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VOL. 103 NO. 04

JANUARY 26, 2024 - FEBRUARY 01, 2024

BORDER CRISIS

NAT. GUARD DEPLOYMENT To Texas Border Paid For By Disaster Response Funds

The deployment to Texas was under the governor's powers to deploy the Guard under state active duty status. Texas did not reimburse Oklahoma for the costs. Unlike federal deployments domestically or internationally, Guard members deploying under state active duty aren't eligible for federal Veterans Administration care if they get injured.

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STATE EMPLOYEE MOVE TO TELEWORK
LEADS TO NEW CORRECTIONS HQ

The increased use of work-from-home and hybrid workplaces among state employees was a catalyst in the OK Department of Corrections. A3

TEACHERS RECEIVED A RAISE IN 2023. A
PROPOSAL WOULD PROVIDE ANOTHER IN 2024

Following last year’s statewide teacher pay boost, an OK legislator is proposing an additional increase to the minimum salary for teachers. A3



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Oklahoma spent more than \$544,000 for the *state’s National Guard* to help secure the U.S. border with Mexico, money that came from a disaster fund typically used for National Guard response to tornadoes and other extreme weather events.

National Guard TX Deployment from A1

Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt, heeding a call from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, called up the National Guard for a 30-day state deployment in August. More than a dozen Republican governors, who have criticized President Joe Biden’s border security policies, sent National Guard members to assist Abbott’s Operation Lone Star.

The deployments drew criticism from Democrats because border security historically is a federal responsibility and National Guard soldiers and airmen called up for that role had fewer enforcement powers than U.S. Border Patrol agents.

Stitt joined Abbott and Republican governors from Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota at a press conference in Eagle Pass, Texas, on Aug. 21. Stitt said he was concerned about illegal drugs like fentanyl being smuggled across the border and people on terrorism watchlists evading authorities at border crossings.

“Every state is a border state,” Stitt said at the press conference, echoing talking points

from fellow Republican governors.

Lt. Col. LeeAnn Tumbelson, a spokeswoman for the Oklahoma Air National Guard, said during the August mission a 50-person contingent of Oklahoma’s National Guard helped with 969 detections that resulted in 23 apprehensions by law enforcement. They successfully turned back 1,183 migrants without incident, she said.

Costs for the deployment are complicated. The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security typically pays for state active-duty National Guard deployments out of that agency’s State Emergency Fund, said spokeswoman Keli Cain.

Because the Oklahoma deployment used equipment funded by the federal government, the state will have to turn around and reimburse the federal government for those costs, Tumbelson said.

The deployment to Texas was under the governor’s powers to deploy the Guard under state active duty status. Texas did not reimburse

Oklahoma for the costs. Unlike federal deployments domestically or internationally, Guard members deploying under state active duty aren’t eligible for federal Veterans Administration care if they get injured.

The influx of migrants at the country’s southern border with Mexico stems partly from the expiration of a Trump-era Remain in Mexico policy that had asylum seekers wait in Mexico as their cases progressed through the U.S. immigration court system. A separate pandemic-related health emergency that limited migrant crossings expired in May, putting further pressure on immigration authorities at the southern border.

Abbott launched Operation Lone Star in the spring of 2021 with thousands of state Department of Public Safety troopers dispatched to the Texas border. They were followed by thousands more members of the Texas National Guard. To date, Texas has spent more than \$5 billion on the initiative, with some of the money diverted from its prison budget.

Abbott recently signed a Texas law that made illegal immigration a state crime, allowing police to arrest people they suspect crossed the Rio Grande between ports of entry. That law, which takes effect in March, likely sets up a legal challenge from the federal government.

Stitt’s callup of the Oklahoma National Guard to help with Operation Lone Star included a provision to go back in 2024 with another 50 Guard members if the need arises, Tumbelson said.

Stitt’s office said there are no plans for a second deployment to the Texas-Mexico border.

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.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

The increased use of work-from-home and hybrid workplaces among state employees was a catalyst in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections’ recent move to a new headquarters in Oklahoma City.

Telework from A1

The increased use of work-from-home and hybrid workplaces among state employees was a catalyst in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections’ recent move to a new headquarters in Oklahoma City. Executive staff at the Corrections Department moved before Christmas into the second floor of a building on North Lincoln Boulevard in Oklahoma City occupied by the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. They previously were at a complex of buildings on Martin Luther King Avenue. Separately, the Pardon and Parole Board signed a sublease last week to occupy 1,500 square feet at the OHCA building, Executive Director Tom Bates said

Wednesday. It plans to move in February. The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed most workplaces, including those in state government. With higher rates of telework and hybrid workplaces, the Health Care Authority occupied just 55% of its headquarters space, said Emily Long, agency spokeswoman. The authority leases the building from Lincoln Plaza/261 LLC, a holding of local property developer Gardner Tanenbaum. “We were at 100%, but when COVID hit, we shifted to more of a work-from-home model that changed what our space needs were,” Long said. “We’re working on welcoming some other entities to provide opportunities this year so we can reach 100% capacity and try to be more fiscally

responsible with the building. We’ll also be able to share resources like janitorial, too.” The Corrections Department signed a sublease with the Oklahoma Health Care Authority for almost 35,000 square feet on Nov. 17 according to a lease agreement obtained under the Open Records Act. It will pay \$41,500 per month for the space. Steven Harpe, executive director of the Corrections Department, told lawmakers in budget hearings last week several buildings at MLK had fire damage and mold issues. He said the agency plans to refurbish the buildings but needed new office space in the meantime. The Corrections Department will continue to house its Corrections Industries, inspector general and training academy at

the MLK complex. Other agencies, too, have consolidated space as many of their employees move to a telework model. Among them is the Department of Human Services, which employs more than 6,250 people. Almost 90% of the agency’s workforce either works remotely (one day or less onsite each week) or in a hybrid model (two to four days a week onsite), according to budget documents for fiscal year 2024 provided to lawmakers. Deborah Shropshire, DHS executive director, said the agency reduced its office footprint by 690,000 square feet in the last few years. Part of that was from pandemic-related budget cuts and a desire to modernize

Telework cont. A5

Proposed increases represent welcomed compensation

Following last year’s statewide teacher pay boost, Sen. Adam Pugh, R-Edmond, is proposing an additional increase to the minimum salary for teachers.

