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VOL. 103 NO. 06

FEBRUARY 09, 2024 - FEBRUARY 15, 2024

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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

DEI

John Neal
The Oklahoma Eagle

The backlash against Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is coming on strong. The naysayers, including conservative ideologues, call it “Divide, Exclude, and Indoctrinate.” Colleges and universities are being denied use of it. Employers are laying off thousands who teach it. Public schools are losing funding to support it. This is the story of the rise and recent decline of the set of values that have provided the tools to marginalized minorities to compete in education and to succeed in the work force. The set of values is “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” commonly known as DEI.

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DEI

SCOTUS Decision, a turning point for DEI

From A2

Programs to teach and train DEI, widely used to root out bias in public education and the workplace, is under attack in Oklahoma and all over the U.S. Encouraged by the June 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision ending affirmative action, the radical right is making this anti-discriminatory effort its next target. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs are being eradicated or curtailed nationwide.

Several high-profile Oklahomans have jumped onto the anti-DEI train. On Dec. 15, 2023, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt issued an Executive Order prohibiting DEI in state universities and agencies. School Superintendent Ryan Walters is urging the adoption of a new “administrative rule” by the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) to outlaw DE&I programs in public schools. Private sector employers are eliminating anti-bias workplace efforts – including some started just a couple of years ago - out of fear the U.S. Supreme Court has targeted DEI programs for elimination.

DEI Basics

A variety of “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (DEI) programs rapidly arose in public institutions and private sector employment in the wake of racially motivated violence and movement protests during the last two decades. The program aims to create bias-free environments, where historically marginalized minorities have an equal opportunity to succeed.

DEI seeks to safeguard the treatment of minorities from the point of recruitment and application through retention and promotion in employment, education, and other social or economic arenas. Its central features, as crafted from multiple sources and paraphrased by The Oklahoma Eagle, are the following:

- Diversity - Ensuring that the widest variety of people is represented by race, ethnicity, gender, age, (dis)ability, nationality, sexual orientation, etc.
- Equity - Providing fair and just treatment of disadvantaged minorities to enable equal opportunity and equitable outcomes.
- Inclusion - Offering beyond diverse representation to ensure group acceptance and mechanisms for achieving contributions from all identities.

The primary purpose and goal of DEI programs is well described in the University of Oklahoma DEI Executive Summary Plan. They are “to support a more diverse, equitable and inclusive culture” with positive “institutional outcomes.”

Proponents of DEI reject critics’ claims that the program carves out special privileges for minorities. “DEI offices are not and have never been an instrument to promote one race or gender or sexual orientation above another,” said Courtney Avant, legislative counsel for the Human Rights Campaign, an LGBTQ+ rights nonprofit. “They have been a critical tool to address inequality and discrimination.” Avant made the statement in the Austin American-Statesman concerning similar DEI prohibitions in Texas.

Colleges and universities

America’s 4,700 colleges and universities receiving federal funds were initially slow to take up the civil rights challenge mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But over time, higher education has played a leading role in promoting civil rights and efforts to address systemic racism, first through affirmative action and later through DEI programs.

DEI programs began to proliferate on campuses. In many cases, they anchored civil rights initiatives in most colleges and universities in the 2010s and 2020s. In Oklahoma, an Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education report submitted to the Governor’s office in February 2023 traced DEI higher education expenditures back to 2013, which increased to an outlay of \$10 million in fiscal year 2022-23.

Oklahoma’s two major universities, the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University, also employ approximately 75 DEI employees at multiple campuses around the state.

However, support for DEI in colleges and universities could suddenly change in Oklahoma and elsewhere as attacks on the program continue to come from Republican-dominated legislatures and state houses. The 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision ending affirmative action was a significant turning point in the contemporary struggle for civil rights.

Gov. Stitt cited sections of the U.S. Supreme Court’s June decision in his December 2023 Executive Order, effectively terminating DEI on nearly 50 state public higher education campuses. Stitt’s Order referenced Chief Justice John Roberts’ majority opinion explaining the broad scope of the court’s intentions: “Eliminating racial discrimination means

The primary purpose and goal of DEI programs is well described in the University of Oklahoma DEI Executive Summary Plan. They are “to support a more diverse, equitable and inclusive culture” with positive “institutional outcomes.”

eliminating all of it.”

The implication in Stitt’s Order, and the opinion of other readers of the decision, is that the Supreme Court is poised to strike down other civil rights initiatives affirming protection for minorities. The court decision could affect not just college admission prospects for historically disadvantaged Blacks but also strengthen and accelerate the broader effort to deny minorities full participation in society safeguarded by other affirmative civil rights efforts.

In a December 2023 letter to the OU community, OU President Joseph Harroz, announced the university was “obligated to comply with the governor’s executive order,” but nevertheless expressed “an unyielding dedication to the principles that have always defined us.” According to the school website, OU-Tulsa has more than 1,300 students and “500 community affiliations” among state university DEI offices closing.

State action. Public schools.

From a legal perspective, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision was a turning point for DEI, but Republican legislatures and state houses had already targeted DEI programs. The Chronicles of Higher Education wrote in an updated publication on July 14, 2023, that it was “tracking 40 bills in 22 states” that would prohibit DEI programs, at least seven of which have “final legislative approval.” In Oklahoma, St. Sen. Rob Standridge, (R-Norman), filed four bills in December proposing to expand Stitt’s Executive Order, taking legislative aim at DEI.

In April 2023, at an OSBE meeting, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Walters demanded Oklahoma public schools report all existing and planned DEI expenditures by Sept. 1, 2023. Walters claimed DEI “forces radical ideologies on students.” Then Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist filed a preliminary report stating that Tulsa Public Schools had “spent \$0” on DEI. Walters cited the TPS report response in the July 2023 OSBE meeting as a reason to delay the Tulsa district’s accreditation and threaten a takeover.

The state board has yet to make public its findings from the schools’ survey on the DEI spending allegation made by Walters. Education Week’s Mark Lieberman told The Oklahoma Eagle its May 2023 Open Records Request seeking the information garnered little response from the state education agency. OSDE’s Director of Communications, Dan Isett, has yet to respond to a similar request for information on state school DEI spending made by The Oklahoma Eagle.

Both the Tulsa and Oklahoma City school districts, the largest and most diverse in the state, have denied having DEI programs. This apparent lack of programs or spending on DEI in Oklahoma’s public schools did not deter Walters from informing the state board in its December meeting that he would seek to enact an “administrative rule” prohibiting DEI programs in state schools.

Tulsa Public Schools has kept its support for the concepts underlying DEI programs. In a June letter, Gist told Walters in response to his “inflammatory declarations” that “Equity is our most closely held value.” In a December 2023 media release, new TPS Superintendent Ebony

Johnson stated, “The diversity of our school district is something we celebrate every day in our classrooms and throughout our school communities. This diversity is a strength of our district and our city, contributing to their cultural richness and economic opportunities.”

Private sector support

DEI private sector training and development programs paralleled Black Lives Matter activities in the wake of Trayvon Martin’s killing and other racially motivated violence but exploded with George Floyd’s murder. In a September 2021 survey conducted by WorldatWork, DEI programs had surged when “More than eight in ten (83%) of the 656 responding organizations say they have taken action on DEI initiatives in 2021, a 13-percentage point increase from 2020.”

Private employers also benefited from developing workplace cultures that preempted civil rights lawsuits. Additionally, McKinsey and Company has established clear links between employment diversity and higher business earnings.

However, following the U.S. Supreme Court’s announcement in January 2022 to reconsider affirmative action and the emergence of critics of DEI, the program began to lose its support in private employment. In the last half of 2022, Revelio Labs workforce analysis reported that in the private employment sector, “DEI roles are leaving companies almost twice as fast as non-DEI roles.”

The trend continued into 2023 and accelerated following the Supreme Court’s decision as companies came to fear reverse-discrimination lawsuits. This occurred even though employers and workers largely embraced DEI. A Pew Research Center survey in May 2023 found, “A majority of workers say focusing on DEI is a good thing... and workers tend to see positive impact from policies and resources associated with DEI where they work.”

In Tulsa, the Chamber’s Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Jonathon Long, told The Oklahoma Eagle, “The Tulsa Regional Chamber recognizes the positive value and impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We stand committed to creating a thriving, inclusive business ecosystem that fuels Tulsa’s growth and prosperity.”

The Tulsa Regional Chamber has a DEI community development initiative dubbed Mosaic. This coalition of companies and non-profit organizations “helps educate, lead and influence businesses on creating diverse workforces and inclusive workplaces to enhance their competitive advantage.” Mosaic has over 70 members in the Tulsa area.

JOHN NEAL, the author, is a former resident of Sand Springs. He is well versed in urban renewal, its uses and abuse, as a former city manager in Oklahoma and departmental consultant for the city of El Paso, Texas. In 2008, he was that city’s planning pirector when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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

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).

Featured Last Week



Hornets Make Triumphant Post-Massacre Return



After 54 years, Linda Berry Retires From Morton



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The Oklahoma Eagle

Founded in 1921

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Publisher 1980-Present

Robert K. Goodwin

Publisher 1972-1980

Edward L. Goodwin, Jr.

Co-Publisher 1980-2014

Edward L. Goodwin, Sr.

Publisher 1936-1972

Theodore B. Baughman

Publisher 1921-1936

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The Oklahoma Eagle | Founded in 1921 | Vol. CII No. 06

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE is published weekly on Fridays by The Oklahoma Eagle, LLC, P.O. Box 3267, Tulsa, OK 74101. General office is 624 E. Archer St., Tulsa, OK 74120. Periodical Postage (WSPS 406-580) is paid at Tulsa, OK. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the above address. Delivery subscription rates (Continental United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands). All subscriptions may include Premium Edition issues throughout the year.
Mail Subscriber Rates: Single copy \$1 | Yearly \$52 | 2 Years \$100

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STATE REP. JIM OLSEN, R-ROLAND, AND CHERYL WILLIAMS, the Republican member of the Oklahoma County Election Board, wait to go before the Oklahoma State Election Board in executive session at the Oklahoma Capitol on Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, in Oklahoma City. PHOTO PAUL MONIES/OKLAHOMA WATCH

State Election Board

Accusations of “purposefully and/or recklessly disseminating false information about Oklahoma’s election system and procedures.”

Paul Monies
Oklahoma Watch

The state Election Board dismissed the Republican member and a Republican alternate from the Oklahoma County Election Board after it determined they failed to certify election results, refused to approve meeting minutes and didn’t disclose conflicts of interest.

In a special meeting, the state board voted Wednesday to dismiss Oklahoma County Election Board Vice Chair Cheryl Williams and Republican Alternate Jenni White after a daylong executive session behind closed doors at the Capitol.

The state board also voted to refer the matters to Oklahoma County District Attorney Vicki Behanna and Attorney General Gentner Drummond for further investigation. It directed the Oklahoma County Republican Central Committee to recommend GOP replacements to the county election board by Feb. 7.

The motion removing White accused her of “purposefully and/or recklessly disseminating false information about Oklahoma’s election system and procedures.” It also said she failed to remove false information. White wrote a Jan. 7 blog post discussing her complaints about the electoral process on the website of Reclaim Oklahoma Parent Empowerment. She also hosted a Jan. 24 ROPE podcast on YouTube discussing election security. It contained an error that she later corrected, White said.

Republican Party activists packed the meeting room on Wednesday before the state election board went into executive session to hear from Williams, White and other election officials, including Oklahoma County Election Board Secretary Doug Sanderson.

County-level election secretaries are appointed by the state election board, which has the power to remove party representatives from the county election boards.

