a tribute for her late husband. Ronnie Wilson, a founder of the GAP Band, played keyboard horn and percussion for the group. The band’s name stands for Greenwood, Archer, and Pine streets that are the main streets connected to the famed Black Wall Street. The other members were Ronnie’s brothers, Charlie and Robert Wilson. The GAP band was hugely popular across the U.S. particularly in the 1970s and ‘80s.

“People don’t understand that music is a discipline and to play music, no matter what genre, you have to have a level of discipline to perfect your spark to perfect your gift. You know, and he nurtured his spark,” Shaw told the crowd.

GAP Band hits

The GAP Band gave the world many top hit songs. Among the hits are “Outstanding,” “You Dropped the Bomb on Me,” and “Yearning for Your Love.” All these tunes and more were covered during the night by a band that the GAP Band discovered, Yarbrough and Peoples. They headlined the event with lead singers Alisa Peoples and Cavin Yarbrough. “The spirit of Ronnie is still alive; he left a legacy,” Peoples said. “We want you to sing, we want you to enjoy it, we want you to dance, and we

want you to have a wonderful time.”

The mood was mellow as purple, blue, and yellow lights circled the venue. About a hundred people attended. They moved closer to the front to fill up the space. Wilson’s closest family and friends sat at the front in round tables covered with gorgeous fall centerpieces and black cloth. The evening featured a range of music – from jazz to funk and, naturally,

R&B. Guests went to concessions and the t-shirt tables out front for refreshments. The crowd was lively! During the performances, when the artists asked the audience to scream, they gladly delivered.

From Broadway and Hollywood, Cissell, as the master of ceremonies for the event, offered an anecdote from Loretta, Wilson’s sister, about Wilson messing with his family from their childhood.

“What Ronnie used to do was chase her and Charlie around because he would take boogers out of his nose and wipe it on them, and I told her that’s a very cute story, but I’m going to tell it,” Cissell said.

Cissell also shared a story from Wilson’s previous group, the New Imperials, during his time at Carver Junior High School. They were to sing “In the Steal of the Night” for the Carver Junior High School Assembly. Someone decided at the last minute to sing the song the group wanted to perform, “Twist and Shout,” but the teachers forbade it from being too risqué.

Dr. Lester Shaw

“People don’t understand that music is a discipline and to play music, no matter what genre, you have to have a level of discipline to perfect your spark to perfect your gift.”

Stories about Ronnie

“We couldn’t even get two choruses out before Mrs. Crutcher did not run down the aisle. She flew. It was like she had a cape on, like Batwoman,” Cissell said. “She said pull those curtains, and we kept on singing anyway. The next day, we were suspended. Who do you think it was who had the idea to sing ‘Twist and Shout’?”

Cissell then gave recognition to Linda Wilson for arranging the tribute to her late husband. Driven by a desire to ensure that her husband’s memory stays alive, she worked tirelessly with Shaw to make the best tribute for the late great icon.

“What I want people to know are who are the shoulders that we stand on,” Shaw said. “We should always remember the people who have sacrificed to make our lives better. We want people to know that there is life after death, and this is a grand showing of how life still exists after death. Life after death always means to me that people will keep the

RONNIE WILSON cont. A5

Jake Simmons, Jr.: Oil Broker and Civil Rights Advocate

By WILLIAM D. WELGE, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



African American oil broker and civil rights advocate Jake Simmons, was born on January 17, 1901, in Indian Territory at Sawokla, which later became Haskell. He emerged from a Creek freedman heritage to broker multimillion-dollar deals between large oil companies and emerging African nations. His maternal great-grandfather, Cow Tom, formerly a slave of a Creek Indian, served as an interpreter for the Creek in dealing with the U.S. government after the Civil War and afterward as a leader for many of the newly freed Creek slaves. Simmons’s father owned a large ranch in the Haskell area. The senior Simmons’s prosperity captured the attention of Booker T. Washington on one of his trips to Oklahoma. Washington stayed an evening at the ranch and sold both father and son on the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Jake Simmons, Jr., graduated from Tuskegee in 1919. After Tuskegee he married

Melba Dorsey and worked in Detroit. By 1920 he had divorced Melba and moved back to Oklahoma, marrying Willie Eva Flowers. In the 1920s Simmons began brokering oil deals in eastern Oklahoma. During the hard times of the depressed 1930s he turned to real estate, selling farms around Muskogee to African Americans in East Texas who had made money in the new oil boom. The poor quality of the land in East Texas, as well as the area’s pervasive discrimination and violence, helped Simmons convince many African Americans to move to Oklahoma. In the 1960s Simmons began brokering large deals with African countries, beginning with Liberia. He worked as a partner for Phillips Petroleum Company and later for Signal Oil and Gas Company. Always active in civil rights, Simmons pursued an early court case against separate schools in a 1938 suit under his wife’s name, Simmons v. Muskogee Board of Education. In March 1939 the

Supreme Court dismissed the Simmons’ appeal from the U.S. District Court. Simmons acted as a leader in the local NAACP and served as state conference president from 1962 until 1968. He also served as a member of the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Commission, presided over the Negro Business League, and participated in the influential National Petroleum Council. Jake Simmons, Jr., died in Tulsa on March 24, 1981. His children, Jake Simmons III, a former undersecretary of the U.S. Interior, Donald, an economist who took over Simmons Royalty Company, Blanche, a social worker, and Kenneth, a Harvard-educated professor of architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, all benefited from their father’s strong leadership.

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.

JAKE SIMMONS, JR. (right) and E. Melvin Porter, 1964 (2012.201.B1028.0119, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

Featured Last Week



Many Black Neighborhoods Are Not A City Priority



How One Researcher Raised The Bar For Disadvantaged Students



Asylum Relief Elusive for Two Afghan Scholars-at-Risk

The Oklahoma Eagle

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CHUCK CISSELL, national performer, was the Master of Ceremonies at Ronnie Wilson Tribute event, Big Ten Ballroom, Tulsa, Okla., Nov. 4. PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS

RONNIE WILSON *from A3*

legacy alive.”
Linda and Ronnie had been friends since high school. Although they were not married the entire time, they were friends for the most significant part of their lifetimes. He was the first flugelhorn and trumpet player at his school and a drum major of Booker T. Washington for his junior and senior years. Linda said before the ’60s and the Civil Rights Act in 1964 was before integration, and black students, along with the community, were not even allowed to cross the tracks by Archer Street to go downtown.

Support for Greenwood

“This is why Greenwood was so strong because they made us stay on the other side of the tracks, so we put together and did things for ourselves and had our resources, our banks, our grocery stores, everything was Black-owned back in the day,” Linda Wilson said.
“GAP Band were way ahead of their time when they named their band in 1967. They were smart enough and intelligent enough to know what Greenwood, Archer and Pine streets meant to north Tulsa. That did a lot for the northside as far as recognition and giving us some pride.”
In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Linda said that she got to know Wilson better in 1982 when she was asked to go on tour with them on the “Drop the Bomb” Tour, and they toured 42 cities throughout the United States, taking around four months.
“He was an amazing, talented, wonderful man,” Linda Wilson said. “We just got each other. He was a confidante, my friend.”
Shaw performed and brought the crowd to their feet with “Before I Let Go.” One of the



LESTER "DOC" SHAW performs at Ronnie Wilson Tribute event, Big Ten Ballroom, Tulsa, Okla., Nov. 4. PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS

groups that he mentors through A Pocket Full of Hope, Upbeat 360, also performed. The young lady trio sang “One Fine Day” by The Chiffons.
“We have to do more in his name,” Shaw said of Ronnie Wilson. “This is like a kickoff of things to come in terms of musicians and just average people doing great things. Ronnie had a love of music. And that resonated with me, and it resonated with the kids in our organization.”
Ronnie James Wilson’s timeless music resonates with a younger generation for inspiration and collaboration. “Outstanding” alone remains one of the most sampled

songs in history and has been used by more than 150 artists.
“I think it’s because of the beat and tempo of their sound,” Linda Wilson said. “As soon as I hear it on the radio, any song that has their beat, I can say that’s GAP Band, and that has picked up with all the younger groups. Charlie has done duos with Snoop Dogg, and Bruno Mars - anyone you can think of - has sampled GAP Band music.”
Linda said Ronnie always had a love for north Tulsa. Right on the corner of where Greenwood meets Pine, the city dedicated a street to The GAP Band called GAP Band Avenue.

“Because everything was segregated so, black people had more pride in each other, and they were closer to each other, and they were able to help each other and motivate each other back in the day,” Linda Wilson said. “And that brought a sense of loyalty and love for the northside itself. That’s what’s instilled in our hearts.”
Other family members who attended, including Ronnie’s sister and cousins, said they were proud to honor him. The icon’s memorabilia sits in historic museums such as Greenwood Rising and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

About Pocket Full of Hope

The organization instructs, mentors, and advises children ages 7 to 19 and focuses on teaching the arts. In the 23 years the program has been in place, it states that 100 percent of the active participants have graduated from high school.

About Historic Big 10 Ballroom

In 2008, A Pocket Full of Hope purchased the Big 10 Ballroom to restore it as a venue for their stage performances and short films. In 1948, Lonnie Williams, Tulsa’s second black police officer, and his business partner, Richard Thompson, constructed the Big 10 Ballroom in the Art Deco style. The venue was created to serve as a destination for famous and up-and-coming musicians. The Tulsa Tribune once referred to the Big 10 Ballroom as the “toniest” Negro nightclub this side of “Harlem...” The ballroom has hosted many notable musicians like Ray Charles, James Brown, BB King, and Little Richard. Although the ballroom thrived in the 1950s and early 1960s, it closed its doors in 1966.

