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By Kimberly Marsh



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PHOTO SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE/GREENWOOD WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER

Women's Business Summit

Kimberly Marsh  
The Oklahoma Eagle

**When the Greenwood Women’s Business Center opened two years ago, it promised to provide women in Tulsa - particularly Black women and other women of color - a hand in launching and growing their businesses.** Last week, at its second anniversary gathering, the InnovateHER Summit, the Center gave the two hundred attendees a couple of big things to celebrate. *Cont. A3*



PHOTO SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE/GREENWOOD WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER

Women's Business Summit

# Women's Business Summit Celebrates Successes

From A2

The first was the remarkable growth of women-owned businesses nationally, particularly over the past four years. From 2019 to 2023, women-owned businesses' growth rate outpaced the rate of men's 94.3% for number of firms, 252.8% for employment, and 82.0% for revenue, according to the 2024 Wells Fargo Impact of Women-owned Businesses Report.

Women-owned businesses make up nearly 40 percent of all businesses - more than 14 million, employing 12.2 million workers and generating \$2.7 trillion in revenue. These figures were announced to the crowd of 200 summit attendees held at the Doubletree Warren Hotel on March 13.

The second cause for celebrating was the success of many of the attendees at the summit. During a ceremony at the gathering, the organizers presented awards to five Black women in business in Tulsa. (See story pp.)

With the help of the U.S. Black Chambers of Commerce, the Greenwood Women's Business Center opened on March 16, 2022. The Chamber has focused on assisting women entrepreneurs rise by establishing women's business centers around the country to give women the free resources

**From 2019 to 2023, women-owned businesses' growth rate outpaced the rate of men's 94.3% for number of firms, 252.8% for employment, and 82.0% for revenue.**

they need to be successful, whether they are bootstrapping or have capital to invest.

Corrie Kimbril, business banker with Bank of Oklahoma, and a Summit sponsor, told the meeting that around 849 new businesses are started by women every day. She quoted reports of Latina and Black women entrepreneurs emerging more robust since the COVID-19 pandemic, with 20% growth.

And yet, Kimbril noted, women also lack access to crucial federal programs, including contracting and procurement programs. According to the most recent data from the Small Business Administration (SBA), women-owned businesses netted only 4.63% of all federal contracting dollars in fiscal year 2022, just shy of the government's long-term 5% goal. While it is slightly improved from the previous year, the 5% goal has been met only twice since it was established over 20 years ago.

**New Opportunities for Women**

Federal contracts are an area where businesswomen can increase their foothold. Alisa Joseph, vice president of programs for the U.S. Black Chambers of Commerce, said during a session at the summit that there are emerging opportunities in government contracts.

"I think it is that space where we see some new opportunities developing. Now that things

have kind of opened since the pandemic, there's obviously spaces for us to hold and convene people like we're doing today," Joseph said. She added that her organization is working with communities to get more information to entrepreneurs on how to break into bidding for government contracts, as male-owned businesses and corporations have done for decades.

"Our summit today was about innovation. We're going to continue to innovate and figure out new ways to attract people to do the work that impacts small businesses."

The annual summit, a free offering, is a way to attract those women across diversity and age and professional and business experience, Joseph said.

"One is we needed people to know who we were, and the summit was a great way of us being able to do that. We envision that as being a jumpstart for some Sister Circle groups that we want to put together, where we can bring more women together to be in a close setting, be able to talk about their issues, mentor and talk with one another."

Some topics emerged from the four keynote speakers that developed into general themes for the day. The Summit's mistress of ceremonies and Build in Tulsa Managing Director, Ashli Sims, said the main themes included shutting down personal social media time to curating social feeds to ensure

Cont. A7

Oklahoma Teen Death

# Federal officials *will investigate* Oklahoma school following nonbinary teenager's death

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Federal officials are opening an investigation into the Oklahoma school district where a nonbinary 16-year-old high school student was in a fight before dying last month, according to a letter sent by the U.S. Department of Education on Friday.

Nex Benedict, whose family says the teen was bullied at Owasso High School, died a day after the fight inside a girl's bathroom at the school. According to family, Benedict identified as nonbinary and used they/them pronouns.

The letter revealing the investigation was addressed to the Human Rights Campaign, which had asked the department to look into Owasso Public Schools and "its failure to respond appropriately to sex-based harassment that may have contributed to the tragic death."

Police in the Tulsa suburb have not released a cause of death but have previously said that Benedict did not die as a result of injuries from the fight, which happened on Feb. 8.

The department's Office For Civil Rights stated it would investigate whether the district "failed to appropriately respond to alleged harassment," according to the letter, which makes no reference to Benedict.

Owasso Public Schools confirmed in a statement that the district received notice of

the investigation and called the allegations unsupported and without merit.

"The district is committed to cooperating with federal officials," the statement said.

Neither police nor school officials have said what led to the fight. But Benedict's family has said there had been harassment because of the teen's nonbinary identity.

"We appreciate the Department of Education responding to our complaint and opening an investigation — we need them to act urgently so there can be justice for Nex, and so that all students at Owasso High School and every school in Oklahoma can be safe from bullying, harassment, and discrimination," Human Rights Campaign President Kelley Robinson said in a statement.

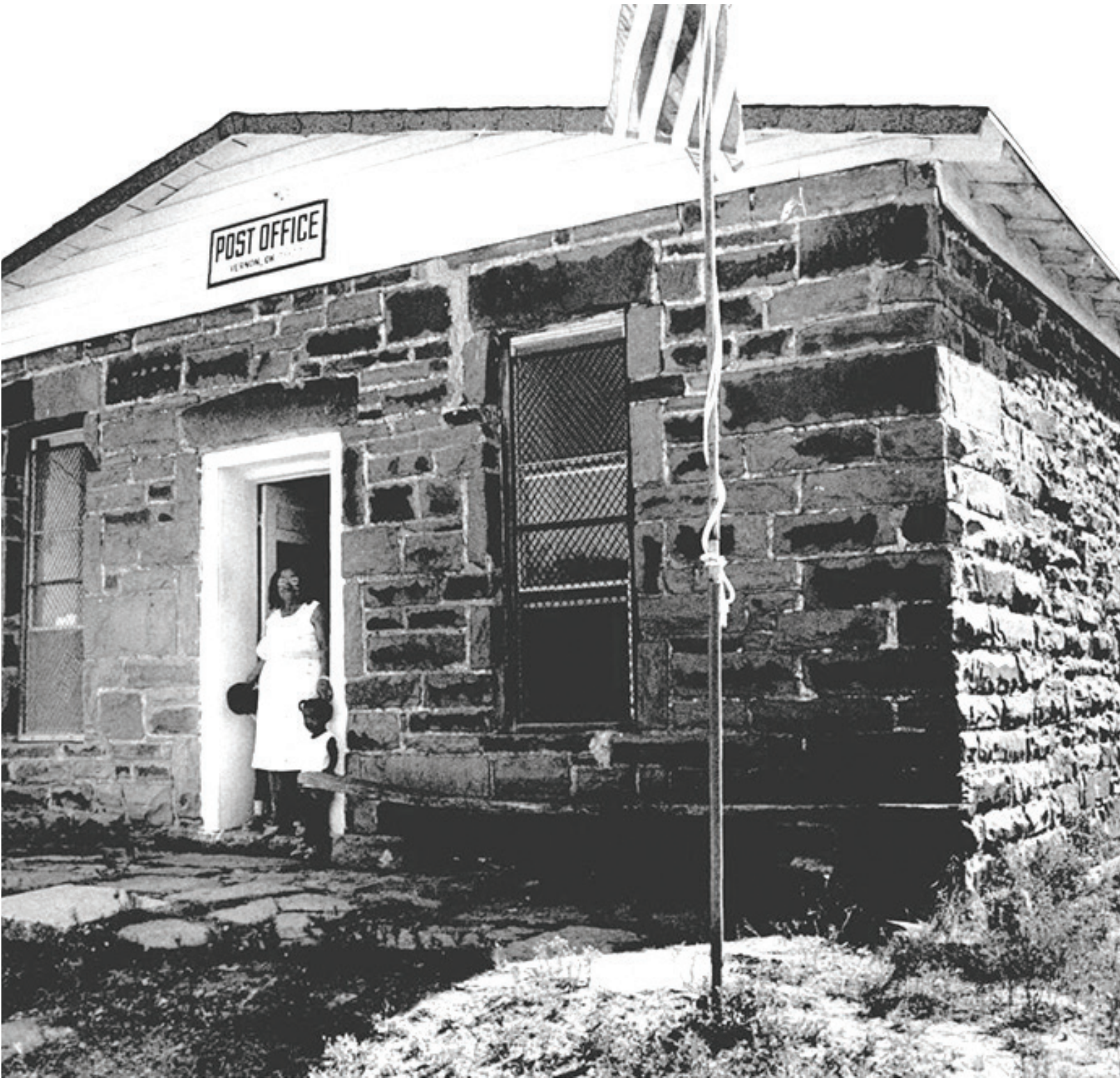
Benedict walked out of the bathroom after the Feb. 7 fight but was taken to a hospital by their family and sent home that night. Paramedics were dispatched to the home the following day for a medical emergency and took Benedict to a hospital emergency room, where they later died, police said.

Benedict's mother, Sue Benedict, has said the teen suffered bruises all over their face and eyes in the fight involving a transgender student and three older girls.

The school district has said the students were in the restroom for less than two minutes before the fight was broken up by other students and a staff member.

# Vernon: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



An All-Black town located in southwestern McIntosh County ten miles southeast of Dustin, Vernon was established in 1911 on the Tankard Ranch in the Creek Nation. Vernon is one of more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and is one of thirteen still existing. Thomas Haynes secured much of the land for the townsite and played a large part organizing the community. Its name honored Bishop W. T. Vernon of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The town received a postal designation in 1912, with Ella Woods as the

postmaster. Edward Woodard served as the town’s first president, but he did not long remain in office. Louise Wesley established the first school and church. The congregation conducted church under a tree; Wesley taught school in her home. In 1917 the community built the New Hope Baptist Church. When the Julius Rosenwald Fund provided money to help build a public school, Vernon became one of the first communities in Oklahoma to receive assistance from that philanthropic source.