At one point, Rep. Jim Olsen, R-Roland, attended the executive session. Olsen is chairman of the House Election and Ethics committee and can attend executive sessions of agencies and boards under his committee’s oversight.

County-level election secretaries are appointed by the state election board, which has the power to remove party representatives from those county election boards. The Republican and Democratic parties in each county recommend a member and an alternate to serve on the three-member county election board.

In an interview Thursday, White said she wasn’t expecting to be dismissed from the alternate position. White said she outlined her questions and complaints in a letter to state election board officials. She received a three-page reply, but then was told to appear before the state board.

“My complaints were mainly about procedure, not personnel, and then suddenly it became all about personnel, not procedure,” White said.

“How was I derelict in my duties?” White said. “I literally went to complain because I wasn’t allowed to do the duties I was trained to do. Because in the training manual, it says where to count the absentee ballots. So how could I be derelict in my duty if I literally complained to them about not being able to do my job?”

Before she appeared before the board in executive session, Williams said she was summoned to the state board for asking questions about election procedures at the Oklahoma County Election Board following a Dec. 12 special election in Oklahoma County.

Williams said a closed-circuit television system for the Republican and Democratic board members to watch absentee ballots being processed didn’t comply with the handbook or training she received for the position. She said

Oklahoma County also didn’t have permission to process absentee ballots a day before the Dec. 12 special election.

In a Dec. 12 letter to Sanderson, State Election Board Secretary Paul Ziriach said an Oct. 25 request from Sanderson to meet and process absentee ballots contained a typo referring to the dates. Ziriach amended his authorization to cover the processing of absentee ballots from Nov. 27 to Dec. 11.

“It is unfortunate this occurred,” Ziriach said in the letter. “Had those dates been included in your original request, I would have also approved those dates.”

Williams, who took over from longtime GOP county election board member Anita DeToy in May, said she wasn’t questioning Oklahoma’s entire election system. Williams said she wanted to verify absentee ballots in person and not via CCTV in the next room. She said discussions with GOP counterparts at other county election boards led her to believe Oklahoma County was alone in using CCTV for that part of the election process.

“Our elections are some of the best in the nation,” Williams said. “I do believe that. Those (voting) machines have been in place for at least 20 years.”

David Glover, the Democratic chairman of the Oklahoma County Election Board, said the county has been using the CCTV system during ballot processing without incident or complaints for several years. Glover was among the witnesses called before the board in the executive session.

A spokeswoman for the state Election Board said Ziriach could not comment on the dismissals because they were personnel matters.

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.

Scott Sapulpa Verdict

A ‘false or malicious’ writing

Tristan Loveless and Michael Duncan
Oklahoma Watch

MUSKOGEE — Nearly three years after one of the worst days of his life, Scott Sapulpa left the Muskogee County District Courthouse late this afternoon vindicated in his claim that The Oklahoman defamed him when one of their reporters misidentified him as the speaker of a racial slur during a high school basketball game broadcast in 2021.

After five and a half hours of deliberation, the jury announced it had reached a partial verdict around 4:45 p.m. when the courthouse was mostly empty and staff had locked the building. Still, the 10 or so observers who filled Judge Jeffrey Payton’s courtroom were greeted by smiles from jurors who announced they had found for Sapulpa on both civil counts: defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

The jury found that Sapulpa had sustained \$5 million in actual damages and found enough evidence to assess punitive damages against Gannett, one of the nation’s largest media companies, which absorbed The Oklahoman in 2019. Jurors are set to return Monday to hash out a number on the punitive damages, which are awarded in an effort to dissuade future actions by the same defendant or others.

“We’re encouraged,” said Michael Barkett, one of Sapulpa’s attorneys. “Ready to come back Monday.”

During Friday’s deliberation, attorneys for both parties meandered about the courthouse hallways, anxiously chatting with one another or the one alternate juror who stayed to hear the verdict.

Earlier in the day, Barkett framed the case as a David and Goliath story — the small-town football coach from Hulbert versus one of the largest newspaper companies in the nation. Barkett asked the jury to award Sapulpa \$20 million.

“This is a case involving a huge, mega media conglomerate company with the power to defame a local man,” Barkett told jurors. “We see the disparity between the power and the powerless.”

Bob Nelon, the lead attorney representing The Oklahoman, had argued that some of the social media backlash Scott Sapulpa faced stemmed from his perceived silence when his broadcast partner went on a racist rant about Norman High School girls basketball players kneeling during the national anthem. Testifying earlier this week, Sapulpa maintained that he confronted Rowan after the incident, but that audio was not captured by the broadcast.

“He can’t disassociate himself from the true fact he was part of a broadcast team who used racist language,” Nelon said.

By reaching its verdict, the jury ultimately decided The Oklahoman published a “false or malicious” writing that subjected Sapulpa to “public hatred, contempt, (or) ridicule,” the statutory definition of libel in Oklahoma.

National scandal at an Oklahoma high school game

In March 2021, less than a year after protests about George Floyd’s murder swept the nation, local broadcast company owner Matt Rowan asked Scott Sapulpa to fill in and help him announce high school basketball tournament games being held at Sapulpa High School. A descendent of Chief Sapulpa, the namesake of the town, Scott Sapulpa testified that he quickly agreed to help Rowan.

On March 11, during Norman High’s game against Midwest City, some members of the NHS team kneeled during the national anthem. During the livestream that Rowan was producing for his

“

He can’t disassociate himself from the true fact he was part of a broadcast team who used racist language.

BOB NELSON, Lead attorney, representing The Oklahoman



▲ FORMER HULBERT, OKLAHOMA, HIGH SCHOOL COACH SCOTT SAPULPA, (second from left) walks with three of his lawyers — Rusty Smith, Cassie Barkett and Stephen McClellan — from the Muskogee County Courthouse after testifying in his libel lawsuit against Gannett Co., Inc., the parent corporation of The Oklahoman. PHOTO MICHAEL DUNCAN



▲ SCOTT SAPULPA, exits the Muskogee County Courthouse with attorneys Rusty Smith, left, and Michael Barkett, right, following testimony in his libel case against The Oklahoman on Tuesday, Jan. 30, 2024. PHOTO MICHAEL DUNCAN

now-defunct company OSPN, he unleashed a rant that ultimately went viral.

“They’re kneeling? Fuck them. I hope Norman gets their ass kicked,” Rowan said.

Sapulpa asked about the kneeling: “Are you serious?”

After clarifying team uniform colors, Rowan continued.

“Fuck them. I hope they lose. Come on Midwest City,” Rowan said. “They’re going to kneel like that? Hell with them. They even saluting the flag? Some of them aren’t. Fucking n*****s.”

The next day, The Oklahoman published its article about the incident around 11 a.m. At 12:37 p.m., sports reporter Cameron Jourdan updated his article to identify Scott Sapulpa as the speaker of the racial slur. Within a matter of minutes, some readers commented that they believed someone else had made the remarks, but Jourdan and The Oklahoman’s editors did not remove his name until 3:05 p.m.

At 5:35 p.m., the article was updated to identify Rowan, who released a statement claiming that blood sugar issues had prompted his outburst.

‘The Oklahoman seems to think it was you’

In testimony Tuesday, Sapulpa said the hot mic incident happened when there was some confusion about whether he had turned his microphone off.

An excerpt of Sapulpa’s video-recorded deposition testimony was played to the jury, in which Sapulpa said he turned to Rowan after his rant and admonished him.

“Dude, what the hell,” Sapulpa claimed he asked Rowan. “And he looked and he said something — not word for word — ‘F-ing them.’ I told him, ‘You shit.’ It was wrong what he did.”

Sapulpa testified that, after the game, he thought the exchange might not have been broadcast, but the next morning he saw a post of it on Twitter. At that time, Rowan began texting him. Phone records entered as evidence also showed several phone calls Rowan had made to Sapulpa.

Eight minutes after The Oklahoman updated its online story falsely naming Sapulpa, a barrage of hate-filled text messages began to reach Sapulpa’s phone. With Sapulpa on the witness stand Tuesday, some text messages and tweets were read aloud and displayed for the jury:

- “Racist fucker”
- “Racist trash. Pls kill yourself.”
- “You a fucking loser.”
- “You racist piece of shit fuck you I hope your kids get als.”
- “Your parents raised a bitch.”

One text referenced Sapulpa’s job at Hulbert Public Schools: “You need to be fired and never accepted into any job again.”

Sapulpa replied: “It wasn’t me. I wasn’t the only one there.”

“Well, the Oklahoman seems to think it was you,” the texter responded. “Good enough for me you dumb ass country bumpkin.”

After the texts continued — more than 70 of which were introduced as evidence during the trial — Sapulpa said he then texted Rowan, “Dude, u need to fix this.”

“I will,” Rowan replied, according to another text message introduced at the trial.

Sapulpa continued.

“The news is throwing my name ‘round like it was me. They’re sending messages. Dude I’m getting hate mail messages like crazy. Now they’re talking about my kids,” Sapulpa texted Rowan.

“Call me,” Rowan texted back. Sapulpa testified that he didn’t respond and has not talked with Rowan since.

“I don’t want anything to do with him,” Sapulpa testified. “I think he wanted someone else to go down with him.”

‘I didn’t trust the media at all’

Sapulpa broke into tears when testifying Tuesday about one particular social media post from a former high school player he had coached, who said he was disappointed in his former mentor.

In the hours after The Oklahoman misidentified him, Sapulpa said some Twitter posts publicized his phone number and email, leading to his doxing — the revealing on social media of an individual’s private information in order to generate and direct public wrath toward them.

Sapulpa said that if The Oklahoman’s Cameron Jourdan texted him to ask whether he had been the announcer making the racist comments, he would have responded. But he said he never received any text from Jourdan. Then, after the story went viral, Sapulpa declined to reply to media attempts to contact him.

“I didn’t trust the media at all at that point,” Sapulpa testified. “I assumed they read it, the

Cont. A7

State Broadband

Expanding access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet services in Oklahoma

Michael McNutt
NonDoc

Work should start later this year on bringing high-speed internet service to about 55,000 unserved or underserved homes or businesses in 57 Oklahoma counties as a result of the Oklahoma Broadband Governing Board today awarding 142 projects.

“This is going to do so much to help rural Oklahoma economically,” board Chairman Jim Meek said. “It’s going to improve health care for a lot of individuals and families that are somewhat isolated. (...) This was as transparent a process as we could possibly make it. This is about serving the unserved and the underserved. That was our primary focus, and most of those were located out in the very rural areas.”

The projects will be financed mostly by \$374 million of federal American Rescue Plan grant money allocated to the board by the Oklahoma Legislature. The 31 internet service providers

selected today — 29 of which are Oklahoma companies — are required to pay for a share of their project costs and complete an agreement with the OBO by the end of next week.

Without the allocation of federal funds, some unserved and underserved areas of the state likely would never get high-speed internet service, Meek said.

“It just costs more in sparser-populated areas to take broadband to them, whether it’s fixed or cable,” he said.

The ISPs’ local shares for the projects will total more than \$90 million, which will bring the total investment to nearly \$500 million, said Mike Sanders, executive director of the Oklahoma Broadband Office.

Sanders called the board’s action historic. “Two-thirds of the state will have a project,” he said.

Most of the projects were awarded in rural areas of the state. Cox and AT&T each were awarded several projects, but smaller companies also won bids. About 80 percent of the projects are fiber-based and the remaining 20 percent are fixed wireless.

“When you look at the number of telephone companies, look at the number of rural electric companies, family-owned companies, moms and pops, investor-owned wireless companies, it’s a great mixture of diverse companies,” Sanders said.

Ten companies that submitted bids were not awarded a project, he said. They either realized it wasn’t feasible for them to continue with the project or they didn’t submit the proper information in their applications.

