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## Revivalists Envision Future For All-Black Towns



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(ABOVE) **ABE LINCOLN TRADING COMPANY BUILDING**, a circa 1903 Clearview building that once served as the office for the Lincoln Townsite Company, Clearview Drug Company, Last Chance Bar and The Juke Joint. PHOTO **BASIL CHILDERS/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE** (BELOW) **CYMONÉ DAVIS**, Black Towns Municipal Management CEO begins a workshop during the Black Towns Revival Weekend. PHOTO **BASIL CHILDERS/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE**

# How Will Our Shared History Survive?

All-Black Towns from A1

Most Oklahomans are familiar with the state’s historic All-Black towns, the significance of the independence established by their residents, the economic freedom earned and the modest safe haven provided throughout the country’s and state’s racially charged history.

The primarily central and eastern located All-Black towns were, and continue to be, keepers of childhood memories, generational faith-based institutions and a reminder of the commitment-to-excellence by those who built a foundation for a future of resilience.

Driving no more than 35 miles southeast from Tulsa, Okla. to Redbird, or as far as 180 miles southwest to Tatums, affords one an opportunity to experience the soul and spirit of All-Black towns that once slowly rose above the horizon of highways and rural roads in the distance.

After every trip, by days end, beneath Oklahoma’s vast and warm evening sky, most would be compelled to closely gather their new memories, and consider, how such history will survive.

Black Towns Revival Weekend, a days-long event organized by Black Towns Municipal Management and Church Building and Loan Fund, “... have partnered with industry leaders and community change-makers to rebuild Black Townships.”

The November 2023 event featured a series of tours and community engagement in the historic All-Black town of Rentiesville and other locales. Members of the host group began dreaming out loud about the All-Black towns, envisioning how they should develop in the next few decades.

Oklahoma once hosted 50 All-Black towns. All-Black towns were once the central-focus of Black-owned businesses, newspapers, churches, schools, and cultural institutions. Residents took great pride in the freedom and independence these communities represented.

That number has dwindled since the 1960s, due in part to desegregation and the subsequent interest residents had to explore greater economic opportunities.

2020 census reporting accounts for 3,500 residents remaining in all 13 towns. Most have experienced significant declines in population by as much as 30%, notably Red Bird, Taft, Tatums and Summit, hosting less than 500 residents combined.

Optimistically, All-Black town mayors, pastors, and community leaders said during the weekend that they look forward to seeing former native residents move back in as younger retirees who can replace the elders

who have kept these towns alive for 120 years.

Often perceived as a harbinger of progress-to-come, and a point of pride by many residents, post offices were one of few public or private institutions that connected All-Black towns to the rest of country. Summit, although platted in 1910, had a post office as early as 1896. Grayson, formerly known as Wildcat, adopted its name after establishing its post office on Feb. 10, 1902.

One concern of many All-Black town residents is the shifting basis of zip code identification. As state and local neighboring communities have grown, All-Black town residents have slowly begun to lose their legacy postal codes and the representation that it affords them.

### Visions for the Black towns

Black Towns Municipal Management and Church Building and Loan Fund considered a few scenarios for sustainability, and offered several visions of what could be employed in Oklahoma’s All-Black towns, to include:

- Broader community-based agriculture networks: Establish a technology infrastructure to power community-based farms to supply local and regional grocers.

- Community griots and an increased distribution of history-based narratives (exchanges): Establish a formal model and state-wide distribution of history-centric storytellers, who craft and publish narratives tailored for multiple generations. Such exchanges would center on healing stories of support to help future generations thrive in their communities.

- Cultural celebrations: All-Black town leaders could also maximize the popularity of Black rodeos to transform rural infrastructure through high-tech development of agriculture and training. The rodeos could be used for 3D Hologram teachers in the classrooms.

### A revivalist weekend

Nearly 50 workshop attendees, ranging in life stages from millennials to over 70 years of age, participated in the Black Towns Revival Weekend. The group traveled between Tulsa, Rentiesville, and other historic All-Black towns. Following a visioning exercise led by BlackSpace Oklahoma, participants met with community leaders, learned about historic sites, and deepened their understanding of the history and the



All-Black Towns from A2

current state of Oklahoma’s surviving 13 historic All-Black towns.

Today, Black leaders work to preserve the remaining towns, including their unique heritage, governance, land ownership, education, and cultural pride. They are now seeing a renewed interest in their lifestyles.

The revival change agents envisioned ways to fill the empty spaces left by absentee landowners. They imagined vibrant gathering spaces that center the community, including churches, a civic center, a gymnasium, and museums.

Spotlight on a few of the towns

As Black Towns Revival Weekend attendees gathered in Clearview, on the north side of Main Street, their attention was drawn towards what is often considered one of Clearview’s most photographed buildings. The National Register of Historic Places Registration form describes the building as possessing “enough physical and historical integrity to convey its significance.” The circa 1903 building was once the Abe Lincoln Trading Company, serving as the office for the Lincoln Townsite Company, founded by Lemuel Jackson, James A. Roper, and John Grayson.

The trading company sold groceries and building materials like hardware, tinware, and fixtures. Its corrugated metal, shed-roof storefront canopy would later serve patrons of the Clearview Drug Company, Last Chance Bar and The Juke Joint throughout the proceeding decades.

Stone walls partially destroyed by fire or natural erosion over time are a common site for many All-Black towns. In Tullahassee, the walls of the former Freedmen (African Creeks) boarding school, the Tullahassee Manual Labor School, partially remain standing against threats of destruction. On the narrow main street of Tullahassee and across from the Civic Center, a tall grassy field is a long reminder of the Earth’s expanse and is level ground to a grand horizon.

Rentiesville, also an event destination, preserves its history through Honey Springs Civil War Museum and Battlefield. There, Black and Native American soldiers fought for both the north and south during the American Civil War. The Oklahoma Blues Hall of Fame, established by the late D.C. Minner, a native of Rentiesville, and his wife Selby, still hosts annual blues festivals and weekend jam sessions. Weekend visitors were greeted by Selby Minner and musician Dr. Harold Aldridge, a retired educator who has written a book with stories from Black teachers at the dawn of desegregation. Throughout the tour routes, homes or vacant buildings separated rural plots of underused land.

Rentiesville, exploring new opportunities to boost population growth, has embraced the tiny homes model, attracting individuals who want to return to the historic city or first-time residents.

Meeting challenges

Black Towns Municipal Management CEO and founder, Cymone Davis, is successfully attracting more attention to All-Black towns and cultural centers, drawing planners, nonprofits, activists, entrepreneurs, developers, and economists who craft and share their visions for these historic hubs.

The welcomed engagement is an opportunity to both learn about the historic significance of the All-Black towns and delve into the common challenges faced. Limited funding, physical infrastructure lacking adequate repair and maintenance, a technology gap highlighted by the absence of highspeed internet access to residential and commercial properties, and a scarcity of land resources held by absentee landowners, some of whom have died.

The towns’ challenges aren’t simply isolated to perceivably limited external resources. Former residents, whose estates have been deeded to heirs no longer living in All-Black towns, often refuse to sell



LANCE EPPS, BLACK TOWNS SUPPORTER AND SUSAN MITCHEL of the United Church of Christ Building & Loan Fund view artifacts at the Honey Springs Battlefield Museum in Rentiesville. PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



THE OKLAHOMA BLUES HALL OF FAME IN RENTIESVILLE was one of the stops during the Black Towns Revival Weekend. PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



(LEFT TO RIGHT) MILDRED BURKHALTER, (RENTIESVILLE) KRIS HARVEY (TATUMS) AND LEON ANDERSON (GRAYSON) All-Black town mayors, appear on a panel in Rentiesville. PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



DR. HAROLD ALDRIDGE shared stories about life in a Black town during the Black Towns Revival Tour Weekend. PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

properties that stand abandoned, partially hidden beyond overgrown brush.

Davis optimistically envisions a long-term goal of creating boarding schools in historic All-Black towns, incorporating a curriculum that emphasizes the history and legacy of Oklahoma’s Black Americans who built communities and towns that flourished, provided refuge from threats of violence and the opportunity to genuinely embrace a just freedom.

She was elected Tullahassee’s city manager in 2020, working in partnership with Mayor Keisha Currin. Davis’s commitment to ‘create a sustainable economic system that enables the town to not just survive but thrive’, is supported by a pursuit for a doctoral degree with the Global Executive Doctor of Education program at the University of Southern California. Her shared success extends to earning a fellowship with Boston-based Dr. S. Atiya Martin and working with the Brookings Institution.

United Church of Christ

As part of the Black Towns Revival Weekend tour, Davis invited the United Church of Christ Building & Loan Fund to join the celebration, as the group seeks more opportunities to help All-Black towns restore historic churches. Led by Executive Director Rev. Dr. Patrick Duggan, the Fund transforms communities by “helping the Church live into God’s economy.” They help congregations plan, raise, finance, and build transformative projects. The churches are often the most resilient groups in small Black towns and the center of their fellowship.

“We wanted to come here because we believe that when a church takes up community transformation, it can be very impactful. And it can incent other transformations,” Duggan said. The Fund also leveraged the weekend to premiere a short documentary, “It Takes A Village,” on its successes in Louisville to show Oklahoma leaders what is possible.

Clearview resident Shirley Nero, historian for the Oklahoma Conference for Black Mayors, said her small community of 36 is now working to annex land to secure property for the town to grow.