Teacher raises from A1

Last year, the Legislature approved pay raises of \$3,000 to \$6,000, bringing the minimum for a first-year teacher with a bachelor’s degree to \$39,601. Under Pugh’s Senate Bill 1313, that starting minimum would rise to \$41,101. Pugh is chairman of the Senate Education Committee. Educator pay would increase across the board depending on experience: \$1,500 for teachers with 4 years or less, \$2,000 for

teachers with 5-9 years, \$2,500 for teachers with 10-14 years, and \$3,000 for teachers with 15-25 years. If passed, the new step increases would take effect for the 2024-25 school year. Pay is one way lawmakers are trying to address the state’s persistent teacher shortage. Teachers now earn an average of \$60,355, including benefits — up from \$55,504 the year before, according to Oklahoma Department of Education data.



BRIDGET HATCH, third grade teacher, high fives a student during a reading lesson at Epic Charter Schools’ Stonegate Virtual Learning Center in Oklahoma City on Feb. 28, 2023. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Red Bird: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



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

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.

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

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

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

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Publisher 1972-1980
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Telework from A3

where DHS offers services.

“In doing that, we’ve brought online new locations that are more efficient and smaller and have the needs for our modern way of working,” Shropshire told senators in a Jan. 10 budget hearing. “We’ve embedded staff in various organizations such as schools and other various access points and community partners instead of everyone having to come to a DHS building to encounter our staff.”

The Corrections HQ move was not without criticism. Rep. Justin Humphrey, R-Lane, chairman of the House’s criminal justice and corrections committee, said the Corrections Department needed Legislative approval to move its headquarters. The agency disputed that requirement, saying it was not required to receive legislative approval to enter into a lease with OHCA or move into its office building. Humphrey has been a frequent critic of the Corrections Department, calling this year for an independent investigation of the agency.

Harpe said the agency informed the House Speaker of the headquarters move. He also briefed the Board of Corrections at its Nov. 29 meeting. The agency sent out a request for proposal for new office space in February 2023, according to documents obtained under the Open Records Act.

“One of the things that happened during COVID is obviously our workforce changed significantly.

JERRY MOORE
OMES’ deputy director

The Corrections Department spent more than \$588,000 to furnish the new office space. About half of that went to new Dell computers and monitors. Other furnishings such as office chairs came from Oklahoma Corrections Industries.

Humphrey’s questioning echoed lawmakers’ concerns in 2020 when Gov. Kevin Stitt and the Oklahoma State Department of Health announced the relocation of the state’s Public Health Lab to Stillwater in the first year of the pandemic. Some lawmakers and many health department employees said they were caught off guard by the announcement, which was coupled with now-defunct plans for an Oklahoma Pandemic Center of Innovation and Excellence.

Bates said the Pardon and Parole Board has been holding board meetings at the Oklahoma Health Care Authority Building since last summer. He said the agency signed a lease at \$2,437 per month, about \$100 more per month than its previous lease at the Connors Building near the Capitol.

“Our staff primarily teleworks or works offsite at DOC facilities,” Bates said. “The primary reason we wanted to move is so we could finally have our offices where our meetings take place.”

The move to telework can add costs to agency budgets, and especially to that of the Office of Management and Enterprise Services, which

provides information technology services to most state agencies. The agency made a \$2.9 million supplemental request to pay for additional secure, virtual private network software.

Jerry Moore, OMES’ deputy director, said office consolidation allowed the state to get rid of outdated or unnecessary internet connections and phone circuits, which saved money.

“One of the things that happened during COVID is obviously our workforce changed significantly,” Moore told House members in a budget hearing on Tuesday. “There was a shift in the density of office buildings. We started looking at the actual circuit types, how big the pipes were. We had savings as we closed buildings or turned off circuits or if we negotiated and moved them to a different circuit type that had a cost savings.”

Moore said offering telework options also helps the state recruit new employees, especially in the IT sector.

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.

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COUNCILWOMAN JOBETH HAMON speaks during a Ward 6 OKC City Council debate Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2023. PHOTO MICHAEL DUNCAN

Voter-approved \$300 million county jail location remains uncertain

Oklahoma County Jail Site from A1

Early in the public comments section of a special Oklahoma County Board of Commissioners meeting Friday, Del City Mayor Floyd Eason stepped up to the podium and said what many in the room were thinking.

The commissioners’ meeting room was packed with Del City residents after a potential new county jail site at 1901 E. Grand Blvd. was added to the agenda. None of the residents spoke in favor of the jail being put in their backyard, but Eason’s criticism focused on the very act of meeting late on a Friday afternoon, which seemed to catch many in attendance off guard.

“What are we doing here at 3 o’clock on Friday afternoon?” Eason asked commissioners. “What is this all about? What couldn’t wait until next week at the regularly scheduled time to meet? Why are you bringing us in here at 3 o’clock on Friday afternoon to talk about an item that each and every commissioner has voted down in a previous meeting? Every one of you has voted against this site at one time or another. What has changed? What is going on here?”

That 1901 E. Grand site had previously been eliminated by commissioners, but after its owner lowered the price it is being considered again. Friday’s special meeting, however, was not intended to discuss a jail site. Instead, it was intended to discuss the hiring of a land acquisition agent to assist the county in evaluating and eventually purchasing a site for the new \$300 million county jail that voters approved last year.

District 3 Commissioner Myles Davidson told the crowd he had added the 1901 E. Grand item to the agenda by mistake while traveling in the days leading up to Friday’s meeting.

“The buck stops here with the error of it being on this agenda,” Davidson said. “This was not intended to look backdoor or anything of the sort. I did this from 30,000 feet on a mobile phone thinking I was actually choosing the following Wednesday agenda. This is nobody’s fault but my own. There is nothing nefarious at

Across Oklahoma County’s political and social spectra, people do not want the jail anywhere near their homes, their church or their children’s school.

hand.”

While Davidson’s admission seemed to be accepted by Del City residents at the meeting, it highlighted a growing problem with site selection for the new county jail as the need to encumber federal American Rescue Plan Act funds begins to tick toward an end-of-year deadline.

Across Oklahoma County’s political and social spectra, people do not want the jail anywhere near their homes, their church or their children’s school. While commissioners’ list of potential sites seems ever-changing, none of the options appears to tick all of the necessary boxes.

To make matters worse, county leaders thought this had been resolved. After a citizen’s advisory board narrowed a list of potential sites to four last fall and commissioners eventually picked a site near the airport in October, the Federal Aviation Administration put the kibosh on that idea several months later, prompting the City of OKC to withdraw its land offer.