Staff assigned each company a number so the names were not known during the review process, Sanders said.

“We looked at those areas that were unserved and underserved,” he said. “It was way after the fact before we even know what companies won or were awarded those areas.”

Internet ARPA projects must be completed by October 2026

Once all necessary agreements are completed, construction can begin on the projects. Work must be completed before the end of 2026,

Sanders said. If an approved provider chooses to withdraw participation, funding will move to the next project on the list until available funding is obligated. Board members must approve any changes.

“This entire program has a little less than two years to not only get shovels in the ground and the fiber laid or the towers built, but it has to be operational by early October of 2026,” he said. “We do know that there will be some companies that will get their particular projects done sooner than that.”

After launching a new process for ISPs to seek \$374 million in ARPA funding for expanding access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet service in Oklahoma, the OBO received 326 applications by the Oct. 9 deadline to apply. The applications totaled about \$5.1 billion, far surpassing the amount available for this round of projects.

Previously, 133 ISPs filed applications totaling about \$4 billion of ARPA funds. They were selected from a batch of proposals submitted through the state of Oklahoma’s

Cont. A10

Scott Sapulpa Verdict

Job loss, media distrust *and racial slurs*

From A6
article The Oklahoman put out and wanted a comment.”

Lost job, business and professional associations

Sapulpa said he believes he lost his job at Hulbert Public Schools because of the story. He said he quit his duties as head football coach after a disappointing season in the fall of 2020, but he expected to be retained as a teacher at his alma mater the next year.

After The Oklahoman’s story, the Hulbert Superintendent Jolyn Choate issued a statement that one of the two announcers was an employee, without identifying Sapulpa by name, and announced he’d been placed on administrative leave.

“While it has been reported incorrectly that our employee was the announcer who said racist language, our employee should have stood up for the students and contested the racist language from the other announcer and the hate and intolerance it represents,” Choate wrote.

Sapulpa testified the newspaper story also caused him to lose his company, Pullman 360, a side business he had established in 2018 using funds from his teacher’s retirement account to build and sell workout sleds to football teams, including the University of Oklahoma.

He said he was also asked by USA Football, a program which operates youth football camps around the country, to remove any social media mention that Sapulpa had coached with them.

Six months after the story, Sapulpa was hired by Pawhuska Public Schools as an after-school coordinator and was recently named girls softball coach. Pawhuska coach Matt Hennessey testified Sapulpa had previously been his assistant football coach before taking the job at Hulbert.

After the news story when Sapulpa was without a job, the Pawhuska principal hired him to be the after-school coordinator, but they could not have him serve in a higher profile position like a coach, Hennessey testified.

‘Scott’s not the same guy’

Hennessey testified the March 2021 incident changed Sapulpa from an outgoing and happy man to one who rarely leaves his house.

“Even to this day, Scott’s not the same guy. He doesn’t want to be in public much. That’s exactly the opposite of who he was,” Hennessey said.

Other coaches and school athletic officials, including Broken Arrow associate athletic director Alton Lusk, told jurors it would be difficult to hire Sapulpa because it would create too much controversy, even though they knew Sapulpa had been falsely accused.

“There would be some backlash. There would be people who know Scott and know he didn’t say that, but on the other hand there would be some people who don’t know. So, for me, I wouldn’t recommend him (for hire), personally,” Lusk said. “Until this is all resolved and his name cleared up, I wouldn’t hire Scott Sapulpa. This will be a red flag for him, probably for a long time.”

One witness brought a chuckle from jurors on Monday. Assistant



FORMER HULBERT FOOTBALL COACH SCOTT SAPULPA is suing The Oklahoman in a defamation trial that started Monday, Jan. 22, 2024, in the Muskogee County Courthouse. PHOTO MICHAEL DUNCAN

Muskogee High School football coach Anthony McNac, who previously coached there with Sapulpa, testified he knew The Oklahoman had identified the wrong man when he heard the voice on the video clip spread on social media because it sounded nothing like Sapulpa’s.

“Scott Sapulpa talks with a twang. He sounds like Boomhauer,” McNac said, referring to the King of the Hill animated television series character Jeff Boomhauer.

‘That whole day is pretty much a blur’

Wednesday morning picked up with the rest of Sapulpa’s testimony. Bob Nelon, the attorney for The Oklahoman, questioned Sapulpa on the details of when he found out the paper had incorrectly named him as the speaker of a racial slur spoken on a hot mic.

“I don’t know,” Sapulpa said. “That whole day is pretty much a blur to me.”

Sapulpa testified he was so traumatized by the event he fled to a remote cabin near Hulbert and convinced his ex-wife to bring him a gun alongside food and clothing.

Nelon then moved on to questioning Sapulpa on why he didn’t reach out to any media outlets to clear his name. The jury was shown text messages from multiple news reporters to which Sapulpa never responded.

Sapulpa defended his decision, citing his distrust of the media after being falsely identified.

He also testified that he understood Hulbert Public Schools’ decision to not rehire him.

“Kids are No. 1. Take care of kids first,” Sapulpa said. “They didn’t have a choice.”

During the cross examination, Sapulpa was also asked about his

mental state after the incident.

“I wasn’t worried about me until you guys put my name out,” Sapulpa said.

When asked if he felt any guilt for being an announcer alongside Matt Rowan, Sapulpa maintained he did not.

“I felt sorry for the kids, that’s it,” Sapulpa said.

Defense calls psychology expert, Hulbert superintendent

James “Jim” Scott, a University of Oklahoma professor specializing in neuropsychology, was the defense’s first witness. He testified that he had reviewed Sapulpa’s psychological tests and that his scores were “below average,” indicating that he did not have depression or anxiety.

However, on cross examination, Scott admitted to never having met Sapulpa before that day, that the tests were administered by another doctor, and that he believed being falsely identified as a racist would be stressful.

Sapulpa’s attorneys claimed he underreported his symptoms in his responses on the psychological tests.

Next, the defense called Choate, the Superintendent of Hulbert Public Schools and Sapulpa’s former boss. She testified that the school district was inundated with messages after the news broke, but that the school district immediately realized the speaker of the slurs was not Sapulpa after hearing the voice.

“That’s not Scott,” Choate said was her first reaction to hearing the audio.

But after calls started coming into the district, she had the district’s Facebook page shut down and issued a public statement that also went out as a robocall to parents explaining the situation and announcing Sapulpa

was on administrative leave.

When asked why his contract was not renewed, Choate said “because we knew he wasn’t going to be head football coach at the middle school or high school.” She said she needed to hire a new head football coach since Sapulpa had resigned his coaching position at the end of the previous season.

When directly asked on cross examination what she had said to Sapulpa after he described the incident to her, she said, “you did nothing.”

She also indicated the district would not consider rehiring Sapulpa. “It doesn’t look good,” she said.

‘I can’t think of a news agency that did not try to contact me’

The final witness Wednesday was Matt Rowan, the actual speaker of the slur. Rowan now lives in Fort Gibson, is self employed and owns a locksmith company. He owned OSPN between 2019 and 2021, the streaming service focused on football and basketball which aired the broadcast.

Rowan testified he was “good friends” with Sapulpa for “probably 15 years or better” and that he’d filled in on broadcasts for him before. He later noted he had not spoken to Sapulpa since the day after the incident.

When asked his reaction to the incident, Rowan bluntly stated, “you heard my reaction,” before later clarifying that “poor choice of words is what caused that.”

Rowan testified that “it deeply offended me they’d kneel during the national anthem” and that he immediately knew the audio had likely been picked up by a microphone because he was also working production. But he also said he was not entirely sure until the

OSSAA called him the next day.

“I got 3,000 or better phone calls that day,” Rowan recalled. “I can’t think of a news agency that did not try to contact me.”

Rowan also told a very different story about his friendship with Sapulpa.

“We were best friends, we talked about everything,” Rowan testified.

Rowan also said “I took full responsibility for what was said,” before criticizing the press release he put out after the event, which he claimed was written by his attorney. When asked her name, Rowan stated he only remembered her office was in Muskogee.

He also testified that he told Jourdan that afternoon, after Sapulpa was falsely identified, “absolutely not. I know for a fact Scott Sapulpa did not say that” while also admitting he did not tell Jourdan he was the one to say the slur.

Sapulpa sought \$20 million dollars in damages

Closing arguments kicked off Friday morning with Barkett.

He emphasized the lack of care The Oklahoman exercised when reporting the story.

“They wanted to be first, they wanted to be on the front page,” Barkett said, “Scott was not a person to them he was a name.”

Barkett encouraged the jury to hold Gannett and The Oklahoman accountable and requested the jury award Sapulpa \$20 million in damages.

“You, the jury, have greater power than Gannett to render justice in this case.”

Defense attorney Bob Nelon downplayed the importance of the case, which Barkett had called the “most important case in Oklahoma.”

“Let’s keep it in perspective,” Nelon said. “The plaintiff’s case for damages rests entirely on speculation.”

He also argued that Gannett’s reporters acted reasonably and suggested the naming of Sapulpa was a “temporary error.”

“(The) temporary error at 12:37 was not the result of professional negligence,” Nelon emphasized.

During his brief rebuttal, Barkett argued “they’re trying to make you blame, Scott” and mocked the idea that Sapulpa received the hate messages coincidentally.

“He went into hiding. They have the audacity to say it was coincidental he was getting hate texts,” Barkett said, “What else are they from?”

At the end of his arguments, Barkett cried as he recounted his high school coach who he claimed “gave me confidence in myself” and changed his life.

“What a tragedy they’ve done to take this man away from what he loves and the kids he could have been a mentor to,” Barkett said.

Tristan Loveless is a NonDoc Media reporter covering legal matters and other civic issues in the Tulsa area. A citizen of the Cherokee Nation who grew up in Turley and Skiatook, he graduated from the University of Tulsa College of Law in 2023. Before that, he taught for the Tulsa Debate League in Tulsa Public Schools.

Michael Duncan is an Oklahoma City lawyer and Norman resident who was a newspaper reporter three decades ago when they still used ink. He photographs and writes about people, places and things.

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THE OKLAHOMA CAPITOL, in Oklahoma City is shown in this evening photo on Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2020. PHOTO PAUL MONIES/OKLAHOMA WATCH



Pensions, Prescriptions and Pot

Tax cuts, education policy and what to do with budget surpluses will dominate much of the upcoming legislative session in Oklahoma, but other subjects have attracted the attention of House and Senate members.

Paul Monies
Oklahoma Watch

Headline-grabbing proposals such as prohibiting so-called furry costumes in public schools and the licensing and drug testing of journalists have little chance of passage. But scores of other bills, if passed, could mean big changes for Oklahomans in everything from land sales and medical marijuana to prescription drugs and state pension system investments.

House members filed more than 1,200 bills by last week’s filing deadline. Senators added more than 840 bills. Just a fraction of those 2,000 proposals—less than 20% by recent tallies—will make it out of both chambers and to the governor’s desk to be signed into law. Hundreds of bills that stalled out in the 2023 regular session remain available for consideration, too.

Medical marijuana continues to draw legislative scrutiny, both on the law enforcement side and for patient safety. Senate Bill 1980, by Sen. Lonnie Paxton, R-Tuttle, would bring the unregulated market for hemp-derived cannabinoids, known as delta-8 and delta-10, under the purview of the Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority. Delta-8 is sold in Oklahoma at non-dispensaries but looks very similar to many retail medical marijuana products. Public health officials have been alarmed at the rapid rise of the delta-8 market, as calls to poison control hotlines involving the products have spiked in recent years.

Meanwhile, lawmakers continue to propose limits on delta-9 THC, the intoxicating chemical in medical marijuana. SB 1753, by Sen. Jessica Garvin, R-Duncan, would limit the THC content of edibles. Another Garvin bill, SB 1748, would tighten up requirements for minors to get a medical marijuana patient license. Both are updates from bills that stalled in the 2023 session.