“There’s just not any out there available. But through annexation, our goal is to increase our population. And then be more secure in gaining nationwide, federal, or state grants and more tax revenue from successful growth,” Nero said. More importantly, Nero wants to attract smaller families and energetic couples interested in increasing the longevity of these Black towns.

Many attendees spoke of the entry of newer, younger mayors, including Kristopher Harvey, mayor of Tatums, and Keisha Currin, mayor of Tullahassee. Sharon Peterson, a native resident of Tullahassee who was passing through while the group was touring, said she and her husband planned to move back when they retire from their careers in Dallas. The mayors and the weekend revivalists applauded that sentiment and said they want more young retirees to see the opportunities and follow Peterson’s lead.

As the four-day workshop ended, Davis pointed to the need for continuous planning to protect the culture of all-Black towns, honor them, and use the history and legacies of a community to inform what the future can be for future generations.

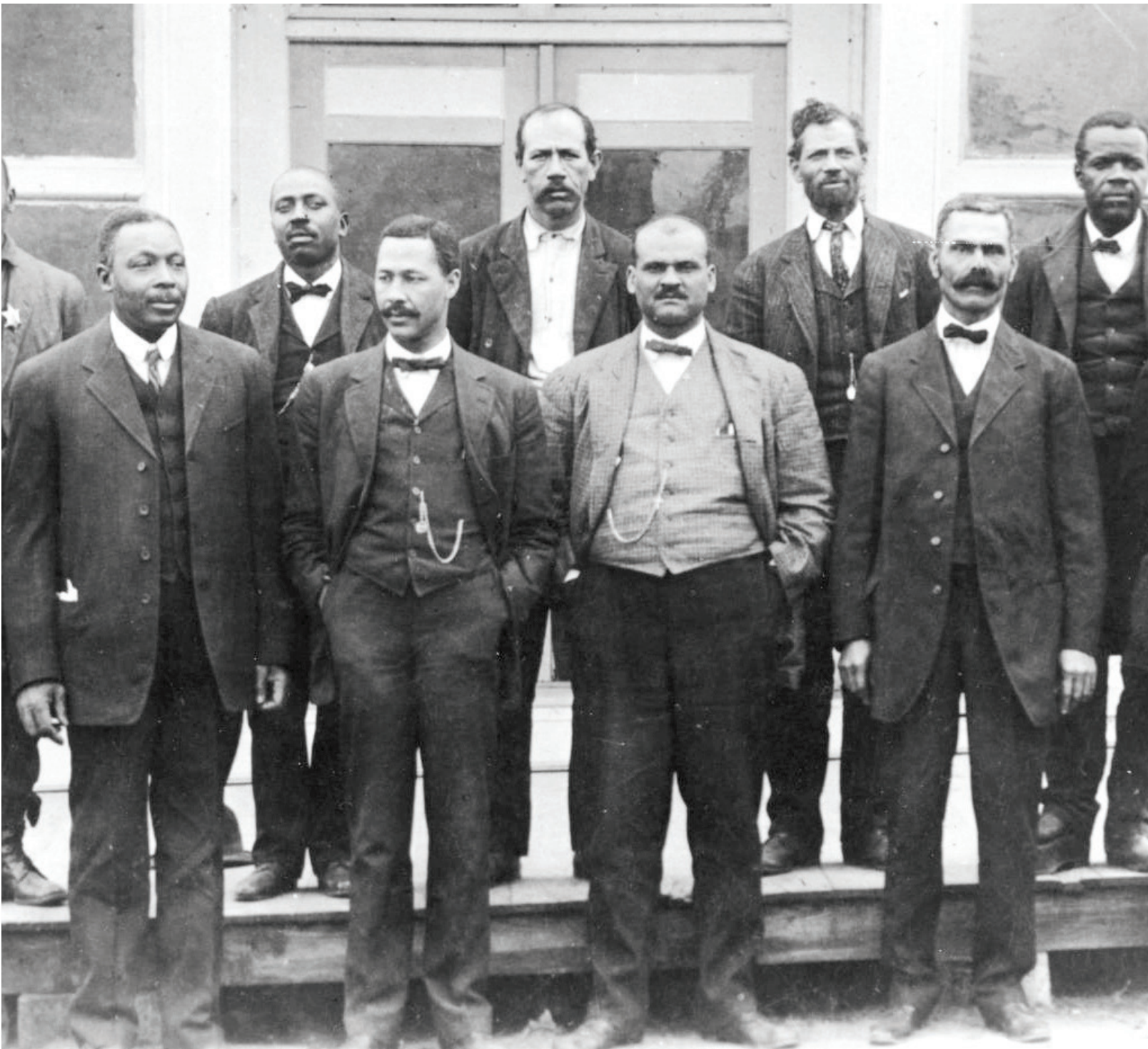
“It’s going to take the wisdom from our elders, knowledge from our young people, innocence and love from our children, and financial resources from our state and federal entities to help rebuild Black towns. This is a collective effort between rural and urban communities, and we need all-hands-on-deck for the work ahead,” Davis said.

(BOTTOM LEFT) VANESSA MORRISON AND LATASHA TIMBERLAKE, Blackspace facilitators, lead lead participants through an exercise during the Black Towns Revival Weekend. (BOTTOM RIGHT) SHARON PETERSON, former Tullahassee resident, reported that she and her husband plan to return to the Black town when they retire.



# Boley: Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



Located halfway between Paden and Castle in Okfuskee County, Boley is the largest and most well-known of the more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The town, established on land allotted to Creek freedman James Barnett’s daughter Abigail, was named after J. B. Boley, a railroad official of the Fort Smith and Western Railway. Founded in 1903 and incorporated in 1905, Boley and the African Americans living in the area prospered for many years. The Boley Progress, a weekly newspaper, began in 1905. The paper and various advertising campaigns circulated through the South and lured many former slaves to the new town. At 1907

statehood Boley sheltered 824 individuals. By 1911 Boley boasted more than four thousand citizens and many businesses, including two banks and three cotton gins. Booker T. Washington, founder of the National Negro Business League and the Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama, visited the town in 1905 and proclaimed it “the most enterprising and in many ways the most interesting of the Negro towns in the United States.” The town supported two colleges: Creek-Seminole College and Methodist Episcopal College. Boley also had its own electrical generating plant, water system, and ice plant. The Masonic Grand Lodge completed a majestic Masonic Temple around 1912. At the time, it was said to be the tallest building between Okmulgee

and Oklahoma City. Like many rural towns, Boley suffered through hard times in the 1920s and 1930s, its population dropping to 1,154 in 1920 and 874 in 1930. By World War II the population stood at 942, and it declined to 573 in 1960 and to 423 in 1980. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, with a population of 1,126, the town was experiencing economic rejuvenation. The number of residents was 1,184 in 2010. Boley still hosts the nation’s oldest African American community-based rodeo every Memorial Day weekend. The downtown business district is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 75001568) and has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service.

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BOLEY TOWN COUNCIL (3377.D.2, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS)).

## Featured Last Week



Tulsa Honors Two Survivors

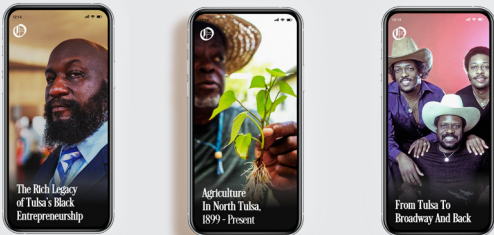


Muscogee Nation Sues City Of Tulsa In Latest Jurisdictional Fight



A Black Perspective On Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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# COMPACT RENEWAL NEGOTIATION OUTCOMES, UNCLEAR

**State-Tribal Compacts** from A1

In the most public and in-depth conversations between tribal and non-tribal leaders since a landmark 2020 U.S. Supreme Court decision functionally affirmed nearly half the state as a series of Indian Country reservations, elected officials and attorneys from four large tribal nations spoke Tuesday to members of the Oklahoma House of Representatives about the history of state-tribal compacts on a variety of topics, including tobacco taxation and motor vehicle licensure agreements that were extended one

**Gov. Stitt maintains the most contentious relationship with tribal nations of Oklahoma.**

year this summer and that will be the focus of further negotiation in 2024.

With Gov. Kevin Stitt having the most contentious relationship with tribal nations of any Oklahoma governor this century, exactly how compact renewal negotiations will unfold over the next year remains unclear, but House Speaker Charles McCall said after the first session of his two-day interim study that it's clear tribal leaders "want legislative leaders in the conversation."