The Vernon Rock Front Post Office is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 84003152). Rock Hill School is listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory as a resource related to African American history. Like many rural towns of Oklahoma, Vernon suffered economic distress during the Great Depression. The exodus of many residents to urban centers after World War II added to the loss of residents. No population statistics are available.

**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.

**VERNON’S US POST OFFICE**, 1980. (2012.201. B1329.0529, by P. Howell, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

## Featured Last Week



KanDee Washington, TPS District 2 candidate



A Brief Primer On Tulsa School Board Elections



Attorney Suing TPS Seeks Board Seat

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INNOVATEHER SUMMIT PRESENTED AWARDS

# GBC Summit Awards Women Business Leaders

The GBC Womens’ InnovateHER Summit presented awards to the following five Tulsa women entrepreneurs on March 13. Ashli Sims, managing director of Build in Tulsa and mistress of ceremonies, made the presentations.

Kimberly Marsh and Sam Levrault (Photos)  
The Oklahoma Eagle



**Women Entrepreneur Under 30**  
Shelby Stephens -  
Founder of Mom’s Closet,  
2022 11th St.

Stephens created Mom’s Closet to fill the need for stylish sustainable fashion for all body types. The organization fosters sustainability and a safe and open community in Tulsa. Her business offers secondhand clothing, green business practices, and a supportive community. The business operates on these pillars: sustainability, economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity. Stephens said, “Truly this really inspires me to keep going. Being an entrepreneur can be very lonely. But this really fills me and helps me to come back to this right. I have a community to come back to and it will help me keep me going when times are hard. I will treasure this forever and ever.”

**The Greenwood Women’s Business Center** The center supports diverse women entrepreneurs in their journey across all business life cycles – from start-up to maturity – with information, tools, and resources designed to escalate their visions. GBC provides technical assistance, shared services, and counseling services (in person and virtually) to help women business owners navigate the myriad of opportunities available that enable their firms to grow, hire employees, and be leaders in their communities. The center is funded in part through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Small Business administration.

**Innovator of the Year**  
Kayla Lee - Co-founder +  
Architect,  
Lee Simon Design

*Lee is a passionate and creative dynamo who is driven first and foremost by a deep love for her community in Tulsa.*

She brings her experiences working on major projects in Chicago, Amsterdam, and Germany to the table. Before creating Lee Simon Design, she worked under her own banner – Kleedo. She is president-elect of the Tulsa Foundation for Architecture, a resource for understanding the history and experiencing the beauty of Tulsa’s finest architecture. Lee said, “I’m an architect here locally. And we’re doing a lot of cool stuff, like Black towns and bringing local jobs to the workforce. This award goes to my mother. I mean, she’s been an entrepreneur, she’s always pushing me to get my master’s degree. In 2020, I opened my own design firm with my business partner, Stephen Simon. We employ local folks with the construction arm to all the residential work we do. On the development side, we have \$48 million projects in North Dakota. Limon. In Oklahoma, the last Black town is getting a grant for \$1.1 million. We’re just using the gifts God has given us to help folks where we can.”



INNOVATEHER SUMMIT PRESENTED AWARDS

Entrepreneur of The Year  
Kim Roxie - Founder of LAMIK Beauty

LAMIK beauty is the world’s number eco-chic makeup line seeking to build women’s self-esteem and reveal their natural beauty. Formulated without parabens, Roxie has created environmentally conscious products with a message for multicultural women. Her business products stand for love and makeup and kindness because she believes true makeup is about what you’re made of. At age 21, Roxie discovered the unique beauty out of her college apartment. With her savings and a small investment from her mother, Roxie opened her first tool first store in Houston. From its humble beginnings in 2004, LAMIK Beauty has been highlighted as one of the eight Black-owned beauty companies by BT and is one of seven Black cosmetics lines dominating the market. It is no surprise that the magazine named Roxie “The Black Beauty Maven” to know. The beauty industry is calling for Roxie and she continues to take

every opportunity to connect with women to help them recognize their own beauty and potential and to impact the community. She is happily married and lives with her husband, daughter, and bonus son and...moved to Tulsa. The products are now sold in Ulta, The Boxyard, 502 E. 3rd St., and online at lamikbeauty.com Roxie said, “As our speakers have said, when one woman wins, we all win. And that’s how we look at it; collaboration or competition, right? So, I just want to say that I’m so grateful to be here. If you told me a year ago that I’d be standing on this stage in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Black Wall Street, and that I was going to say see an Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the Greenwood Business Center,... I wouldn’t believe it. But I’ll tell you, I stepped foot in that office with Donna and LeRinda, and they were just so warm. And I just thank you all for the work that you’re doing, it is making a powerful impact.”



Maxine Horner Lifetime Achievement Award  
Shannon Eddington, Executive Management Consultant

The award is dedicated to the late Tulsa state senator Maxine Horner - an exceptional woman, a trailblazer. Horner was one of the first African American women to serve in the State Senate. In that role, she held positions in the chair of the Democratic Caucus as well as the chair of Business and Labor, and Government Operations committees, and vice chair of Adult Literacy committee. She also founded Oklahoma’s Promise, a scholarship program that has allowed generations of Oklahomans to attain a college education. She was the author of the groundbreaking commission created in 1997 to study the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Horner also fought for reparations for the (Black Wall Street) massacre descendants. Shannon Eddington is an executive management consultant with a focus on operational management, business development and strategic planning. She has worked with many companies, including nonprofit manufacturing, entertainment, retail, IT services, telecommunications, hospitality, and graphic design, and as a former manager of business consulting and outsourcing group. As a former recruiter and operations manager, her expertise has helped her leverage her skills and talents in a multitude of ways to serve small and large businesses across Tulsa. Eddington graduated from Oklahoma State University and serves the Tulsa community as a consultant and volunteer. She is also adopting two children. Eddington said, “As part of my own growth and development, being a very unseen and unknown child growing up in a broken home, I cleaned up well, but I didn’t grow up well. My passion for business and

for coaching and development is just to see people succeed. There’s so much potential in every person but they just don’t feel seen, and they don’t recognize their own value or worth. It is just my heart’s desire, because I felt so unseen, and I wish somebody would have come alongside me and said this is how we do this. This is how we move forward. This is how we regulate our own emotions. This is how we chase big things.” “My motto is “To be love in action.” Show up for people. Get your hands dirty with what they need and what you have to offer you. We are gifted. We have so much capacity to give to other people what we’ve been intrinsically gifted with growth in business is just my desire to serve and to give. Last year, I founded a nonprofit called Deeply Rooted to just get involved in the child welfare system. I’ve been a foster parent for nine years. I’ve taken therapy to children that have severe mental health and severe trauma backgrounds. I’m very excited to be able to adopt two kiddos today. It’s wonderful they are siblings. I presently have six children. I’m a single parent. I’ve been alone here my whole life. My only biological son is 12. If you meet him, he’s like a mini therapist. He is my greatest treasure and my biggest reward and blessing.” “Thank you for this recognition. I want to encourage everybody here to use all of those skills and all of those resources and all of your talents to just bring the community up with you and don’t go blaze those trails alone. Bring other valuable women along and show them the way. We have to step into our own power and our own strength. We have to own it.”



Community Champion Award  
Raittia Rogers

Author - Raittia Rogers, is the author of “I Broke Out of Prison,” which chronicles her journey of being locked up in a prison and in a destructive mindset. Rogers grew up hard, living the life of a juvenile delinquent in and around Tulsa. Imagine if your loved one physically ended up in prison, but they had been locked up spiritually their entire life. Her book chronicles her powerful testimony that demonstrates the power of God that set her free both physically and spiritually. Her work has been a blessing to others in the community. And because of that, and today, we celebrate and honor Raittia Rogers. Rogers said, “Thank you. I just want to say ‘Yes, I did come from a whole lot.’ When I grew up, family, friends, my atmosphere, my community, my parents, some things happened. It really pushed me out there at a young age. I got into gang affiliation, selling dope, robbing, stealing ribbon, and running the streets. I went to Margaret Hudson (Program),... a school for young pregnant teenagers. I had my son at 15. I was in state’s custody, other than the Tulsa of girls group room home while I was pregnant. A lot went on for me. I wouldn’t listen. In and out of Juvenile Detention at a young age, in and out of jail. And I got caught up, living in a criminal-minded lifestyle. I served time in prison. And when my back was up against the wall, no one was there. But a voice spoke to me and gave me a miracle and changed my life around. So that’s why when some of you see me out in the community, some of the things that I do. It’s not because I want to do, it is that voice that leads me on to say, give back, help, volunteer. Now I have my DLC badge, which I’ve been having for many, many years where I give back to the juvenile, to the Department of Correction, speaking to the inmates where I was locked up.”

Women’s Business Summit

# New opportunities *and sage advice* for women-owned businesses and enterprises

*From A4*

the content you see is meaningful and valuable. The speakers discussed need versus want and how innovative problem-solving comes from having less.

**Creativity is an equalizer**

Creative thinking is the equalizer for people who do not come from a place of many resources or feel that they have been marginalized in some way during their life, said Nicole Barton, photographer and publisher of She Is Tulsa Magazine. Barton shared her beliefs and approach to developing creativity through a story.

“My belief is that people who come from scarcity or may have obstacles to overcome are intuitively more creative than the average person. I don’t think there’s anything more creative than having to make something out of nothing,” she said.

“Think if you had been in a circumstance where you have had to dig things out of the cupboard or the back of the fridge and look at what you’ve had, and make a meal out of it because that’s what you had; or something breaks, and you don’t have the money to replace it so maybe you Frankenstein a few things together, and it works, and you keep on rolling. To me, this is how you exercise that (creative) muscle. And that’s what it really is. It’s just practicing overcoming problems in ways that might be unexpected, or unique. And that’s really the heart of creativity.”

