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NATION
Bishop Leah Daughtry Breaks Down Why You Need to Vote |A16

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Shirley Chisholm's Legacy Claimed A Seat at the Table |A15

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Mayoral Candidates Make Their Pitches

Nichols Seeks To Be Tulsa's First Black Mayor



INSIDE

POLITICS:
Focus on the contenders for Tulsa Mayor
Kimberly Marsh, The Oklahoma Eagle, A7

AG to Lay Out Evidence in Epic's Multi-Million Dollar Embezzlement Case
Jennifer Palmer, Oklahoma Watch, A9

Lawmakers Seek Tougher Shoplifting, Domestic Abuse Penalties
Keaton Ross, Oklahoma Watch, A10

Homelessness and mental health can intersect for those on the streets, their allies
Matt Patterson, NonDoc, A11

Talk of Greenwood: Celebrating the lives of Tulsans every week
Dr. Jerry Goodwin, The Oklahoma Eagle, A18

Last Week's Headlines
Just in case you missed it. A4

Boley
Historic OK All-Black Town. A4

Jobs & Classifieds
Discover career opportunities. A13

Faith In Tulsa
The Eagle Church Directory. A14



FOCUS ON THE CONTENDERS FOR TULSA MAYOR / A7

TPS DISTRICT 5: INCUMBENT JOHN CROISANT FACES CHALLENGE FROM TERESA PEÑA / A8

PRELIMINARY HEARING CONTINUES FOR EPIC CHARTER SCHOOLS FOUNDERS / A9



MONROE NICHOLS, Tulsa, Oklahoma mayoral candidate and former Oklahoma House Representative, District 72nd. ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Mayoral Townhall

Mayoral Candidates *Make Their Pitches*

NICHOLS SEEKS TO BE TULSA’S FIRST BLACK MAYOR

Kimberly Marsh
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Oklahoma Eagle is launching its coverage of the August 27 Tulsa mayoral election with a report about the three candidates’ presentations during a March 25th town hall. *Two midtown neighborhood associations and Mvskoke Media, the independent free press for the Muscogee Creek Nation, sponsored the event. The candidates appearing were Tulsa City Councilor Jayme Fowler, Tulsa County Commissioner Karen Keith, and Monroe Nichols, former Oklahoma House Representative of the 72nd District. Nichols is African American and a champion of improving conditions on north Tulsa.* The other two contenders are white.

Cont. A3



KAREN KEITH, Tulsa, Oklahoma mayoral candidate. ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Mayoral Townhall

The Communicator, *The Elected Official* and The Optimist

From A2

During a broad-ranging discussion, the candidates highlighted the following key topics: the challenges of the unhoused and the related problems of mental health; street improvement delays; bipartisanship and co-governance with Tulsa area Native American tribes; and issues with mass transit.

The town hall, held at The Venue Shrine at 18th Street and Boston Ave., was standing room only. The crowd was primarily composed of the residents of the Riverview Neighborhood along Riverside Drive and the adjacent Maple Ridge neighborhood from Riverside to Peoria and 11th Street to 31st Street. Indigenous members of the Muscogee Creek Nation joined the sponsorship as the original owners of the land east of Riverside, historically marked by the Council Oak Tree and Dream Keepers Park.

Addressing Co-governance and Jurisdictional Issues

The Creek Nation provided a cultural perspective on Tulsa’s government with questions regarding tribal sovereignty, parkland preservation, and governance. The first question covered a challenge to the city’s jurisdiction over municipal crimes committed by tribal citizens within the city limits.

All three candidates said they would take a similar approach to such cases. They concurred that they would comply with the law, acknowledged appreciation for the sovereignty of the tribes, for the need to follow court rulings on jurisdictional issues, and the importance of negotiating with mutual respect. They acknowledged the deteriorating nature of Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt’s relations with the state’s tribal governments. They agreed this was not the kind of relationship they would support.

Nichols told the crowd he intends to address all the vital issues - from public safety to homelessness to job creation

and education - by creating a co-governance strategy and appointing a senior director of tribal policy and partnerships.

“The reality is this is not an easy thing to work through. But it is also not something that has to be this difficult, this adversarial... I think moving forward, given that this is the largest city that rests wholly on native reservation, it’s important that we don’t just think about this one court ruling in a vacuum...Because we are inhabitants of their reservation, and our administration will make sure that we not only respect tribal sovereignty, but we will co-govern with tribes from day one.”

Keith said she is committed to resolving lingering issues with the tribes and will work with tribal leaders directly, as she has done during her tenure as Tulsa County Commissioner.