Illicit marijuana growing operations and law enforcement concerns with foreign criminal cartels buying up cheap land for cultivation led to several proposals regulating land purchases by non-citizens and agents of foreign governments. House Bill 3125, by Rep. Danny Williams, R-Seminole, would

prohibit foreign ownership of agricultural land and establish an Office of Agricultural Intelligence to “collect and analyze information concerning the unlawful sale or possession of agricultural land by prohibited foreign parties or prohibited foreign-party-controlled business entity.” Rep. Neil Hays, R-Checotah, has a similar measure in HB 3077.

Some bills clarify legislation on property sales by legal residents who aren’t U.S. citizens. SB 1705 by Sen. Brent Howard, R-Altus, would clear up the affidavit process needed for real estate transactions under SB 212 from the 2023 session.

Several bills either contract or expand the Oklahoma Energy Discrimination Elimination Act, a 2022 law that gave the state treasurer powers to restrict contracts and investments with banking and financial institutions perceived to be hostile to the oil and gas industry. The implementation of that law led to confusion and bureaucratic sparring, but some lawmakers want to expand it and give the treasurer veto power over state pension funds that have taken an exemption.

HB 3541 by Rep. Mark Lepak, R-Claremore, would expand the law to include financial company policies hostile to timber, mining and agriculture interests. It would also allow the state treasurer to unilaterally override any exemption taken by a pension system. HB 3222 by Rep. Kevin West, R-Moore, would add firearms companies to the anti-discrimination status for financial investments and limit the ability of pension funds to take an exemption.

SB 1536, by Sen. Dave Rader, R-Tulsa, would let the attorney general mediate disputes over the law’s implementation if a pension system and the treasurer disagreed on the need for a fiduciary duty exemption to the law. That came out of a legislative interim study in the fall.

Other lawmakers want to limit the law’s scope. SB 1510, by Sen. Chuck Hall, R-Perry, would remove local governments from the law. That stemmed from concerns that cities and counties doing business with banks on the restricted list would have less flexibility. Among the cities with concerns was Stillwater, which saw an infrastructure loan from Bank of America get caught up in the confusion last year.

Several bills would make changes to

the state’s sprawling superagency, the Office of Management and Enterprise Services. A recent report by the Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency made recommendations after studying the agency’s operations. It handles information technology, purchasing, budgeting, employee management and state office buildings and fleet vehicles.

SB 1430, by Hall, would break out OMES’ Central Purchasing division into a separate agency and make the state purchasing director an appointee of the governor, with confirmation by the Senate. Another bill by Hall, SB 1416, would allow state agencies to contract for information technology services outside of OMES.

Prescription drug availability at independent pharmacists could be boosted by several bills. The rise of pharmacy benefit managers, owned by large retail drugstore chains, has caused problems for many Oklahomans as they fill prescriptions. Pharmacy benefit managers use their market power to force health insurance companies to have their customers fill prescriptions either by mail only or at the retail chains they also own. That limits prescription drug availability, especially in rural areas.

Lawmakers responded by giving the attorney general more enforcement powers. SB 1628, by Howard, would prohibit pharmacy benefit managers from discriminating against a healthcare provider if it participates in a federal drug rebate program called 340B.

In the House, HB 3379 by Rep. Marcus McEntire, R-Duncan, creates the Oklahoma Health Care Safety Net and Affordable Prescription Accessibility Act. It would prohibit discriminatory pricing practices of pharmacy benefit managers. The federal Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals last year struck down a 2019 Oklahoma law regulating pharmacy benefit managers. Its ruling is in conflict with another federal appellate court, and the issue could end up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Other bills to watch:

HB 3959, by Rep. Jon Echols, R-Oklahoma City
It would create the Professional Sports Arena Act, allowing income tax revenue from visiting NBA teams to be captured and put

into a fund for a new sports arena. Oklahoma City voters in December extended a temporary, one-cent sales tax to fund a new arena for the NBA’s Thunder that could cost more than \$1 billion.

SB 1267 by Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City
It would add a paid family leave requirement to new recipients of the state’s Quality Jobs incentive program.

SB 1575 by Kirt
It would extend the minimum time to appear in court for eviction proceedings to 10 business days, up from 5 calendar days.

SB 1218 by Sen. David Bullard, R-Durant
It would prohibit licensed dealers from denying anyone over 18 from buying a firearm, unless they are otherwise prohibited under state law.

SB 1254 by Garvin
This proposal would increase the penalties from bringing a gun onto school property to a felony, up from a misdemeanor, and maximum fines of \$2,500, up from \$250.

SB 1476 by Sen. Jo Anna Dossett, D-Tulsa
It would offer a sales tax exemption for firearm safety devices like gun safes, cases, lock boxes and trigger locks.

HB 2968 by Rep. Annie Menz, D-Norman
It would stop Service Oklahoma from collecting unpaid tolls from the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority in order to renew a vehicle registration.

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

Teacher Pay Raises

Oklahoma Teacher Shortage Continues

John Neal
The Oklahoma Eagle

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters is doubling down on a decision to deny Oklahoma teachers’ pay raises.

Walters presented the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) proposed budget for 2024-25 to the powerful House Appropriation and Budget Education subcommittee on Jan. 10 at the Oklahoma State Capitol building. The budget included no pay raises for teachers.

After Walters explained his budget strategy to the panel, he faced numerous questions, including some tough questions from Tulsa’s two representatives on the panel.

The scenario recalled Walters first meeting of the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) in January 2023. In that session that was held soon after he took over as state superintendent, he led board members to remove a teacher pay increase from the department’s proposed budget. Oklahoma ranked near the bottom among states in teacher pay and faced a critical teacher shortage. Those circumstances have changed little in the past year.

The proposed OSDE budget will be decided in the new legislative session. Several lawmakers have already introduced separate bills to increase teacher pay and change Walter’s budget proposal.

In the session last month, the House subcommittee members asked about teacher shortages and the record number of emergency certifications issued for persons not otherwise qualified to teach. Walters responded, “We are not there yet.” But he continued to defend a proposed budget that cuts \$47 million in education spending over the previous year.

St. Rep. Meloyde Blancett (D-78) asked Walters why he had targeted Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) for harsh criticism. Rep. John Waldron (D-77) peppered Walters with questions about his factual assertions during the budget hearing. Waldron repeatedly requested more information from the Superintendent concerning proposed department activities and spending.

Proposed decrease in education spending

Despite Superintendent Walters and the OSBE recommendation for no teacher across-the-board pay increase in January 2023, the state bumped teacher annual salaries from \$3,000 to \$6,000 based on job experience. The Oklahoma Eagle staff performed an analysis of Oklahoma teacher pay based on various published teacher salary surveys. The 2023 increase brings Oklahoma into a more competitive position in the state’s region but leaves teacher salaries at least \$10,000 below the national average teacher pay.

The following chart shows teacher related positions starting salaries based on entry level

qualifications.

Tulsa Public Schools Starting Salaries for Teachers

The salaries noted represent compensation offered to teachers at Step 0 of the salary scale.

Position	Salaries
Intern	\$35,000
Emergency Certified	\$41,000
Bachelor’s Degree	\$43,000
National Board Certified	\$44,158

Tulsa Public Schools
Source, Tulsa Public Schools

While the OSDE budget for FY 2024-25 recommended by Walters to the Oklahoma legislature proposes no increase in teacher salaries, it includes the opportunity for additional pay based on extra work or performance incentives.

The following is a regional comparison of teacher starting salaries based on a bachelor’s degree and no emergency certification exception for FY 2023-24:

Regional Comparison of Teacher Starting Salaries

Teacher starting salaries based on a bachelor’s degree and no emergency certification exception for FY 2023-24

State	Starting Salary
Oklahoma	\$39,601
Tulsa Public Schools	\$43,000
Kansas City, KS	\$46,650
Little Rock, AR	\$50,000
Dallas ISD, TX	\$61,000

Tulsa Public Schools
Source, Tulsa Public Schools

The OSBE budget recommendation includes no material changes to the State Aid Formula, which channels state funds to school districts. Thus, school districts will have no additional discretionary spending from the state to hire additional teachers or pay them more.

State direct aid to schools represents over 75 % of the board approved OSDE budget for 2024-25. Walters told the subcommittee that “allocation” of the Literacy Pilot and School Resource Officer programs are being spread over several years. The State Superintendent said this spreading of funds gave the department the “budget cuts” necessary to net the department a reduction of \$47 million over the previous year.

At the same September 2023 meeting approving the proposed budget, the OSBE approved another round of “emergency” teacher certifications, now being issued in record numbers. The OSBE issues these certifications to teachers who lack the training and qualifications to teach their assigned subject and grade level.

By the end of December 2023, the board has approved the issuance of 4,776 such emergency certifications to fill in for teacher shortages. This number is up from less than 200 statewide a decade ago. It is a historic high and represents more than 10% of all public school teacher positions. Tulsa Public Schools had approximately 300 issued during the current period.

“Back to Basics”

State Superintendent Walters is leading the education department in a decidedly different direction, particularly regarding funding activities to address student test scores. His approach includes adopting new rules tying academic achievement to accreditation. The budget also sets aside funds under the direct control of the OSDE to assist select school districts or targeted groups within a district.

Walters dubbed the program “Back to Basics” in presentations to the OSBE and subsequently to the House education subcommittee. He has carved out \$66.55 million in the OSDE budget for the program. The program’s major components are student tutoring, teacher training, performance incentives, and signing bonuses for teacher recruitment.

The FY 2024-25 effort involves continuing and expanding some initiatives that began in the current year, which used Tulsa Public Schools as a test case and example. Various observers, including some State Board members, cautioned against unreasonable expectations from the programs for Tulsa Public Schools. Walters and the OSBE regularly faced criticism from the public at their monthly meetings, who often alleged the board was targeting TPS and being too harsh.

Some of this criticism was also made by local and state elected officials. However, new TPS Superintendent Ebony Johnson has repeatedly thanked Walters for OSDE help. Johnson said her gratitude extended beyond technical assistance from education department professional staff to include strong financial support for TPS tutoring

programs.
Questions linger

Superintendent Walters set the tone for the meeting with House legislators by emphasizing the uphill battle Oklahoma schools face. In particular, Walters cited national student test scores that place Oklahoma near the bottom among the 50 states.

The superintendent also briefed legislators on a recently released Stanford University study that named Oklahoma as the greatest loser from COVID-19 related student learning losses. According to Eric Hanusher’s study, The Economic Cost of the Pandemic, Oklahoma is projected to experience the highest per person economic loss in the nation. The total economic loss is expected to be “\$200 billion for the state in the 21st century,” Walters told the House subcommittee.

In response, Rep. Chad Caldwell (R-40) expressed skepticism that the proposed \$15 million tutoring program could overcome these forecasted learning losses.

Caldwell asked Walters, “Is this your answer to reverse those trends?” Walters replied, “Yes sir!”

Waldron, one of the state representatives whose district includes a segment of north Tulsa, also questioned the math behind the cost-benefit calculation of the tutoring program. The Back to Basics program of slightly over \$60 million is less than two percent of the total budget scheduled for the department in 2024-25.

Signing Bonuses

Most of the criticism of the OSDE budget centered around the signing bonus program aimed at teacher recruitment. The program pays teachers between \$15,000 to \$50,000 to return or come to Oklahoma to teach in rural or high poverty districts in 2023-24.

Walters’ budget will spend \$10 million for the program next year after adding 522 teachers this year. But the program successfully recruited only 67 teachers from out of state. Those meager results drew some backlash from critics of the program.