Barton told the participants about the unexpected things she had done in her business. She also shared some changes that shifted her mindset to benefit the business. While scarcity is not the place anyone wants to be all the time, there is a time when it can enhance your creativity. Barton said it is essential not to take the actions that you might think are roadblocks to success.

“If you can excel with a little bit, work with what you have to the absolute bottom of the bucket, then when you upgrade to wherever that next level, you are going to run circles around other people because you already did so much,” she said.

“Before you spend the money on the thing that you think you need, I will challenge you to figure out if you can do it with what you have first,” she added. She explained that it is harder to be creative



PHOTO SAM LEVRULT MEDIA/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE/GREENWOOD WOMEN’S BUSINESS CENTER

when overwhelmed “by all these things now that you put in front of yourself.”

**Be Your Goal Concierge**

As founder of Your Goal Concierge, Erica Kesse has created a sanctuary and resource hub for matriarchs and mom CEOs. Kesse spoke about overcoming many challenges that left her feeling “done” after years of being under her mother’s watch, nearly being kidnapped, and losing a baby. She did it by finding new gifts - knowledge, power, and inspiration - to renew her spirit and efforts.

Building around her stories, Kesse encouraged all participants to not only think about but also bask in the way they became innovators, then recognize that the path to being harmonious is to triage yourself every day, ask yourself those tough questions, and be honest with yourself, and foster relationships.

“You will not be anywhere without your relationships. Relationships are your life, your lifeline, and your power. You must make sure you’re connected.”

**The Six Cs of Business**

Keynote speaker Aryis T. Scales, senior vice president of Social Responsibility & Global Initiatives for Nareit, has been a champion for women entrepreneurs and communities of color for nearly two decades. Her mission-oriented approach to addressing social inequities led to transformative public-private partnerships with numerous local brands.

It also helped her develop innovative policies and initiatives through which she secured over \$60 million in funding and administered more than \$250 million in grants and subsidies. Scales shared her approach to addressing social inequities and obtaining funding for initiatives.

Scales outlined the six “Cs” she considers essential to being “capital ready.”

- Commitment - “I had to have a real honest conversation with myself just recently...Do you really want to have a side hustle? Do you want to have this business?”
- Competency - “The best way to increase your competency is to know your craft - you have to be able to continuously improve your craft.”
- Compelling - “If you can identify things that are on your plate that you can transition off so that you can find those peak hours to do the research that I need to cultivate a relationship with XYZ...when you get in front of them, you can position yourself to have the conversation around what it is that you do.”

- Cultivation - “There’s the cultivation of relationships, there’s the cultivation of yourself as a leader, and there’s the cultivation that you put into making sure that you have your house in order, your ducks in a row.”
- Completing - “You have to complete these applications, you have to complete the things that you say you will do when you have conversations, you have to complete deliverables on services and projects so you can speak back and say, ‘Here are the receipts.’”
- 2Competing - “I often get blown away by how many opportunities will sometimes (be) put out for business owners to respond to from a financial standpoint...and the response rate is so low.”

Being “capital-ready” is also about getting right about money, Scales explained. “As children, we often hear our parents talking about the lack of money,” she said. “It has a lasting psychological impact and shapes our relationship with money as adults.”

Scales works with entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, and women who are what she calls Henri’s - “High Earning, Not Getting Rich.” Scales said it’s crucial for a woman entrepreneur to work to break out of the scarcity mindset, and that is done by asking questions, getting information, doing research, and building knowledge.

“How do you take this money so that we’re not operating from a place of scarcity? But to a place where we feel comfortable, where we feel knowledgeable...And that’s what I’m talking about, the minutia that we don’t necessarily want to do. We’re so busy being in our business that we’re not working on our business. And it’s, it’s a catch-22.”

“But it’s not because oftentimes the time exists,” Scales said. “It’s a matter of putting down the social media, turning off Netflix, and focusing on using time the best way you can to hit the six “Cs” and succeed in business.”

**KIMBERLY MARSH** is a native Oklahoman and contributing writer for The Oklahoma Eagle. Kimberly’s passions are education, politics and community narratives.



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VALERIE G. interviews about proposed legislation that would outlaw homeless people from sleeping on state owned lands. She sits with friends at their homeless camp near Oklahoma City Boulevard and Classen Avenue on March 5, 2024. PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Homeless Encampments

# Breaking Camp: Lawmakers Take Aim at Homeless Encampments on State Land

*Two bills would outlaw sleeping on state land that isn't a designated campsite. Supporters say it's for safety. Opponents say there are better ways.*

Heather Warlick  
Oklahoma Watch

Valerie G. was sitting alongside Oklahoma City Boulevard on March 5, huddled with some friends, trying to keep warm in 45-degree morning weather, next to a makeshift fireplace made from a metal bucket with holes punched in it, burning a piece of wood. She asked that Oklahoma Watch not use her last name.

Valerie, 41, a well-spoken woman with vibrant blue eyes that reflected a hesitant trust, said she has been living homeless in Oklahoma City for eight years. During that time, she said she has been sexually assaulted numerous times and is now trying to get out of a human trafficking situation with a drug dealer in the area.

"Being a female out here is extremely dangerous," she said. She spoke of other homeless female friends who had also been victimized and even murdered on the streets of Oklahoma City.

When her trafficker caught wind that she was considering pressing charges, she said, things became worse for her.

"I have to watch my ass constantly," she said. "I don't know if he's going to turn against me one day. It's scary."

To stay away from her trafficker, she said she moves around from place to place, on state and municipal land and even private property.

Bills intended to keep people like Valerie, who are experiencing homelessness, from sleeping on state-owned lands, are making their way through the 2024 Oklahoma Legislative Session. Two bills in particular would evict people from sleeping on public rights-of-way or state-owned lands and threaten fines, misdemeanor charges and imprisonment if people don't comply.

"I believe that's a violation of my constitutional rights and actually, my civil rights," Valerie said.

"Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," Valerie quoted the Emma Lazarus poem that graces the Statue of Liberty.

Valerie is one of more than 1,430 people in Oklahoma City and more than 1,130 in the city of Tulsa who slept in emergency shelters or under the open sky during the 2023 Point in Time counts. Many of those people are children who, with their parents, sleep on state-owned and public-owned land, including under highway overpasses.

The Oklahoma Senate and House of Representatives on Wednesday passed from their chambers HB 3686 by Rep. Chris Kannady, R-OKC, and SB 1854, co-authored by Sen. Darrell Weaver, R-Moore, Kannady, and several other lawmakers.

The bills would require officers to first issue a warning,

asking the person to leave and offering a ride to an emergency shelter with overnight beds or other types of assistance facilities such as food pantries. Failure to move or accept a ride could result in a fine of up to \$50 or a maximum of 15 days in jail.

"We're already down on our luck," Valerie said. "We're already depressed. We don't want the situation that we're in."

While many Oklahoma legislators seem to support the bills, some local and national experts think they are a waste of time and resources. Better ways exist to handle the problem of homelessness other than clearing homeless camps by forcing people out and clearing the grounds, they contend.

"You're going to fine us and put us in jail?" Valerie said. "How is that helping us? You can't bulldoze the problem."

### Under the Bridge Downtown

Kannady declined to talk about the bills with Oklahoma Watch, saying if the public wants to know his opinions, they can watch the videos of committee meetings and floor activities available at the Oklahoma State Legislature website. During a committee meeting, Kannady said the bill was necessary to give law enforcement tools; now, he said, there isn't much they can do and the minimal penalties called for are just tokens.

Weaver said his biggest concern is people sleeping under overpasses and the dangers it presents them and the general public.

"I know there is a certain location that literally, if (a person sleeping there) were to roll off down the ramp at the back of this underpass, I mean there's nothing that would stop them from rolling right out into the road," Weaver said in defense of his bill on the Senate floor.

"It's clearly a safety issue for not only those individuals, but (also for) the person that's driving their car that could be in a potential of now having to run somebody over and having to live with that for the rest of their life," he said.

"Just get out from under the underpass, that's all I'm saying," Weaver told Oklahoma Watch.

Nowhere in the bills do the words underpass or overpass appear. On the Senate floor, Weaver said a person asked to move by an officer could simply relocate across the street from their original location, from state land to municipal land.

Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City, voiced serious concerns over the proposed new law during the Senate floor session when lawmakers voted to pass the bill out of the Senate.

"What I'm concerned about is criminalizing someone who doesn't have a home," Kirt said. "That doesn't solve our problem. When we talk about moving someone across the street, that is still in our community. We've not solved

that challenge that that person is facing. This is written in a very broad manner that makes it difficult to analyze who would be impacted, what type of assistance we're talking about and what would count as a refusal."

Kirt went on to say that Oklahoma needs to change the way the state approaches the challenge of homelessness.

"If somebody is sleeping under a bridge, they have nowhere else to sleep," she said. "We are short of units for people to live; we are short of shelter beds; some of our communities don't have overnight shelters available at all."

Dan Straughan, founder and executive director of The Homeless Alliance in Oklahoma City, agreed with Weaver that sleeping under overpasses is dangerous, but he said it's virtually the same as people sleeping in tents in the woods or on sidewalks.

The state has failed to invest enough in facilities that assist with factors like mental health, substance abuse, legal representation for evictions and healthcare, which can lead to, or be exacerbated by homelessness, Straughan said.

"When we haven't set up the infrastructure to take people out from under the overpass and get them into housing, then people sleep under overpasses," Straughan said.

Valerie agreed.

"You want us to get off the streets and stuff, why not take those resources that you're putting into making laws against us, and put them into trying to help us?" Valerie asked.

### A Dangerous Life

"The public health part of this is more for the people that are sleeping up there (in overpasses) than it is for the general public," Straughan said. "The danger to the public is more of a moral injury."

As people drive through the city and see homeless people sleeping in dangerous conditions, they may feel bad and wish it weren't happening along their roadways.

"I think there is a legitimate government interest in curbing those activities, but there is a smart way to go about it and a dumb way to go about it," Straughan said. "And (these bills are) the dumb way."