Commemoration Fund, opening a new grant cycle

GRANT APPLICATIONS *from A1*

TULSA, Okla. For a fourth consecutive year, the Commemoration Fund is proud to announce the opening of its new grant cycle. Established in 2020, the grantmaking organization was developed in response to the disproportionate needs of Tulsa’s Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and historically underserved communities. Since its inception, the fund has supported the successful expansion of dozens of programs across the metro. The Commemoration Fund’s Advisory Board invites local nonprofits and programs committed to addressing the unique challenges present in Tulsa’s communities of color to apply.

“The Zarrow Commemoration Fund seeks grant applications from diverse Tulsa nonprofits working to eliminate racial disparities and advance social justice,” said Chair Hannibal B. Johnson. “Guided by people of color, ZCF helps develop nonprofit leaders of color and, through the projects supported, empower communities of color.”
Since its inaugural year, the Commemoration Fund has awarded 75 grants to 55 BIPOC-led and BIPOC serving organizations throughout Tulsa. The fund’s Board is thrilled to be able to further invest in the tailored solutions designed by local

nonprofits to confront and correct the social inequities impacting
Tulsa’s vast minority communities in the coming years. The Board projects it will present its 100th grant in 2024, totaling over \$4 million awarded in the span of four years in support of program initiatives ranging from social justice reform, community and youth development, health equity, and economic development.
“It has been an amazing experience seeing the manifestation of our Commemoration Fund grants grow from financially seeding the very first round of brilliant ideas a few years ago to seeing the impact of the grantees’

work transition from blooming flowers in the community to deep-rooted trees,” said Vice Chair Eunice Tarver. “The portfolio of work and success that our grantees have accomplished has and will continue to strengthen not only those experiencing life at the margins but add overall value and health to who we are, as the city of Tulsa.”
Organizations applying for a grant from the Commemoration Fund can request between \$3,000 to \$100,000 for a year’s worth of financial support to execute their strategic efforts in improving the lives of their participants and communities. Funds
GRANT APPLICATIONS *cont. A6*



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Incoming applications will be reviewed by the Commemoration Fund’s board

GRANT APPLICATIONS *from A5*

awarded can be used to launch or expand new programs, purchase new equipment, strengthen general operations, or bolster organizational capacity-building, among other developmental tactics designed to champion diversity and equity throughout Tulsa.

Incoming applications will be reviewed by the Commemoration Fund’s board, comprised entirely of Tulsa community and business leaders of color, including Board Chair Hannibal B. Johnson, Author, Attorney, and Consultant; Board Vice Chair Eunice Tarver, Vice President of Student Success, Tulsa Community College; Board Secretary Ashley Harris Philippsen, Executive Director, ImpactTulsa; Glenda Love Williams, Consultant, and Ret. CEO, Ronald McDonald House; Moises Echeverria, President and CEO, Foundation for Tulsa Schools; Joseph Bojang, Owner, Web Champs; Danny Williams, Attorney, Frederic Dorwart Lawyers; Jessica M. Lozano-Alvarez, Professional Provider Network Manager, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Oklahoma; and Jennifer Loren, Senior Director, Cherokee Film, who joins the board as this year’s newest member.

“I’m so very humbled and honored to join the Board of the Zarrow Commemoration Fund,” said Jennifer Loren. “As a Tulsa Native, I am excited to learn about the projects and organizations supported by this fund and the incredible work they are doing to correct injustices in our communities. I look forward to taking part in year four and seeing how we can continue to make the world a better place through this change-making organization.”

Grant applications will be accepted now through February 1, 2024. Organizations can apply by visiting the Commemoration Fund’s website at <https://zarrow.org/commemorationfund/>.

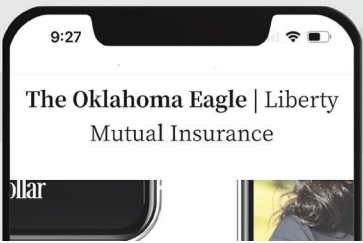
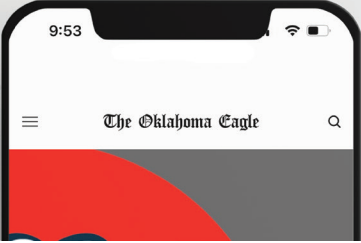
Since its inaugural year, the Commemoration Fund has awarded 75 grants to 55 BIPOC-led and BIPOC serving organizations throughout Tulsa.



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Our Mission

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



OVER 31 YEARS IN PRISON, LOTT SAID HE MUST HAVE DIED 1,000 TIMES

WRONGFUL CONVICTION from AI

PERRY LOTT felt like things were starting to fall in place for him in 1987 when he relocated from his home state of Wisconsin to Ada, Okla.

At the time, Lott was developing plans for a green card business. He also wanted to follow his passion for horses by working with them.

But then, Lott's life was shattered when he was accused of raping a woman at gunpoint. The woman could not make out all the features of her assailant but said that he was a black male between 5'7 and 6'2 and had a gold tooth.

The next day, when police were filming a reenactment video outside the victim's home, they spotted Lott, who was around the same height as the assailant and had a gold tooth.

Lott told police that he had been with his fiancée the night of the rape. She confirmed his alibi. However, the next day, at a police lineup, the victim identified Lott as her attacker, mainly because he was the only one with a gold tooth (the other men in the lineup were given gold foil from a local flower shop, which the victim could see had been placed there).

Arrest and Conviction

Lott was arrested after the lineup. He was tried and convicted and given a 100-year prison sentence. However, in 2014, the Innocence Project ordered DNA tests of the rape kit, which showed that Lott was not the rapist.

The victim eventually acknowledged that she had been scared to pick the wrong man in the lineup and that nothing specific, apart from the gold tooth, made her choose Lott.

In 2018, Lott was released from prison, and in early October 2023, he was finally exonerated.

On Oct. 28, Lott, now 61, shared his story before a gathering of criminal justice reform advocates about his harrowing ordeal. The event was held at the Church of the Restoration on Greenwood Avenue. Hooked on Justice, an advocacy group for prisoners founded by Emily Shelton, sponsored the event. Lott told the audience that he survived 31 years in prison because he found things to laugh about that kept him from crying and because he knew good people were helping him.

Before his arrest, Lott said he felt he was on track to make it in life and was "God's gift to mankind." Then,

however, "my whole world spun out of control," and "I became stuck in a whirlpool he could not get out of."

Over 31 years in prison, Lott said he must have died 1,000 times; he made a conscious choice, however, to better himself and feels "grateful that God ultimately did not abandon me."

Takeaways from the experience

Lott takes from his experience that, however bad the things that are done to you, "joy cannot be taken, support cannot be stolen, and love cannot be broken."

When Lott first went into prison, Lott said that he was naïve about the systemic racism that exists in Oklahoma and the fact that "there were people out there who did not want people like him [as an African American] to succeed."

Lott further said that the current system punishes young people, noting that the "truth [about the injustices in our society] hurts, but by exposing the truth, we can ultimately heal."

Lott urges people to "stop communicating with hate, pistols, and guns," and to choose to do good, as those who do wrong will suffer, and those who do good will ultimately rejoice—as he has been able to do following his release.

Community-Wide Call for Criminal Justice Reform

Lott's talk was part of a gathering of north Tulsa community activists committed to criminal justice reform.

Brooke Bradley-Saylor, a civil litigation paralegal and who is the founder of the second chance legal movement, emphasized in introducing the speakers that Oklahoma has among the highest incarceration rates per capita in the world and that the state does not try to rehabilitate inmates but punish and humiliate them, which is not correct.

Emily Shelton, head of the non-profit NGO that advocates for humane prison conditions and is a Children's Advocacy intern at Tulsa County Public Defender's Office, emphasized that Oklahoma inmates

are subjected to harsh labor and deprived of adequate diets.

The practice of solitary confinement is particularly cruel and will drive people insane after 15 days, though the average stay in Oklahoma can be up to three years.

According to Shelton, the U.S. prison population was only around 200,000 until the early 1970s when Richard Nixon declared a War on Drugs. It has skyrocketed since that time, with attendant problems of overcrowding and a decline in prison programs.

Prisons have become big business and an integral part of the U.S. economy, a key reason that harsh crime laws remain on the books.

One of the speakers suggested that GEO Group Inc., a Florida-based company that runs a large private prison in Lawton, contributed money to Gov. Kevin Stitt's political campaigns.

Darrell Wiggins, who only got out of prison eight months ago after serving a 30-year sentence, emphasized in his talk his efforts to reform the parole system so that inmates would be better informed

of what they need to do to achieve parole and so that the parole board is not used as a political instrument by the Governor—as it has often been.

Wiggins further emphasized the importance of providing better mental health programs and educational opportunities in prisons, including for long-term offenders who could benefit tremendously from them.

During a break from the main speakers, testimonials of inmates who were unjustly incarcerated or given excessively long sentences were played on a tape recorder.

A number of the inmates never received proper legal representation and were coerced or intimidated into taking a plea even though they were innocent.

Others have not been able to present new evidence in their case in court.

One man, Michael Lowery, was given a 100+ year sentence in what witnesses identified as an accidental shooting, while another man, Prentice E. Ponds II, was given over 25 years in prison for participating in a relatively innocuous fist fight (where nobody was seriously injured or killed) and after he was allegedly framed for insurance fraud.