Subcommittee Chair Rep. Mark McBride (R-53) also questioned the policy provision that paid the teachers all the bonus money up front. The state needs to “claw back” the money if the five-year teaching commitment is unkept. McBride told Walters he would introduce legislation spreading the bonus payout over several years.

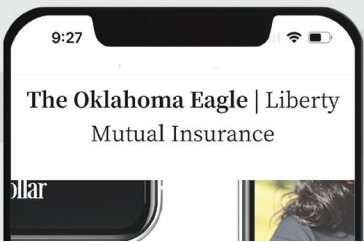
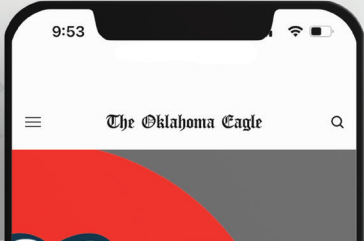
Since the legislative meeting, multiple media outlets have reported there are serious flaws in the program’s administration. At least nine teachers are being asked to return the money immediately. Walters has claimed applications were falsified while several legislators lay the blame on the state agency.

JOHN NEAL, the author, is a former resident of Sand Springs. He is well versed in urban renewal, its uses and abuse, as a former city manager in Oklahoma and departmental consultant for the city of El Paso, Texas. In 2008, he was that city’s planning director when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.

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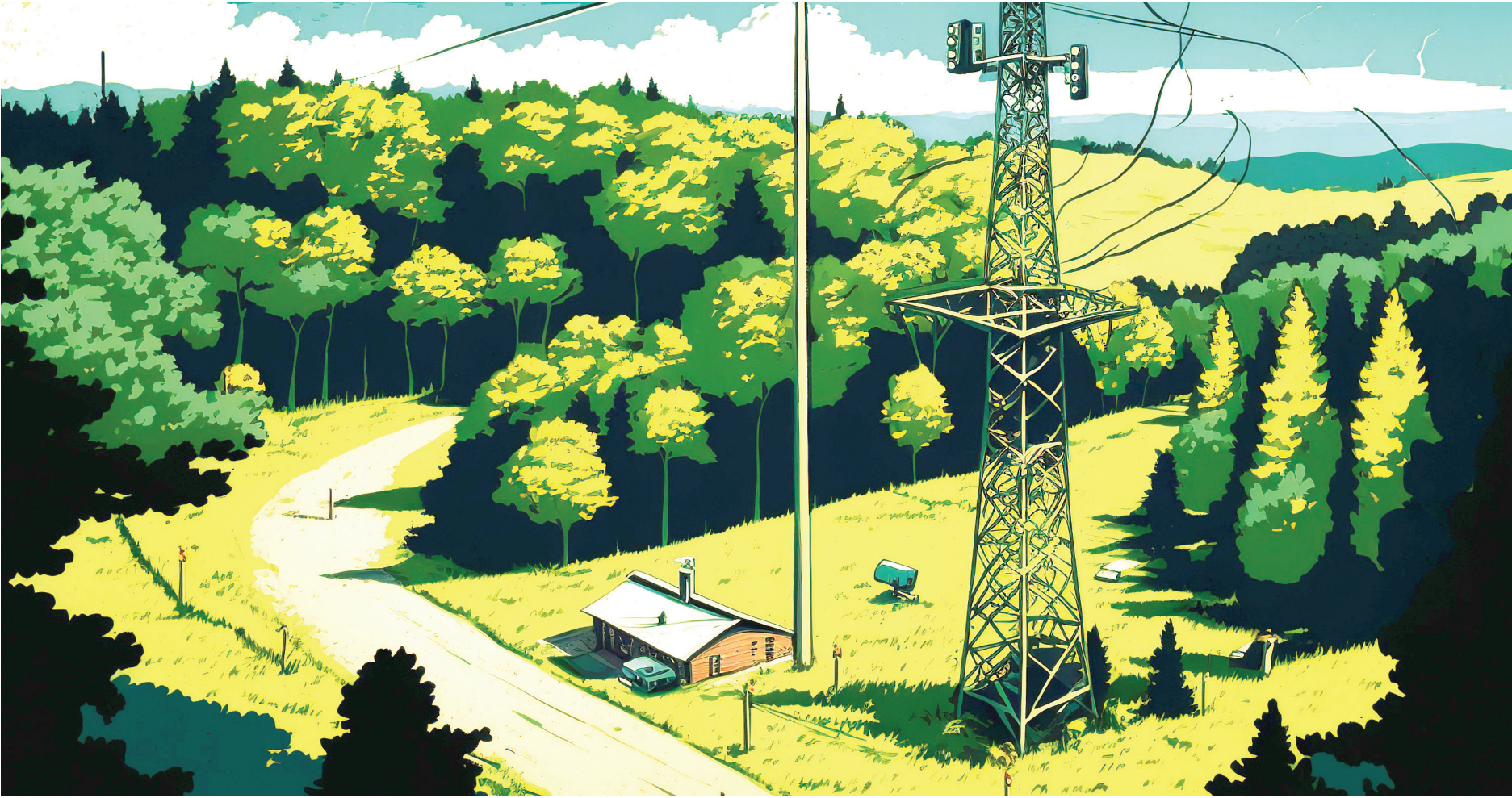


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

State Broadband

More grant opportunities will follow

From A6

ARPA portal in 2021, before the Broadband Office was formed, and 2022.

The OBO discarded its original proposals in August after hearing complaints from ISPs and concerns from its governing board members. Sanders said a review of the previously proposed projects and supplemental inquiries showed that some of the state’s most challenging geographical areas would not be serviced under the OBO’s original criteria.

The OBO staff reviewed the latest proposals last fall and sent their recommendations to a subcommittee of the governing board. Applicants were scored on a variety of factors, including workforce standards that provided points if a project

is governed by “a project labor agreement” and “a community benefits agreement that offers wages at or above the prevailing rate.” Points were also provided if a project applicant proposed high safety standards and committed to hiring “local workers” and “workers from historically underserved communities.”

OBO staff last month reviewed the projects in an effort to avoid awarding grant funds to homes and businesses with existing or planned service. Successfully contested locations were removed from funding consideration, and revised proposals were submitted.

Before the grant review subcommittee chairman, Dwight Hughes, presented the 142 applicants to the board for approval Thursday, board Chairman Jim Meek and

member Fob Jones left the room because they said they had a potential conflict of interest. Board Vice Chairwoman Amanda Mullins noted that the board still had a quorum and then read each of the applicants, the counties and the number of unserved or underserved people they would serve.

All of the projects were approved 6-0 unanimously after individual roll-call votes. The voting process took about two hours.

This is the first grant program administered by the OBO. Others will follow, including \$159 million from the ARPA Capital Projects Fund and \$797.4 million in Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) funds. The BEAD money is expected to be awarded in spring or summer of 2025.

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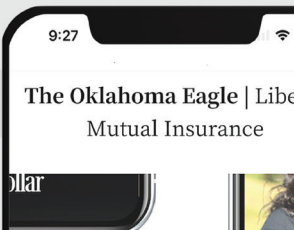
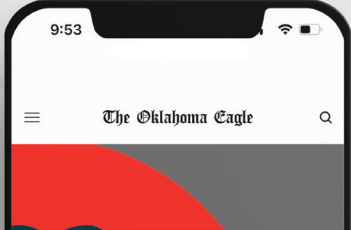
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To amplify our core value of equity, through journalism and editorial” is the cornerstone of our continued success.



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- Honor
- Fair-mindedness
- Truth

The Oklahoma Eagle

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

Minister RJ Smith

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

CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

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

Pastor Ruthie I. Howard



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

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Pastors Wesley & Alfie Gray would like to invite you to come and experience the Word of God in action this Sunday! God has a word for you, He Guarantee's it! You'll be glad you did!!!

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Elder Julius W. Bland
Sr., Pastor
918-810-3882

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3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391

Sunday School
9:30 a.m.

Sunday Morning
Worship 11 a.m.

Bible Study
Wednesday
7 p.m.



Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr.
Pastor

Gethsemane Baptist Church

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

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School
9:00 a.m.

Church Services
11:00 a.m.

Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

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

Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons

Sunday Worship: 1pm
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p

"The Righteous Are As Bold
As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

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

Pastor Rick Bruner

Sabbath School (Saturday)

9:30-10:45 a.m.

Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.

Choir Rehearsal

Wednesday 6:00 p.m.

"The Seventh Day Is Still
God's Sabbath"

Northside Christ Gospel Church

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

Sunday School -
10 am

Sunday Morning
Worship - 10:45

Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm

Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm

Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm

Wednesday worship - 8pm

Rev. John W. Anderson

VERNON AME CHURCH

307-311 N. Greenwood Ave.

P: 918-587-1428

F: 918-587-0642

vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

Sunday
Church School
8:30 am

Worship Service
10:00 am

Wednesday
Bible Study
6:00 pm



Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH NORTH TULSA

THE CHURCH WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS US



Pastor Anthony L. & Mrs. Kelly Scott

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Morning Worship - 11:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer Meeting - 6:30 p.m.
Bible Study - Noon & 7:00 p.m.

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Rev. David Wiggs
Senior Minister

Sunday Worship
8:30 and 11:00 a.m.

Sunday School
9:40 a.m.

Sunday TV
Worship
11:00 a.m.

KTUL Channel 8



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9:45 a.m.

Sunday Morning Worship
11:00 a.m.

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by faith"

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2247 N. Peoria
Tulsa, Okla. 74106
(918) 425-1071

Warren Blakney, Minister

Sunday Bible School.....9:00 a.m.

Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.

Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.

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Pettie Chapel CME



19364 S. S. Mingo Road.
Bixby, 74008
Phone: (918) 366-8870

Rev. Robert Givens

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.

Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

Church In Power

732 E. 31st North
Tulsa, OK 74106 - (918) 835-1525

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Wednesday Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.

Church Ministries:

Children's Church, CIP Praise Dancers, and CIP Praise Tem.

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Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

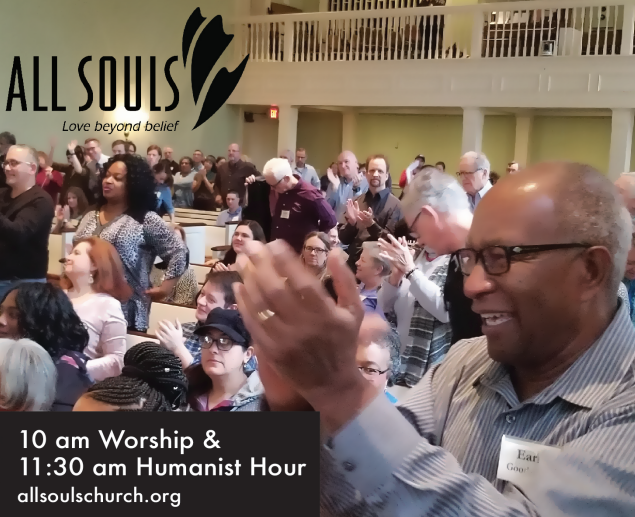
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419 N Elgin Tulsa, Oklahoma

Office:

918-584-0510

Fax:

918-584-1958

Prayer Line:

918-584-PRAY

Sunday School

9:30 a.m.

Morning

Worship 10:45

Wednesday

Bible Study

Noon and 7:00



In The Spirit Christian Church

"Come And Experience The Spirit"

1020 South Garnett
Tulsa, Okla., 74128
Phone: (918) 836-6823
Fax: (918) 836-6833

Eclectic Praise, Extraordinary
Worship, And Spirited Preaching.

Wednesday Services

10:00 a.m. Spirit Seniors

5:30 p.m. Support Groups

6:30 p.m. Community Dinner

7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Sunday Worship

Church School

9:45 a.m.