When homeless people are asked to move, Staughan said they usually comply. He recalled a recent situation near Virginia and NW 4th in downtown Oklahoma City. The area has a lot of trees and, Straughan said, if you don't mind traffic, it could be a good place to camp.

Law enforcement officers started fielding calls from residents and business owners upset about the camp, its residents, and the amount of trash accumulating in the area. Officers told the campers they had to move, so they packed up and moved east, to a large undeveloped plat that's privately owned.

"So what happened then is a government entity moved

Cont. A9



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Homeless Encampments

# Relief & solutions possible with public-private cooperation

From A8

people off public property and made it the problem of a private citizen,” he said. Straughan said that will continue to happen if laws are passed that make homeless camps illegal on state or public property.

A Constitutional Question

A pending court decision could call the constitutionality of these laws into question if cities don’t provide enough shelter beds. In April, the U.S. Supreme Court is set to review an appellate court ruling out of Grant’s Pass, Oregon. The appeal is partially based on a 2018 precedent in *Martin v. Boise*, in which a three-judge panel found that anti-camping ordinances violated the U.S. Constitution. The Boise case ended with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals deciding that forcing people off public property when not enough beds are available in emergency shelters is unconstitutional under the Eighth Amendment’s Cruel and Unusual Punishment clause. In Oklahoma City, emergency shelters providing overnight stays have 950 beds. During the city’s 2023 Point in Time count, those beds were mostly full, leaving about 550 people without access. During Tulsa’s 2023 Point in Time count, 686 people occupied beds in the city’s 688 total emergency shelter beds. Two beds were open, likely because family units of three occupied spaces that could accommodate four. For safety reasons, shelters decline to place a non-family member with family groups. Considering the city’s 1,130 homeless on the day the Point in Time count was taken, the data suggests a shortage of about 440 shelter beds available in Tulsa on any given night.

A Proven Path Home

“I hate being out here,” Valerie said. “I love the people. I try to be positive with people, and I try to help people when I can, but I hate being out here. It’s been long enough.” She teared up when asked if she would accept help if offered and said she needs help. “It’s nice to be treated like a human being,” she said. “So many people despise the homeless.”

Since September 2023, 88 people living outdoors have been placed in homes through the Partnership’s Encampment Rehousing Initiative. One of the goals of the Key to Home Partnership is to rehouse 500 people experiencing unsheltered, chronic homelessness by the end of 2025.

KEY TO HOME, a City of Oklahoma City public-private partnership.

Oklahoma City government and nonprofit projects, such as the new Key to Home Encampment Rehousing Initiative, address the problem of people living in homeless encampments by engaging dozens of nonprofit, private and public stakeholders. Since September 2023, the Encampment Rehousing Initiative has targeted nine encampments, one being the underpass at I-44 and Pennsylvania Ave, said Jamie Caves, strategy and implementation manager for the Key to Home Partnership. Eighty-eight people living in those encampments have been successfully placed in homes, the city of Oklahoma City reported. Those people were assigned case managers and provided with wrap-around services to address the particular problems that contributed to their becoming homeless. These problems may involve criminal records, health debt, less-than-honorable military discharges (preventing the VA from providing housing assistance), evictions, mental illness, substance addiction and other obstacles. Nowhere in the Encampment Rehousing Initiative are people threatened with fines, which they usually couldn’t pay and would likely lead to warrants, or arrests, adding criminal charges to homeless people’s lists of obstacles. And contrary to threatening jail time, the Initiative can help its clients get some criminal records expunged so they can clear that slate. Key to Home aims to rehouse 500 people experiencing unsheltered, chronic homelessness by the end of 2025. The Encampment Rehousing Initiative is similar to models used in Houston and Dallas. In 2021, 91% of Houston people experiencing homelessness who were offered housing accepted, Caves said, and since 2011, Houston has seen a 63% reduction in homelessness.

**Homelessness and a Housing Problem** “Do I feel like homelessness is a housing problem?” Weaver said. “It could be. I mean, it could be if they don’t have any place to live.” The National Income Housing Association estimated that Oklahoma lacks more than 81,600 homes available for people

INSIGHT

Key To Home Partnership

The Oklahoma City Key to Home Partnership is a membership-based collaborative whose mission is to prevent and end homelessness. This is achieved by fostering shared responsibility, collaborative planning and aligning the stakeholders and resources essential to implementing the strategic priorities of the community-approved long-range plan and the homeless system collective action plans.

seeking them. The group estimated \$26,500 per year as the minimum income for a family of four to sustain housing and related costs. Oklahoma City and Tulsa initiatives are incentivizing building multi-family units to help offset insufficient housing supplies. But building affordable housing meets resistance with 96% of the residential land in Oklahoma City and 81% of Tulsa residential land zoned for single-family units according to Sabine Brown, infrastructure and access senior policy analyst at the Oklahoma Policy Institute. Rezoning is needed to help residents, especially people with very low incomes, to escape their niches under overpasses and find safe and affordable homes. Straughan pointed to a continuum of housing needs ranging from entry-level renters who move up the housing ladder, eventually becoming homeowners. If something kinks that spectrum, Straughan said, people can’t move up and others can’t move into the entry-level homes. Even if available, affordable homes weren’t so scarce, people experiencing homelessness generally don’t have the money it would take to move in. Though 14% of people experiencing homelessness reported having jobs in the Tulsa Point in Time census, the state’s low minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour, hasn’t increased since 2009. That is a far cry from the Oklahoma Policy Institute’s estimate of a wage of at least \$18 per hour needed to sustain a market-value two-bedroom rental. When people don’t have stable housing, they cost communities money, cycling through emergency departments, psychiatric centers, detox programs and jails, according to The National Alliance to End Homelessness. Alleviating the financial burden homelessness brings also takes money and time, Straughan said. “If you really want to address this problem there are ways to do it, but criminalizing homelessness is not an effective tool,” Straughan said. No city in America has ever managed to arrest its way out of homelessness, Straughan said.

The Oklahoma Standard – A Moral Dilemma

Oklahoma is the third fastest-growing economy in the country as of 2023, according to the Oklahoma Commerce Department. “We’re also one of the most compassionate states,” Straughan said. The Oklahoma Standard, he said, was born from the willingness of Oklahomans to help one another after disasters such as the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, the 2023 spate of wildfires that destroyed 47,222 acres of lands, and the 1999 Bridge Creek–Moore tornado that destroyed 8,000 buildings, killed 46 people, and injured 800. “You drive by and you see people sleeping under an overpass and you ought to feel some level of guilt,” Straughan said. “You ought to think to yourself, ‘My community can do better.’” “We were based on immigration and underprivileged people,” Valerie said. “That’s what America is about.” We can do better, but not by fining and imposing jail time on people during their lowest moments, Straughn said. “We’re homeless – that’s a condition of America,” Valerie said. “That’s not our fault. Start looking at the government, not at us.”

HEATHER WARLICK is a reporter covering evictions, housing and homelessness. Contact her at (405) 226-1915 or hwarlick@oklahomawatch.org.

Abortion Database

# Is the Oklahoma legislature *considering a bill* to compile a database of women who have had abortions?



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Sue Bin Park  
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma House Bill 3216, which passed the House Public Health Committee but is awaiting a general House vote as of Mar. 4, 2024, would mandate a database of patients who have received abortion services in Oklahoma. Privacy concerns raised in committee prompted the author, Rep. Kevin West, R-Moore, to promise an amendment after approval by the Committee. The proposed edit would allow collection of information such as the date, medical indications

that it was necessary to save the patient, and the gestational age of the fetus, without tracking individuals. House Bill 3216 would also ban contraception that would induce abortions or prevent the implantation of a fertilized egg. While current language would imply prohibition of IUDs in addition to over-the-counter medications, West has clarified he is willing to amend the text to only apply to contraceptives administered without doctor supervision, such as emergency contraceptives, also known as the morning-after pill. □

Drummond Opinion

# After Drummond opinion, Stitt asks court to decide rights, obligations on dual office-holding

Tres Savage  
NonDoc

Three secretaries in Gov. Kevin Stitt’s Cabinet are joining him in asking an Oklahoma County judge to review and make a legal finding about statutes governing the ability of agency directors to serve simultaneously as Cabinet secretaries.

Last week, Attorney General Gentner Drummond issued a formal opinion stating that Oklahoma Department of Transportation director Tim Gatz could not simultaneously serve as ODOT director, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority director and as a secretary in Stitt’s Cabinet. Gatz resigned from the secretary position and the OTA post.

Stitt criticized Drummond’s opinion as a “political attack,” and today Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur, Secretary of Human Services Deb Shropshire, and Secretary of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage Shelley Zumwalt joined him in filing the lawsuit seeking declaratory judgments that “Oklahoma law allows the governor to appoint Cabinet secretaries from among agency heads” and that “the gubernatorial appointment and Senate confirmation process may not be collaterally challenged by virtue of an [attorney general’s] opinion.”

While AG opinions offer formal interpretation of state statutes or constitutional provisions that are generally held to carry the force of law until ruled upon by a court, they are non-binding and can change from attorney general to attorney general.

“The most recent AG opinion concerning Tim Gatz is flat wrong, and in order to continue working to make Oklahoma a top-10 state, a court will need to fix the mess the opinion created,” Stitt said in a press release announcing the case.

In responding to a formal question about Gatz’s roles requested by Sen. Mary Boren (D-Norman), Drummond’s opinion about Gatz caught many Capitol observers off guard, considering the practice of having a transportation secretary also serve as head of ODOT or OTA—or both—has occurred frequently in the last 30 years.

Drummond and Deputy Attorney



OKLAHOMA GOV. KEVIN STITT speaks at a press conference Thursday, Feb. 9, 2024. PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

General A. Chase Snodgrass wrote that “this office finds that it is a violation of Title 51, Section 6 for a single individual to serve simultaneously in two or more roles as secretary, executive director of ODOT and executive director of OTA.”