Shelley Ware, who runs a program to help inmates prepare for life after incarceration, spoke about Channen Ray Ozell Smith, who is serving a life sentence at Dick Connor Correctional Facility in Hominy, Okla., for a murder he did not commit as another man came forward to confess to the crime and witnesses placed him 30 kilometers away from the scene of the crime.

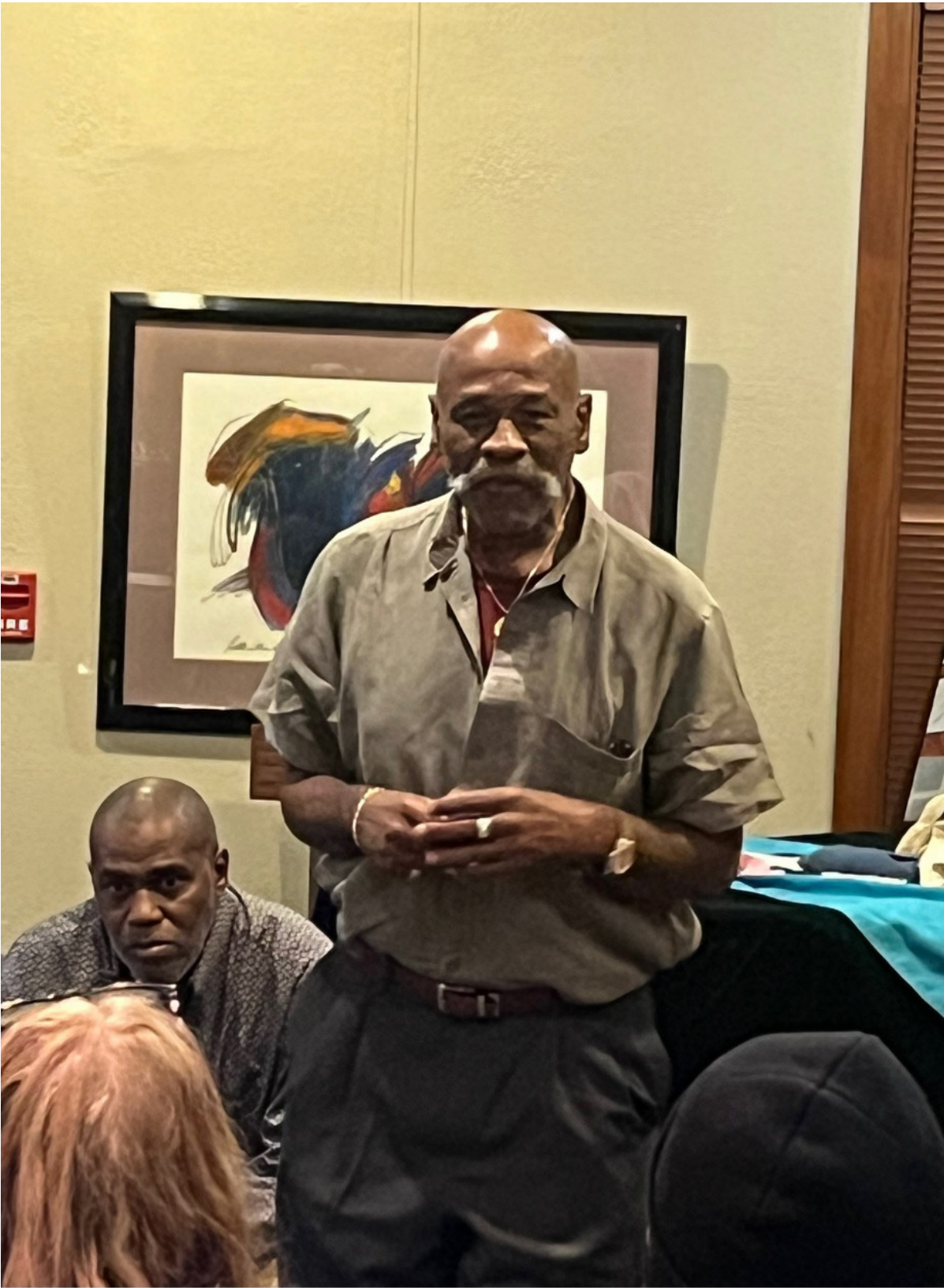
Lisa Woolley of Broken Arrow also spoke about the ordeal she and her husband endured after they were wrongfully accused of killing their grandchild: the Woolleys are still fighting an uphill battle in court to get custody of their surviving grandchild even when they were exonerated of any wrongdoing and have a track record as loving parents.

These and many other horror stories highlight the need for greater accountability of prosecutors and judges and systemic changes in Oklahoma's criminal justice system.

Gov. Stitt has helped lower the incarceration rate in Oklahoma for men by 20% and by 30% for women, according to Oklahoma Watch, commuting the sentences of hundreds of people convicted of non-violent offenses.

However, Stitt's administration, much like former Gov. Mary Fallin's, has failed to follow through on a voter mandate to reclassify some low-level, non-violent drug offenses as misdemeanors and to channel the savings from lower incarceration rates into mental health and substance abuse treatment.

According to The Oklahoman, zero state dollars have been set aside for this voter-supported initiative, which would be a step in the right direction if implemented.



PERRY LOTT speaks at the Greenwood Church of Resurrection on October 28. PHOTO JERRY KUMARIV, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

PERRY LOTT (far right) speaks at an event on North Greenwood. Emily Shelton (left) and Darrell Wiggins (center) were attendees. PHOTO JERRY KUMARIV, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



DEFINING THE ‘ACTUAL DAILY COST’ TO COUNTY JAILS

DOC MUST PAY COUNTY JAILS *from AI*

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections, which has been paying counties \$27 a day per inmate awaiting transfer to state custody, must reimburse county jails for both consumable costs, such as food and clothing, as well as operating expenses incurred as a direct result of holding the inmates, the state Supreme Court ruled today.

While several local and state officials said they were still reviewing the ruling Tuesday, many counties calculate a separate per-detainee number — an “average daily cost” for all jail operations — that is at least double the \$27 figure that DOC now pays counties for holding people after a court conviction.

But Tuesday’s ruling appears to require new math on behalf of counties as they calculate hard costs “directly attributable” to housing DOC inmates, a nuance likely to frustrate county sheriffs and commissioners who currently calculate their “average daily cost” by considering overall expenses related to operating a jail. As a result, the ultimate financial implications of the Supreme Court ruling remain unclear.

“It will have a fiscal impact to the state,” Senate Appropriations and Budget Chairman Roger Thompson told NonDoc.

Tulsa County District Attorney Steve Kunzweiler said his office is still reviewing the decision, and he confirmed that state law allows all parties in the lawsuit “to petition for rehearing” before the Supreme Court.

“I would imagine both sides are going to be looking at the import of the decision and make a decision one way or another,” Kunzweiler said. “At this point, we’re weighing our options, just as I imagine the other side is weighing their options.”

Defining the ‘actual daily cost’ to county jails

The 5-4 decision stems from a longtime dispute over how much DOC must pay county jails for detaining inmates after they are convicted but before they are transferred to state custody. Title 57, Section 38 of state statute requires DOC to reimburse a county the cost of housing its inmates, setting the reimbursement rate at \$27 unless the actual daily cost exceeds that amount.

For years, the DOC and counties have been unable to come up with an agreeable definition for actual daily cost. The Tulsa County Board of Commissioners asked the State Auditor and Inspector’s Office to calculate Tulsa County’s cost, and the Department of Corrections sued the auditor and the commissioners in Tulsa County District Court.

Amid questions about subject matter jurisdiction, the case went to the Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals and eventually to the state Supreme Court, which vacated the appellate court ruling Tuesday, determined an “actual daily cost” definition and remanded the case back to Tulsa County District Court for further proceedings.

The justices voted that “actual daily cost” includes consumable costs as well as any cost incurred

by a county shown to be “directly attributable” to housing a DOC inmate, according to the majority opinion written by Vice Chief Justice Dustin P. Rowe.

“The term ‘actual daily cost’ encompasses both consumable costs (e.g., food and clothing) as well as those additional costs incurred as a direct result of housing a DOC inmate,” Rowe said. “Costs not directly attributable to the housing (of) a DOC inmate are not reimbursable by DOC.”

In the event the actual daily cost of housing a DOC inmate exceeds \$27, and the DOC disputes the county’s proposed rate, the state auditor will calculate the actual daily cost, the opinion states.

“We hold ‘actual daily cost’ includes both consumable costs as well as those additional costs that are directly attributable to housing a DOC inmate,” Rowe wrote in the opinion joined by Chief Justice M. John Kane IV and Justices James Winchester, Noma Gurich and Dana Kuehn.

The majority opinion states it is undisputed that the actual daily cost of housing a DOC inmate includes “consumable costs” like food, clothes and medical care. But the question of whether “fixed costs,” which constitute the jail’s operating expenses, are included within the actual daily cost has lingered.

“Operating expenses are not necessarily dependent on the number of prisoners, as some operating expenses are inevitably incurred regardless of whether a DOC inmate is housed in a county jail,” Rowe said. “However, there may be instances when a jail’s operating expenses increase due to housing a DOC inmate. For example, if a county jail employs a set number of jailers in the regular operation of its jail, that cost is not directly attributable to housing a DOC inmate. If, however, a county jail employs an additional jailer and demonstrates the hiring of the additional jailer is directly attributable to housing a DOC inmate, such cost would exist in fact and be included in the actual daily cost.”