"I think what we also heard from them today is that they don't believe the Legislature

receives any communication from the governor on the talks and the discussions. They define what they see as a negotiation versus a demand. And that's a valid point, because the governor does not communicate with us in terms of what conversations he has had — what communication he's having, either written, verbal or other means," said McCall (R-Atoka). "So going forward, everybody needs to know what everybody is saying, but it's not so much 'the what,' it's 'the how.' And I think for us

**State-Tribal Compacts** cont. A6

# Okla. State Legislature overrode a pair of Stitt vetoes to extend existing compacts

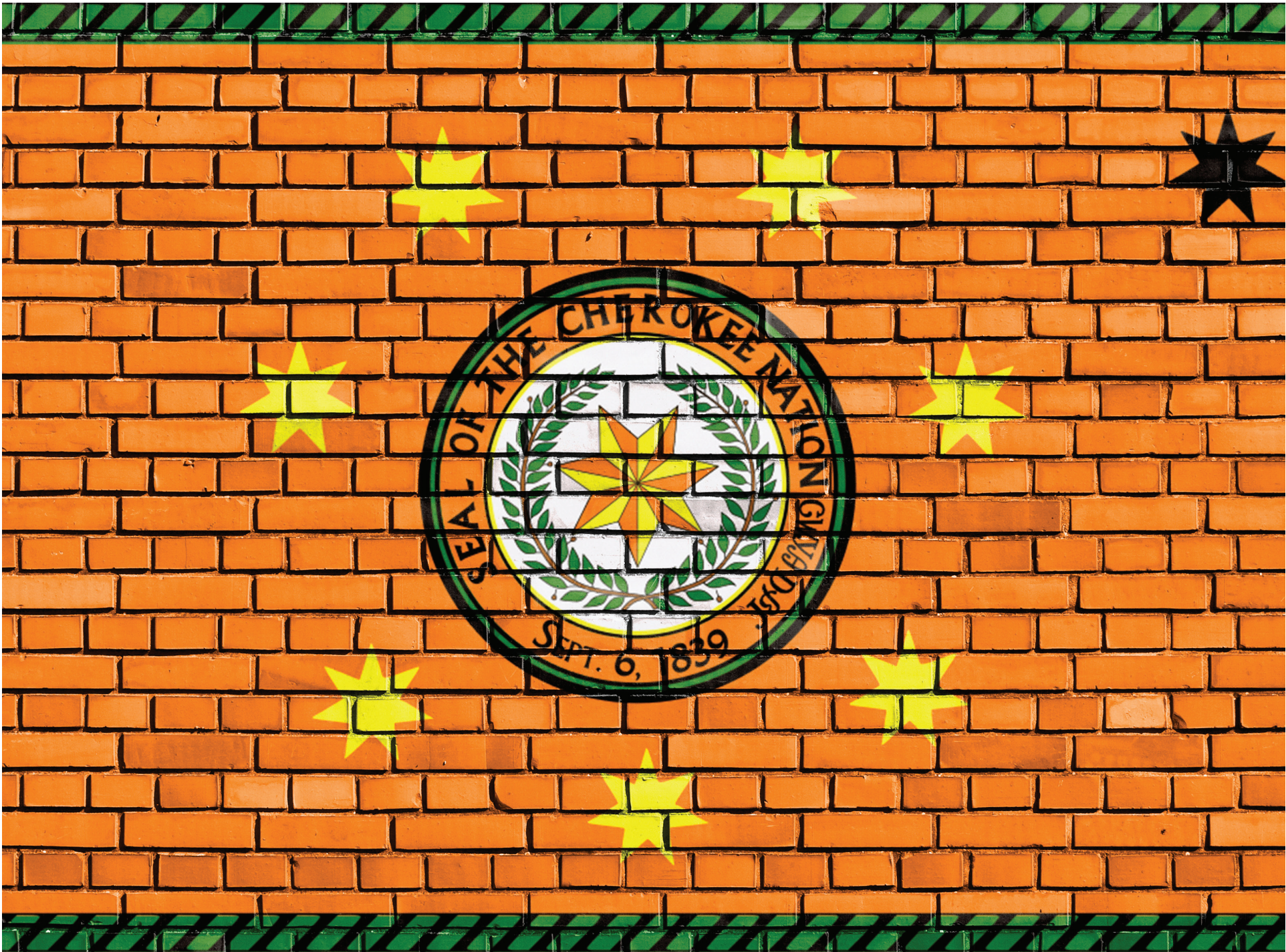


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## State-Tribal Compacts from A5

to really get to the finish line on a compact extension, a renewal, a new compact — if something comes up in the future that we haven’t taken up before that we need to address, it’s going to happen by the leaders sitting down and talking.

“The Legislature is going to be involved going forward.”

Participants in McCall’s study heard that — in the 30-year history of Oklahoma’s more than 900 state-tribal compacts — different agreements have been established in different ways, some involving only legislative action, some involving only gubernatorial negotiation, and others involving both.

“If we had a document that says this is how we compact, this is the procedure we follow, I think it would be a great help to both sides and take away some of the uncertainty,” said Mike Burrage, the longtime general counsel of the Choctaw Nation. “Everybody would know what the path is, and if there is an issue how we’d resolve (it).”

Put lightly, there have been plenty of “issues” as a slew of state-tribal compacts — on casino gambling, tobacco taxation, motor vehicle registration and hunting and fishing licenses — have approached their expiration dates during Stitt’s time as governor.

Sometimes owing to concerns about the McGirt v. Oklahoma’s decision potential impact on civil regulatory jurisdiction and sometimes owing to his belief that the state should have previously negotiated a “better” deal, Stitt has insisted he will not be “a rubber stamp” on compacts coming up for renewal. His strategy ended a pair of hunting and fishing compacts with the Cherokee and Choctaw nations, which functionally decreased state revenue owing to how federal payments are calculated based on overall license numbers. Tribal leaders sued Stitt and won a ruling that determined the state’s Model Tribal Gaming Compact had renewed automatically owing to action taken by the Oklahoma Horse Racing Commission.

Most recently, the Legislature overrode a pair of Stitt vetoes this summer to extend existing tobacco taxation and motor vehicle licensure compacts by one year, a tumultuous political chapter set to repeat itself in 2024.

“Having good state-tribal relations requires something of all of us,” Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said during Tuesday’s study. “And it requires understanding that the exercise of tribal sovereignty, whether expressed through a compact or any other way we exercise sovereignty, doesn’t come at the expense of the state of Oklahoma.”

The McGirt decision has fundamentally changed criminal jurisdiction rules in more than 40 percent of the state, however, and initial 2020 efforts to establish new and broad public safety compacts quickly fell apart. Now, tribal citizens accused of a crime within the Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, Quapaw, Ottawa and Peoria nations may only be prosecuted by a

tribe or the federal government, not the state.

Stitt has railed against the legal duality, pushing legal challenges that led to a subsequent landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta that upended decades of widely perceived Indian law precedent by saying the state has concurrent jurisdiction to prosecute non-tribal citizens who commit crimes against tribal citizens within Indian Country reservations.

During Tuesday afternoon’s panel involving attorneys from the Chickasaw, Choctaw and Cherokee nations, House Appropriations and Budget Committee Chairman Kevin Wallace (R-Wellston) read questions from other legislators. Wallace asked the panel members if they could see an avenue where the state of Oklahoma could have “dual jurisdiction” to prosecute crimes committed by tribal citizens on the reservations.

Burrage provided the only response, which could signal an opportunity to revive the public safety compact conversation but could also irritate some tribal citizens who might view a return to concurrent prosecutorial jurisdiction a relinquishment of tribal sovereignty.

“There is a path forward for concurrent jurisdiction, and that situation existed for a long time prior to McGirt,” Burrage said. “As the tribes have recognized, that path — there’s a clear path forward on that when it comes to compacting.”

### Civil law questions ‘don’t have a judicial resolution (...) yet’

The question of criminal jurisdiction in eastern Oklahoma highlights a key and disputed phrase in the McGirt majority opinion: “For [Major Crimes Act] purposes, land reserved for the Creek Nation since the 19th century remains ‘Indian country.’”

“McGirt was a U.S. Supreme Court decision that dealt with the Major Crimes Act and what was Indian territory within the Major Crimes Act. It wasn’t a civil lawsuit,” Burrage said Tuesday. “Look at McGirt for what it is, but don’t take it for what it’s not. That’s what a lot of people have done and that’s what has caused a lot of emotional outbreaks and so forth against the tribes, I think, and it’s a position the tribes never took.”

Despite Burrage’s claim, attorneys for the Chickasaw, Cherokee and Choctaw nations — the three tribes represented during Tuesday afternoon’s second panel discussion — have taken that position in court, specifically citing the McGirt decision’s affirmation of the Muscogee (Creek) Reservation in an amicus brief supporting Muscogee citizen Alicia Strobble’s appellate case arguing that she is exempt from state income tax authority because she lives and works within her tribe’s reservation.

“McGirt plainly held that the Creek Reservation survived allotment and remains

intact today,” the Chickasaw, Cherokee and Choctaw attorneys wrote. “Therefore, the provisions of Oklahoma Administrative Code (...) now apply in all lands within the Reservation boundaries described in the Muscogee (Creek) Treaty of 1866.”

If Strobble prevails in her case, which is set for oral arguments before the Oklahoma Supreme Court on Jan. 17, Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton said this summer that a new compact on income taxation might make sense.

“As a sovereign nation, our tribal members, I do not believe that they should be taxed,” Batton said in July. “However, we are all Oklahomans, and we do need to pay our fair share. I think there’s a compact on taxation that should come into place at some point in time in the future.”

Strobble would appear to have a strong case for exemption from state income taxation owing to the plain language of state code and the 1993 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Oklahoma Tax Commission v. the Sac and Fox Nation, which found:

Absent explicit congressional direction to the contrary, we presume against a state’s having the jurisdiction to tax within Indian country, whether the particular territory consists of a formal or informal reservation, allotted lands, or dependent Indian communities.

While Wallace said Tuesday he believes the Oklahoma Supreme Court will rule in favor of the state Tax Commission, he is prepared for policy discussions if tribal citizens who live within reservation boundaries are affirmed to be exempt from state income tax.

“If it is, I think we will end up redoing the tax base for the state of Oklahoma, because we will not have two separate tax codes,” Wallace said. “It will be fair and equitable for all Oklahomans, no matter your race and ethnicity.”