In many ways, the new Oklahoma County Jail is off to an inauspicious start that would be troubling on its own, but some view it as even more concerning because of the current facility’s problems that have plagued the county since it opened in 1991. Now, the trouble finding a site has some wondering if it might just be best to build where the jail stands now at 201 N. Shartel Ave. on the west side of downtown OKC.

What’s old is new again: Revisiting the current jail site

Oklahoma City criminal justice advocate Jess Eddy has been speaking out at meetings related to the Oklahoma County Jail for years. But most recently, Eddy has taken up the cause of revisiting the jail’s current site as one that might work for the future.

Members of the Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Authority, who manage the day-to-day operations of the jail, and county commissioners

have expressed a strong desire for the new jail to be only one or two stories, similar to the David L. Moss Center in Tulsa, a two-story building that sits on about 19 acres and houses up to 2,000 detainees.

“I think we need to do the current jail site,” Eddy told commissioners Friday. “It’s bewildering to me that people say it needs to be a tower. I spoke to the property owner of that large plot north of the jail. He hadn’t been approached but is willing to sell at fair market value. Doesn’t need to make a profit. When I see those kinds of things happening like people saying a tower is necessary, I am befuddled when David L. Moss is two stories and 2,000 beds on 19 acres.”

The present jail site sits on about eight acres. Eddy said about 13 acres would be required to build a two-story jail there. That means the county would be required to purchase land around the jail to create the necessary space. Eddy said he believes it’s possible to acquire up to 36 acres in that part of downtown OKC to build the jail, which would make it closer to the Oklahoma County Courthouse and more centrally located in the population center.

“I think that’s what makes the most sense,” Eddy told NonDoc. “If you look at where services are, what people need, most of it is downtown. That’s transportation, that’s services of all kinds. Most of it is there. The idea of taking it out of that area and putting it where there are little or no services just doesn’t make sense, and yet we’re talking about doing just that. And nobody wants it in their area, either, which is why it makes even more sense to just put the new jail on the current spot.”

Moreover, Eddy said the problems with jail site selection process are overshadowing a larger conversation that needs to take place. He and others have long advocated for a smaller jail when the new one is built. As proposed, the new jail is expected to house about 1,800 people.

“We need a public discussion about why it’s not happening downtown,” Eddy told commissioners Friday. “What I’ve come to

New jail location: Myriad options with *no clear direction* in sight.

Oklahoma County Jail Site from A6

understand is that people want to build a bigger jail to accommodate a growing population. That’s the actual conversation that needs to be happening. If you want to build a bigger jail, that is a reasonable statement. I disagree, but this process is subverting us from having that healthy conversation.”

The county is expected to sell the eight-acre site of the current jail after it is demolished and cleared. Eddy believes other forces are at work in preventing the downtown site from being fully considered.

“It’s been communicated to me clearly that [a prominent] developer, is the big rich developer in this community who has told everybody behind the scenes, ‘Hell no I want to develop that area,’” Eddy said during Friday’s meeting. “So that’s why the current site hasn’t been vetted or looked at because that is the powerful developer.”

District 2 Commissioner Brian Maughan said he hasn’t been warned off the current site by developers.

“I have not received any pressure from anybody about doing it, it’s about my own resolve to not go back to a tower,” Maughan told reporters after Friday’s meeting.

Hamon: ‘Yes, build it in my backyard’

While the City of Oklahoma City isn’t directly involved in the jail project beyond zoning issues, some members of the City Council have been paying close attention to the process.

Ward 6 Councilwoman JoBeth Hamon is one. The current jail sits in her ward and, while others around the metro don’t want the new jail, she would welcome it.

“I would very much like to see it at the current site, or adjacent properties,” Hamon told NonDoc. “From what I can tell by following it and talking to some of the commissioners is I haven’t gotten the sense that the current site has ever gotten a really good first look. It’s felt like there has been this desire to look at other sites because of presumptions about the current site. I’ve never seen any kind of analysis that says here is a matrix showing the same information about all of these sites given their pluses and minuses.”

Hamon said sites like the previously selected location near Will Rogers World Airport or the one at 1901 E. Grand Blvd. still being considered create problems by being located too far from public resources like the courthouse or the city bus station.

“That’s been my concern is that these other sites mentioned have been out in no-man’s land,” she said. “There doesn’t seem like there’s access to ways to get back into the community. If you’re being asked to come to a diversionary program or you need to use other services, how do you do that once you’re let out of jail miles from those services? It’s for that reason that I think the current site should be looked at. I’ve been the one person saying, ‘Yes, build it in my backyard.’ But when I hear those arguments from people who don’t want it, I understand it to a certain degree. Any new development, whether it’s a jail or a mall, will change the dynamics of a neighborhood. So for that reason and many others, I think the current site should be studied more, and if it won’t work, the reasons why need to be documented.”

Hamon, along with Ward 2 Councilman James Cooper, Ward 7 Councilwoman Nikki Nice, Rep. Jason Lowe (D-OKC), Rep. Forrest Bennett (D-OKC) and Del City Ward 3 Councilwoman Claudia Browne, are set to host a discussion about the new jail site at 6 p.m. Monday at Metro Tech, 1900 Springlake Drive.

Maughan: ‘I know it’s been confusing to the public’

Maughan said the process of finding the site for the new jail has been bumpy, but he believes the county is still taking the best approach.

Still, he said, there is a sense of urgency at play. ARPA funds the county received from the federal government in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic must be encumbered or spent by the end of this year.

“We really are trying to work with absolute due diligence to make sure we get this right, and we need all of the options on the table in order to do that,” Maughan said. “I know it’s been confusing to the public. They’re on. They’re off. But sometimes new information becomes available. We’re trying to drill on these sites and see what the structure and the environment looks like.”

Beyond the ARPA deadline, county officials have other motivation to construct the new jail as quickly as possible. This week, agendas for both the Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Authority and the Oklahoma County Budget Board featured executive session discussion items related to “a pending investigation, claim or action by the United States Department of Justice regarding conditions at the Oklahoma County Detention Center.”

Maughan admitted that wherever the new jail



INCUMBENT OKLAHOMA COUNTY COMMISSIONER BRIAN MAUGHAN speaks during a debate hosted by NonDoc on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020. PHOTO PABLO ANGULO

“I am against eminent domain for any reason,” he said. “Stockyards. Downtown. Out in the wilderness. I don’t care. We have willing property owners who are willing to sell, and until that is no longer the case I’m not going to vote for eminent domain.”

BRIAN MAUGHAN
District 2 Commissioner

site is located, it likely won’t please everyone or be a “perfect” spot.