In a dissenting opinion joined by Justices Yvonne Kauger, James Edmondson and Richard Darby, Justice Douglas Combs took issue with Rowe’s interpretation of “actual daily cost” being limited to only “directly attributable” costs.

“[Title 57, Section 38] provides ‘the reimbursement [is] to defray expenses of equipping and maintaining the jail and payment of personnel,’” Combs wrote. “It does not say, as the majority opinion asserts, that it is for payment of personnel that have been hired to take care of a specific inmate. In order to ‘house’ an inmate you must have a house, a functioning facility, staffed and equipped to house an inmate on any given day or days.”

Thompson (R-Okemah) said he anticipates prisoners in county jail custody after conviction will be transferred to DOC more quickly, one way or another.

“I think some of these state prisoners being housed in the county jails will be pulled into the state system,” he said.

He said some counties may have been tardy in informing DOC when an inmate had been sentenced so they could draw DOC



CINDY BYRD speaks during a GOP state auditor and inspector primary debate Wednesday, June 20, 2018, at Trolley Stop Record Shop in Oklahoma City. PHOTO MICHAEL DUNCAN

reimbursement for an additional day or two.

“Quite frankly, there have been some county jails that have used this as income,” Thompson said.

State auditor: Ruling is ‘extremely unfortunate’

State Auditor Cindy Byrd was disappointed in the Supreme Court’s ruling, noting that Rowe’s opinion stops short of saying DOC must pay counties for the per-prisoner average daily cost calculated by each county for overall jail operations.

Byrd said the Oklahoma Constitution prohibits local taxpayer funds from being used to pay for expenses the state should be incurring, such as the housing of inmates transferred to state custody after conviction in district court.

“Today’s ruling by the state Supreme Court is extremely unfortunate,” Byrd said in a statement. “It places a financial hardship on all 77 counties. The state Constitution is clear that no local taxes may be spent on services for which the state is responsible. State inmates are the sole financial responsibility of the state Department of Corrections, not our counties. Our county property taxes are what fund our county jails.”

Byrd added that she believes the DOC is using the situation to its benefit at the expense of county governments across the state.

“Sadly, the DOC is taking advantage of counties by housing

inmates at their jails at a rate of \$27 per day when the actual cost, according to the DOC’s own numbers, ranges from \$57 to \$108 per day,” Byrd wrote. “Because the counties are now forced to incur these costs, the citizens will receive fewer core services from their counties, such as road repairs and law enforcement. Regardless, of course, my office will comply with the court’s opinion, and I look forward to justifying these costs back in district court.”

‘Just doesn’t cover the cost’

Kay Thompson serves as chief of public relations for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. Asked how much DOC pays to counties jails annually for housing inmates post-conviction, Kay Thompson said the state paid out \$9.7 million in Fiscal Year 2022 and \$10.2 million in Fiscal Year 2023, which ended June 30.

“We are still evaluating the opinion and look forward to working with the county jails and the Oklahoma Sheriffs’ Association about the appropriate next steps,” said Kay Thompson, who is the daughter of Sen. Roger Thompson.

Joe Allbaugh serves as the chairman of the Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Authority, which manages the troubled Oklahoma County Jail. A former DOC director himself, Allbaugh said the reimbursement rate for DOC inmates in county jails has to go up.

“Those who are incarcerated

have received their judgment and sentencing and are waiting to be taken into the DOC system,” he said. “There are 28,000 people system-wide or so, so the cost of inflation and feeding and the medical care of those individuals is high. But we can’t have a cap at some arbitrary number, because it just doesn’t cover the cost. Someone has to pay for it. The cost ends up being taken over by the county.”

Allbaugh, who had not read the opinion Tuesday afternoon, said this is a statewide problem and it’s an issue that the DOC and Legislature should address.

“There has been an unwillingness to pay attention to our correctional system statewide, and it affects everyone involved from male and female detainees to staff to our county jails because the law requires a certain level of care,” he said. “But no one ever steps forward to be a leader in this area which has been extremely frustrating for myself and other trust members who serve on a volunteer basis. For the most part, county commissioners and staff are aware of those concerns but there’s only so much money to deal with it. But it needs to be dealt with sooner or later. Sooner rather than later.”

Allbaugh said more than 100 DOC inmates, both men and women, are at Oklahoma County’s detention center currently. Those individuals transfer from county to state custody after the county submits judgment and sentence documentation to DOC.

“It’s an issue that needs to be



THE DAVID L. MOSS CRIMINAL JUSTICE CENTER is located in downtown Tulsa, Oklahoma. PHOTO THE FRONTIER

resolved across the board,” he said. “We have done a recent calculation, and we are in the process of doing an independent third-party calculation, and they are doing the exact dollar amount required.”

The Oklahoma County Jail’s average daily cost is set by District Judge Natalie Mai, according to spokesman Mark Opgrande.

“This year she set it at \$61.73 a day,” Opgrande said. “That is the daily amount we can charge detainees for being incarcerated. (Currently) DOC only pays us \$27 a day per the statute for each day they are here until they are moved to DOC.”

Casey Roebuck, public information officer for the Tulsa County Sheriff’s Office, said the Tulsa County Jail’s average daily cost is \$63.42, a figure that was arrived at with assistance from the state auditor’s office.

Average daily costs for county jails fluctuate from year to year. In August, the Seminole County Board of Commissioners adjusted its average daily cost from \$67.54 down to \$57.51 owing to calculations presented by District Attorney Erik Johnson.

Background outlining Supreme Court’s decision

In 2011, then-state Sen. Josh Brecheen (R-Colgate) formally asked the state attorney general to examine the DOC rate dispute, but the Attorney General’s Office did not state whether the \$27-per-day rate specified by state law was sufficient to cover counties’ costs.

The Bryan County Board of Commissioners challenged the law in court, and the district court ruled that when costs exceed \$27 the county is entitled to reimbursement from the state of Oklahoma “to fully reimburse the costs of housing incurred by the county for such inmate without being limited by the cap limit” of Title 57, Chapter 1, Section 38.

DOC appealed, and the Court of Civil Appeals affirmed the decision.

Tulsa County then hired a national firm specializing in calculating jail costs and rates to study rates at the Tulsa County Jail, known as the David L. Moss Criminal Justice Center. At the time, the firm determined Tulsa County’s actual daily cost for housing, caring for and feeding inmates was \$55.81 per inmate per day. Tulsa County sought reimbursement for that amount, but DOC rejected the request. Tulsa County’s commissioners and the Tulsa County Criminal Justice Authority sued DOC.

About the same time, legislators amended state law by passing a bill that took effect Nov. 1, 2017, and remains in effect today. The law provides a procedure when a county and the DOC disagree on the actual daily cost of housing a DOC inmate. It instructs a county to notify DOC if the actual daily cost of housing a DOC inmate is more than \$27 a day no later than Sept. 30. If DOC agrees, the agency will pay that rate beginning the next fiscal year.

If DOC rejects that rate, then the state auditor and inspector will determine the reimbursement rate, which shall by imposed

beginning the next fiscal year, the law states.

Despite the amended law, Tulsa County did not seek a reimbursement rate from the state auditor’s office and continued its lawsuit in district court. DOC argued it should not have to reimburse Tulsa County for the fixed costs of operating the jail.

A judge ruled that Tulsa County’s reimbursable costs cannot include fixed costs, instead limiting reimbursement to the actual costs of feeding, housing, clothing and providing medical treatment.

Tulsa County then asked the state auditor’s office to determine the actual daily costs of housing a DOC inmate. The state auditor’s office agreed, and Tulsa County dismissed its case against DOC. The state auditor’s office notified Tulsa County that the actual daily cost to house a DOC inmate was \$63.42.

In 2020, DOC filed a petition for review in Oklahoma County District Court against Tulsa County and the state auditor’s office to set aside the state auditor’s reimbursement rate. A district court judge agreed with Tulsa County and the state auditor’s office that it lacked subject matter jurisdiction, but they also concluded that the state auditor’s method to determine actual daily cost was rational. DOC objected, and the case was sent to the Court of Civil Appeals, which reversed and remanded the district court’s ruling and determined that the Legislature intended the phrase ‘actual daily costs’ to include fixed costs.

Both DOC and the state auditor’s office

sought certiorari review with the Supreme Court. DOC contended the Court of Civil Appeals’ determination that actual daily costs include fixed costs was incorrect, and the state auditor’s office contended the Court of Civil Appeals erred finding the district court had jurisdiction over the dispute because the state auditor was exercising her discretionary executive power granted to her by the Legislature and that interference by the courts would violate the separation of powers.

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. An inductee of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame, 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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A refundable income tax credit of up to \$7,500 per child

PRIVATE SCHOOL TAX CREDIT from AI

The state is spending almost \$4 million with a contractor to set up and administer a new private school tax credit program. That’s four times what the Oklahoma Tax Commission estimated in the spring when lawmakers were finalizing the policy.

The Parental Choice Tax Credit sets up a refundable income tax credit of up to \$7,500 per child for private school expenses. Lawmakers capped the overall cost of the program at \$150 million in tax year 2024, rising to \$250 million in tax year 2026. More than 32,000 students are in private elementary or secondary schools in Oklahoma.

Merit International Inc. will be responsible for working with schools and parents to educate them on claiming the tax credits. The application process will use Merit’s software platform. The company will train Tax Commission employees and school representatives to use the software.