Committee members were told Tuesday by attorneys who testified to remember that the designation “Indian” is more a political classification than a racial classification, with sovereign tribal nations having the ability to determine their membership. They were also reminded that the McGirt decision’s affirmation of reservations in Oklahoma has not changed the rights, protections and sovereignty afforded to Indians.

However, it has expanded the land that qualifies as “Indian Country,” which Indigenous law professor Lindsay Robertson called “a term of art” while testifying Wednesday about the undetermined extent to which eastern Oklahoma is now Indian Country for civil regulatory jurisdiction, which includes matters like taxation.

“So now that it’s Indian Country, does the state of Oklahoma still have civil law jurisdiction over it? And the answer is, we don’t definitively know,” said Robertson, who worked on tribal law and compacting issues in the administrations of Republican Gov.

State-Tribal Compacts cont. A7

*Put lightly, there have been plenty of “issues” as a slew of state-tribal compacts — on casino gambling, tobacco taxation, motor vehicle registration and hunting and fishing licenses — have approached their expiration dates during Stitt’s time as governor.*



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

# Hope for a new chapter of tribal-state negotiations

## State-Tribal Compacts from A6

Frank Keating and Democratic Gov. Brad Henry.

Robertson noted that the idea eastern Oklahoma could be a reservation for criminal law purposes but not a reservation for civil regulatory purposes would be peculiar.

“We don’t have a judicial resolution of that question yet,” Robertson said. “I would say as a fairly informed spectator, I would think if the court were to find Muscogee Nation were Indian Country for one purpose but not another, it would be the first time in history that that line had been drawn.”

Asked if he thought having the reservations exist for criminal purposes but not civil purposes would be a functional way to govern society, Wallace replied, “No, I do not.”

### Anoatubby: ‘I hope we can come to terms’

When legislators return for regular session in February, Tuesday’s conversations — and interviews with elected officials afterward — hinted that tribal-state compact negotiations could be different in 2024.

For instance, Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby said the Stitt administration’s July decision to release emails to NonDoc showing back-and-forth conversations and red-lined documents on a potential tobacco tax compact extension chilled the negotiation process.

“These days I don’t put anything in an email,” Anoatubby told lawmakers Tuesday, one day before his 78th birthday. “There was nothing real earth-shattering there. I just feel like negotiations need to be a little more confidential.”

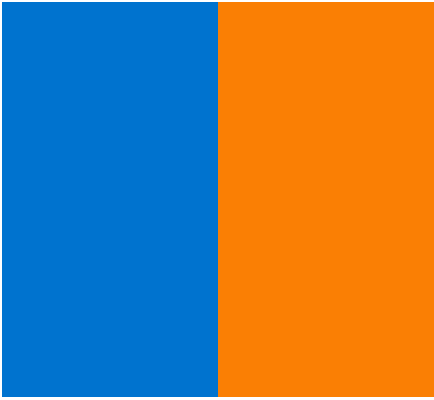
McCall agreed, praising the abilities of retired Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Steven Taylor but questioning the Stitt administration’s insistence that Taylor join a meeting at the Chickasaw Nation’s Oklahoma City headquarters.

“When you have current leaders of nations or sovereigns in this case, those people have to get together and agree to terms of engagement. It can’t be one-sided,” McCall said. “The failings of those meetings is not due to any individual specifically. It’s a failure because the co-equals did not have an agreed-upon process, and when somebody tries to interject something foreign into a process that is not agreed to, it creates distrust and it makes it harder to move forward. You start from a position of having to regain trust before you can take that step forward.”

Asked how further conversations on the expiring tobacco and motor vehicle licensure compacts might unfold, Anoatubby said after

**The environment we’re in, plainly, is one in which the tribes and the Legislature itself favors it having a more prominent role in compacting, and I think they’re doing their homework.**

**Chuck Hoskin Jr.**, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation



Tuesday’s hearing that he is unsure but that tribal nations “need to be on the same page.”

“We can’t approach it the same as we did before. It was just us negotiating. We have other tribes in the state now engaged, so we’re going to have to get together before we can actually deal with it,” Anoatubby said. “I hope we can come to terms. (...) It’s going to be dependent upon the tribes getting together, and we’ll work on that. I’m hopeful, that’s all I can say.”

The other tribal leaders who testified Tuesday also expressed hope for a new chapter of tribal-state negotiations this decade, particularly as it relates to finding a tobacco compact agreement.

“The environment we’re in, plainly, is one in which the tribes and the Legislature itself favors it having a more prominent role in compacting, and I think they’re doing their homework — literally — in anticipation of that,” Hoskin said after Tuesday’s hearing. “I think there is an opportunity. I appreciate the Stitt administration put forth something. I think my colleagues on the panel summed it up nicely, which [felt like], ‘This is the only path forward, take it or leave it,’ was perhaps the implication. But I’m willing to be optimistic that it’s the first of what could be other discussions.”

Wes Nofire, a former Cherokee National Tribal Council member who has clashed with Hoskin, attended Tuesday’s panels and said afterward it was important to remember that only four of the state’s 38 federally recognized tribal nations received seats at McCall’s table.

“Working out of the governor’s office, we’ve always maintained an open door policy to communicate with anyone, not just the tribes that were there today, but all of our federally recognized tribes in the state,” said Nofire, whom Stitt designated as his Native American liaison in September. “And so I want to make sure that beyond just the tribes that were their representing their constituents, we have many other tribal governments in the state who didn’t have the opportunity to reflect their voices.”

Nofire’s comment underscored Stitt’s history of aligning his interests more often with smaller tribal nations that have historically faced obstacles to casino industry development from the larger tribes represented Tuesday.

But Hoskin said Stitt’s remarks for the past five years have made it difficult for tribal citizens and their elected officials to view him as a trustworthy partner in compact negotiations.

“I think he means what he says when he makes his public statements about tribes. I take all of it to mean he doesn’t really see a

world in which tribal governments ought to be exercising sovereignty, and to the extent he has to deal with it, it’s a business deal and the state should get more by us getting less,” Hoskin said. “I think that’s going to continue to inform his understanding of state-tribal relations. I don’t really see people around him that are really in a position to advise him otherwise, but we do have a Legislature who are, frankly, the adults in the room when it comes to a genuine understanding and a desire to go forward.

“I think we may have to work around the governor, but he’s the governor, and to the extent that he’s making offers, we ought to be responsive to that.”

Still, Hoskin said he is holding out hope for renewed and improved negotiations about the tobacco and motor vehicle licensure compacts in 2024.

“I think it is going to take the tribes coming together with one voice, because the tobacco compact is of the nature where you want some market certainty all over the state, at least where the compacts apply,” Hoskin said. “There’s still hope. We have some time, and perhaps today’s meeting will remind us all that we need to achieve some results on those compacts, and I don’t want to rule out that we could do it with the governor, because we could.”

Nonetheless, those who spoke during McCall’s two-day study emphasized the value of having a public meeting where critical history and legal perspectives could be shared.

“Today is a remarkable day. Let’s aim to make it less remarkable by doing this more. No one is breathing fire. Everyone wants what is best for the state of Oklahoma,” said Chickasaw Nation special counsel Stephen Greetham, whose remarks focused largely on the tenants of tribal sovereignty and Oklahoma’s legal lack of standing to regulate tribal governments. “When you come to those points where the state can’t control the tribes and the tribes can’t control state (...). When you reach that point, do you dig in and approach each other as adversaries, or do you sit down and try to figure out ways to problem-solve with each other?”

Cherokee Nation Attorney General Chad Harsha said compacts are often “mischaracterized as a commercial type of contract or business agreement” instead of documents crafted to recognize specific rights drawn from treaties and avoid “high-risk issues” that could otherwise draw litigation and acrimony.

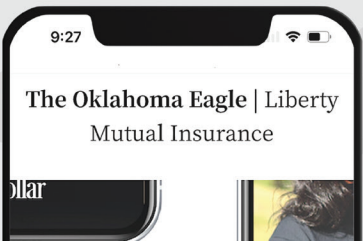
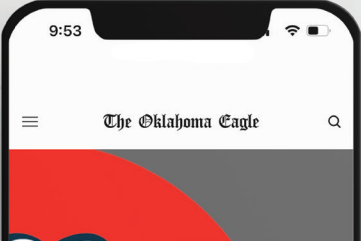
“I think compacting is a good way to resolve some of these disputes,” he said.

## State-Tribal Compacts cont. A8

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“JUST BECAUSE A COMPACT WORKED AND WAS AGREED UPON 10 YEARS AGO DOESN’T MEAN IT’S GOING TO WORK AND BE AGREED UPON TODAY”

Del Beaver,  
Muscogee Nation  
Second Chief



From left to right MUSCOGEE NATION SECOND CHIEF DEL BEAVER, CHICKASAW NATION GOV. BILL ANOATUBBY, CHOCTAW NATION CHIEF GARY BATTON AND CHEROKEE NATION PRINCIPAL CHIEF CHUCK HOSKIN JR., prepare to speak to an Oklahoma House committee Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023. PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

State-Tribal Compacts from A7

Muscogee Nation Second Chief Del Beaver summed up Tuesday’s first panel by saying open conversations on tribal-state relations “should be more commonplace.”  
“I think we’re at the cusp of something special,” Beaver said. “Just because a compact worked and was agreed upon 10 years ago

doesn’t mean it’s going to work and be agreed upon today, because all the tribes are different from 10 years ago. The state of Oklahoma is is a different place than 10 years ago, so our perspective changes. Especially since McGirt, it has changed.”  
Beaver and his counterparts with the Chickasaw, Choctaw and

Cherokee nations said virtually none of the state’s slate of elected officials were in office when major compact negotiations occurred 10 and 20 years ago, meaning a loss of institutional memory can jeopardize the opportunity for informed negotiation now.  
“There have been far too many

times that a tribe has been the subject of a conversation, but we have not been part of that conversation. That’s where we get sideways, where there are conversations about us but we are not part of that conversation,” Beaver said. “Moving forward, when decisions are going to be made, we need to be at the table.”