“We’re trying to see what the neighboring concerns might be and if any of them can be addressed,” he said. “It’s a huge matrix of trying to make this Rubik’s Cube work as best we can. It will probably be an imperfect decision whatever results from this, but we are going to do the best we can.”

One option Maughan does not want to consider is building the new jail at the current site. He said he believes those advocating for its use are oversimplifying what would be needed to make that work.

“I have always been a ‘No’ on that for the reasons of I don’t want to go back to a tower,” Maughan said. “You would not realistically be able to build out around the existing facility and have enough adequate land to build a one-level jail. Even if you explored a second story, it likely wouldn’t be enough. [Jess Eddy] made a very valid point about some things he was comparing it to, but I don’t think he understands some of the nuances and was pretty much oversimplifying the situation, with all due respect. It’s just not that simple. We need enough space to have future growth, not just what we house now. We need this facility to last for, I hope, another 30 to 50 years, and you have to plan for that.”

Maughan is also opposed to using eminent domain to acquire properties around the current jail, and he has also opposed Davidson’s proposal for a site near Stockyards City for the same reason.

“I am against eminent domain for any reason,” he said. “Stockyards. Downtown. Out in the wilderness. I don’t care. We have willing property owners who are willing to sell, and until that is no longer the case I’m not going to vote for eminent domain.”

While she is not as solidly opposed to rebuilding on the current site as Maughan, District 1 Commissioner Carrie Blumert shares some of Maughan’s concerns about using the

current jail site.

“The biggest issue is it’s hard to get enough land to get a one- or two-story facility,” Blumert said of the current location. “It would be really hard to acquire enough land in our timeframe to be able to use the money that we have and keep with that one to two stories.”

While the end of the year might seem like a long time away, when it comes to massive projects like building a jail, that time will pass quickly. Maughan said the time element means commissioners need to be focusing on the most viable sites possible.

“I think that we wouldn’t want to pursue a site this close to an ARPA deadline that didn’t have the environmental or the engineering (studies completed),” he said.

But Blumert stopped short of completely snuffing out the idea of using the current site, or somewhere close to it.

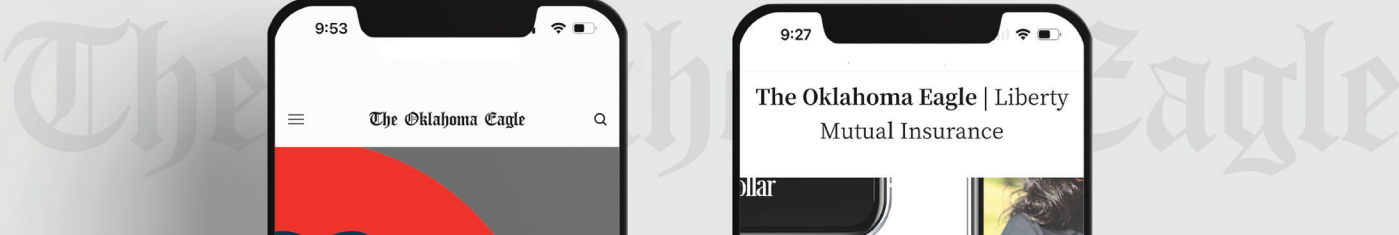
“I wouldn’t say that the current site is completely off the table, but there are some major issues that we would have to overcome if we decided to do that,” she said.

MATT PATTERSON has spent 20 years in Oklahoma journalism covering a variety of topics for The Oklahoman, The Edmond Sun and Lawton Constitution. He joined NonDoc in 2019. Email story tips and ideas to matt@nondoc.com.

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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



OK Legislature now compelled to consider income tax cut *prior to budget certification*

Income Tax Cut from A1

Undeterred by his most recent special session call lasting five hours and accomplishing nothing, Gov. Kevin Stitt today announced he is calling lawmakers back for another special session to seek a 0.25 percent reduction in Oklahoma’s personal income tax rate.

In his executive order, Stitt called on legislators to return Monday, Jan. 29 — one week before the start of Oklahoma’s regular four-month session. It will mark the third special session for the 59th Legislature already. In May, lawmakers called their own special session to pass several budget bills, something they did to ensure they had a chance to override any potential vetoes by Stitt, who let most of the measures become law without his signature and who filed litigation seeking to invalidate lawmakers’ actions.

“From day one, I’ve called on the Legislature to give Oklahomans a much-deserved tax cut,” Stitt said in a release. “With record-breaking savings and a strong economic outlook, there’s no time like the present to deliver a pay raise to all Oklahomans. Let’s get this across the finish line before we head into regular session.”

In October, the second special session of the 59th Legislature functionally ended on the same day it began, with the State Senate adjourning in exasperation after Stitt declined an invitation to discuss his tax-cut plans in front of the Senate Appropriations and Budget Committee. Beyond an income tax rate reduction, Stitt’s special session call in October included two other topics for consideration: transparency requirements in the state budget process; and creation of a “trigger” that would move the state toward eliminating the individual income tax entirely if a court finds that tax “inapplicable to any individual by virtue of their race, heritage, or political classification.”

On Tuesday, Stitt’s latest call specified that legislators “shall only act to put up for a vote a 0.25 percent decrease in individual income tax rates.”

For years, Stitt has said the state can afford a personal income tax rate cut, referring Tuesday to last month’s



SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE GREG TREAT (R-OKC) speaks to media after adjourning a special session hours after it began Tuesday, Oct. 3, 2023. PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

estimate of funds available for appropriation presented to the Board of Equalization, which he chairs. Stitt said the fiscal report, which he will use to draw up his executive budget proposal to lawmakers on the first day of session, Feb. 5, indicated a bright outlook. A final appropriation authority is scheduled to be approved by the board Feb. 15.

In his release, Stitt said the state has \$5.4 billion in savings, a strong economy and fiscally conservative policies, making it well-positioned to trim the state’s personal income tax.

A 0.25 percent cut in the personal income tax has been estimated to drop future collections by about \$240 million for the next full fiscal year. The state’s legislative-appropriated budget for the current

fiscal year, which began July 1, is \$12.96 billion.

Treat calls Stitt’s move a political stunt, ‘waste of taxpayer money’

Legislative leaders had a mixed reaction to Stitt’s call for a special session so close to the start of next month’s regular session.

“House Republicans will do their constitutional duty and answer the governor’s call to special session,” House Speaker Charles McCall (R-Atoka). “We will be ready to pass meaningful tax relief legislation for the hardworking people of Oklahoma as we previously have in multiple special and regular sessions.”

Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat (R-OKC) said calling the

Legislature into a special session the week before the regular session begins is a needless waste of taxpayer money.

“It is disappointing the governor would call another special session,” Treat said in a release. “I met with the governor and Speaker McCall Thursday. The governor laid out his intentions for a special session regarding tax cuts. I outlined to the governor we will not know how much money the state will have to spend on a tax cut until the Board of Equalization meets to certify budget numbers in mid-February.”

Treat, who lambasted Stitt’s negotiation tactics several times in 2023 and who has promised a heavily altered budget negotiation process for 2024, said the governor was attempting another “stunt.”

“It is unfortunate the governor has chosen this route,” Treat said. “The Senate will adhere to the call of the special session, as we have always done to respect and uphold our constitutional duty. However, I do not know what will be different between the last week in January and the last time he pulled this stunt in October.”

House Democratic Leader Cyndi Munson (D-OKC) also questioned Stitt’s fiscal responsibility by calling another special session.

“The governor’s call for a special session to cut income taxes is just his latest political stunt, and it is not a genuine attempt to lower costs for Oklahoma families,” Munson said in a statement. “We have not even completed our agency budget hearings to gain a comprehensive understanding of our state’s fiscal picture, including the potential loss of federal dollars post-COVID.”

“We will have four months beginning Feb. 5 to deliberate fiscal and policy ideas. Our job as legislators is to work through these important issues, as we are called to do every year. Instead, the governor is asking us to waste time and taxpayer dollars by throwing ideas at the wall to see what sticks. It is unwise and fiscally irresponsible to ask the Legislature to haphazardly cut revenue.”

Senate Minority Leader Kay Floyd made similar remarks.

“To undertake statewide, comprehensive tax reform in five days, without committee work and public vetting and input, would serve no other purpose than to place politics over policy,” she said. “The governor’s call for a special session just one week before the regular session begins does not serve the best interest of this state or its citizens.”

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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Wednesday worship - 8pm

Rev. John W. Anderson

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F: 918-587-0642

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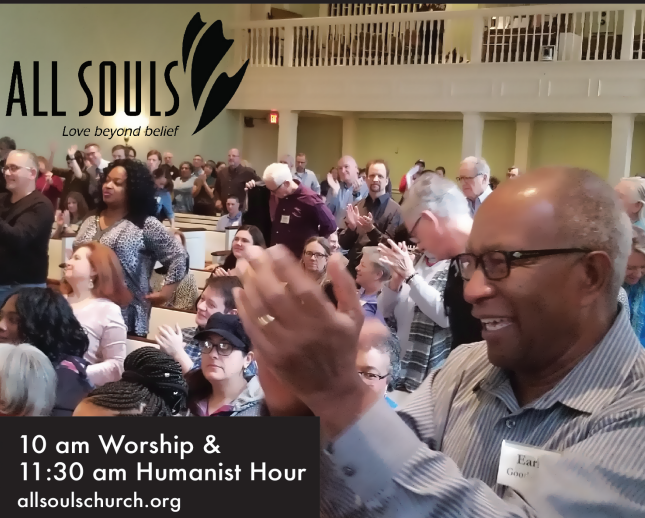
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FOR BLACK KIDS, UNDERFUNDED PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE INEQUALITY FACTORIES

A new report reveals how hundreds of billions of dollars have been snatched away from the nation's public schools since 2016. **A11**

UPDATED FAFSA FORM HELPS BLACK STUDENTS GET MORE AID

The Department of Education expects the updated and redesigned financial aid form to help students get more for their higher education. **A13**

Forced to make *decisions* with *life-long impacts*



NYS SENATOR ZELLNOR MYRIE speaks at a press conference at Million Dollar Staircase, Capitol, Albany, NY. PHOTO NYS SENATE MEDIA SERVICES

New Yorkers cannot successfully contest wrongful convictions by simply proving their innocence without DNA evidence if they have pled guilty.

What Are Your Odds *Against The State?*

Tandy Lau, Word In Black

"Natascha Tiger" pleaded guilty but is innocent," wrote Rowan Wilson, current chief judge of the New York Court of Appeals, in his 2018 *People v. Tiger* dissenting opinion. In fact, no crime probably ever occurred, but New York State's highest court ruled Tiger, a licensed practical nurse, could not challenge her wrongful conviction plea on the basis of innocence without DNA evidence because the Orange County woman pled guilty to charges in 2012.

Tiger was finally cleared last August due to an ineffective assistance claim, but the Court of Appeals' ruling set a legal precedent — known as case law — for how New York State would approach similar cases. Subsequently, New Yorkers cannot successfully contest a wrongful conviction by simply proving their innocence without DNA evidence if they have pled guilty.

The justice system isn't logistically designed for every case to go to trial, even if it is a constitutional right, so defendants are often offered a bargain in return for admitting to having committed the crime. Professing to guilt provides more certainty for the defendant and deals usually come attached with shorter sentences than if someone is convicted in a trial.

"If you're charged with a crime, you have to make a decision," said Maurice Possley, senior researcher with the National

Registry of Exonerations. "[If] you think you can succeed in defeating the state's case, whether you're guilty or innocent, you have to make that decision. What are your odds? What do you feel is the likelihood that the state will lose and by that, mean that there will be an acquittal? And once you take that into consideration and the state makes you an offer, then you have to make a decision."

Roughly 99% of misdemeanor convictions and 96% of felony convictions stem from guilty pleas. There are many reasons why innocent people plead guilty. Possley said variables include expediting cases, coercion from attorneys, and the threat of longer sentences, often known as a "trial tax." Around 24% of National Registry of Exonerations entrants pled guilty to a crime they did not commit. Of those 838 people, more than half are Black, and 26 were charged in New York, according to Possley.

"It's really only in the last few years that we've had any kind of meaningful discovery [or] meaningful bail reform [in New York]," said Sergio De La Pava, New York County Defender Services legal director. "So you're talking about decades of people incarcerated, being told [to] plead guilty, and [they'll either] get out or [they'll] get out a lot sooner than if [they] risk a trial."