The Tax Commission said it chose Merit because it had experience setting up similar educational programs in other states. It also faced a compressed

timeline for implementation of House Bill 1934. The commission has a one-year, \$3.95 million contract with Merit, agency spokeswoman Emily Haxton said in an Oct. 31 email.

That expense is far beyond initial estimates. The Tax Commission estimated it would take \$1 million in administrative costs in the current fiscal year to set up the program, according to a fiscal impact statement the agency provided lawmakers in May. It estimated another \$706,000 in administrative costs for fiscal year 2025.

Daniel Seitz, a spokesman for House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, said lawmakers appropriated \$1 million to the Tax Commission for administrative costs. Any costs above that would have to be absorbed by the agency’s budget, Seitz said. They would not come out of the cap available for the private school tax credits.

Tax commissioners discussed the contract at their Sept. 12 meeting. Haxton said discussions are ongoing to see if the Tax Commission would be reimbursed for the agency portion of the contract.

Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City, said she remains concerned about transparency, fraud and accountability under the private school tax credit program.

“Are we going to have any view into this vendor on who’s authorizing them and how they’re authorizing them?” Kirt said. “There’s nothing in the legislation requiring a release of data other than the number of credits. I have big concerns about a third-party vendor and how they’re going to be held accountable. Will data be accessible through open records? Tax Commission data is generally not unless specifically authorized.”

Merit has contracts with Ohio and Kansas to administer education-related tax credits, vouchers and educational savings accounts. The Ohio Department of Education paid Merit \$2.25 million in fiscal year 2023 to administer an educational savings account program for after-school activities, according to Ohio purchasing documents.

Merit’s contract with the Oklahoma Tax Commission wasn’t bid out in a full purchasing proposal. Instead, the Tax Commission picked Merit from

a list of approved contractors compiled by the Oklahoma Management and Enterprise Services under a statewide contract for IT deliverable-based services, Haxton said.

“Merit’s pricing structure is cost-effective and considers the judicious use of public funds,” the company said in its statement of work to the Tax Commission. “Merit delivers ‘Software with a Service’ (SwaS), not just software. This means our team will work to ensure program success, even as the goals evolve.”

The Tax Commission approved emergency rules for the private school tax credit program at its Oct. 24 meeting after receiving hundreds of public comments. Many commenters were concerned about the mismatch between taking the credit for a tax year, which mirrors the calendar year, and the school year. Commissioners recognized the problem but said the Legislature would have to resolve that issue.

“Throughout the process, we were trying to simplify the taxpayer experience and simplify the school experience, while still maintaining an adequate level of controls in

place to make sure the money gets to where it needs to go to,” the agency’s executive director, Doug Linehan, told commissioners.

Another state vendor, PCG Scholar, administers the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship, a voucher program for students with disabilities or other special needs. Lawmakers created that program in 2010, but it faced legal hurdles before reaching full implementation. The State Department of Education oversees the Lindsey Nicole Henry program, which served more than 1,350 students in the 2022-23 school year, according to the Education Department.

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. Follow him on Twitter @pmonies.

Most Republican state officials have a record of opposing Medicaid participation

NORTH TULSANS, HEALTH INSURANCE from AI



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

More than 14,000 African Americans across Oklahoma have lost Sooner Care health coverage (also known as Medicaid), including almost 4,000 residents of Tulsa County, according to The Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) statistics provided to the Oklahoma Eagle in a series of interviews and emails. Many of those losing coverage will not know when their benefits have been lost, critics of the purging of the Medicaid program allege.

The elimination of those receiving Medicaid coverage is part of a statewide trend. Since April, over 150,000 persons in Oklahoma have been removed from Medicaid health insurance. That number includes 25,000 in Tulsa County. OHCA has also scheduled the displacement of an additional 122,000 beneficiaries from the program over the next few months.

The cutbacks are a significant blow to many North Tulsans since Medicaid provides crucial access to health care for many in the community who have no other means of receiving essential medical treatment. Research shows that Hispanic and Black people are likely to be disproportionately impacted by this unwinding, according to The KFF, formerly known as The Kaiser Family Foundation. While the Black population of Tulsa County is 11%, the agency estimates 17% of the disenrolled will be African American. Thus, the Black population of Tulsa County is over 50% more likely to be purged from SoonerCare than the rest of the population.

State officials nationwide are sweeping through the ranks of the poor and most vulnerable, stripping millions of government health insurance. As the COVID-19 pandemic officially ended, Oklahoma and all other states must recertify eligibility for all Medicaid health insurance participants. Over ninety million persons are being reviewed for potential ejection from the program.

When complete, the agency expects to have removed 272,000 members from SoonerCare rolls, or approximately 20% of its 1.3 million beneficiaries. OHCA estimates that over 46,000 Tulsa County residents will lose SoonerCare, including 8,000 African Americans and thousands of children.

This enrollment purging will hit North Tulsans hard because Medicaid health insurance eligibility includes many low-income households. North Tulsa is home to a concentration of low-income individuals and families. Household income for Blacks and other minorities is a fraction of that for whites in Tulsa, while the poverty rate is multiple times larger. Over half of Blacks live in North Tulsa, where the federal poverty rate- used as an income benchmark (133%) for SoonerCare participation- is over 30%.

Post Pandemic Disenrollment

Medicaid is a federal insurance program

administered by the states that provide health care benefits principally to low-income individuals and the aged, blind, and disabled. Over ninety million persons are enrolled nationwide. About 1.3 million are “members” of Oklahoma’s version of the program, SoonerCare. This includes 165,000 persons who are members in Tulsa County participating in one or more SoonerCare aid programs. That constitutes approximately 25% of the population in the county. Over 50% of SoonerCare beneficiaries are children.

During the three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment ballooned as states were prohibited from removing participants from their programs because of the public health emergency, regardless of eligibility. Beginning earlier this year, states were required to recertify participants for eligibility. In April, Oklahoma started a nine-month process to “disenroll” or “unwind” membership, terms used by the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. The Oklahoma department has a budget of \$10.5 billion in FY 2024, more than two-thirds funded by the federal government.

Following federal guidelines, OHCA developed a comprehensive and detailed plan to recertify SoonerCare participants. An “Oklahoma Communications Plan” was prepared over a year before the declared public health emergency for the pandemic ended on May 11, 2023, having lasted approximately three years.

Oklahoma was one of the first states to initiate the disenrollment process but is doing it more methodically than other states, according to OHCA Public Information Officer (PIO) Emily Long in interviews with the Eagle. Long confirmed that the disenrollment strategy was to begin with the “least vulnerable first” and make multiple attempts to contact SoonerCare members through their individual portal at the agency’s website, as well as postal “mail, email, phone calls, texts, social media, and media releases.”

Procedural terminations

April Anonsen, a Senior Director at the agency, acknowledged some members were unreachable or unresponsive but needed to complete the renewal process. This response failure resulted in what PIO Long said is a “procedural disenrollment or termination.” The PIO spokesperson defined procedural termination as a failure by the member to provide “requested information,” resulting in “no confirmation of ineligibility.”

The KFF, an independent monitor of states’ disenrollment process, pegged Oklahoma’s “procedural disenrollment” rate at 75% of total terminations through August 2023.

In a written response to the Oklahoma Eagle commenting on this finding, Long emphasized the agency’s extensive outreach efforts. “Before their coverage ends, members are reprocessed and compared with data matches to determine if they may be eligible for their current program or another

program,” she said. Senior Director Anonsen added that Oklahoma “was the only state to have a real-time application process” so members could reenroll promptly, “even at the doctor’s office.”

Nevertheless, in an official agency website posting in August- the most recent month reported for activity- the agency disenrolled 34,429 members statewide, with “93.4% Procedural Denial Disenrolled.” This tally included 5,669 dropped in Tulsa County at a comparable procedural disenrollment rate.

Political opposition to Medicaid

Most Republican state officials have a record of opposing Medicaid participation. Medicaid is a federally mandated program that requires state financial participation and administration and is thus subject to significant state government oversight and control. The OHCA is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the Oklahoma Governor (5), the House Speaker (2), and the Senate President (2). This all-Republican-appointed political body establishes policies and adopts rules for SoonerCare, including the disenrollment process underway.

A majority of Oklahoma Republican elected officials opposed the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA), which expanded Medicaid membership. A key provision in the legislation increased the Medicaid income eligibility threshold to 133% of the federal poverty level effective in January 2014. Oklahoma declined the Medicaid expansion even though the federal government funded 100% of the cost through 2016. After that, the federal contribution gradually reduced to 90% but remains today’s federal contribution.

And yet, Oklahoma residents approved a ballot measure in June 2020 approving Medicaid (SoonerCare) expansion effective in 2021. Oklahoma was the 37th state to approve the expansion of membership, one of five to do so by referendum, but the only state to accomplish this through a state constitutional amendment. Governor Stitt and other Republicans opposed the ballot measure, claiming expansion would strain the state’s health care infrastructure and finances.

Following the successful referendum, Stitt made a last-ditch effort to privatize SoonerCare by outsourcing health care for most recipients. The Oklahoma Supreme Court blocked the OCHA from doing so in June 2021, only weeks before the expansion became effective. In the first month of expansion, 145,000 newly eligible Oklahomans enrolled in SoonerCare, and 300,000 expansion participants were registered in the program.

For questions on SoonerCare eligibility or enrollment status, visit MySoonerCare.org or call the SoonerCare helpline: 800-987-7767

The elimination of those receiving Medicaid coverage is part of a statewide trend. Since April, over 150,000 persons in Oklahoma have been removed from Medicaid health insurance. That number includes 25,000 in Tulsa County.