“The Oklahoma Supreme Court has long held that ‘entering upon the duties of a second office or acceptance of a prohibited office ipso facto operates as a vacation of the

first office, notwithstanding the person’s intention of continuing to hold the first office,” the opinion stated. “Should a conflict of interest arise on the part of the appointing authority or should the officeholder attempt to maintain his vacated office(s) under color of title, relief may be obtained through civil action.”

Certain Cabinet and director positions have existing exemptions on the dual office-holding

prohibition, and legislative leaders are already considering adding additional exemptions for positions like those held by Arthur, who serves as secretary of agriculture and director of Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

“Working with the exceptional staff at the [ODAFF] and having the opportunity to serve as secretary of agriculture provides me valuable insight into the needs of farmers, ranchers and agribusiness in the

state. I worked directly with the two previous secretaries of agriculture, who also served as the agency director for ODAFF,” Arthur said in Stitt’s press release. “I saw firsthand the positive impact a person serving in both capacities can have. I look forward to clarity being provided on this issue and doing all that I can to help agriculture thrive in Oklahoma.”

In the petition filed Thursday by the governor and his secretaries, agency attorneys argued that Drummond’s opinion “stems from a relentless, coordinated attack on the [Turnpike Authority].”

Days after Drummond issued his pair of OTA-related opinions last week, Pike Off OTA celebrated with an email announcing, “We are making a difference!” Drummond spoke during a rally for the organization at the State Capitol last year.

Boren, who asked the formal questions to which Drummond responded, also praised his findings last week.

“I’m encouraged that the attorney general took the time to explain so thoroughly how Mr. Gatz is currently breaking the law by holding more than one office,” Boren said. “Hopefully, everyone responsible for creating this problem will work together to correct it by hiring new leaders for ODOT and OTA. Prompt compliance with the AG’s opinion will prevent further litigation and ensure that law and order is respected in our government.”

Phil Bacharach, Drummond’s communications director, issued a brief response to Stitt’s court filing.

“The attorney general stands behind his legally binding opinion and welcomes the opportunity to respond to the lawsuit in a future filing,” Bacharach said.

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



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**A ROAD SIGN** greets motorists passing through Taloga, the county seat of Dewey County, on U.S. Highway 183 in northwest Oklahoma. Initiative petition organizers would need to seek signatures in Taloga and other rural communities if a resolution requiring signature collection by counties advances and gains voter approval. PHOTO **KEATON ROSS/OKLAHOMA WATCH**

OK Ballot Initiatives

# Oklahoma Lawmakers Again Take Aim at Ballot Initiatives

Keaton Ross  
Oklahoma Watch

Perched along a rural stretch of U.S. Highway 183 between Clinton and Woodward, Taloga is the state’s smallest county seat.

The Dewey County Courthouse, a Great Plains Bank branch and a handful of shops and convenience stores line the town’s main street, where passing motorists must slow to 25 miles per hour but aren’t required to stop at any intersection. Just after noon on March 6, about three cars per minute traveled through the town of 288 residents.

Far removed from the bustling shopping centers and entertainment venues of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Dewey County isn’t a destination for initiative petition signature collectors. But a pending resolution in the Legislature, authored by a representative who believes the state’s method of direct democracy favors urban residents, would force organizers to Taloga and dozens of other rural communities across the state to get their question on the ballot.

House Joint Resolution 1054 by David Hardin, R-Stilwell, proposes a constitutional amendment to require initiative petition organizers to collect a percentage of signatures in all 77 of Oklahoma’s counties.

The resolution cleared the House Rules Committee on Feb. 20 and is pending before the full House. If approved in both chambers, the measure would appear before voters as a legislatively referred state question.

During committee debate, Hardin said the measure would give rural Oklahomans a greater voice on what appears on the ballot. Hardin, who served as Adair County Sheriff before being elected to the House in 2018, said he has never seen signature collectors in far eastern Oklahoma.

“If the effort had been made to come to rural Oklahoma, we might not be looking at this,” he said. “I think it will help democracy.”

Another measure cracking down on initiative petitions, House Bill 1105 by Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, would mandate a \$1,000 petition filing fee and increase the statutory protest period from 10 to 90 days. It would also require signature collectors to complete an OSBI background check.

“Where you live shouldn’t determine how important your voice is,” Alexander said. “And I reject the position that because more people live in urban areas their collective voice doesn’t count as much as the voice of those who live in less populated areas.”

**CINDY ALEXANDER**, founder of the democracy advocacy organization Indivisible Oklahoma

Unlike HJR1054, McCall’s bill could become law without appearing before voters. It passed out of the House Rules Committee on a party-line vote and is eligible to be heard on the House floor.

Critics of the proposals say Oklahoma’s voter-led ballot initiative process, which has brought criminal justice reform, medical marijuana and Medicaid expansion to the state over the past decade, is already among the most stringent in the nation among states that allow direct democracy.

Under current criteria based on the 2022 gubernatorial election turnout, organizers have a 90-day window to collect 92,223 signatures for initiated statutes and 172,993 signatures for constitutional amendments. Requiring a percentage of signatures in every county would stretch petition organizer resources and favor campaigns bolstered by out-of-state money, said Cindy Alexander, founder of the democracy advocacy organization Indivisible Oklahoma.

“Where you live shouldn’t determine how important your voice is,” Alexander said. “And I reject the position that because more people live in urban areas their collective voice doesn’t count as much as the voice of those who live in less populated areas.”

Rep. Andy Fugate, D-Oklahoma City, said he fears the proposal would allow a handful of sparsely populated counties to “hold the state hostage” and keep a measure from appearing before voters.

“The reality is that we have five counties with less than 1,500 voters,” Fugate said. “These counties are going to have a complete override over whether the people can take matters into their own hands. We are going to centralize all of the legislative power in this body.”

House Majority Floor Leader Jon Echols, R-Oklahoma City, said a yes vote on the resolution was a “no-brainer” because it would go directly to the ballot for voters to decide.

In Dewey County, with a population of 4,448 residents, 1,767 voters cast ballots in the 2022 gubernatorial election. If House Joint Resolution 1056 took effect before the 2026 gubernatorial election, organizers would need to collect 141 signatures for an initiated statute and 265 signatures for a constitutional amendment.

Initiative campaign organizers typically aim to collect well above the required number

of signatures in case some are challenged during the state’s verification process. For instance, the Yes on 820 campaign to legalize recreational marijuana submitted more than 164,000 signatures to the Secretary of State’s office

Walt Hill, a former Republican state lawmaker who served as House minority leader in the late 1980s, ran a successful initiative petition campaign in 1988 to statutorily require the regular legislative session to convene on the first Monday in February and adjourn on the last Friday in May. More than three-quarters of voters approved the constitutional amendment.

Hill, who represented a district spanning the panhandle, said he fears further restrictions on the ballot initiative process would kill all but the most well-funded efforts to get a question on the ballot. He said the original authors of the state constitution intended the ballot initiative to be a check of balance on the Legislature.

“You can’t kill the process just because you got a couple of bad bills that come in,” Hill said, referencing the successful voter-led campaigns to legalize medical marijuana in 2018 and expand Medicaid in 2020.

The push to add hurdles to the ballot initiative process comes as an effort to increase Oklahoma’s minimum wage nears the signature collection phase. The Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled on March 4 that a challenge from the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and State Chamber of Commerce was insufficient to keep State Question 832 from appearing on the ballot. The proposal, which organizers aim to have on the November general election ballot, would gradually increase the state’s minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2029 and tie future increases to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Consumer Price Index.

A handful of Democrat-authored measures to expand ballot initiative access, including a proposal to increase the signature collection timeframe from 90 to 180 days, were not heard before the Feb. 29 deadline for bills to pass out of committee and are effectively dead.

Note: This story was updated to clarify how joint resolutions reach the ballot.

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



STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION RYAN WALTERS was sworn into office during an inauguration ceremony at the Capitol on Jan. 9, 2023. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Walters' Media Blitz

# State Dollars Prop Walters' National Media Blitz

Jennifer Palmer  
Oklahoma Watch

**PUBLIC MONEY** for Oklahoma students is paying for email pitches like this one:

“Good morning! Ryan Walters, state superintendent of Oklahoma, banned porn/explicit reading materials and graphics from classrooms in Oklahoma, but Edmond Public Schools is appealing this action, asking the state Supreme Court to allow porn back in classrooms.”

That pitch goes on to say:  
“School board members won’t even allow adults to read these books out loud, yet Edmond Public Schools are begging for kids to be reading this sexual garbage.”

And this one, seizing on the death of an Owasso High School student:

“An open letter called for Ryan’ (sic) immediate removal from office for, the letter claims, “fostering a culture of violence and hate against the 2SLGBTQI+ community in Oklahoma schools.

“Ryan responded to the letter saying: ‘[this is a] standard tactic of the radical left, and they will stop at nothing to destroy the country and our state.’”

“Want Ryan on to discuss?” the pitches conclude.

Vought Strategies, a communications firm in Arlington, Virginia, sent those emails in recent weeks to national media outlets. The Oklahoma Department of Education hired the firm to write speeches and op-eds and book Walters on at least 10 national TV and radio appearances per month.

That has some people questioning whether Walters is boosting his national profile at the public’s expense — something Mary Vought, president and founder of the firm, made clear she is working to do.

“I will work with my network of stakeholders to obtain attendance at national events and conferences in order to increase the national exposure of the client,” she wrote in her bid for the contract, public records show.

A former attorney general said the agency’s use of public money and resources for personal gain is concerning.

“To have somebody whose sole purpose is not to get information to the public, but to get information about you on a public platform for your own personal gain is an illegal use of public funds and public resources, in my view,” said Drew Edmondson, a Democrat who was Oklahoma’s attorney general from 1995 to 2011. “I cannot think of a rational, legal explanation.”

## State Set Up Vought LLC

Another question about the use of public resources was raised because secretary of state records show that David Martin, an Education Department employee, set up the LLC for Vought Strategies in Oklahoma on Nov. 9, the last day proposals were accepted. Martin is the registered agent, and he listed the Oliver Hodge Building, where the department is housed, as his address.