"Fixing" the case law stemming

Wrongful Convictions cont. A12

Facing Unequal Educational *Opportunities* In Every State

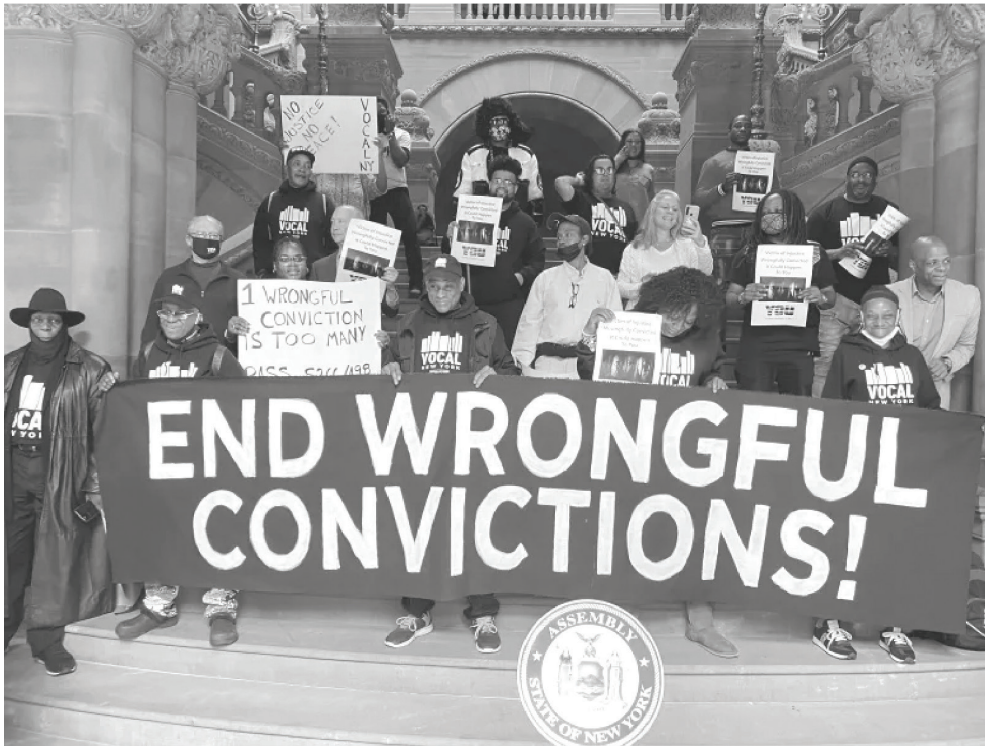
A new report reveals how hundreds of billions of dollars have been snatched away from the nation's public schools since 2016.

Joseph Williams, Word In Black

For the Black community, education is considered an investment, the best way for Black children to get ahead in life, and a key to overcoming systemic racism. But a new study indicates states are short-changing the schools Black children attend, worsening the achievement gap.

A study titled "The Adequacy and Fairness of State School Finance Systems" found that Black students are twice as likely as white students to attend school in districts with subpar government funding and more than three times as likely to live in "chronically underfunded" districts.

Unequal Opportunities cont. A12



ADVOCATES from VOCAL-NY, one of the Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act coalition organizations, hold rally during the last legislative session. PHOTO COURTESY OF VOCAL-NY

The Fate of the *Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act*

Wrongful Convictions from A11

from *People v. Tiger* is one of the goals of the Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act, a comprehensive bill introduced by State Senator Zellnor Myrie that, among other things, would allow those who plead guilty to challenge a wrongful conviction with credible non-DNA evidence.

“We unfortunately have seen that New York is third in the nation in wrongful convictions,” said Myrie. “We don’t have the appropriate procedures to challenge those wrongful convictions, and they end up costing the state more money in the long run...so why don’t we, at the front end of the system, ensure that anyone who has been wrongfully convicted, even if they plead guilty, [has] the mechanism to challenge [it]?”

This past summer, the legislation passed both the New York State Senate and Assembly, but last month, Gov. Kathy Hochul vetoed the bill due to an “unjustifiable risk of flooding the courts with frivolous claims.” Myrie told the Amsterdam News he’s disappointed by the news but that he plans on renewing talks in this year’s session.

Rebecca Brown, who worked on the bill while serving as the Innocence Project’s policy director, echoed the state senator’s sentiments, pointing to the impact on real life people. But

she pointed out the progress as a sign of the legislation’s growing appeal.

“Every year we’ve made gains — the year before last it passed one chamber and then this year, the full legislature,” said Brown. “To me, that signals that this is something that lawmakers care about. It certainly polled incredibly well as an issue, as a reform, across party lines. What is concerning to the coalition is that there has not been a true effort to get the parties to figure out how to move forward on this bill.”

While Tiger is synonymous with the 2018 ruling the bill’s sponsors hope to amend, Natascha Tiger represents many flesh-and-blood people affected by such a decision.

“She was facing years in state prison [and] pled guilty to recklessly burning a child who was in her care,” said De La Pava. “Only because she was sued in the civil sphere following that conviction that it properly came to light that the injuries were actually the result of a medication the child was on. She was innocent. She was factually innocent in a way that maybe even she herself failed to grasp.”

Telling Her Story

When Tiger recently met with the Amsterdam News in Newburgh, she was largely unaware of the Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act. She’s relieved that her case is over, but remains upset “about everyone else who can’t take back their guilty pleas.”

Her ordeal began around Thanksgiving 2011, while caring for a “severely disabled” 10-year-old girl. Tiger noticed the child’s skin broke out while bathing her. The girl was not submerged in water and instead placed on a mesh cot over a bathtub and washed with a hand-held shower hose. Medical providers initially theorized the condition stemmed from an adverse reaction to medication, but later deemed the red, peeling skin as a result of scalding water. The girl was treated for third-degree burns and given skin grafts.

Authorities investigated Tiger and at the time, she feared professional consequences. Criminal charges were unfathomable, so she cooperated fully as someone completely unfamiliar with the justice system. Tiger even proactively arranged meetings with investigators, believing the process was a formality. While she initially knew she didn’t burn the child, the nurse second-guessed herself after the hospital’s analysis and graphic photos of the child’s injuries were shown to her by Child Protective Services. She confessed to not monitoring the shower water’s temperature and wrote an apology letter to the girl’s mother.

In April of 2012, police arrested and charged Tiger. In July 2012, Tiger pled guilty to the single charge of endangering the welfare of a disabled person.

“When she asked her original attorney, he said he didn’t find anything helpful, which is why she pleaded guilty,” said her current lawyer, John Ingrassia. “She wasn’t equipped with the necessary information to plead innocent...what’s really important is that she asked. It wasn’t like she made a decision without inquiring.”

After all, how could she dispute the charge without actually knowing the ailment’s cause? Tiger also faced a stiff trial tax, with up to seven years in state prison if she rejected the plea. She was told by her former attorney that medical experts who could prove her innocence were too expensive, according to court documents. Her only possible witness— the girl — was blind and non-verbal.