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

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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
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(918) 625-2374

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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

307-311 N. Greenwood Ave.

P: 918-587-1428
F: 918-587-0642

vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

Sunday
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8:30 am

Worship Service
10:00 am

Wednesday
Bible Study
6:00 pm



Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

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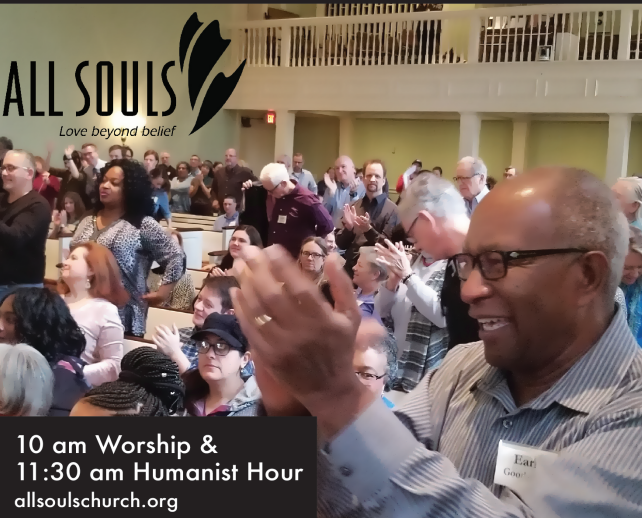
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918-584-0510

Fax:

918-584-1958

Prayer Line:

918-584-PRAY

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Morning

Worship 10:45

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Bible Study

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10:00 a.m. Spirit Seniors

5:30 p.m. Support Groups

6:30 p.m. Community Dinner

7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Sunday Worship

Church School

9:45 a.m.

Worship

11:00 a.m.

Ministries: Administration, Children's Church, Children's Choir, Spirited Kids, Guest Services, Intercessors, Men's Fellowship, Outreach and much more...



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Cosby-Willis,



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NEW FUNDING CUTS CAN MAKE LIFE
HARDER FOR BLACK STUDENTS

House Republicans want to cut Title I education funds by 80%, potentially eliminating \$15 billion for underserved schools and students. **A15**

PRESERVING
AFRO-MEXICAN HERITAGE

“As a child, all I wanted was to belong. Yet, as I grew older, I realized that regardless of what others said or thought, I belonged to both cultures. **A14**

Underdiagnosed,
Undertreated,
Young Black
Males With
ADHD Get Left
Behind

By KFF HEALTH NEWS, WORD IN BLACK
BLACK MALES, ADHD

A recent study found that young Black males are substantially more likely to be underdiagnosed and undertreated for the neurological condition than white peers.

As a kid, Wesley Jackson Wade should have been set up to succeed. His father was a novelist and corporate sales director and his mother was a special education teacher. But Wade said he struggled through school even though he was an exceptional writer and communicator. He played the class clown when he wasn’t feeling challenged. He got in trouble for talking back to teachers. And, the now 40-year-old said, he often felt anger that he couldn’t bottle up.

As one of the only Black kids in predominantly white schools in upper-middle-class communities — including the university enclaves of Palo Alto, California, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina — he often got detention for chatting with his white friends during class, while they got only warnings. He chalked it up to his being Black. Ditto, he said, when he was wrongly arrested as an eighth grader for a bomb threat at his school while evacuating with his white friends. So he wasn’t surprised that his behavioral issues drew punishment, even as some of his white friends with similar symptoms instead started getting treatment for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

“Black kids at a very young age, we start dealing with race, we have a lot of racial stamina,” said Wade, who now lives outside of Durham, North Carolina. “But I didn’t understand until later on that there was probably something else going on.”

After spending years grappling with self-doubt and difficult relationships — and smoking what he called “Snoop Dogg volumes of weed” from middle school until his 20s — he learned he had ADHD and dyslexia, two diagnoses that often overlap. He was 37.

It’s long been known that Black children are underdiagnosed for ADHD compared with white peers. A Penn State report published in Psychiatry Research in September studied the extent of the gap by following more than 10,000 elementary students nationwide from kindergarten to fifth grade through student assessments and parent and teacher surveys. The researchers estimated the odds that Black students got diagnosed with the neurological condition were 40% lower than for white students, with all else being equal — including controlling for economic status, student achievement, behavior, and executive functioning.

For young Black males, the odds of being diagnosed with ADHD were especially stark: almost 60% lower than for white boys in similar circumstances, even though research suggests the prevalence of the condition is likely the same.

The racial ADHD divide isn’t merely a health concern. It’s deepening inequity for Black children, and especially Black males, said the study’s lead author, Paul Morgan, the former director of the Center for Educational Disparities Research at Penn State. He now leads the Institute for Social and Health Equity at the University of Albany.

ADHD has been diagnosed in nearly 1 in 10 children in



WESLEY JACKSON WADE is a licensed clinical mental health counselor who practices in Durham, North Carolina. Wade was diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia in 2020, after years of grappling with the symptoms of those conditions. Now Wade counsels Black youth and adults to help identify neurological conditions. PHOTO EAMON QUEENEY FOR KFF HEALTH NEWS

the United States, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study published in 2022, with rates surging nearly 70% in the past two decades. It is often a lifetime condition that can be managed with treatments including therapy and medication. Untreated, children with ADHD face much greater health risks, including drug addiction, self-harm, suicidal behavior, accidents, and untimely death. By adulthood, many people with undiagnosed ADHD have spent years feeling isolated and hopeless, just as Wade did.

Even before Wade’s diagnosis, he was helping similar college students in a career counseling role at North Carolina State University. Today, he’s a licensed mental health and addiction counselor and doctoral student, but he said it’s been hard to see his successes.

“To the rest of the world, this is a Black man with two master’s degrees, and he’s a PhD candidate, and he has two licenses and certifications,” he said. “But to me, I’m a brother who’s had a lot of bad luck with people and jobs I’ve gotten fired from. I’ve never been promoted, ever, in my professional life.”

Wade’s experiences of race and ADHD are intertwined. “ADHD is an accelerant to my Black experience,” he said. “I can’t separate my experiences as a Black boy and Black man from my experiences of understanding my neurodivergent identity.”

People who study and treat ADHD cite several reasons why young Black males fall under the radar, including teachers who are racially biased or have lower expectations of Black students and don’t recognize an underlying disability, and Black parents who are distrustful of teachers and doctors, fearing they’ll label and stigmatize their children.

“We’ve known for a long time that ADHD diagnoses are not made in a vacuum. They’re made in a geographic context, cultural context, racial context,” said George DuPaul, a psychology professor at Lehigh University who studies nonmedication interventions for ADHD.

Studies have shown that ADHD underdiagnosis contributes to harsher school discipline and to the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Black kids routinely face punishment, including criminal prosecution, for problem behavior and mental health conditions such as ADHD, while white kids are more likely to be diagnosed with behavioral conditions and receive medical treatment and support. There’s a common saying: “Black kids get cops, white kids get docs.”

Courtney Zulauf-McCurdy, a researcher and clinician at the University of Washington School of Medicine, focuses on decreasing mental health disparities in early childhood. By preschool, she said, Black children with ADHD symptoms are more likely to be expelled and less likely to receive appropriate treatment than their white peers.

Her research has found that teachers’ judgments of children are heavily influenced by their opinions of the kids’ parents, and that often determines whether those children are evaluated for behavioral conditions and given appropriate

support — or simply kicked out of class. She said the Penn State findings confirm what she’s seen in clinics and heard from parents.

Zulauf-McCurdy also pointed to research that shows Black children are 2.4 times as likely as white kids to receive a diagnosis of conduct disorder compared with a diagnosis of ADHD. She said the racial bias and overdiagnosis of conditions such as oppositional defiant disorder, defined by symptoms of being uncooperative and hostile toward authority figures, result in more punitive consequences such as being isolated in separate classrooms.

To fix inequities in ADHD diagnosis, mental health experts see a need for increasing culturally sensitive screening and addressing Black families’ concerns about potential bias and racism. Ensuring access to information about symptoms and treatments for ADHD may help address obstacles to care.

Looking back, Wade said, he is grateful he got diagnosed, even if it came late. But, he said, learning about his condition earlier would have given him more confidence navigating school, work, and life. “If I was able to get a diagnosis, I would have had a lot more support and love in my life,” he said.

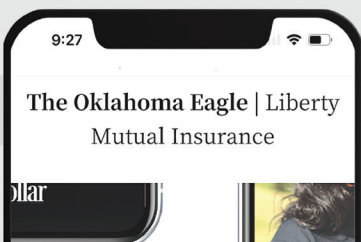
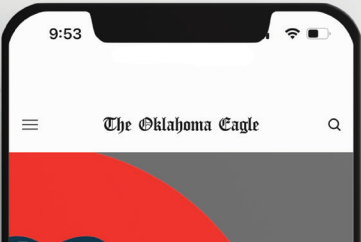
Behavioral tools and medication have made it easier for him to focus and to regulate his mood. The diagnosis has also helped him become more aware of how to manage his depression and anxiety.

“Now it’s an understanding of how I exist, how my brain works,” Wade said. “I don’t think that I’m just broken.”

Still, Wade wonders what the ADHD label would have meant for him as a child — despite his family’s privileges of money and education — before more awareness existed about the condition. Even now, he said, the remaining stigma around the diagnosis is probably worse for Black kids, who still get less benefit of the doubt than white children.

Today, Wade is helping Black and neurodivergent youth and adults identify ADHD and other conditions. It’s part of his work, but it’s also deeply personal.