Martin did not respond to a voicemail left for him on Tuesday. According to his LinkedIn profile, Martin started at the department in March 2023 as assistant chief operating officer; in November, he was promoted to senior director of technology and accountability.

Dan Isett, the department’s director of communications, couldn’t explain why Martin registered the LLC.

“No, I don’t have anything for you on that,” he told KOKH.

## Walters: We’re Doing National Recruiting for Teachers

Months ago, Walters, in an interview with FOX 25 (KOKH-TV), offered an explanation for why his department needed the public relations contract. He said his national media appearances are for teacher recruitment.

“So you’re saying, we as Oklahoma parents and students are going to benefit from you going on more national media?” reporter Wendy Suares asked during the Nov. 13 interview.

“What I’m saying is, we are doing national recruiting efforts for teachers to come to our state,” Walters replied.

Mary Vought, in her bid, said she has 17 years of national media experience and

has pitched and orchestrated TV and radio interviews on Fox News, CNN, Bloomberg TV, Newsmax, One America News Network, Sirius XM, Salem Radio, Fox News Radio, and more.

For Vought’s work, Oklahoma agreed to pay an estimated \$30,000 for the first four months, from March 6 to June 30, public records show. The contract can then be extended for up to three years.

Vought, in a Nov. 9 letter submitted to the Office of Management and Enterprise Services, said her compensation would be \$5,000 per month. She followed up on Nov. 14 with an hourly breakdown, estimating her firm will spend a total of 25 hours per week, at a rate of \$200 per hour.

Vought did not respond to multiple attempts to reach her for comment.

Vought came under fire for a similar contract with Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy. She was hired in 2019 for \$4,000 a month in state funds to get him on Fox News and right-wing media outlets and write op-eds under his name. The contract was extended and amended multiple times through the end of Dunleavy’s second term in 2026, skirting the state’s procurement laws and playing at political favoritism, according to Dermot Cole, a former writer for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Alaska Dispatch and Alaska Dispatch News.

The résumés of Mary Vought and Walters’ top advisor, Matt Langston, appear to overlap. Vought worked for U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson’s office from 2011-2013. Langston was Johnson’s traveling press secretary from June 2010 to Jan 2011, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Vought’s was the only bid received, even though the state maintains a list of a dozen Oklahoma-based public relations firms approved for state contracts.

## OSDE: It’s a Contract Extension

The contract started March 6 but emails make it clear Vought was working for Walters as early as Aug. 10.

Isett on Tuesday told KOKH that Vought already had a contract with the department and the Mar. 6 contract was an extension.

“I have an email from central purchasing saying we’re in the clear to continue working with them while we were waiting for the new RFP to be approved,” Isett said. “To be clear, we wouldn’t proceed if it were extralegal.”

Isett did not provide the previous contract by publication. Oklahoma Watch’s attempt to inspect the contract in person on Wednesday was rebuffed by department staff.

Oklahoma Watch was unable to find a record of payments to Vought in the state’s online checkbook system through Jan. 31, which is the most recent data available.

The top item on the contract shows the state and Vought agreed that, as of March 6, Vought had not yet begun the work.

“Supplier shall not commence work, commit funds, incur costs, or in any way act to obligate the state until the contract is effective,” it reads.

Vought has pitched Walters to national media outlets on topics including fentanyl and the southern border, drag queens in the classroom, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, teacher unions, library books, and his appointment of Chaya Raichik, the far-right social media influencer behind Libs of TikTok, to a library advisory committee.

None of the email pitches obtained by FOX 25 and Oklahoma Watch contain any reference to teacher recruitment.

The emails were sent by Caroline Woods at Vought Strategies. When reached by phone, Woods referred all questions, including Woods’ title, to Mary Vought.

Walters is in Washington, D.C., this week, making appearances on Newsmax and Fox News.

This story was produced in collaboration with FOX 25 (KOKH-TV) and Anchor/Investigative Reporter Wendy Suares.

**WENDY SUARES.** This story was produced in collaboration with FOX 25 (KOKH-TV) and Anchor/Investigative Reporter Wendy Suares.

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CLASSIFIEDS

SOLICITATION FOR BIDS  
(BID NOTICE)

Sealed bids, in the form of Online Bidding only, will be received by the Capital Assets Management, Construction and Properties (CAP) up to 96 hours prior to the time and date indicated below. The bids will be opened and read aloud after the time indicated. Copies of the plans and bid documents may be obtained from the CAP's Online Plan Room accessed from: <https://omes.ok.gov/services/construction-and-properties>. Copies of the bid documents are on file at the Construction and Properties office and are available for public inspection.

CAP Project Number: CAP24-0146

Project Name:  
DHS Maintenance Shop - Tulsa

Project Location:  
7318 E Pine St. Tulsa, OK 74115

Using Agency:  
Oklahoma Department of Human Services

Bid Documents Available: Friday, February 23, 2024, Fee to Submit Online Bid: See Website

Pre-Bid Conference: Mandatory, Refer to "Instructions to Bidders" in Project Manual. In case of adverse weather conditions, please call 405-521-2112 prior to Pre-bid Conference.

Date and Time:  
Thursday, January 11, 2024 at 11am

Location:  
7318 E Pine St. Tulsa, OK 74115

Bid Opening Date:  
Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Location: Online Bids Only

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Contact Person: OMES PM: Druey Hall – [druey.hall@omes.ok.gov](mailto:druey.hall@omes.ok.gov)

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Project Manager, Construction & Properties Department

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## Church Of The Living God

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

## Words of Wisdom Ministries FC

Temporarily meeting at the Courtyard Marriott 3340 S 79th E Ave Tulsa OK  
(918) 230-3022

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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**Gospel Tabernacle Outreach Ministries, Inc.**  
Traveling Outreach Ministries  
609 E. Zion Street  
Tulsa, Oklahoma  
Elder Julius W. Bland  
Sr., Pastor  
918-810-3882

## ALL ARE WELCOME

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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**

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**Pastor Anthony L. & Mrs. Kelly Scott**

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Sunday School - 9:30 a.m.  
Morning Worship - 11:00 a.m.  
**Wednesday**  
Prayer Meeting - 6:30 p.m.  
Bible Study - Noon & 7:00 p.m.

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Sunday School  
9:40 a.m.  
Sunday TV  
Worship  
11:00 a.m.  
KTUL Channel 8

## TIMOTHY BAPTIST CHURCH

821 E. 46th St. N. • 425-8021  
**REV. TWAN T. JONES**  
Sunday School  
9:45 a.m.  
Sunday Morning Worship  
11:00 a.m.  
"We've come this far by faith"

## NORTH PEORIA CHURCH OF CHRIST

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.  
There's no place, like this place, anywhere near this place.

## 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"

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Tulsa, OK 74106 - (918) 835-1525

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Wednesday Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.

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

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"Have Faith In God." Mark 11:22



Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

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**Mount Zion Baptist Church**  
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.**

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10:00 a.m. Spirit Seniors  
5:30 p.m. Support Groups  
6:30 p.m. Community Dinner  
7:00 p.m. Bible Study

Sunday Worship  
Church School  
9:45 a.m.  
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11:00 a.m.

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**A \$1.6 TRILLION YEARLY WAGE GAP**  
Despite some progress on the gender wage gap, women still make less than men. **A15**

**BLACK FRATERNITIES UNITE**  
Black fraternities from across the country came together to discuss how to increase African American male voter turnout. **A15**

# Why Experts Say “Keep Land in Your Family if You Can”



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Building Wealth

With Black families losing their land at alarming rates, *splitting property among relatives can build wealth when done right.*

## A Preventable Loss of Wealth

**Bria Overs**  
Word In Black

Will Edmond, vegan chef and travel content creator, had had enough. After spending 13 years living in Atlanta and a couple of years in Louisiana, he decided it was time for a change. It was time to return to his roots.

“Cities are becoming more stressful,” Edmond, 39, tells Word In Black. The appeal of urban living has declined for some due to the traffic, crime, and the rising cost of living. “I know my family has land back in East Texas. I can go back, clean it up, get it together, and build some unique structures on it. And that’s what led me here.”

In 2022, Edmond and his partner, Austyn Rich, moved back to Edmond’s ancestral hometown in East Texas, also known as Piney Woods. It’s a rural area known for its beauty, pine trees, lakes, and nature trails. And it’s here that Edmond’s family land — a whole 45-acres passed down through generations — is located.

But this experience, where Black folks keep land in the family, is rare.

Financial experts frequently laud homeownership as the key to wealth building. Yet, the Black homeownership

rate has never been above 50% — a level other ethnic and racial groups have reached and surpassed. For the Black community, the loss of land and property contributes to the widening homeownership gap and the even wider racial wealth gap.

“The immediate cause of home loss is the lack of estate planning,” says Nketiah “Ink” Berko, an equal justice works fellow at the National Consumer Law Center. “Either someone didn’t write a will, or maybe they did, but in the will, they left the home to five or six people. And by doing that, they’ve fractured the homeownership interests in the property.”

According to a 2022 Consumer Reports survey, one in three Americans has a will, but 77% of Black Americans lack one.

Estimates vary on the exact amount of Black-owned land lost. The Land Trust Alliance, a land conservation advocacy organization, estimates that between 1865 and 1919, Black folks in the South owned 15 million acres of land. By 2015, Black Americans had lost 97% of their land.

The American Bar Association offers a similar statistic: between 1910 and 1997, Black farmers and families lost more than 90% of the 16 million acres they owned — and the organization considers that to be a conservative estimate.

Cont. A16

## Wage Gap

## The Cost of Being a Woman: A \$1.6 Trillion Yearly Wage Gap

*Despite some progress on the gender wage gap, women still make less than men, with women of color suffering the most*

**Bria Overs**  
Word In Black

On this year’s Equal Pay Day, there’s little to celebrate. Although women now earn more than ever have, the gender wage gap persists. And they’re feeling the pain in this current economy and political climate.