Tiger spent four months in jail for a crime that she did not commit. She also lost her medical license and subsequently struggled to find employment before landing a cleaning gig. The experience was traumatic.

While Tiger pled guilty to the criminal charges, a jury later ruled in favor of her and her employers in a civil lawsuit filed by the girl’s parents after evidence from the biopsy—which was available but not provided before the plea bargain—indicated the child’s outbreak was indeed from an adverse medical reaction, not hot-water burns. Tiger then enlisted Ingrassia to help her vacate the conviction under both actual innocence and ineffective assistance.

Despite the 2018 Court of Appeals decision preventing her from challenging her conviction with evidence proving she was innocent, an appellate court later ruled she could vacate her plea due to her first attorney failing to provide the child’s biopsy and expert testimony to inform her decision before pleading guilty. But Tiger risked prison time if she moved forward with a new trial. She says it was a no-brainer.

This past August, all charges were dropped.

Tiger once believed “when people are exonerated, that is it.” Not anymore. She’s still figuring things out, although she knows she wants to return to nursing. Yet apprehension remains with how easily doing her job mutated into a wrongful conviction.

“I do want to get my license back, especially the way it was taken from me,” said Tiger. “I’m taking it day by day. I want to, but there’s a fear.”

Can’t Change a Tiger’s Stripes Through CPL 440

The Challenging Wrongful Convictions would overrule the Tiger decision by amending Article 440 of the New York Criminal Procedural Law (CPL 440). Motions brought under it challenge a conviction or sentence’s legality. But avenues to exoneration on the basis of innocence currently provided by CPL 440 are reserved for people convicted at trial due to the Tiger ruling and exclude those who plead guilty—the overwhelming majority of defendants. Yet the article clearly acknowledges the possibility of innocent people pleading guilty, because it specifically allows them to challenge their conviction with forensic DNA evidence.

When interpreting CPL 440 plainly, those who plead guilty can only challenge wrongful convictions on the basis of innocence if their exonerating evidence comes from DNA testing. Such a decision effectively kills most direct claims to innocence on procedural grounds long before the criminal justice legal system can determine their credibility.

In lieu of a 440 motion, wrongful convictions stemming from a guilty plea can be challenged through fledgling conviction integrity units. They’re usually led by prosecutors and operated out of a district attorney’s office. Most notably, Manhattan D.A. Alvin Bragg’s Post-Conviction Justice Unit helped clear Steve Lopez—the Exonerated Five’s co-defendant who spoke to the AmNews for the second part of this story.

While these prosecutor-led solutions often pose as small-scale, viable alternatives to 440 motions, the units are few and far between outside of New York City. According to VIOCAL-NY, 53 of the 62 counties do not have a conviction integrity unit. Of the nine that do, only two are outside of New York City and Long Island.

“There are people who are out there that have pled guilty, despite being innocent,” said Lopez’s lawyer Eric Renfroe. “I appreciate what Alvin Bragg did, in vacating Steve’s conviction...but if people have the evidence, we shouldn’t have to wait for that action. There should be another avenue besides the grace of district attorneys.”

TANDY LAU is a Report for America corps member who writes about public safety for the Amsterdam News. Your donation to match our RFA grant helps keep him writing stories like this one; please consider making a tax-deductible gift of any amount today by visiting <https://bit.ly/amnews1>.



PHOTO GETTY/FG TRADE

Unequal Opportunities from A11

At the same time, researchers found that “educational opportunity is unequal in every state — that is, higher-poverty districts are funded less adequately than lower-poverty districts,” according to the report.

The funding disparities are likely to further increase “opportunity gaps” between Black and white children, creating what one researcher called “inequality factories.” And the disparities are occurring as school districts set academic achievement standards that children in underfunded districts often struggle to meet.

The findings, compiled by a team of researchers from the Albert Shanker Institute, the University of Miami, and Rutgers University, evaluated the K-12 school finance systems of all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The project analyzed data from 2009 — the depths of the Great Recession, during which revenue-starved states slashed education budgets — to the 2020-21 school year, roughly a decade after the economy recovered.

A thumbnail measure of education quality, school district spending varies across the country, with some school districts and states spending far more per pupil — and paying teachers more — than others. Yet spending matters: data has linked higher district spending to better student performance, test scores, and outcomes.

When the U.S. economy entered a sharp downturn, revenue-starved states slashed education budgets. But when the economy rebounded, however, not all education budgets bounced back.

“Good school finance systems compensate for factors states cannot control (e.g., student poverty, labor costs) using levers that they can control (e.g., driving funding to districts that

need it most),” according to the study. “We have devised a framework that evaluates states based largely on how well they accomplish this balance. We assess each state’s funding while accounting directly for the students and communities served by its public schools.”

The framework found that in 2021, 39 of 50 states and the District of Columbia are spending less on public schools — what the researchers call “fiscal effort” — than they did in 2006, according to the report. The spending deficit, meanwhile, cost schools “over \$360 billion between 2016 and 2021,” the report states.

Yet “most states have increased their expectations for the performance of schools, teachers, and students” without increasing funding needed to reach the higher benchmarks,

Unequal Opportunities cont. A13



SARAH HILL (third from right) was named as a federal judge for the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma by President Joe Biden. PHOTO PROVIDED

Former Cherokee Nation AG Named As Federal Judge

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

First Native American Woman To Serve As A Federal Magistrate In Oklahoma

Sarah Hill has been appointed to serve as a judge for the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma. A program was held at the University of Tulsa College of Law to recognize her appointment.

Nominated by President Joe Biden, Hill is the first Native American woman to serve as a federal judge in Oklahoma. She is a tribal citizen of the Cherokee Nation.

“This sends a powerful message to young people, inspiring them to dream big and reminding them that regardless of their background or community, they can reach incredible heights and accomplish great things in their careers,” said Oren Griffin, dean of the University of Tulsa College of Law.

A graduate of the TU College of Law, Hill is a former attorney general, deputy attorney general, and assistant attorney general of the Cherokee Nation. As assistant attorney general, she concurrently served as a special assistant U. S. attorney for the Northern District of Oklahoma. In her position as special assistant, Hill was authorized to prosecute federal criminal cases occurring in Indian country.

Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said, “...Hill...is a brilliant attorney with a commitment to public service, fairness, justice and the rule of law... Today is a historic day for the country for which we should all pause to celebrate.”

A press release announcing the program to celebrate her selection said Hill “has invaluable experience in advocating for crucial legal issues affecting Native peoples’ rights.”