“I remember how it felt to not be seen, to not be heard, and to have your needs dismissed,” he said. “It feels good to see other people getting the help that they need and know that it helps Black people as a whole and generations of those families.”



“I was sharply reminded of my differences.”

Mercedes White, head of the Theater Program at the Harlem School of the Arts (HSA)

AFRO-MEXICAN HERITAGE *from A13*



PHOTO LAPACAZO M. SANDOVAL/NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS

Unless you live under a proverbial rock without Wi-Fi service, you know that New York City is now filled with members of the Mexican community, and Harlem has reflected this change in the type of businesses, food trucks, restaurants, and street vendors lining the streets. The type of music heard drifting out of bodegas now packed with items imported from Mexico adds to the city’s vibrant multicultural atmosphere.

I’ve lived in Harlem since the late ’80s, and I’ve witnessed the swirling of cultures as this section of the city has transformed. A blink of an eye turned what was once a stronghold for African Americans, Africans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans into a new haven for immigrants, primarily Mexicans. I am Afro Mexican, and as an Afro Mexican, we are often lumped in and assimilated with the aforementioned groups. I’m not complaining. It’s all good. It’s not like we are trying to deny our African roots; it’s the opposite. We embrace our melanin with love.

With this influx, our cultural traditions find significance in the heartfelt commemoration of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) — observed from October 27th to November 2nd.

There are numerous misconceptions about Día de los Muertos, often originating from other Spanish-speaking communities. Perhaps it’s the skull decorations that trouble them or the belief that the departed, including pets, return to visit. Many also feel uneasy about the ofrenda, or altar, associating it with Santería and Voodoo.

However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Creating an ofrenda, typically in private homes and cemeteries, is a simple yet profound way to honor our departed loved ones. It includes family photos, marigolds, offerings, water, food, salt, candles, and Pan de Muerto adorned with bones and skulls, symbolizing the circle of life. The aroma of copal incense often hangs in the air, carrying prayers and purifying the space, crafting a sacred atmosphere—a warm invitation for spirits to return. Día de los Muertos holds deep roots in the ancient traditions of Aztec, Toltec, and Nahuatl communities, where death was viewed as a natural phase in life’s cycle rather than an endpoint. This profound cultural heritage was acknowledged by UNESCO in 2008, recognizing it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This designation emphasized that cultural traditions, like Día de los Muertos, are not relics but living expressions passed down through

generations.

Here’s what Mercedes White, head of the Theater Program at the Harlem School of the Arts (HSA), model and influencer Nioby Monroe, and editor and content creator Michael Baca, aka The Black Mexican, have to share about being Afro Mexicans in this country and embracing both of our cultures, of which we are equally proud.

AMSTERDAM NEWS: Ms. White, you are like my spirit animal. It’s awesome that there is an ofrenda at The Harlem School of the Arts (HSA) to acknowledge the short film “Taking the E Train” (based on the upcoming children’s book) that you are producing. How was it for you, growing up, being Afro Mexican?

MERCEDES WHITE: Honestly, it was both awesome and confusing. Throughout my upbringing, my awareness of my Black identity was limited. I knew I was Black — how could I not? But Blackness is more than just skin color, and I struggled to relate. It wasn’t until I ventured into my predominantly Mexican neighborhood that I was sharply reminded of my differences. Despite sharing the same cultural upbringing and participating in the same traditions as my Mexican peers, I was always seen as Black, and that was that. This confusion escalated when my father’s side of the family insisted, without relent, that I was not Black but Mexican. So, how was this experience both awesome and confusing? Well, it was a mix of both. As a child, all I wanted was to belong. Yet, as I grew older, I realized that regardless of what others said or thought, I belonged to both cultures. Nothing could change that fundamental truth.

AMN: What elements of the beauty within each culture, both separately and when blended, do you wish more people comprehended?

MW: Both cultures have strong foundations in the family unit, especially under the influence of the matriarch. This shared aspect leads to notable similarities in upbringing experiences.

AMN: Nioby Monroe, thank you for representing both the African American and Mexican American communities as a model and influencer. I follow you on social media. What does that entail exactly?

Nioby Monroe: First, thank you. Embracing my African American and Mexican American heritage entails embodying the rich cultural traditions

and experiences of both ancestries. It means having a unique identity that intertwines the histories, struggles, achievements, and resilience of two distinct communities.

AMN: What challenges did you face, if any, growing up?

NM: The challenges I’ve faced since childhood, and even now, stem from the fact that I’ve never fit neatly into any predefined category, leaving people often unable to truly understand me.

AMN: Thank you so much, Michael Baca, aka The Black Mexican. My brother from another mother. I follow you on social media. You make me laugh!

MICHAEL BACA: Thank you, my Afro Mexican sister.

AMN: Let’s jump into it. How do you celebrate Día de los Muertos?

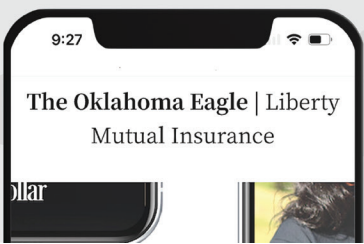
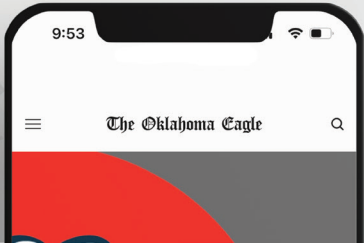
MB: I celebrate Día de los Muertos by spending time with my family and remembering the loved ones who have passed. We tell funny stories about them, and most importantly, we teach the children about relatives who have passed. Talking about relatives that have passed is our way of keeping them alive in our hearts. It is very important to my family that we remember our loved ones because we believe you only actually die when nobody remembers you.

AMN: I feel you, and I agree. What does being Blaxican or Afro Latino mean to you?

MB: When I was growing up, I would choose to identify as Mexican or Black only because I feel like society puts you into a box and forces you to identify with being Mexican or Black. Many job applications still force you to identify as Black or Hispanic, and if you check the box for Hispanic, then you cannot choose the box for Black or any other race. Also, as a content creator, I have received many comments telling me that I cannot identify as Blaxican, and comments such as, “if your dad is Black, then you’re Black.” Being Blaxican or Afro Latino is a way that I show respect to both of my cultures, which I respect and am proud to be a part of.

“As a child, all I wanted was to belong. Yet, as I grew older, I realized that regardless of what others said or thought, I belonged to both cultures. Nothing could change that fundamental truth.”

Mercedes White, head of the Theater Program at the Harlem School of the Arts (HSA)



House Republicans want to cut Title I education funds by 80%, potentially eliminating \$15 billion for underserved schools and students.

BLACK STUDENTS, FUNDING CUTS from A13



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Time and time again, teachers call for more money to buy materials for classroom projects and pay for field trips. Principals and CEOs want additional funds to keep their schools up-to-date technologically and culturally. And school psychologists and counselors have requested more mental health providers and services within school walls.

But, with the fate of Title I funds resting in the hands of an upcoming House of Representatives vote on funding, all the things education professionals are pushing for may just get a bit harder.

Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives want to cut 80% of funding for Title I, a federal program

that sends money to schools based on the number of children from low-income backgrounds enrolled there.

For almost 60 years, Title I programs have been used to decrease class sizes, pay for teachers assistants, create afterschool programs, pay for resources to teach reading and math, and offer countless other necessities for underserved students.

“Some schools have been underfunded for decades, leaving their students, especially those who are Black, Brown, or live in rural areas, without the facilities and resources they need to come into their brilliance,” Becky Pringle, President of the National Education Association said in a statement. “Every student — and I do

mean every — should have access to a great public school, which is why we must protect Title I funding.”

The House bill, which could be approved as early as next week, would potentially wipe away nearly \$15 billion for historically and currently underserved school districts. To add insult to injury for Black students, the bill would also ban the use of funding to teach “critical race theory,” a term that is not defined in the legislation, according to reporting from Chalkbeat.

The dramatic cuts, which would slash 28% of the overall education budget, would also directly impact more than 50,000 Head Start slots, wipe out over 200,000 educational jobs, and eliminate Title II grants used to recruit

and retain teachers.

Studies show that highest-need districts — which often have large Black and Brown student populations — already receive substantially less state and local funding than lower-need districts. Funding from Title I programs is intended to fill those gaps.

The NEA is encouraging its members and supporters to email their elected officials and urge them to “oppose the draconian cuts in education funding proposed by the House GOP.” But they’re not alone. Organizations like the National Parents Union are also organizing against the proposed cuts.



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



CONSPIRACY IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Killers of the Flower Moon

By **KIMBERLY MARSH**, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

IF IT WAS MARTIN SCORSESE’S PURPOSE TO CREATE A 3 1/2 HOUR MOVIE TO MAKE US GO BEYOND THE POINT OF UNCOMFORTABLE, HE SURELY ACHIEVED THAT WITH “KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON.”

After viewing the acclaimed movie, I came away with discomfort. My legs and arms were asleep. I also felt the agony and the pain of the Osage people, whose epic losses are central to the movie’s narrative. I also felt a tremendous amount of disdain for the horrific white men who created nightmares for the Osage and made this movie possible. I don’t mean the actors and the director but the actual people on which the murderous plot was based.

If the dowdy, frowning mouths of old white townspeople didn’t make you want to puke, the graphic scenes of death and the betrayal and deceit played upon the family of Mollie Burkhart, the Osage protagonist of the story would.