In 2023, women earned, on average, 21.8% less than men, according to the Economic Policy Institute. While that’s better than 2022, where women made 22.9% less, it’s not necessarily because jobs are starting to pay better — and higher

Cont. A16

Building Wealth

Legacies are planned



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A15

Splitting Land Between Family

Berko says that land initially divided by a few children can become further divided by several grandchildren and even more so by subsequent generations. This division, known as “heirs property” or “tangled title,” creates challenges and difficulties in maintaining and keeping the property within the family.

This phenomenon also affected Edmond’s family. “My family, we own about six acres, and then my cousins up the street own some of the land as well,” he says. “We have all of the land still in our family to this day.”

On his father’s side of the family — which also owns a lot of land — a relative sold off their portion. Selling is one way to lose land, but other ways are incredibly burdensome to families.

A National Consumer Law Center report co-authored by Berko highlights laws and policies that could protect, resolve, or prevent heirs property. According to the report, heirs property owners are at greater risk of property tax lien foreclosure and frequently miss out on benefits or disaster relief.

Or, mortgage companies may refuse payments from “people who are not the borrower, refuse to provide information about how much is owed, and refuse to consider heirs for loan modifications or other foreclosure

avoidance options,” according to the report.

“A lot of people lose their land for \$4,000 because nobody in the family can agree to even pay anything on it, and then they lose it,” Edmond says. “Well, you only owe that much on it, and the land was worth \$100,000. Now somebody else has it. I see that a lot around here.”

Tax and mortgage foreclosures leave families vulnerable to investors who offer to purchase the property for much less than it is worth, adding to the racial wealth gap.

Keeping it in the Family

In 2023, Edmond, Rich, and their family members turned the abandoned land into a homestead and “glamping” destination called Glamping Remote. When the project was complete, they shared their story publicly.

Edmond says it was important for him to share his journey and his family’s story because it can serve as an example of what’s possible for Black people. With it being unlikely that houses and property will get cheaper, Edmond believes if people can work with the property in their family or help pay the property taxes, they should.

“If people want to have any type of wealth or to hold on to land that’s been passed down from generation to generation, they need to come back to their grandfather’s and uncle’s land,” he says. “Land is something that’s only made one time.” □

Black Male Voting

Black Fraternities Unite to Promote Black Male Voting

Black fraternities from across the country came together for the National Panhellenic Council Fraternity Days on the Hill to discuss how to increase African American male voter turnout.

James Wright Jr.  
Word In Black

Louis Williams, a member of the Colorado Spring, Colorado alumni chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., is bothered by what is going on politically in the country and wants to play a role to get more Black men voting and in the political process.

Williams, 30, flew from Colorado to the District to participate in the third annual National Panhellenic Council Fraternity Days on the Hill, with programming primarily taking place at the Salamander Washington DC in Southwest.

“I came here to see what we plan to do from a broad perspective,” he said. “We’re on the brink of the destruction of democracy.”

Williams’s fraternity leadership was joined by leaders and members of Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma and Iota Phi Theta at the conference. During the convening, which took place from March 10-12, participants listened to speakers on how Black Greek fraternities can work together to increase African American male voter turnout.

The Black Male Vote

The conference took place as data has emerged that this year Black people may not be as enthusiastic about President Biden as opposed to 2020.

A New York Times-Siena poll in late October found that 22% of Black voters in six battleground states, including the key swing state of Michigan, would vote to re-elect President Trump while 71% said they would support Biden. Biden won 92% of the Black vote in 2020, according to the Pew Research Center.

A Pew voter study revealed Black men are more likely than Black women to vote for Republicans. In 2016, 14% of Black men voted for Trump, compared with 4% of Black women. In 2020, Pew reported 12% supported Trump, compared with 5% of Black women.

Black Frats Unite

At the voter rally that occurred on March 12, leaders of the fraternities were unanimous in the need for Black men to go to the polls throughout the year.

“We need to embrace the reality we are

facing,” said Dr. Willis Lonzer, general president of Alpha Phi Alpha, on the role Black men are playing in getting out the vote. “We are dealing with apathy. We are not carrying our weight.”

Lonzer said the Black fraternities coming together and tapping into their unique, collective strength is key.

“We cannot do what the sororities do,” he said. “They are engineered differently from us. They are going to do what they do. We need to embrace our role as Black men.”

Lonzer said each of the fraternities has some sort of voter registration and education campaign. Alpha Phi Alpha’s campaign is “A Voteless People is a Hopeless People.”

“We need to coordinate our different campaigns, so we are not stepping on one another,” he said.

Richard B. Mattox serves as the Eastern Province polemarch for Kappa Alpha Psi. Mattox noted that Trump once said he would “be a dictator for a day” and referenced a quote from former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie saying, in essence, that Trump would suspend parts of the Constitution if reelected.

“The Constitution contains the 13th Amendment, the 14th Amendment and the 15th Amendment,” Mattox said. “If that happens, slavery would be legal. You are a slave again.”

Mattox said the Black fraternities have the tools to inform people about the consequences of election and “we have to go back and tell the story.”

Mark E. Jackson is the first grand vice basileus for Omega Psi Phi. While he complimented the Black fraternities coming together, he said he wished there had been better communication about the event taking place.

“Next year, we should have activities at Howard University and at the University of the District of Columbia,” Jackson, 57, said. “We should also involve the high schools in this city.”

Jackson recommended the participants approach their faith leaders and “ask for five minutes to talk about the importance of voting and to pass out information.”

Sherard Cooley is an active member of Alpha chapters in the D.C. metropolitan area. Cooley, 43, gave the conference high marks.

“It is great to see the Divine Nine fraternities together,” Cooley said. “Most of the time, we are depicted going against each other. But we are trying to work together.” □



PHOTO TIMA MIROSHNICHENKO / PEXELS

Wage Gap

\$1.6 trillion loss annually because of the wage gap

From A15

education and self-advocacy only improved wages so much. The EPI found that the pay improvement is likely because men’s wages have stagnated.

Research from the National Partnership for Women and Families found that women lose \$1.6 trillion yearly because of the wage gap. “That’s a lot of money that we want in the pockets of women and their families,” Jocelyn Frye, president of the organization, says.

For Black, Latina, and Indigenous women, the wage gap problem is compounded by racial and gender discrimination, along with occupational segregation. These factors not only contribute to pay disparity with white men, but also Asian women and white women. Because of the type of jobs these women work, many of which are hourly positions with little to no options for retirement savings, health insurance, and other benefits, this pay discrepancy adds to the racial wealth gap for each racial and ethnic group.

Frye adds that Black and Latina mothers, in particular, are more often the primary or sole breadwinners of their families, making them the “key to economic stability for their families.”

“When you ensure that they can participate in the economy equally, then they will do better, and their families will do better,” she

says. “We know that centering women of color and the economic narrative is really critical to the economic growth of our families and our nation.”

**The Wage Gap and Reproductive Justice**

When women enter motherhood, they are hit with the “motherhood penalty” — a unique phenomenon where women see a decline in their earnings that can last the rest of their working years.

But beyond that, since the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June 2022, several states have made women’s reproductive health a legislative target. So far, 14 states have banned abortions, while 11 states have gestational limits between six and 22 weeks, according to KFF.

“Many of the attacks we see, we believe, have multiple effects as we’ve seen across the board,” Frye says. “It’s not just about abortion, it’s access to IVF, access to OBGYN care writ large, it’s maternal health. All of those things affect the economic stability of families.”

**Businesses Could Help Solve the Gap**

Both Frye and the Economic Policy Institute believe federal and state policymakers should do more to close the pay gap. In 2017, the Trump administration suspended an Obama-era wage gap initiative that required companies

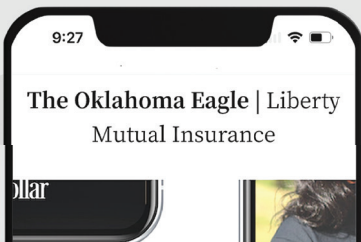
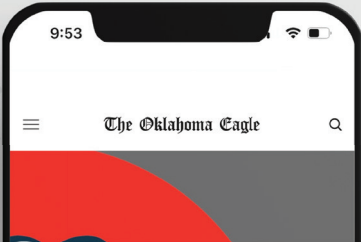
with 100 or more employees to confidentially report to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) what they pay employees, categorized by job type, sex, race, and ethnicity.

The Salary Transparency Act and Pay Equity for All Act were introduced in Congress in March 2023, but there has been no movement in the year since. States like California, Maryland, and New York have passed laws requiring salary ranges on job postings.

However state efforts only partially solve the pay gap issue because women could easily fall on the lower end of the salary range. Besides, some employers still ask for previous pay history, making it more challenging for women to negotiate pay that reflects their worth.

While the nation waits for legislation, business owners can help with this issue by examining and addressing how they pay women in their workplaces.

“We really have to rely on employers to do their own due diligence and to include race and gender into the analysis they do because many will say they are looking at their gender pay gap, but then won’t look deeper,” Frye says. They should “look at how they’re enforcing and ensuring they’re looking at their workforce on a regular basis to minimize inequality.” □



# Ernie Fields Jr. Passes

## Noted Musician and Hollywood Producer



ERNIE FIELDS JR., a 1951 graduate of Booker T. Washington High School, worked with a variety of recognized entertainers, including Sam Cooke, Marvin Gaye, Gladys Knight, Pattie LaBelle, and Stevie Wonder among others. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Critically acclaimed musician and multi-instrumentalist Ernie Fields Jr. passed away at his home in Pasadena, Calif., on March 8. He was 89 years old.

Fields built a career that introduced him to the most familiar names in the entertainment industry. He had an advantage that was not afforded to many others.

His father Ernie Fields Sr. was a renowned band conductor. His illustrious career is highlighted in “Going Back To T-Town: The Ernie Fields Territory Big Band” book by Carmen Fields, sister to the younger Fields.

Fields Sr.’s band was the eponym for Big Band rhythm and popularity in the 1930s and for two-three decades afterwards. A musical phenomenon that garnered him “world famous” status performing across the country.