Hill was confirmed by the Senate in December. Sen. James Lankford said, “...I believe Hill... will protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and administer justice fairly and impartially.”

Joining Judge Sara Hill (third from right) during a recognition program at the University of Tulsa College of Law are (l-r) Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr., former Cherokee Nation Judicial Appeals Tribunal Chief Justice Philip H. Viles, University of Tulsa College of Law Dean Oren Griffin, University of Arizona Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law Dean Stacy Leeds, and Cherokee Nation CEO Chuck Garrett.

MLK Student Leadership Forum inspires next generation of students

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle



BERTHADDAEUS BAILEY is managing director of My Brother's Keeper-Tulsa. PHOTO PROVIDED

The Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society sponsored a youth program during the local five-day observance of the MLK Holiday on Jan. 12.

More than 200 students participated in the “Keepin’ It Real” Student Leadership Forum held at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa. The program was designed to educate and engage students in a discussion about the legacy of Rev. King.

BerThaddaeus Bailey, managing director of My Brother’s Keeper-Tulsa, was the

program facilitator. My Brother’s Keeper is an initiative of the Obama Foundation. It is a community of the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance launched by former President Barack Obama in 2014 to build safe and supportive communities where boys and young men of color have clear pathways to opportunity.

Additionally, Pleas Thompson, president of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society, addressed the students.

“I was honored to participate in the MLK Student Leadership Forum to facilitate a dialogue with leaders of today about how we can leverage strategies of the Civil Rights Movement to make transformation in today’s time. The students left excited and prepared to go back to their respective communities and take on a leadership role in the struggle for progress,” said Bailey.

Topics discussed during the program included “Student Leadership during the Civil Rights Era,” “MLK Nonviolent strategies,” “Deep Dive into ‘I Have A Dream’ and ‘I Have Been To The Mountain Top’ speeches,” and “Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.”

As it states on its website, the My Brother’s Keeper-Tulsa nonprofit “leads a cross-sector national call to action focused on building safe and supportive communities for boys and young men of color.”

For more information about My Brother’s Keeper-Tulsa, contact bbailey@impacttulsa.com.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity honors the passing of Lawrence Henderson



THE PASSING OF LAWRENCE TRAVIS HENDERSON was recognized by the Alpha Tau Lambda chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity honored the homegoing of Lawrence Travis Henderson. The Alpha Tau Lambda chapter participated in the fraternity’s Omega Service for him at Butler-Stumpff and Dyer Funeral Home on Jan. 2.

On the passing of its member, the fraternity released a statement highlighting Henderson’s life: (It was edited for clarity.)

(Henderson) was born May 10, 1948, in Beggs, Okla. His family relocated to Tulsa, where he lived and attended school. Having dedicated his life to Christ, he transitioned on Christmas Day, 2023.

He began his career in education at Memorial

High School. He later would be named principal of McLain High School. An avid chess player, Henderson also served as adjunct instructor at Langston University Urban Center in Tulsa.

Henderson earned two master’s degrees in education and history at Northeastern State University. He earlier earned a bachelor’s degree in education at Langston University. At Langston, he joined Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. He is a graduate of Booker T. Washington High School Class of 1966.

A lifetime member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., he was an active member of the local chapter serving as chapter president.

Henderson’s dedication to his family and friends was unwavering.

Attending the service were (l-r) Cecil Piercy III, Phil Armstrong, Rondale Wilson, Corey Myers, Russell LaCour, Howard McCondichie, Jason Gilley, Jerod J. Widemon, Brandon Jackson, Sam Burns, Joel Myers, Nathaniel Smith, and David Trent.

Gilley is the chapter president, and Widemon is area director.

For more information, see its social media page, <https://www.facebook.com/tulsaalphas>

Events

February Black History Month

Feb. 1

“The Lingering Legacies of Urban Renewal” is the third part of a five-part series of a community read of the award-winning book “Built from the Fire: The Epic Story of Tulsa’s Greenwood District, America’s Black Wall Street” at Oklahoma State University – Tulsa, 700 N. Greenwood Ave. at 7 p.m. Author Victor Luckerson and photographer Don Thompson share their research and collection of photography to tell the story of Greenwood. The free community program will cover Chapters 16-20 in the book. For more information, visit <https://humanities.utulsa.edu/deep-greenwood/>.

Feb. 1

Choir Boy is an exploration of the intersection of race and sexuality through brilliant storytelling, music, and syncopated step dancing. The Charles R. Drew Prep School for Boys is dedicated to the creation of strong, ethical black men. Pharus wants nothing more than to take his rightful place as leader of the school’s legendary gospel choir. Can he find his way inside the hallowed halls of this institution if he sings in his own key? Choir Boy is an exploration of the intersection of race and sexuality through brilliant storytelling, music, and syncopated step dancing.

Feb. 3

11th Annual Black Wall Street Heritage and History Festival for Black History Month to be held at Tulsa School of Arts and Sciences, 1202 W. Easton St. , from 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. This year’s theme is “Black Towns Matter.” For vendor or more information, call (918) 770-6020.

Feb. 3

Crowning Glory: The Ameka Premiere Extravaganza at Circle Cinema Kicking off Black History Month, Dr. Tamecca Rogers, a member of the Tulsa-based Artists Creative Fund, is thrilled to present “Crowning Glory: The Ameka Premiere Extravaganza” at Circle Cinema. This red-carpet event is an exclusive celebration of the animated series “Ameka and Her Magical Crown,” created and directed by the visionary Dr. Tamecca Rogers. When: Feb. 3, 2 p.m., Where: Circle Cinema, 10 S. Lewis Ave..

Feb. 10

Tulsa Alumni Chapter Kappa Alpha Psi presents its Annual Scholarship Sweetheart Ball 2024 on Feb. 10 at the Doubletree Hotel by Hilton Tulsa – Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. For ticket information, visit its Facebook page or call (918) 833-4300.

Feb. 16

20th Anniversary of the Alzheimer’s Diversity Outreach Services “Out of Africa Healthy Brain Strategies Gala at Hyatt Regency Tulsa Downtown, 100 E. 2nd St., VIP Experience: 6 p.m.-7p.m., Dinner: 7:30 p.m. For more information, contact beverly-baul@alzoutreach.org.

Feb. 17

Education for Scholars, Inc. to sponsor United to Fulfil the Dream Annual Fundraiser on Feb. 17 from 1 p.m. – 3 p.m. at Northeastern State University (Administrative Office Building), 3100 E. New Orleans St., in Broken Arrow.