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

# OSDE & Walters’ Motion Considered “Bizarre” By AG



ATTORNEY GENERAL GENTNER DRUMMOND, filed a writ of mandamus asking the Oklahoma Supreme Court to compel the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board to cancel its contract with St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School on Friday, Oct. 20, 2023. PHOTO BENNETT BRINKMAN

Without offering a reason, the Oklahoma Supreme Court denied a motion Tuesday from the State Department of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters asking to intervene in a case involving a potential Catholic virtual charter school. However, justices granted a similar motion from the school.

Catholic Charter Case from A1

Attorney General Gentner Drummond filed a writ of mandamus Oct. 20 asking the Oklahoma Supreme Court to compel the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board to cancel its contract with St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School. The SVCSB voted to approve the new charter school in June and finalized its contract with the school in October, meaning it could open for the 2024-2025 school year. If it does, it would likely be the nation’s first religious charter school.  
Although the Supreme Court had set a Nov. 28 hearing to decide whether to take up the case — called assuming original jurisdiction — that hearing was canceled after St. Isidore filed a motion to intervene in the case. Similarly, OSDE and Walters filed a joint motion to intervene. Drummond submitted an objection to OSDE and Walters’ motion to intervene Monday, and the court denied their motion Tuesday without explanation.  
In his objection, Drummond called OSDE and Walters’ arguments that they should intervene because they are responsible for distributing school funding “bizarre.”  
“[OSDE and Walters] do not have a protectable interest relating to petitioner’s claims,” Drummond wrote. “Rather, the movants bizarrely argue that the ministerial duty of correctly apportioning state aid funds to sponsored public charter schools and to all qualifying public schools pursuant to a legislatively-created formula is an interest that may be impeded or impaired by this original jurisdiction action. That is decidedly not the case. Petitioner’s prayer for a writ of mandamus compelling the Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board to fulfill its legal duties and cancel its illegal contract with a sectarian institution in no way impacts the movants’ — or rather, the board of education’s — administrative duties, regardless of the outcome.”  
OSDE chief political advisor Matt Langston criticized Drummond in a statement late Tuesday.  
“The attorney general’s hostility not only to the religious freedom of millions of Oklahomans but also his desire to shut down any representation of their views in

our state’s highest court is deeply disturbing and not in keeping with Oklahoma values,” said Langston, a political consultant who lives in Texas and who ran Walters’ 2022 campaign. “The Constitution and the Supreme Court are clear: we cannot discriminate on the basis of religion, and under Superintendent Walters’ watch, we will not. We look forward to continuing to defend the religious freedom of all Oklahomans at any time and in any venue.”  
Langston’s statement comes one day after Walters said he and Drummond work “very closely” on various matters in a livestreamed interview with KOKH anchor Wendy Soares.  
In the court order denying OSDE and Walters’ motion, justices did give Walters and the department permission to file amicus curiae briefs in the case.  
On Tuesday, the court approved St. Isidore’s request to intervene in the case. Attorneys for the potential new school have until Nov. 21 to respond to Drummond’s original petition seeking the cancellation of the state’s contract with the religiously-affiliated entity.  
Charter schools are public schools that can be privately run. Although Oklahoma’s charter school laws require schools to be “nonsectarian,” Walters, St. Isidore, members of the SVCSB and others believe recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions could call that clause of the law into question.  
**Others ask to intervene, file amicus briefs**  
Additionally on Tuesday, seven of the 10 plaintiffs suing the SVCSB over its decision to authorize St. Isidore filed their own motion to intervene in the case.  
Represented by lawyers with a number of national groups — including Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, Education Law Center and Freedom From Religion Foundation — the potential intervenors refer to themselves as “the taxpayers” in court documents and argue that they have a legal interest in ensuring their tax dollars are not spent unlawfully.

“Our clients’ proposed intervention would benefit the attorney general’s lawsuit because they are among the people — parents, students, families, educators, clergy, taxpayers, and a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation — who will suffer if a religious public school is permitted to open,” lawyers for the potential intervenors wrote in a joint statement announcing the filing. “They and their children will be excluded by the school’s discriminatory practices. They will be taxed by the government and forced to financially support a religion that many of them do not share. Their interests and diverse perspectives are valuable and will help the Oklahoma Supreme Court reach a just outcome.”  
In their statement, the lawyers also said St. Isidore opening would mark a “sea change for our democracy.”  
“The law is clear: Charter schools are public schools that must be secular and serve all students,” they said. “St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual Charter School plans to discriminate against students, families, and staff and indoctrinate students into one religion.”  
Adding to the flurry of filings in the case, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools submitted an amicus curiae statement Tuesday asking the court for authorization to file an amicus brief “in support of the Oklahoma Attorney General’s position that Oklahoma cannot create state religious groups.”  
Lawyers for that group argue the potential new school could jeopardize federal education funding for Oklahoma.  
“The risk of losing federal funding to Oklahoma public charter schools in turn risks the Alliance’s nationwide mission to lead public education to unprecedented levels of academic achievement by fostering a strong public charter school movement across the country,” the attorneys wrote.

BENNETT BRINKMAN became NonDoc’s education reporter in August 2022 after completing a reporting internship. He holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma and is originally from Edmond. Email story tips and ideas to bennett@nondoc.com.



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

2007, between 66% and 90% of the state’s district court funding has come from fines and fees. Approximately 25% of court debt assessed is collected, The Frontier reported last year.

While Gov. Kevin Stitt and legislative leaders have indicated support for reducing some court fines and fees, several bills seeking to tackle the issue have fizzled out in recent legislative sessions.

A proposal filed this year aimed at reducing administrative fees placed on defendants cleared the House but did not receive a hearing in the Senate. In 2022, a bill that would have waived court costs after 48 to 60 months of on-time payments unanimously cleared the Senate but stalled in the House.

Killman, who secured stable employment and moved with her eight children from a two-bedroom apartment to a four-bedroom house after paying off her court debt, said she’s hopeful the state will continue to make strides in reforming its court fines and fees system. She said a good next step would be to outlaw third-party court debt collections.

“That should not even be legal,” Killman said. “All it does is cause more stress and cause people to owe more than what they began with. It just makes it harder on a person.”



**KEATON ROSS** covers democracy and criminal justice for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or [Kross@Oklahomawatch.org](mailto:Kross@Oklahomawatch.org). Follow him on Twitter at [@\\_KeatonRoss](https://twitter.com/_KeatonRoss).

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# Oklahoma law authorizes district courts to issue failure-to-pay warrants if a defendant has not paid their fines and fees or made contact with the courthouse

Debt Collection Scheme from A1

When Aberdeen Enterprizes II threatened to have her arrested over \$1,200 in outstanding court fines and fees, Kendy Killman became a prisoner in her own home.

The mother of eight feared being arrested unexpectedly, so she avoided unnecessary trips to the grocery store or her children’s school. She said the third-party debt collector rejected her proposition to set up a monthly payment plan, wanting only a lump sum or nothing at all.

“They would call once a week to threaten me, saying you’re going to jail and they’re going to come to your house and arrest you,” Killman said. “And I said OK, there’s nothing I can do about it. When you have no resources you have no resources. So I just kept waiting for them to show up.”

Cleveland County deputies arrested Killman on a failure-to-pay warrant in June 2016 during a routine traffic stop. Her debt was finally settled in November 2018, nearly a decade after she was convicted of misdemeanor possession of marijuana in 2009.

Killman is one of seven plaintiffs in a 6-year-old class-action lawsuit challenging Oklahoma’s court debt collection processes, which remains pending in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma. The plaintiffs claim Aberdeen threatened indigent debtors with jail time and worked with sheriffs across the state to issue arrest warrants when payment did not come.

Federal law prohibits debt collection agencies from threatening arrest because of a lack of payment. However, Oklahoma law authorizes district courts to issue failure-to-pay warrants if a defendant has not paid their fines and fees or made contact with the courthouse.

The lawsuit, which is in the written argument stage, is credited with prompting legislation reforming how Oklahoma courts determine a criminal defendant’s ability to pay court fines and fees. Despite the federal litigation the Oklahoma Sheriff’s Association continues to profit from a partnership with Aberdeen Enterprizes to collect unpaid court debt.

Tax forms filed with the Internal Revenue Service show the Oklahoma Sheriff’s Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that organizes training, offers administrative support and lobbies on behalf of 77 county sheriffs across the state, received more than \$2 million from Aberdeen Enterprizes II between 2017 and 2021. The sheriff’s association received more than \$415,000 from the arrangement in 2021, accounting for nearly 40% of the organization’s total revenue.