Worship

11:00 a.m.

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



Rev. Sharyn
Cosby-Willis,

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THE TOLL A ‘1,000-YEAR STORM’
TAKES ON A BLACK FAMILY A17

5 HBCUs Leading The Charge In Creating Black Excellence



NAM QUI BUS EST, ipsam fugit re volupta tureheniet, qui non re doluptaturem re laborae dolesendae intiam. PHOTO ET LABORIS

HBCU

They’ve shaped generations of Black professionals. Now HBCUs are working to educate students K-12, particularly in STEM fields.

HBCU Contributions

Aziah Siid
Word In Black

What do Martin Luther King Jr., Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and Vice President Kamala Harris have in common? They’re all graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The schools saw a surge in applications from high school seniors after the murder of George Floyd. And along with increasingly being seen by Black high school students and families as havens of safety — both physically and culturally — HBCUs produce nearly 13% of all Black graduates, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics. I’m a Morgan State graduate, so I know first-hand these schools aren’t just academic institutions. They’re a testament to the determination of Black Americans to create spaces of excellence, empowerment, and cultural affirmation in the face of racism. And in the nearly 187 years since the first HBCU — the African Institute, later renamed Cheyney University of Pennsylvania — opened its doors, they’ve become incubators of Black intellectuals, activists, and professionals.

A 2022 proclamation from President Biden for National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week pointed out their incredible contributions to society: “HBCUs have produced 40 percent of all Black engineers and 50 percent of all Black lawyers in America. Seventy percent of Black doctors in our country attended an HBCU, and 80 percent of Black judges are alumni of these schools.” The institutions also play a prominent role in maintaining the Black teacher pipeline. They produce 50% of Black teachers, thus boosting the number of Black men entering classrooms and introducing students to the love of learning. So, this Black History Month, let’s look at the contributions five HBCUs have made, and how their current impact on K-12 education makes a difference.

1. Howard Univesity

Listen, when the school is the alma mater of Carter G. Woodson, the creator of Black History Month, you know it has to be No. 1 on the list. Founded 150 years ago by Army General Oliver Otis Howard, Howard University has also long been a pioneer in educating Black women at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our first black vice president, Kamala Harris,

Cont. A14

Promoting Peace

Promoting Peace: Street Corner Resources Fights Violence

The ethos of peace powers Street Corner Resources, an anti-violence nonprofit organization based in central Harlem.

Shannon Chaffers
Word In Black

“Peace and blessings” is a common greeting used by both staff and passersby, the message “I Am Peace” is emblazoned on the staff’s T-shirts, and bold black letters spelling out “Speak Peace Forward” adorn the back wall of one of the organization’s two buildings on 145th Street. The neighboring building hosts the office of Iesha Sekou, founder and CEO of SCR, but Sekou herself is more likely to be found meeting with her staff next door, greeting visitors on the benches outside, or sitting in one of SCR’s vans en route to the myriad events or meetings that make up her hectic

Cont. A14

HBCU

HBCUs, *Serving the greater education community*



◀ ◀ **NAM QUI BUS EST**, ipsam fugit re volupta tureheniet, qui non re doluptatorem re laborae dolesendae intiam.
PHOTO **ET LABORIB**

◀ **NAM QUI BUS EST**, ipsam fugit re volupta tureheniet, qui non re doluptatorem re laborae dolesendae intiam.
PHOTO **ET LABORIB**

From A2

graduated in 1986. Charlotte Ray, the nation’s first Black woman lawyer — and the first woman admitted to the Washington D.C. bar — graduated from Howard’s law school in 1872.

HU continues to make modern-day strides as it competes directly with schools in underserved communities through its dual enrollment courses.

2. Spelman College

Voted as the #1 HBCU in the country for 17 consecutive years by U.S News & World Report, Spelman College has earned its distinction for more reasons than one. Founded in 1881 as Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, the all-women’s campus has been a beacon of education and hope for Black women nationwide. Spelman College was home to visionaries like Martin Luther King Jr’s daughter, peace advocate and CEO of the King Center, Dr Bernice King, politician and activist Stacey Abrams, and the legendary novelist Alice Walker. Walker’s Pulitzer Prize novel, “The Color Purple,” is one of the most frequently banned books in the United States and continues to serve as a staple in Black history and culture.

Spelman continues to serve the greater Black education community through partnerships

like their initiative with the National Education Equity Lab, a nonprofit that works to boost economic and social mobility for high school students. The program provides free college-level courses to low-income high school students to make them confident they can succeed in college and prepare them for higher education. In addition, alumnae of the college are working to make attending the institution more affordable for incoming freshmen and current students.

3. Florida A&M University

Through rhythm and song, FAMU alumni, like musical artist Common, have spoken life into the Black community. In 2018, Common helped launch Art in Motion Charter School in his hometown as a way to, as he told Ebony magazine last year, “bring academics but also artistic expression and holistic living to children that are from Chicago.”

As for Common’s alma mater, the 140-year-old university — which began with only 15 students and two instructors — is currently ranked as the No. 1 HBCU for research and development by the National Science Foundation. The university continues to make immense strides in law, pharmaceutical sciences, and more.

To encourage more young people to pursue STEM, FAMU hosts an annual STEM Day for students in grades 6-12. The event features academic speakers, hands-on activities, and

science demonstrations to give participants a realistic look at what the future holds.

Additionally, the university holds a “Women and Girls in STEM Mentoring Event” each year, introducing nearly 200 K-12 girls to female engineers, scientists, and academics. In 2022, FAMU expanded its STEM Day to include third, fourth, and fifth graders, broadening the event traditionally aimed at girls in grades 6-12.

4. Morgan State University

Morgan State University President David K. Wilson recently became the first HBCU president to win the national Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education, presented by the McGraw Family Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. His efforts to improve retention, graduation rates, and support for degree completion for Black students underscore MSU’s commitment to advancing Black leadership and success.

The university is committed to increasing representation in fields such as STEM and communications by recruiting students as early as their junior year of high school. Since 2021, Morgan has had a partnership with NASA designed to foster interest and retention in STEM among K-12 students. They also have a summer program for rising high school seniors and incoming freshmen interested in actuarial and mathematical sciences. The

free, six-week program allows students to take pre-calculus, go on field trips, and participate in professional development seminars.

5. Prairie View A&M University

One thing Prairie View A&M University has said is her name. Sandra Bland. As a 2009 graduate, member of the Sigma Gamma Rho sorority, civil rights activist, and summer school counselor, Bland’s name echoed throughout the university and the Black Lives Matter movement after her death in 2015.

Founded in 1876 as the Alta Vista Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, the second public institution of higher learning in the state initially admitted only men. Recognizing the need for all Black people to be educated, it soon welcomed women.

PVAMU carries the legacy of inclusivity into its STEM Mobile Road Show. On-board technology allows Prairie View to bring hands-on demonstrations to high schools across the state and enable students to engage in activities.

Leaders of the program hope the mobile show will “play a role in exciting and engaging young minds, in particular under-represented minorities, in STEM education.”

The university also has a shadowing program where secondary students can sign up to follow a College of Engineering student around for a day to get a feel for what the school’s STEM programs are like.



JULIAN MILES, 19, joined Street Corner Resources’ youth program after he lost his friend to gun violence two years ago. “I wanted to make a change in my community, because you never know if somebody’s going to die the next day,” he said.
PHOTO **SHANNON CHAFFERS/NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS**

Promoting Peace

SCR represents the new face of violence prevention emerging in New York City

From A13

daily schedule.

Since founding the nonprofit in 2005, Sekou has overseen its expansion to provide a variety of services, including summer and afterschool programs for youth, a robust violence intervention program, legal aid and housing referrals, and a monthly open mic night called the Peace Café. It’s all aimed at promoting peace in a neighborhood that has long suffered from the devastating consequences of poverty and violence that plague many of New York’s Black and brown neighborhoods as a result of decades of disinvestment.

In many ways, SCR represents the new face of violence prevention emerging in New York City. Research has shown that community-based nonprofits partly contributed to the decline in violence in American cities between the 1990s and the 2010s, and the city’s recent investment in anti-violence initiatives has put these groups at the center of a new public safety infrastructure to address gun violence, alongside policing.

While her organization has benefited from this newly available funding, Sekou will be the first to tell you that none of this support came without a fight, one that continues to this day.

Beginnings of Street Corner Resources

Street Corner Resources emerged from Sekou’s earlier community work in Harlem—more specifically, from her brownstone on 136th Street, where she lived for around 30 years. Sekou made the space a safe haven for young people, especially those who had run away from home and were vulnerable to violence.

“I had the typical brownstone stoop, and kids would sit up on the railing, they would sit on the stoop, they would sit in the downstairs garden area [where] I’d put some chairs down. . . my house was the house,” Sekou explained, recalling the various activities she organized, like homework and college application sessions, weekend brunch, and Kwanzaa celebrations.

This sort of community organizing came naturally to Sekou, who grew up in an activist household. Her mother frequently tasked her

with making signs for the various protests they attended. After spending about a decade in Florida to attend college and work in adult education, Sekou moved back to New York in 1984.

She first encountered the scale of the gun violence crisis in Harlem when she began working at a series of welfare-to-work programs as an educator, where many of her clients were young mothers.

“They were losing their sons. A number of young people were getting shot and killed and losing life. And I was helping these women to bury their children,” Sekou said.

Alarmed by the devastating toll of this violence and frustrated by the failure of existing programs to address it, Sekou’s own mother inspired her to create her organization.

“One of the things my mother said was that, when you see something that you want to see different, then you be the person to make it different,” she said.

While Sekou said starting an organization from scratch initially seemed “far-fetched,” her mother pointed out that she already had the seeds of an organization through her house. They chose the name Street Corner Resources because it spoke to how Sekou had built a space where young people could hang out, feel safe, and access resources to secure a better future.

Fighting for Funding

In its early years, SCR operated with very limited funding, mostly from small donations. Sekou focused her attention on young people, drawing on her background in education and experience running youth summer programs. She arranged activities like games of chess, or dance and music workshops.

She also sought to intervene against violence more directly. On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, she and a few other neighborhood residents stood at the corner of 129th Street and Seventh Avenue, across the street from St. Nicholas housing.

“We were out there to disrupt the violence. To talk to young people, to get them to think about their behavior,” Sekou said. “Were there guns? Yes. Did we take guns? We didn’t physically grab the gun and take it, but they turned in guns to us.”

Sekou also attended community board meetings in hopes of securing more funding, but her frustration at government inaction meant she was often seen as disruptive and hostile by those whom she was asking for help.

“She’d come in like a volcano, exploding with lava!” recalled Inez Dickens, a City Councilmember at the time who became Sekou’s ally. “Sometimes it was hard to get a hold of that volcano because she would be so angry because people weren’t listening. And I wanted her to understand: You’re trying to get funding. . . It doesn’t mean [being] meek. It doesn’t mean being humble. But it means you come in stating your facts, stating your case, and why your program is necessary.”

Dickens helped Sekou secure funding from the City Council starting around 2013, some of which was used to establish a media center at Harlem Renaissance High School in 2014.

Around the same time, the city began offering grant money for anti-violence initiatives like Cure Violence, a public health-based approach to violence prevention that employs credible messengers—people from the neighborhood with experience of gun and gang violence—to work as violence interrupters. In 2014, the city established the Crisis Management System to systematize this public health approach. Along with other community organizations, SCR joined the program.

“For us, the Crisis Management System was a way to give this a name—the work that we do,” Sekou said.

In recent years, the city has invested more money into the Crisis Management System, which consists of more than 50 community-based organizations and has a budget of \$86 million.