As Ernest Burkhart, Leonardo DiCaprio played the film’s key antagonist like Marlon Brando or Jack Nicholson would. He looked like he had an orange peel stuck between his gums and his lower lip. He went from being a fresh-faced World War I veteran to the haggard conspirator in the systematic bilking and killing of Mollie’s family members.

DeNiro: Nuanced Performance

Robert DeNiro also gave a nuanced performance underscoring the calculated duplicity and greed that enabled the exploitation and murder of countless Osage citizens. DeNiro unsurprisingly makes you initially consider him a hero, but that quickly disintegrates into absolute contempt for the ruthless Fairfax tycoon Bill Hale, aka King of the Osage Hills, who gains the misplaced trust of many Osage families. The film unsparingly depicts the murders, betrayals, and deceit inflicted on the Osage, solidifying the

viewer’s feelings of outrage at the real-life perpetrators.

The constant mourning and grief in the life of Mollie Burkhart is played in perfection by Lilly Gladstone. The first two hours went by as you would expect, with the story being laid out in deliberate, painstaking form. For the last hour and a half, we watch Mollie Burkhart struggle through her “illness,” knowing that she knew of the murders and her assailant but remained stoic and never wavered in her commitment to her husband until the great reveal in the last 10 minutes of the movie.

“Killers of the Flower Moon” holds the same title as the book by David Grann, which is taken from a passing reference to the flowers known to be “killed” or to fade. It is a creative title, albeit a mouthful and hard to remember in sequence. Is it flowers of the killer moon or killers of the flower moon? After nearly four hours, one should remember, but they are only mentioned once.

The film is challenging to watch at times due to its graphic violence and devastating scenes of loss. But the discomfort and anger it evokes is intentional - Scorsese wants the viewer to feel the injustice and dehumanization suffered by the Osage viscerally.

“Killers of the Flower Moon” is a towering achievement and masterfully crafted indictment of the exploitation of the Osage people. Though difficult to watch at times, it’s an unforgettable portrayal of a painful chapter of American history and a tribute to human dignity in the face of cruelty. Scorsese has vividly brought to light a shattering true story of exploitation and racism that demands reflection, and he did the right thing by filming the movie in the hills, oilfields, and prairie grasses of the beautiful Osage Nation.



KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON movie poster. PHOTO PARAMOUNT PICTURE, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Booker T. Washington Distinguished Hall of Fame announces plans for 2023-2024

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN

The Booker T. Washington Distinguished Hall of Fame Foundation announces that it will be accepting nominations for its Hall of Fame later this month and student scholarship applications in spring 2024.

As of 2023, the foundation has inducted 86 alumni, faculty, and administrators, such as James Batton, Ph.D., Ed Lacy, Don Barnum,

Allen Heinberg, Dr. Julia Hare, and DeMarco Morgan, as Hall of Fame honorees. Twenty-five seniors have received four-year scholarships, and six seniors have been awarded one-year scholarships.

The purpose of the HOF is to identify and honor graduates, retired faculty and administrators, and patrons of Booker T.

Washington High School who have exhibited high qualities of leadership, attained high levels of achievement, or made meritorious contributions to the school, local, national, or global communities. Alumni are invited to submit nominees who have distinguished themselves.

Additionally, regarding student scholarships, the board of directors solicits Booker T. Washington High School student applications and selects the most qualified seniors for scholarships.

The foundation was established at the beginning of the 1996-1997 school year as a function of the administration of the school. At that time, the foundation began to identify outstanding alumni to be recognized in the Hall of Fame. In the 2011-2012 school year, the foundation started to award college scholarships.

The next year in the 2012-2013 academic year, the foundation became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and was officially named as the Booker T. Washington Distinguished Hall of Fame Foundation.

According to a press release from the foundation, its future will include inducting alumni and BTW high school supporters with HOF honors and offering student scholarships.

Throughout the year, the foundation seeks donations and sponsors fundraising events to support its HOF and college scholarship programming.

The foundation says the history, experience, and expertise of its board of directors guides and directs the decision-making process in support of the HOF vision and mission.

The press release states the foundation will continue the legacy of the organization for the school in the great Southwest region of the country.

Members of the Board of Directors of the Booker T. Washington High School Distinguished Hall of Fame Foundation are Janice Bayouth, Susan Braselton, Whitney Downie, Ioder Fisher, Matthew Fransein, Julie Horgen, Reggie Ivey, Rebecca Marks-Jimerson, Matt King, Zenobia Mayo, Dr. Joyce McClellan, Michael Pierce, Dr. Lester Shaw, Dr. La Verne Ford Wimberly, and Dr. Melissa Woodridge.

For more information, visit the foundation’s website, <https://www.btwhalloffame.org/>, or its Facebook page, [tulsa.btw.hof](https://www.facebook.com/tulsa.btw.hof).



FORMER TULSAN DON JACKSON, who lives now in Los Angeles, is an author, spiritualist, and motivational speaker. PHOTO PROVIDED

Jackson releases new book, ‘Prodigal – Leaving Church and Finding God’

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN

Don Jackson announces his new book, “Prodigal – Leaving Church and Finding God.” The book is “prescriptive nonfiction work that aims to challenge and inspire readers with new and sometimes controversial viewpoints on various topics related to spirituality” from the author’s website.

Jackson shares his life experiences beginning in New Orleans before his family moved to Tulsa, Okla. He delves into his faith walk and the opportunities and challenges that he encountered. As a musician who played the drums, Jackson played in the church under the direction

of Irma Dean Wilson, mother of GAP Band’s Charlie Wilson.

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Jackson said he had “a burning desire to tell (his) life story.” A pivotal moment in his life was when he had a health issue that included a heart attack. He became more introspective after this incident. He was inspired to “empty his soul to what is to the best of my ability” into a book.

He wants readers to understand, and learn from his example, and for “everyone to walk away with knowing that you’re okay.” He says, “(Everyone)

is “an activity of the one thing that is happening, which is consciousness. Everything is a movement of consciousness.”

Jackson reveals seven commandments that he follows in life and how he serves his family and friends. The first commandment is “Love everyone as yourself.” He says it is a kind of love given and received where it is a “desire for you to live in the fullest happiness and purpose you possibly can.”

The book is available at [mrdonjackson.com](https://www.mrdonjackson.com), Barnes and Noble, and Apple Books.

Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is accepting applications for Fund for Teachers Fellowships

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN

In a press release, the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence has announced that it will be accepting applications for Fund for Teachers fellowships. The program gives Oklahoma educators who teach pre-K through 12th grade the opportunity to pursue self-designed professional learning.

Individual teachers may apply for up to \$5,000, while teacher teams may apply for up to \$10,000 in grant funds. Applications are online at fundforteachers.org and completed applications can be received until Jan. 18 at 5 p.m.

Oklahoma’s 2023 recipients used their grants for a wide variety of experiences, including leading an excursion in Costa Rica to experience the country’s rainforest and ocean ecosystems, exploring fairy tales and folklore in Europe, and attending The Ron Clark Academy, a demonstration school in Atlanta with hands-on workshops.

“These fellowships provide such amazing opportunities for Oklahoma teachers,” said Elizabeth Inbody, executive director of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence. “They are able to absorb the things they experience and then put that knowledge

back into a classroom setting, greatly enriching their students’ learning opportunities.”

To be eligible, teachers must spend at least 50% of their time directly providing instruction to students, must be returning to the classroom in the consecutive school year, and must have at least three years’ experience teaching pre-K through 12th grade at the end of the current school year.

The grants are made possible through a partnership between Fund for Teachers, the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, and the Tulsa Community Foundation.

The Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence is a nonprofit that recognizes and encourages academic excellence in Oklahoma’s public schools.

For more information about Fund for Teachers grants for Oklahoma teachers, visit fundforteachers.org or contact Fund for Teachers Oklahoma Program Coordinator Lauren Dow at ldow@ofe.org or 405-236-0006.



Events

2023

- Nov. 11**
“Addressing Mental Health in Our Community” workshop will be held on Nov. 11 at 5 p.m. at the Gilcrease Clubhouse, 1919 W. Seminole St. For more information, contact (918) 584-2541.
- Nov. 21-26**
“Beetlejuice,” at Tulsa Performing Arts Center – Chapman Music Hall, 110 E. 2nd St. For tickets, call (918) 596-7111.
- Nov. 25**
Holiday Concert and Lighting Event on Historic Greenwood Avenue, on Nov. 25, 6 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. For more information, visit shineongreenwood.org.
- Dec. 7**
American Red Cross to host Disaster Preparation class at Greenwood Women’s Business Center, 102 N. Greenwood Ave., Suite 201 (Second floor) on Dec. 7 at 11 a.m. For more information, contact (539) 867-4127 or info@greenwoodwbc.com.
- Dec. 8 and 9**
National Association of Black Journalists – Tulsa Chapter Salute to Excellence Awards Gala (Dec. 8) and Professional and Community Workshops (Dec. 9), Tulsa Community College – Center for Creativity, 910 S. Boston Ave. For more information, contact nabjtulsagala23@gmail.com.
- Dec. 9**
Greenwood Chamber of Commerce Third Annual World Class Winter Gala, Doubletree Hotel by Hilton – Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. on Dec. 9 at 5 p.m. For more information, visit <https://historictulsagreenwoodchamber.com/>.

2024

- Feb. 17, 18, and 24**
Theatre North’s “Topdog/Underdog” performance at Tulsa Performing Arts Center, 110 E. 2nd St. For ticket information, call (918) 596-7111.