Since 2010, state law has authorized county sheriffs to refer unpaid debt cases to the sheriff’s association, which over the past 13 years has compiled the information

and forwarded it to Aberdeen Enterprizes II. The collection agency tacks on a 30% collection fee, which is split with the sheriff’s association after payment is received.

Reached by phone, Aberdeen director Robert Shofner declined to comment. Ray McNair, executive director of the sheriff’s association, did not respond to several telephone messages seeking comment.

In federal court filings, Aberdeen and the sheriff’s association attest that their conduct did not violate federal or state law. John R. Woodard and Jennifer Struble, Tulsa-based attorneys representing Aberdeen Enterprizes II, wrote in a July filing that the company cannot be expected to be neutral because of how the debt collection industry works.

For the petitioners, who often struggle to pay for both necessities and the fees, the threat of arrest can be devastating. Killman, for instance, receives a monthly disability benefit to support her as she cares for her disabled son.

Some indigent defendants will see relief under a state law that took effect Nov. 1.

House Bill 2259 by Rep. Danny Sterling, R-Tecumseh and Sen. Brent Howard, R-Altus, requires judges to notify defendants of their financial obligations at the time of plea or sentencing and allow them to present evidence that they are indigent. Those who are classified as totally disabled by a government entity, receive state or federal nutrition or housing assistance or whose income is below 150% of the federal poverty line will be presumed unable to pay court debt. Using 2023 federal poverty guidelines, an individual with an annual income of less than \$21,870 or a family of four earning less than \$45,000 per year would qualify for relief.

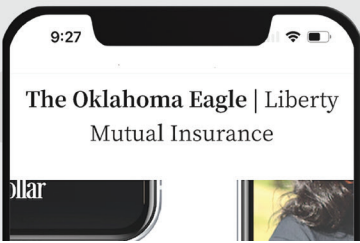
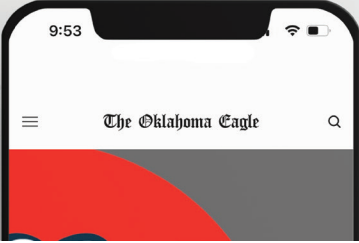
The legislation also requires outside collections agencies, such as Aberdeen Enterprizes II, to notify individuals of their right to request a cost hearing if they are unable to pay the debt.

Sterling said the legislation will ensure that criminal defendants statewide are treated fairly. Some district court judges are overly harsh while others are too lenient, he said.

“It was just not a very efficient system,” Sterling said. “It wasn’t working. This is maybe not perfect, but we feel like it’s a step in the right direction.”

Also taking effect this month is House Bill 2041, which authorizes law enforcement to give a verbal warning to individuals with outstanding misdemeanor warrants and advises them to contact the county clerk to resolve the issue. Rep. Monroe Nichols, D-Tulsa and Senate Pro Tem Greg Treat, R-Oklahoma City, sponsored the measure.

Criminal justice reform advocates have long criticized the state’s reliance on fines and fees to fund district courts and some state agencies. Since Fiscal Year



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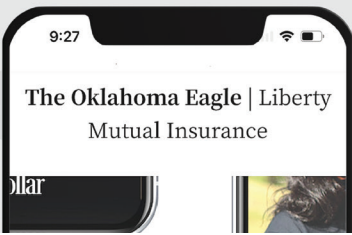
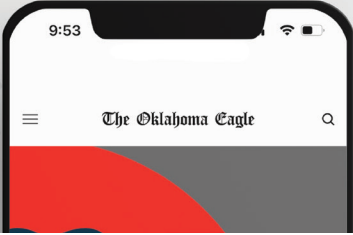
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AMIDST GROWING POLITICIZATION, BOOK BANS  
BECOME INCREASINGLY COMMON IN TEXAS

In a list of banned books in 2022-2023, PEN America reported Texas as banning 625 of the nation's total 3,362 book bans. **A13**

Q&A: ACTRESS JACKERA DAVIS  
OF 'BEETLEJUICE' THE MUSICAL

Jackera Davis plays the role of Girl Scout and understudies for the character of Lydia Deetz. **B2**

# Melanie Campbell: Civic Champion Seeks Change on the Ground

Gwen McKinney  
Word In Black

The longtime activist and head of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation says politics are local but impact is national.

Early on, the civic engagement bug bit Melanie Campbell.

It was the mid-1980s, and Atlanta was teeming with politics and possibilities. "Everything was melded with the advocacy of social and racial justice — voting rights, labor rights, economic justice — they were interwoven into our work," remembers Campbell, then a student activist in the "second wave" of Southern voting rights campaigns.

From on-the-ground labor organizing with Mississippi catfish workers, to Selma Bloody Sunday voting rights marches and trainings, to mobilizing Atlanta University Center Get-Out-The-Vote elections, Campbell's plate was overflowing.

When offered a job with the Washington, D.C.-based National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) in 1995, it seemed an easy choice. "I decided to come to D.C. for about 18 months," reflects Campbell, a native of Mims, Florida.

Fast forward nearly 30 years, and the NCBCP President and CEO acknowledges that the time and demands have been a perpetual preoccupation, no less consuming than the campaigns of her youth.

When Black civic and political leaders meet with the president, it's usually Campbell who is the ringleader and convener. When the push was mounted to ensure a Black woman was seated on the Supreme Court, Campbell mobilized a far-flung array of Black women's civic, legal, and service organizations to underscore their voice and presence.

This October, Campbell joined with Florida civic activists on a whistle-stop tour taking aim at policies that purge voter rolls, ban books, and lob a wholesale attack on Black history. The tour, dubbed "Power of the Ballot — We Will Not Be Erased," is aimed at reaching Black voters where they live — on college campuses, churches, wing joints, and town halls. A rolling chartered bus, loaded with activists and leaders of Florida's National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, traveled to Jacksonville, Daytona, Brevard County, South Florida, and Tallahassee.

"Politics are local, but what's happening in Florida cities and towns is an attack on our democracy as a country," Campbell says.

Florida tour organizer Salandra Benton, convener of the Florida Coalition on Black Civic Participation and the Florida Black Women's Roundtable (BWR), says the tour is a call to arms and action.

"In Florida, our people are under siege," Benton insists. "This tour is aimed at people who are feeling defeated to give them hope, to be empowered, wake up, and vote for solutions to improve their lives. We can't afford to be erased or give our power away by not voting."

The National Coalition comprises over 70 national membership organizations, 11 state-based affiliates, and leading Black women civic and political leaders. Their decades-long push has also helped to explode the electoral power of Black women. Beginning in early 2000 and leading up to the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, exit polls and election outcomes revealed that overperforming Black women voters were tipping the balance in electoral victories across the country.

The secret sauce, confides Campbell, is in the diversity



MELANIE CAMPBELL, executive director and Chief Executive Officer of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Inc. PHOTO COURTESY

and unity of our people weaved throughout the fabric of Black civic life — sororities, faith organizations, service clubs, and advocacy organizations.

"Prominent veterans and those just starting out, seasoned organizers and emerging leaders all have something to give," Campbell draws on personal testimony, acknowledging that she was mentored at the knees of legendary leader Dorothy I. Height.

The chair and president of the National Council of Negro Women, Dr. Height was the quintessential "race woman" whose influence and impact touched virtually every major civil rights campaign of the 20th Century — anti-lynching, employment, women's rights, voting rights, education, and Black women's empowerment.

Campbell says Dr. Height dispensed many lessons, but intergenerational inclusion — a vital hallmark of NCBCP — was one of the most important. "She knew youth are our future, but never missed an opportunity to salute the Sherones on whose shoulders she stood."

"She treated everyone with the same respect and dignity," Campbell continues. "It didn't matter if you were the President or First Lady of the United States or the sister from the neighborhood."

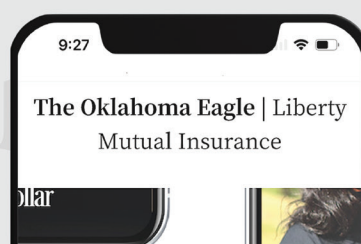
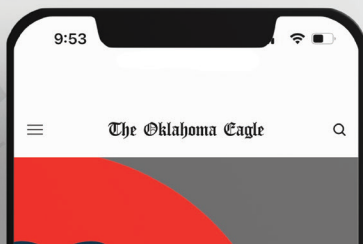
GWEN MCKINNEY is the creator of Unerased | Black Women Speak and is the founder of McKinney & Associates, the first African American and woman-owned communications firm in the nation's capital that expressly promotes social justice and public policy.



The Oklahoma Eagle

## Our Mission

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



# Planning for the Future While Caring for an Adult With Special Needs

Renata Sago, Word In Black



PHOTO COURTESY

Planning For The Future from A1

Happy Aging is a unique series focused on how to help you age well. These stories have been created in cooperation with AARP and Word In Black.

Thousands of caregivers go through the important, yet daunting task of providing support to adults with special needs every day. According to a survey from the National Poll on Healthy Aging, within the past two years, more than half of adults ages 50 to 80 said they had helped an adult age 65 or older with some form of care. These tasks include trips to food pantries and doctor’s appointments, help taking medications and getting dressed. For 35 years, Sequaya Tasker has seen caregivers of individuals with developmental disabilities navigate a wide range of circumstances. She is Senior Executive Officer of Programs Innovation at The Arc.

**WIB:** Let’s talk about people ages 50 to 80 who are helping an adult with special needs. How common is this?

**Tasker:** It’s very common. Typically, it’s a parent – and I’ll be very transparent. I am a parent of a child who has ADHD and autism. One thing you recognize early as a parent of a child with special needs is that you’re always going to be a parent of a child with special needs.