Experts say that measuring the effects of the program is difficult, because it can be hard to isolate the causes of fluctuations in gun violence at a neighborhood level, and each Cure Violence program differs slightly. But researchers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice who studied the program found that it is a “promising model” for addressing community gun violence. Their study showed that neighborhoods with CMS sites had a steeper decline in gun violence and greater reductions in social norms supporting

Promoting Peace

A traumatizing experience that shaped a future

From A14

violence compared to areas without sites. “I think it’s been proven enough to know that it’s a good investment for local governments as a complement to law enforcement,” said the study’s co-author, Jeffery Butts. “[These programs] don’t have to be magic solutions. They just have to help contribute to public safety, and they pay for themselves. And they met that standard.”

Speaking Peace Forward

When Josh Marte first came to Street Corner Resources five years ago, he had just completed a short stint in jail and was seeking a way out of the drug dealing and gang activities he had engaged in for much of his life.

Marte grew up in Harlem, and said that many of his family members dealt drugs and carried guns as a means of survival. But Marte said he never participated until he had a traumatic encounter with the police when he was around 14 years old. One snowy day, he and his cousin were on their way to school when two police officers stopped and searched them.

“[They] dumped my bookbag out, [roughed] me up. Made me and my cousin step out of our sneakers to search the bottom of our socks, saying we had drugs on us...Then the officer goes and searches the private areas of us. And I...felt very violated,” he recalled.

Marte said the experience was so traumatizing that he turned to street life as a way to prevent himself from being victimized again. The incident elevated his status among older members in the community who had faced similar treatment from police.

“When the police came and harassed me, now I wind up being accepted by them, and now I’m back doing it to others. I’m not going to be the victim, I don’t want to be the victim, so I’m victimizing,” he explained.

Marte first came to SCR looking for a maintenance job, but after he spent a few weeks around the organization, Sekou decided to hire him as a violence interrupter.

Now a senior member of the Speak Peace Forward violence interruption team, Marte regards Sekou as a mentor, and SCR as a place that helped him see beyond a cycle of violence and retaliation.

On a warm and sunny afternoon in early October, Marte and four SCR staff members gathered outside of SCR’s offices, preparing to head out on a neighborhood canvas. Three times per day, five days a week, the staff walks through an area that stretches from 145th Street to 137th Street, between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Malcolm X Boulevards. Along with program manager Mike Saylor, Marte often leads these canvases.

After setting off, they first stopped about 30 feet away as they passed by the gas station across the street. A man pumping gas recognized them and started talking to the group, saying “Y’all do great work.” A few more feet down the road, the group paused again. This time, a young man

Measuring the effects of the program is difficult, because it can be hard to isolate the causes of fluctuations in gun violence at a neighborhood level, and each Cure Violence program differs slightly.



IESHA SEKOU (CENTER) AND STREET CORNER RESOURCES’ outreach team. Sekou started the organization in 2005 as a way to combat gun violence in central Harlem. PHOTO STREET CORNER RESOURCES

stopped them to explain that he was looking for a job. Javon Griffin, another team member, handed him one of the cards that all the staff carry on canvases. Known as “public education,” or “pub-ed,” these pamphlets contain information about the services SCR offers as well as advice on how to de-escalate tense situations.

As we continued along, Marte explained that in addition to engaging people they encounter by chance, the team also uses the canvases to monitor neighborhood hotspots, like certain parks or corners, as well as buildings that are hangout spots for gang members. Building connections with these community members is key to de-escalating potential conflicts, Marte said.

If he hears about a conflict between individuals, for example, he speaks to both people involved, to convince both that the other side doesn’t want trouble. He then arranges for the two to meet.

“I don’t care if [they] have a fistfight. I’ll take that loss of a fistfight. But to stop that shooting and that stabbing, we have to find a way to get them to come together, to get them to understand that we’re all on the same boat,” he said.

For conflicts between larger groups, SCR employs other strategies, like “occupying” the corner where a group gathers, offering resources to those involved, and even motivating them to come to their offices with gift cards.

After about 15 minutes, the team arrived at Mott Hall High School. The staff were there to provide “safe passage,” which they practice at a handful of Harlem schools on a rotating basis during dismissal time. As the exiting students streamed out of the building, the staff fanned out to greet them. Two set up between the exit gates and the nearby subway station entrance. The other three continued down the block, stopping at the corner where students often gather after NYPD school safety agents have ushered them away from the school’s entrance.

On that day, the latter group’s positioning was fortuitous, because a fight between two girls broke out on the corner. Marte successfully intervened before sending those involved home. All five staff then gathered on the corner to monitor the area. As tensions calmed, the staff resumed handing out pub-ed to students as they passed by, alerting them to SCR’s after-school program.

About 20 minutes later, though, Marte received a call. A stabbing victim had just been brought to

CURE VIOLENCE

Works to change the thinking on violence at the community level and for society at large.

the nearby Harlem Hospital. SCR partners with the hospital in what is known as hospital-based violence intervention. Through the program, which operates in multiple hospitals throughout the city, the staff respond to all incidents involving victims of shooting, stabbing, or violent assaults brought to Harlem Hospital.

The hospital is a familiar place for Marte. Since his childhood, his mother has worked there as a nurse, treating trauma patients, including those who’ve been shot or stabbed. Marte’s role involves providing a different treatment to these victims and their families: making sure they feel safe, offering them resources, and encouraging them not to retaliate.

In this case, the victim was a 16-year-old boy. After speaking with the boy and his family, and getting his number, Marte and the group continued on the canvas. Suspicious that the incident was gang-related, Marte planned to follow up the next day.

For the canvas’s final stretch, Marte made a point of stopping by local shops, whose workers can provide key information about community dynamics. One restaurant owner was particularly enthusiastic about meeting the staff, stopping the team for a 5-minute chat and taking a handful of pub-ed.

The canvas wrapped up at General Charles Young Playground, about 2 minutes away from SCR’s offices. The playground is a frequent stop for the staff, and they relaxed a bit as they greeted familiar faces and introduced themselves to those they didn’t yet know. “We need more of this,” one woman said when handed a pub-ed card.

Challenges Faced by Violence Interrupters

“Here in Harlem, we say Superman doesn’t have a cape, he has an ‘I Am Peace’ shirt on,” Marte said, previewing a poem he hopes to perform at

Cont. A16



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SCR STAFF participate in weekly self-defense classes at General Charles Young Playground. PHOTO SHANNON CHAFFERS/NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS

Promoting Peace

For conflicts between larger groups, SCR employs other strategies, like “occupying” the corner where a group gathers, offering resources to those involved, and even motivating them to come to their offices with gift cards.

From A15

the Peace Café.

The violence interrupters have signed themselves up for work that is physically and mentally draining, and dangerous. The interrupters receive extensive training in conflict de-escalation, mediation, and self-defense. They also receive mental health care through one-on-one and group therapy sessions—but the work is by nature traumatic.

Both Saylor and Marte recalled separate incidents when the team had been called in to break up a fight between two large groups. While they initially succeeded in de-escalating the situation, a couple of people from the fight broke off and began letting off shots a few blocks away.

In this situation, the interrupters must stand back and wait for law enforcement and emergency services to arrive.

“We don’t have a gun, we don’t have a vest, we don’t have even some handcuffs,” Marte said. “At that point, the violence is happening... You had to let it be.”

The work can take its toll. Marte decided to take a break when, after a day when he had to speak with seven victims at the hospital, he realized he couldn’t give the community the attention they deserved.

“I was addressing the victims: victim number one, victim number two, victim number three. And to me, it was almost like, so insensitive,” he said. “I wasn’t no longer giving my all or my best to who I was dealing with. And I would never rob the community like that.”

After a six-month break, Marte returned to the job this summer reenergized. But these challenges demonstrate the need for more resources to make the violence interruption work more sustainable. Sekou said she’d like to have more hospital responders “so that the workers who respond don’t have to deal with trauma three times in one day.”

And although SCR is not the only Cure Violence site in Harlem (SAVE Harlem also operates in a section of East Harlem), the strategy as a whole is not established in every neighborhood, and its \$86 million budget is miniscule compared to the NYPD’s \$10.8 billion budget.

“The thing that makes communities safe have nothing to do with patrol cars and badges. [It’s] about the strength of the neighborhood, economic opportunities, housing, schools, medical care—all the stuff that rich people take for granted. That’s how you build a strong community and make safety. But the challenge is to get public officials to actually care about that,” said Jeffery Butts of John Jay College.

Sekou also believes that police play a more reactive than preventive role in addressing violence. SCR maintains what they describe as a one-way relationship with the police: to preserve their credibility, they never supply police with information on the individuals they work with. But they are receptive to acting on

information the police give them.

For example, sometimes the police will reach out to the office if they receive complaints about youth in the neighborhood. Rather than creating further disruption by making arrests, they will ask SCR staff to address the situation.

Sekou has also built relationships with police leaders, like NYPD’s current Chief of Training, Olufunmilola Obé, who was the former Manhattan North Borough commander. Obé said that although the NYPD and SCR did not have a “perfect relationship,” she valued working with the organization to address youth gun violence.

“I would go to [Sekou] always and say, this is what we see. Can you help me?... So that we don’t have another kid dead, we don’t have retaliation,” she explained. “And she was always very successful in helping us quell whatever problems we had.”

Lasting Impact: SCR’s Youth Programming

When Sekou is asked about the impact of her work on young people, she begins to tear up.

“It overwhelms me,” she said of running into past participants. “Sometimes I walk away with a little tear when I see a young person [who] was struggling, and I helped them or we helped them, and they’re doing something I didn’t expect them to do.”

Saylor said the youth program currently serves around 30 kids, ages 14 to 21, from a range of backgrounds, including those who have a history of violence or are deemed at-risk, who often “have some things going on in their lives, where they don’t know how to talk about it, get help for it, [or] plan their life ahead.”

By giving youth structured activities where they could otherwise be unsupervised, and providing financial support in the form of stipends, SCR hopes they can steer kids away from violent behavior. Indeed, research has shown that afterschool programs can reduce violence.

But SCR’s limited size means they can’t reach everyone—a fact that becomes clear with every shooting.

“[I’m] always thinking about how could we have stopped this shooting, or this kid from dying? I’m always thinking about what could be done, what more [we] could do,” Sekou said.

Her next goal as part of this vision is to secure a building that can serve and house vulnerable youth. She says it would be like a larger scale version of her brownstone home, where SCR got its start.

“That’s where I developed my vision for this,” she said. “We need a place where young people can come and stay...and to be able to have a door that we can open past midnight, when [they] feel uncomfortable and they need to talk and they feel like they want to be involved in an act of violence.”

Quick Facts

Street Corner Resources

Street Corner Resources seeks to create a more peaceful community by providing teenagers and young adults greater access to real employment, education, training and other resources to assist them as they strive for success.

SAVE Harlem

Save Harlem Now! was founded in 2015 to address the urgent need to preserve historic properties in Harlem. The NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission has designated 66% of Greenwich Village, more than 50% of the Upper East and West Sides, but less than 20% of Harlem. Our work continues, and is more important now than ever.

Harlem Hospital Center

Harlem Hospital Center is a 286-bed hospital that provides a broad array of preventive, primary and acute care services including general medicine and medical subspecialties, general surgery and surgical subspecialties, infectious diseases, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics and neonatology, critical care, imaging, radiology and nuclear medicine, rehabilitation medicine, psychiatry and substance abuse services, dental and oral surgery, physical, speech and occupational therapies. We are an Area-Wide Burn Center and Level I Trauma, with Centers of Excellence for Bariatric Surgery, Breast Imaging and Sexual Assault Forensics, a designated Stroke and AIDS Center, a World Health Organization's UNICEF Designated Baby Friendly Hospital and a member of America's Essential Hospitals Safety Net Hospitals.