“I won’t have a liaison because I have such great respect for these leaders that I feel as the mayor of this community, I need a one-on-one relationship to work with them...Our tribes are investing in the right areas, and so we have much more in common than not. They’re doing important work around the state, in Tulsa County, and our region, so I have met with the region’s tribal leaders and have a good working relationship with them. They know that I have deep respect for the history and for the work that they are doing. So on day one, I will be working in lockstep to address issues that all of us are facing in Tulsa with our tribal partners.”

Fowler said he also would work to streamline processes between city agencies and tribes to make communities safer for everybody. He is the only one of the three candidates who has not accepted donations from tribal governments to support his campaign. He has not met with all the tribal leaders but says he looks forward to having an open dialogue with them.

“Would I accept donations from one of the tribes? I would not, and I think that is a serious conflict of interest. So, I think you always want to work with people at arm’s

length with no hidden strings attached. I think that ethics are extremely important, and when you do things at arm’s length, without any financial remuneration, I think that’s very, very important.”

No one should call our streets home

Responding to a series of questions regarding the homeless issues in Tulsa, all three candidates agreed that improvement in mental health services and outreach are needed.

“I think we all agree that absolutely no one should call our streets home,” Keith said. “But that is what we are faced with at this point. She offered a three-pronged approach, starting with cutting the red tape for developers who are working to build affordable housing and the missing middle housing. First, she will appoint a person dedicated to helping her break through the barriers to housing, which slows down construction and adds expense to development costs.

The second is creating synergy among all the mental health care facilities and programs in the city, pointing out that more facilities are opening, and there will be unparalleled opportunities to work together to get people to safe places. The third aspect is supporting law enforcement who are working with mental health providers.

“So there’s really some good things happening. Don’t give up. I really think we’re on a trajectory to make this work so that we’ll get it done.”

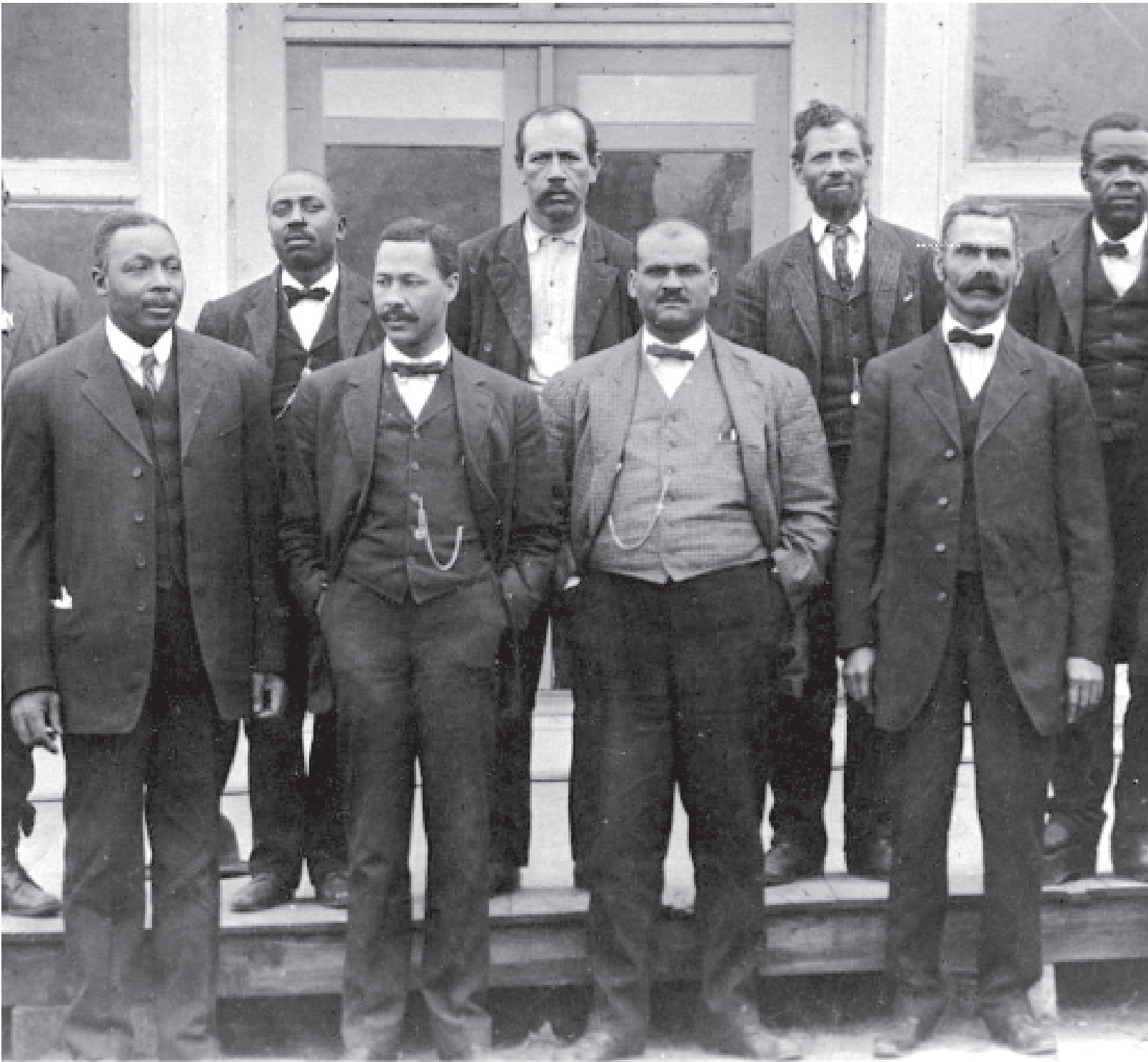
Fowler is equally passionate about mental health and housing. He echoed Keith’s statements. He is also confident the mental health crisis is being addressed through increased Crisis Response Teams with paramedics, police, and mental health professionals, along with the influx of mental health providers from Laureate’s expansion and Parkside to the new provider Grand Mental Health and all-new facilities at OSU-Tulsa, Veterans Administration facility along with Indian Health to provide services,