**WIB:** What are the immediate, short-term needs that caregivers have?

**Tasker:** The biggest thing is planning for that child and planning on what that’s going to look like when they’re no longer there or no longer able to care for that child. They’re looking for resources that are in their community. Typically, the child with special needs has gotten used to the community they live in, so they’re used to seeing those same things. Navigating those same things can be an extreme challenge because there’s not necessarily resources that are just readily there for the caregiver to just tap right into.

**WIB:** What were some of the first things you’d say people become aware of when becoming a caregiver?

**Tasker:** It’s a lot of trial and error. Maybe that primary caregiver passed away or is no longer able to serve in that capacity in some way, so you have siblings or another relative that may become a primary caregiver. The first resource they get would be through the state with what they call the Home and Community Based waiver. Those

waiver services are very limited. The [caregivers] that are more challenged are the ones that, all of a sudden, they’re becoming responsible for this other person’s life and they don’t know what door to knock on. Unfortunately, there really is not one door to knock on. We’re talking about trying to juggle multiple – sometimes up to five to six – different resources that are available. But they’re all talking a different language. They’re talking about different eligibility requirements, different applications they’re going to have to fill out. There is not one application that can be completed and then given to each entity.

**WIB:** What tips would you offer for people who are balancing self care and caring for their loved ones?

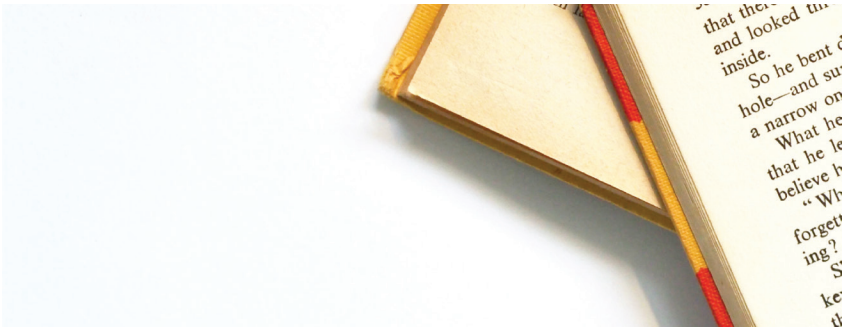
**Tasker:** The biggest tip I would say to them is understanding that if you’re not well, you can’t take care of that person. The second thing is to have difficult conversations about, “Hey, when I’m gone, this is what I would like to happen and this is how we can make this the best transition for that person.”

**WIB:** Do they have to take on any legal guardianship to help carry out responsibilities?

**Tasker:** Personally, I don’t think guardianship is always the best solution for everybody. For some people, it is. But not for everybody. There is another terminology that a lot of states have actually written into legislation that’s called supported decision making. It allows the person to still be as independent as they want and still make those life choices that they want, but holistically. When you start talking about guardianship or even supported decision making, every state looks at it differently.

**WIB:** Have you seen a noticeable improvement with the help that you have provided caregivers with?

**Tasker:** To a certain extent, I have. As a caregiver, sometimes, we just do. We don’t necessarily see. When you are pursuing something, really look into what your state has to offer because there are a lot of resources. It’s just, unfortunately, they’re not always in a quick, easy to find place.



## Amidst Growing Politicization, Book Bans Become Increasingly Common in Texas

In a list of banned books in 2022-2023, PEN America reported Texas as banning 625 of the nation’s total 3,362 book bans. Of those books, subjects focusing on critical analysis of race, sexuality, or gender have seen widespread bans.

Sam Judy Word In Black

Nonprofit organization PEN America, which identifies its directive as to “raise awareness for the protection of free expression” in the United States and worldwide, has released its list of banned books in the 2022-2023 school year.

Of the books banned, titles include contemporary and well-known books such as The Handmaid’s Tale, Twilight, and American Psycho, but also included They Called Themselves The K.K.K.: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group, Striving for Equality: LGBTQ Athletes Claim the Field, Transgender Lives: Complex Stories, Complex Voices, and many other titles either applying a critical lens to the history of discrimination the United States holds or providing greater context on concepts such as sexuality and gender.

Since the Texas School Board altered education guidelines this year, book bans are likely to become more common as the years progress. As the effectiveness of teaching critical race theory (CRT) is refuted by representatives, comprehensive climate science lives under threat of being conflated with incomplete information on fossil fuels, and full gender expression has been prohibited in many public spaces, further bans are likely to further hinder education on these topics as well.

The list includes banned books across Texas, with no documented bans this year for Dallas Independent School District. However, surrounding cities and suburbs have taken on bans on books handling topics on struggles of racial discrimination worldwide, evolutionary theory, and subjects classifiable within LGBTQ+ history.

Frisco ISD has followed suit with much of the rest of the state, banning the works of Stephen Hawking as well as books such as Before We Were Free, a novel set to the backdrop of the time of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and the massacre of thousands of Haitian citizens in 1937. The district also banned The Diary of Anne Frank.

Aside from book bans hitting race and LGBTQ+ themed works the hardest, around 7% of bans were imposed on books with mental illness or substance abuse as a theme. Variably, 4% of bans are on books either focusing on or referencing climate science, evolution, or epidemiology. The majority of banned books included popular novel series’ such as A Song of Ice and Fire and Twilight.

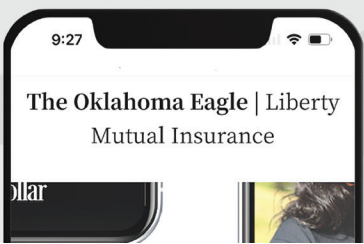
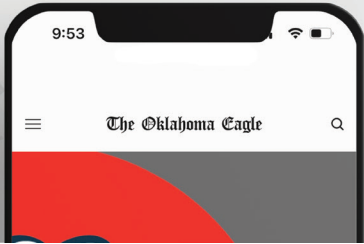
As the topics have been subject to increasing politicization in Texas, it’s no surprise that more than 1 in 3 banned books contain core themes of race, gender, and sexuality. With around 67% of books banned through administrative measures, the remaining 33% is split almost evenly between formal and informal challenges submitted to the Board of Education. Books are typically challenged on grounds of sexual content, offensive language, or assertion that content is unsuitable for any age group.

Among specific authors, the bans force the exclusion of the works of prolific Black writer Sapphire, Chicana author and poet Sandra Cisneros, novelist Neil Gaiman, and literary giant J.R.R. Tolkien. Additionally, feminist writers such as Octavia Butler, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, and Allison Bechdel have been banned from schools and libraries.

Bans in Texas account for 18.6% of the entire country’s book bans. While the state takes greater steps in censoring topics offering critical perspectives on race, white privilege, trans/nonbinary identity, sexuality, and and gender dynamics, eliminating any chance that students may encounter material provoking critical discussion allows the state to guide perspectives on these topics more effectively.

As Texas state government has passed laws to prohibit trans individuals from accessing virtually any gender-affirming care, limit lessons on race and civil rights, and close down DEI offices (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) at colleges all across the state, the BOE likewise restricts public access to crucial works that could potentially help developing students to understand associated concepts.

Books holding themes of race and sexuality have been banned in several districts in previous years, however, bans have been spreading closer and into densely populated cities such as Houston and San Antonio. Mayor Eric Johnson has expressed his view that cities in America need Republican policies to succeed, and likewise, Dallas sits at a point of vulnerability with dwindling access to educational resources slowly approaching byway of surrounding districts.



# Q&A: ACTRESS JACKERA DAVIS ‘BEETLEJUICE: THE MUSICAL’

Camila Abdusattorov from A1  
The Oklahoma Eagle

JACKERA DAVIS  
PLAYS THE ROLE OF  
GIRL SCOUT AND  
UNDERSTUDIES FOR  
THE CHARACTER OF  
LYDIA DEETZ. DAVIS IS A  
RECENT GRADUATE OF  
SAM HOUSTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY WITH A  
BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN  
FINE ARTS SPECIALIZING  
IN MUSICAL THEATER.  
THE TALENTED YOUNG  
ACTRESS IS NOW ON HER  
NATIONAL TOUR DEBUT.  
ON HER WAY TO TULSA,  
SHE WAS INTERVIEWED  
ABOUT HER ROLE, BEING  
A PART OF A BROADWAY  
PRODUCTION, AND  
TRAVELING THE  
COUNTRY.

Below are questions and answers from Davis provided to  
the TCC Connection and The Oklahoma Eagle.

Can you share about your background and how you  
decided to pursue a career in Theatre?

I got my start in church, always involved with church  
Christmas plays and the children’s choir. However, my  
very first musical was in freshman year of high school.  
I remember forging my mother’s signature to stay after  
school to audition for “Alice in Wonderland.” I had never  
sung in front of my family let alone a group of my peers  
alone. I ended up getting the role of Alice.

Can you explain the audition process for “Beetlejuice”?  
What was your reaction when you got the role?

My audition process started with a self-tape because I was  
still living in Texas, having just graduated from college  
with my BFA. I also did my first callback on Zoom as well  
and from there they flew me out for the final callback, and I  
found out I got the job about a week later. I was completely  
over the moon, and I feel so blessed and lucky.

How do you prepare for the role of the Girl Scout and as  
the understudy for Lydia? Did you draw inspiration from  
personal experiences or other sources?