Ernie Orlando Fields (known professionally as Ernie Fields Jr.) was born in Tulsa July 29, 1934, while his musician father was traveling in upstate New York. He graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1951. Majoring in music education at Howard University, he graduated in 1960 and almost immediately became a part of his dad’s organization.

Following in his father’s path, Fields embarked on an itinerary that would have him collaborating with legends and present-day and well-known contemporaries in the music industry.

In his early career, Fields Jr. toured with the Temptations, Sam Cooke, the Impressions, and Lionel Hampton in addition to countless recognizable names in the entertainment industry. He was more than a band member. He was a multi-instrumentalist, playing all saxophones (baritone was his favorite), flute, and even bagpipes. A reliable recording session mainstay, his musical contributions are on gold and platinum record albums and uncredited on countless more.

In a 2010 episode of “American Idol,” Fields Jr. played the didgeridoo for a contestant. In addition to performing on the program, Fields was the music contractor for the popular program and for “The Voice” and many others.

His professional performances took him around the world, from London for the live concert (FreedomFest) honoring Nelson Mandela’s 70th birthday, to Africa and Japan with the modern funk band of trombonist Fred Wesley, to parts of Europe with French singing sensation Johnny Hallyday. Fields was particularly proud of two performances at the White House during the Obama administration. He also enjoyed serving as guest conductor from time to time for the Ray Charles Orchestra.

One of Fields Jr.’s last performances in Tulsa was in 2019. He and his grandson, Ryan Brown, paid tribute to the city’s treasured past on Greenwood. The program entitled “The Golden Age of Greenwood” paid homage “to a period when R&B, soul, and funk music were sprouting right here in Tulsa,” according to Julie Wenger

Wilson’s article in Tulsa People magazine announcing the program.

In her book, Carmen Fields says “my brother, Ernie Fields Jr., who followed in Dad’s career footsteps and became a legend in his own right.”

Fields Jr. is survived by his sister, Carmen (Lorenz Finison) of Boston, Mass., niece Karly Finison; three daughters, Pam Williams of Tulsa, Michelle Fields-Wilson and Lisa Fields Miller, both of Georgia; three grandchildren, Ryan Brown (Johanna Jobin), Paige (Blakely) Merrick (Victor) of Georgia, and Sheena Green of Tulsa; and six great grandchildren. He is also survived by hundreds of musicians he coached and mentored over the years.

Services are pending.

Reference: Watson, J. W. (2019, October 8). Ernie Fields Jr. honors his father’s musical legacy. Tulsa People. [https://www.tulsapeople.com/city-desk/ernie-fields-jr-honors-his-fathers-musical-legacy/article\\_602d0b62-ea16-11e9-be79-674641d60218.html](https://www.tulsapeople.com/city-desk/ernie-fields-jr-honors-his-fathers-musical-legacy/article_602d0b62-ea16-11e9-be79-674641d60218.html)

## Events

### March Women’s History Month

**Mar. 23**  
Artist Helen Juliet Atkins is hosting a free community tile making workshop at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., at 1 p.m. The tiles will be featured in the Pathway to Hope Resilience Artwork (Underpass artwork on Boston Ave.). She is hosting the project with support from the Oklahoma Arts Council Art in Public Places and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. For more information, contact Michelle Burdex at [mbburdex@greenwoodculturalcenter.com](mailto:mbburdex@greenwoodculturalcenter.com) or (918) 596-1020.

**Mar. 25**  
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 [staugustineparish@tulsaaok@yahoo.com](mailto:staugustineparish@tulsaaok@yahoo.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](mailto:ramona.curtis@tulsacc.edu).

**Mar. 30**  
Queendom will be held at the Historic Big 10 Ballroom, 1624 E. Apache St., 8 p.m. – 10 p.m. The program will feature poets, musicians, singers, dancers, comics, and more. According to the organizer, the “showcase will leave you inspired, entertained, and empowered. (It is) the ultimate ‘Girl Power’ moment!” The event is sponsored by J’Parle’ Artist Group Inc. For ticket information or more information, see [www.jagtulsa.org](http://www.jagtulsa.org).

**Apr. 4-7**  
World Stage Theatre Company presents “Choir Boy,” directed by Justin Daniel in the Liddy Doenges Theatre, 110 E. 2nd St. For ticket information, visit [www.tulsapac.com](http://www.tulsapac.com) or (918) 596-7111.

**Apr. 6**  
North Tulsa Economic Development Initiative (NTEDi) Fundraiser at Pine Premier Child Care, 518 E. Pine St., beginning at 11 a.m. Lunch, featuring smoked turkey legs, hot links, and hot dogs with chips will be available for purchase. The proceeds will benefit NTEDi student book scholarships. To place a drop-off meal order, call (918) 813-8546 or (918) 850-3875. For more information, contact [ntedi.north@gmail.com](mailto:ntedi.north@gmail.com).

**Apr. 12-13**  
National Association of Black Journalists Region III conference, Tulsa, Okla. Eleven states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, will be represented. For more information, contact Eva Coleman, Region III director, at [evacolemannabj@gmail.com](mailto:evacolemannabj@gmail.com).

**Apr. 18**  
Greenwood Cultural Center hosts its Legacy Award Dinner at the GCC, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 6:30 p.m., reception; 7 p.m., dinner. The program will honor Geoffrey M. Standing Bear, principal chief of the Osage Nation, and the Osage Nation. Alfie Woodard will serve as the honorary chair. For more information, call (918) 596-1020 or visit [www.greenwoodculturalcenter.com](http://www.greenwoodculturalcenter.com).



ERNIE FIELDS JR. performed around the country in addition to stopping through Tulsa to celebrate his success with his hometown. PHOTO PROVIDED

The Oklahoma Eagle

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



# Bland Selected To Collegiate Journalism Academy



**GARRETT BLAND**, majoring in mass communication with a concentration in journalism, is a junior at Tennessee State University and a graduate of Booker T. Washington High School. PHOTO PROVIDED

**Dr. Jerry Goodwin**  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The state’s largest news organization in Tennessee, The Tennessean, named 13 juniors and seniors from universities across the state to join its inaugural journalism program. Garrett Bland, a graduate of Booker T. Washington High

School, was selected as one of the students. Bland is a student at Tennessee State University, majoring in mass communication with a concentration in journalism. In January, the collegians were offered training from the newspaper in beat coverage, reporting techniques, visual journalism, and digital production. Additionally, the student journalists received one-on-one counsel and advice from

award-winning reporters. “I learned that becoming a journalist takes a great amount of sacrifice. Some of the journalists talked about the ebbs and flows of being a journalist, which gave a perspective to me,” said Bland. The students were selected by their respective universities. The criterium was to identify “promising journalism and communication students who expressed interest in pursuing journalism careers following graduation” according to a press release. When he returns to the college campus, he will join other students in reviving the TSU Campus TV station. In addition to his studies in journalism, Bland said, “I...plan to participate in a ministerial internship for college students...in Nashville this summer or after I graduate next year.” He said his professional goal “is (to) begin a career in sports media or journalism while also pursuing ministry opportunities.” Last month, Bland participated in an internship program with NBCU Academy in New York City. While there, he visited various media outlets. He said, “It was an amazing week!” In fall 2023, Bland was an intern with the NFL’s Tennessee Titans. In addition to attending a variety of workshops, he worked at every home game in the production booth and in other areas of football operations. He said his favorite part was during Alumni Weekend when he “connected with past professional (football) players.” During the summer, he completed an NBAXHBCU Fellowship with the NBA’s Oklahoma City Thunder.

# Bobby Eaton (Re)Starts A New Chapter



**BOBBY EATON JR. (L)** shares the awards presented to him by Stanley Campbell, CEO of the House of Mtenzi Museum, and organizer for the national Stone Awards. PHOTO ET LABORIS

**Dr. Jerry Goodwin**  
The Oklahoma Eagle

## Eaton To Perform

Stalwart Tulsa musician and northside personality Bobby Eaton Jr. is launching a new band. The funk group, Eaton Out, will be staging its inaugural concert on April 6 at 7 p.m. at the 36th Street North Event Center, 1125 E. 36th St. N. According to organizers for the event, “Everybody who loves Tulsa music needs to jump on this!” Advanced tickets are available and can be purchased at KBOB 89.9 FM studios, 1216 N.

Lansing Ave., Suite D; Ralph’s Menswear, 736 E. 36th St. N.; Starship Music and Gifts, 1241 S. Lewis Ave.; or online at 918funk.eventbrite.com

## Eaton Receives National Awards

Bobby Eaton Jr., CEO of Eaton Media Services, was honored by the Stone Awards in Memphis, Tenn., last fall. He produces 12 radio shows, featuring doctors, lawyers, and youth, and is former host of “The Bobby Eaton Show” on KBOB 89.9FM. The youth are on the Juice Radio Show (theradiojuiceshow.com) on the radio station. The 2023 Mtenzi “CAMMY” award is given to individuals who “acknowledge and award

those tried leaders and place accountability on all said leaders,” according to the award’s social media page. The inscription on Eaton’s award said for “Best Celebrity, Songwriter/Musician/Activist: ‘Still Creating Decade Award.’” The second award was the “EBEN Award.” Eaton received this honor for his philanthropic work in the Greenwood and former Black Wall Street area with businesses and youth. In his acceptance remarks, Eaton said he spoke about Black Wall Street, the violence on Greenwood from the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, and his musical career with Natalie Cole. For more information, visit www.kbob899.com and theradiojuiceshow.com and see the related social media pages.

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## *Eaton Out* Inaugural Concert

*Stalwart Tulsa musician and northside personality Bobby Eaton Jr. is launching a new band. The funk group, called Eaton Out, will be staging its inaugural concert on Saturday April 6 at 7 pm at the 36th Street North Event Center. Everybody who loves Tulsa music needs to jump on this! Advanced Tickets are \$20 and can be purchased at KBOB 89.9 FM studios (N. Lansing) or online at 918funk.eventbrite.com*



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