“

The thing that makes communities safe have nothing to do with patrol cars and badges. [It’s] about the strength of the neighborhood, economic opportunities, housing, schools, medical care—all the stuff that rich people take for granted.

Jeffery Butts, John Jay College



THE REED FAMILY — AubreyRosie, 14; Krystle, 39; KayCee, 7; Donald Jr., 43; and Donald III, 17 — lost everything in the unprecedented flooding that hit San Diego in late January. PHOTO WORD IN BLACK

1,000-Year Storm

Climate change makes these deluges regular occurrences. After San Diego’s recent flooding, the Reed family is trying to pick up the pieces.

Willy Blackmore
Word In Black

No one was expecting that much rain. When more than three inches fell on San Diego in just six hours, it took the Southern California city by surprise. It was a Monday, people were at work and at school, and the only reason that Krystle Reed knew that the very unexpected was happening back at her house in the hilly Encanto neighborhood was because her in-laws, who have been living with the Reeds, were at home.

As the rain fell and ran down the hill, the storm drains on their street were overwhelmed and started to back up. The drain in her neighborhood’s yard collapsed into a yawning sinkhole, and water began to fill that yard and then hers too — and kept filling and filling until the Reeds’ home was brimming with at least four feet of water.

The deluge is said to have been a thousand-year storm, but thanks to climate change, we’re seeing more and more of these improbable rainfall events happening far more than every century or millennia. Flooding is becoming almost routine in New York City, where over 7 inches of rain fell in parts of Brooklyn during a September storm last year. Chicago was also hit with 9 inches of rain in some areas last July. Flooding from such major storms can affect any kind of neighborhood, but research shows that certain urban neighborhoods tend to get more flooding than others: the areas where Black people like the Reeds and many other Encanto residents live.

Her husband, Donald Reed Jr., a school bus driver, rushed back from work and was able to rescue the family’s four dogs. But many of their belongings were ruined — laptops, phones, and other technology. “PS5 isn’t cheap,” she says. Family photos and other items of great emotional value were lost, too, though thankfully, the urn that holds her late

mother’s ashes was on a high shelf. Two of the family’s cars were parked on the street, and are now inoperable due to the floodwater.

“My brother lives with us, my sister-in-law was living with her parents,” she says, and the Reeds have three kids, too, ranging from 7 to 17-years-old. “Nine people overall who are trying to figure out and shuffling where they can go.”

And because the house is not in a flood zone, the only coverage for water damage they have is through their homeowner’s policy, and only applies to things like a burst pipe or a leaking roof. (Flood insurance is its own federally subsidized program, and most people who do not live in a flood zone do not purchase flood insurance.) There are parts of Encanto that are in the flood zone of the Chollas Creek, a channelized waterway that braids through the neighborhood, but the Reeds’ home isn’t even on the edge of one of those areas.

The family bought the house in 2020, their first home, and just before real estate prices began to skyrocket. It has four bedrooms, and a yard so large they were considering building an ADU that Krystle’s in-laws could move into instead of continuing to stay in the family’s RV (the in-laws lost their own house, which they had lived in for years and had paid off, to a title-theft scheme). Elsewhere in the neighborhood, you might find chickens or even goats grazing on the large lots.

Encanto is one of the most diverse parts of San Diego, and while it’s not as Black as other neighborhoods in the southeastern parts of the city, like neighboring Valencia Park, it’s more Black (17.5%) than the city on the whole (6.6%). As is often the case in urban Black neighborhoods, that was originally by nefarious design: much of Encanto was redlined in the 1930s along with much of the rest of southeast San Diego, and was one of the first parts of the city where Black and Latinx residents were allowed to buy property.

While the redline maps from the 1930s don’t

cite any flood risks, the area has been subject to major flooding in the past: for example, in 1916, decades before Cholla Creek was channelized for flood-control purposes, a small creek in the neighborhood burst its banks, forming a 100-foot-wide lake. But unless you’re living right alongside Cholla Creek, flooding wasn’t exactly top of mind for most people in Encanto before this storm hit. It certainly wasn’t for the Reeds.

“It wasn’t on our radar, not a flood,” Reed says. “You’re at the bottom of a hill, so you’d expect water to hit your car to an extent,” but that’s about it.

Now, the extended Reed family is bouncing between extended family and hotels the city has provided vouchers for. They got a contractor in to rip out the floor and five feet of drywall throughout the house, above the high water mark, to try and avoid a major mold problem. But with no insurance money, and nothing yet from FEMA despite there being a federal emergency declaration, it’s unclear how they’re going to get their house back into habitable condition. The Reeds have raised a little over \$6,600 through a GoFundMe — but the cost of tearing out the floor and walls alone costs \$6,500.

“We were able to afford that based off of our GoFundMe, but I don’t know how we’re going to get a new floor, new cabinets, and everything else,” she says. The city came and cleaned the rocks and mud off of the street, but it hasn’t done much beyond that in terms of helping rebuild.

Unfortunately, there’s more rain — possibly much, much more rain — heading for Southern California. Which means San Diego could get hit badly again over the next few days, while people like the Reeds are still trying to recover from January’s record-breaking storm.

If there’s going to be another flood, Reed would rather it be sooner than later. “At this point, if it’s going to happen I’d rather it just happen now,” she says. “It can’t get no worse.”

WILLY BLACKMORE is a freelance writer and editor covering food, culture, and the environment. He lives in Brooklyn.



American Heart Association®

MORE THAN 350,000 PEOPLE experience cardiac arrests outside of the hospital every year. The American Heart Association is offering CPR training. PHOTO AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION

American Heart Association Celebrates American Heart Month

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Heart Disease is a leading cause of death

During American Heart Month in February, the American Heart Association is encouraging Tulsa families to learn more about saving lives that have been impacted by heart illness and disease.

The association is promoting an initiative to support more individuals to learn CPR. The Nation of Lifesavers program is focused on doubling the survival rate of cardiac arrest by 2030 by making it easier for people to learn CPR.

More than 350,000 people experience cardiac arrests outside of the hospital every year. Of that number, twenty-three thousand are children.

In 2019, African Americans were 30 percent more likely to die from heart disease than non-Hispanic whites and more likely to have high blood pressure according to the Office of Minority Health at the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. African American women are nearly 50 percent more likely to have blood pressure as compared to non-Hispanic white women.

AHA says knowing CPR, if performed immediately, can double or triple a cardiac arrest victims' chance of survival.

The program is offered in a blended online course at Heartsaver® CRP AED Online with a follow-up hands-on skills session conducted by an American Heart Association Training Center instructor. Another option is to enroll in an in-person course to learn and receive hands-on certification.

"If you are called to respond in a cardiac emergency, knowing CPR may save the life of someone you love," said Dr. Jabraan Pasha, president of the American Heart Association-Tulsa board of directors. "We are committed to extending the chain of survival in Tulsa through education because the power to save a life is in each of our hands."

The American Heart Association is hosting the following events in the future: April 27 – Heart Walk and May 11 – Heart Ball.

For more information, call (918) 877-8359.

La Fayette Named To National Leadership Institute



EXCELL LA FAYETTE JR. is a former Fortune 500 executive, business consultant, author, motivational speaker, and life coach. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Excell La Fayette Jr., a former Fortune 500 management executive and business consultant, has been selected to participate with the Next Generation Leadership Institute. The institute is sponsored by the National Conservation Foundation in Washington, D. C.

The year-long program prepares future leaders to create greater awareness of the conservation challenges in a changing world. According to NCF, NGLI was established as an institution that provides conservation professionals with the tools to become national leaders through personal, civic, and organizational leadership development.

La Fayette, a board member of the Creek County Conservation District in Bristow, will join six other individuals who will meet for training sessions during the year and a capstone program in Salt Lake City, Utah. The cohort participants were selected through

a competitive national application process.

"It is an honor to be selected to this year's Next Generation Leadership Institute," said La Fayette, a graduate of Langston University.

The first meeting of the selectees will be at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the National Association of Conservation District in San Diego, Calif. They will attend sessions on the following topics: generational intelligence, emotional intelligence quotient, personal leadership styles, diversity, and conflict.

"The NGLI program is rooted in advancing the leadership skills and professional development of the next generation of conservation leaders," said NCF Chair Brent Van Dyke. "I look forward to watching this new group of cohort members continue to grow throughout this leadership program. I'm confident they will use these valuable lessons to advance their professional careers and the future of the conservation movement."

For more information on NGLI, see www.nationalconservationfoundation.org.

Aspiring Student Writers Are Invited To Make Their Voices Heard

YOUNG PEOPLE'S
Creative
Writing
CONTEST 2024
Cash Prizes | For Ages 10-18
Entries Accepted Feb. 1-29

PHOTO TULSA CITY-COUNTY LIBRARY, TULSALIBRARY.ORG



Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Tulsa City-County Library announces its annual Young People's Creative Writing Contest. The contest gives young writers the opportunity to share their stories.

With three age divisions in five different categories, TCCL encourages Tulsa County youths to stretch their imaginations and deepen their relationships with writing by telling their stories in their own words — or illustrations!

From Feb. 1-29, students ages 10-18 can participate in the contest by submitting their writing online, by mail, or to any TCCL branch. The contest is free to enter for those who live or attend school in Tulsa County or have a nonresident library card.

The three divisions are for the following ages: 10-12, 13-15, and 16-18. Participants may enter one manuscript per category but may enter all categories within their corresponding age group.

The categories are Short Story, Informal Essay, Poetry, Short Play, and Comix. First-, second-, and third-place winners will be chosen for each

age category. Cash prizes will be given for first place, \$100; second place, \$50; and third place, \$25.

All entrants will be invited to an awards presentation on May 3 at the Central Library. The featured speaker will be Raina Telgemeier, winner of the Tulsa Library Trust's 2024 Anne V. Zarrow Award for Young Readers' Literature.

For more information about the Young People's Creative Writing Contest, call (918) 549-7323 or visit www.tulsalibrary.org/YPWC. To learn about the Anne V. Zarrow Award program, see www.tulsalibrary.org/zarrowaward.

Events

February Black History Month

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. 15-16

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity will be hosting its statewide conference in Tulsa. For more information, contact Jason Gilley, president of the local Alpha Tau Lambda chapter, at tulsaalphas1906@gmail.com.

Feb. 16

Miss Black and Old Gold Scholarship Pageant – "Elegance of the Nile" at Central High School, 3101 W. Edison St., 7 p.m. The pageant is sponsored by the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. For more information, contact alphaokdistrict@gmail.com.

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 Fulfill 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. This year's theme is "Sowing Seeds for Our Future." The program is to commemorate the non-violent work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For sponsorships, tickets, or more information, visit www.educationforscholars.org/events.

Feb. 23

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

Mar. 13

2024 Greenwood Women's Business Center InnovateHER Women's Summit at the Doubletree Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. The program is sponsored by the Greenwood Women's Business Center, 102 N. Greenwood Ave., Suite 201, 10 a.m. -3 p.m. For more information, contact info@greenwoodwbc.com or gbcwomensummit.com.

Mar. 27

Women's History Month – "And So I Stayed" will be shown at Tulsa Community College at its VanTrease Performing Arts Center for Education (PACE), 103000 E. 81st St., on March 27 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. The film is an award-winning documentary by Natalie Patillo and Daniel A. Nelson about survivors of abuse fighting for their lives and spending years behind bars. This is the story of how the legal system gets domestic violence wrong, according to a press release about the film. The program is sponsored by the T. Oscar Chappelle Family and the TCC Foundation. For more information, contact ramona.curtis@tulsacc.edu.

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.