Although I am not 10 years old, I actually can find lots of  
similarities between the Girl Scout (character) and myself.  
Like her bubbly personality and humor. Lydia as well has  
so many relatable qualities, like her vulnerability and her  
lack of being apologetic for who she is.

What do you find most challenging about your character,  
and how did you overcome those challenges?

The Girl Scout’s physicality married with her humor was  
challenging but makes the character all the more fun to  
play!

Are there any standout moments or scenes in  
“Beetlejuice” that you are particularly excited about or  
find personally meaningful?

I always enjoy my time on stage. However, I find the  
most joy when I get to pop in as an understudy to play  
Lydia. It keeps everything new and fresh, and I love a good  
challenge.

How do you prepare mentally and emotionally before  
going on stage?

By listening to my favorite music to get me pumped before  
a show!

Can you share any interesting behind-the-scenes stories  
from the rehearsal or production process?

Probably not the most interesting but seeing my Lydia wig  
for the first time was magical! As the first black Lydia I was  
so nervous but excited to be that sort of representation, and  
when that natural curly wig was presented, it made it all  
the more real!

What messages or themes do you hope the audience will  
take away from this play?

Determination, grief, and finding humor in dark  
circumstances.

As an actor, how do you balance your individual creative  
input with the director’s vision for the play?

Theatre is so unique in that it truly is a collaboration in all  
aspects to get the show up and running. These creatives  
especially were good about allowing us to bring aspects  
and bits that we organically brought to our characters and  
(they) just built us up from there.

What do you do to have fun or as an escape from the  
demanding work of acting?

I really try to focus on maintaining my hobbies! I love  
finding new music, journaling, crocheting, going on hikes,  
thrifting etc.

Touring can be a demanding lifestyle. How do you  
manage the challenges of being on the road, both  
personally and professionally?

Just making sure I prioritize self-care whenever I can!

As an actor on tour, you are away from home for an  
extended period. How do you make each new city feel  
like a temporary home?

Moving from city to city every week can make it difficult  
to feel like you’re home so I kind of treat each city like a  
new vacation spot or adventure. I love finding new coffee  
spots, doing tourist things, and trying new foods.

What advice would you give to aspiring actors who are  
inspired by your work and want to pursue a career in  
theater?

Keep working at it! And never stop trying to find ways to  
learn more about what you enjoy doing!

Is there anything else that you would like to share with  
our readers?

Come see our show for a good cry! Whether you’re  
laughing or genuinely crying!

PHOTO PROVIDED



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# Girl Scouts Beyond Bars

## Family Better Together

## Father/Daughter Pen Pal Program

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## Mother/Daughter In-Person Family Reunification

GIRL SCOUTS BEYOND BARS program offers an opportunity for mothers and fathers who are incarcerated to be reunited with their daughters and other family members.. PHOTO PROVIDED

# Girl Scouts reunites incarcerated parents with daughters

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma sponsors a program that reunites incarcerated mothers and fathers with their daughters. It is the only Girl Scout organization in the state to have this program. GSEOK works directly with the state Department of Corrections to identify eligible candidates for the program.

“The state has 26,000 kids that are affected by parents who are incarcerated,” said Shannon Luper, program manager for Girls Scouts Beyond Bars. Oklahoma has the highest rate of female incarceration, according to Prison Policy Initiative. On PPI’s website, it says PPI is a national organization that examines and reports on “how states vary in their use of punishments” and proposes policy and reform recommendations.

Not only does Oklahoma lead the nation with its staggering classification, but the state has the highest rate of women in prison in the world. It imprisons 281 per 100,000 women. The average in the U. S. is 133 per 100,000 women. Comparing Oklahoma to founding North American Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, the third rank belongs to Portugal with 15 per 100,000 women.

Within the Girls Scouts Beyond Bars program are the following components: (1) Father/Daughter Pen Pal and (2) Mother/Daughter In-Person Family Reunification. Girl Scouts has been offering reunification services for over 20 years. The results have prevented intergenerational incarceration. The organization has a record of success where the parents and daughters have used this opportunity to rebuild their lives together.

“The mothers and fathers play an important role in their child’s life. We are a reunification program between the parents and the daughters,” said Luper, who has been affiliated with the program since its inception.

When the parents in the Department of Corrections custody have met certain criteria, then the Girl Scouts program begins to provide opportunities for the parents and daughters to see one another and offers classes to help the mothers and fathers to rebuild their relationships with their daughters. The program continues with programming after the incarcerated parents have been released from custody.

The goal of the organization is to serve 150 girls per year. What makes the program even more special is that it includes the daughter’s siblings in the reunification process. The program has been designed to help reunite daughters and their siblings with their parents.

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars requires the parent(s) to meet the following qualifications: (1) to have at least six months remaining in Department of Corrections custody, (2) to have committed no crime against the child, (3) to have one year misconduct free, (4) to have Level 2 or above classification with the Department of Corrections, (5) to have a willingness to work for a better relationship with the child, and (6) to have received guardianship approval.

Regina Moon is president and CEO of the Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma.

For more information, contact Shannon Luper at (918) 277-6032 or sluper@gseok.org.



STEVE ERUE (C), CHAIR OF THE UNITED NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION OF TULSA, IS JOINED BY HIS WIFE QUEEN ERUE (L); AND JOY OLOLO, former chair of the UNAT, as they cut the cake to celebrate the 63rd anniversary of Nigeria’s independence, attended by approximately 350 people attended PHOTO PROVIDED

# Nigerian Independence Day Celebrates 63rd Anniversary

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Nigeria received full independence from Great Britain on October 1, 1960. Annually, Nigerian communities around the world celebrate its independence. This year’s program recognized the 63rd anniversary. The United Nigerian Association of Tulsa held its program on Oct. 7.

The mission of UNAT is “to promote

the spirit of excellence in the area of Nigerian culture, education and welfare among Nigerians and the community at large.”

Hundreds of Nigerians and friends of the community attended the event. The occasion was an opportunity to celebrate the culture, food, music, and dance of the country with the largest economy in

Africa.

In addition to the Independence Day program, the organization hosts “Taste of Nigeria” in August. It is another opportunity to be introduced to the African country’s culture.

For more information, contact (918) 706-6626 or visit [www.unatok.org](http://www.unatok.org).

# Fireside Chat with Booker T. Washington

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Noted educator and civil rights leader Booker T. Washington presented a Chautauqua-formatted program, where an individual brings the historical figure to life through theatrical monologues. Dr. James Holmes Armstead Jr. portrayed Washington at the Jewish Federation of Tulsa, 2021 E. 71st St., on Nov. 1.

Armstead shared the essence of Washington. He revealed Washington’s impact on American education and civil rights. Also, Armstead highlighted the significant partnership between Washington and Jewish philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. Rosenwald was a former Sears executive at the time when the company was the world’s largest mail-order house and chain of retail stores. Among many causes, Rosenwald led a campaign to build more than 5,000 schools in 15 southern states, including Oklahoma. Rosenwald was considered a chief advocate for the improvement of education for Blacks.

Armstead is a retired professor of strategy and international law

from the U. S. Naval War College. In addition to his international law career, the former United Nations Secretariat and Pentagon official has a wide range of experiences as a European and Central Asia election observer and Inspector General and Civil Affairs Officer in the U. S. Army. Other positions have included staff and command positions in the Army Reserves and National Guard. He has taught international law, strategy, and national security policy for nearly 50 years.

A “Hornet Happy Hour” was sponsored before the program featuring light food and beverages.

The program was supported by the Booker T. Washington Foundation for Excellence, Martin Luther King Commemoration Society, and the Jewish Federation of Tulsa.

For more information, contact Isabella Silberg, [isilberg@jewishtulsa.org](mailto:isilberg@jewishtulsa.org); Chloe Kirk, [ckirk@jewishtulsa.org](mailto:ckirk@jewishtulsa.org); or Rebecca Marks-Jimerson, [rebecca.mjimerson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rebecca.mjimerson@sbcglobal.net).



DR. JAMES HOLMES ARMSTEAD JR. portrays educator and author Booker T. Washington PHOTO PROVIDED

# Events

others, and friends of people with mental health conditions at St. Augustine Catholic Church, Education Center, 1720 E. Apache St., 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. The meetings are held on the fourth Monday of each month. For more information, call (918) 587-2965 or contact [staugustineparishtulsaok@yahoo.com](mailto:staugustineparishtulsaok@yahoo.com).

## 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](mailto: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 [nabjtlsagalasala23@gmail.com](mailto:nabjtlsagalasala23@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://historictulsaagreenwoodchamber.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.

### Apr. 12-13

National Association of Black Journalists Region III conference, Tulsa, Okla. Eleven states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, will be represented. For more information, contact Eva Coleman, Region III director, at [evacolemannabj@gmail.com](mailto:evacolemannabj@gmail.com). call (918) 596-7111.

# Events

## 2023

### Nov. 21-26

“Beetlejuice,” at Tulsa Performing Arts Center – Chapman Music Hall, 110 E. 2nd St. For tickets, call (918) 596-7111.

### Nov. 25

Shine on Greenwood Merchant Marketplace and Lighting and Concert on Nov. 25, 12 p.m. – 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. For more information, contact Meghan Scott at [hullo@tulsacountyliving.com](mailto:hullo@tulsacountyliving.com) and visit [shineongreenwood.org](http://shineongreenwood.org).

### Nov. 27

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is hosting its monthly support group for family members, significant