Nichols painted a bleaker picture of the overall picture

Cont. A6

Boley: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



Located halfway between Paden and Castle in Okfuskee County, Boley is the largest and most well-known of the more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The town, established on land allotted to Creek freedman James Barnett’s daughter Abigail, was named after J. B. Boley, a railroad official of the Fort Smith and Western Railway. Founded in 1903 and incorporated in 1905, Boley and the African Americans living in the area prospered for many years. The Boley Progress, a weekly newspaper, began in 1905. The paper and various advertising campaigns circulated through the South and lured many former slaves to the new town. At 1907 statehood Boley sheltered 824

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

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

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.

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

Featured Last Week



Jennettie Marshall: Guiding Tulsa Schools Through Troubled Waters



Arts & Culture: To Kill A Mockingbird Coming to Tulsa



Winter Storm Natural Gas Price Lawsuits Languish

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Women’s History Month Profile

ASHLEY TOWNSEND, VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNITY MANAGER, CHASE BANK
By Dr. Jerry Goodwin and Kimberly Marsh

Ashley Townsend teaches how to save money and create generational wealth



ASHLEY TOWNSEND, Vice President, Community Manager, Chase Bank. PHOTO PROVIDED

The Oklahoma Eagle conducted an interview with Ashley Townsend of Chase Bank. She is vice president community manager at the bank. Joining in the interview was Kim Marsh, a news and editorial contributor at the newspaper. (The interview was edited for clarity and conciseness.)

The Oklahoma Eagle: As Vice President, Community Manager for Chase, what are your office’s, and the institution’s, strategic goals for African American financial services customers and the North Tulsa community?

Ashley Townsend: Chase announced a \$30 billion equity commitment to help close the racial wealth gap that exists in our Black and brown communities across the country. They have hired 150 community managers (across the country) like me to lead this work in communities like ours. I am Tulsa’s Vice President Community Manager, and I focus on building strong relationships between Chase and our African American communities here in Tulsa. I have been with Chase for eight years in total. I have been in this position for two years. I was a personal banker for six years prior to my current role. I do this by partnering with local organizations, companies, churches, and other types of groups to host free financial health workshops. I host workshops that teach people about budgeting strategies and the importance of saving and building credit. We also partner with our Chase team to host home lending workshops and investing 101 sessions. We are here to offer free tips and tools, and to provide resources to the community in the places and spaces where they are most familiar and comfortable. I can get out of the four walls of the bank and meet people where they are. I’m all about...teaching people how to save their money and to create generational wealth.

The Oklahoma Eagle: What strategic partnerships has Chase established with North Tulsa community organizations and what success have you experienced?

Ashley Townsend: When we partner with organizations like Greenwood Rising, it’s our goal to be there and to be a part of the solution. We bring programs to the public like “The Legacy of Black Banks in America” event that we had recently. We have unique relationships with each organization that we partner with, but our goal is to serve the people that are associated with those organizations in meaningful ways. I have the opportunity to teach free financial health workshops and host events with these partners at their locations that are directly benefiting their members (and customers). Our sessions are safe and informative, and people always leave feeling empowered to use their newly found financial knowledge to change their lives.

The Oklahoma Eagle: How does Chase encourage and respond to feedback from residents of the North Tulsa community?

Ashley Townsend: There are many ways we receive feedback from the community. Our bankers and employees are active in the community and serve on some of Tulsa’s most amazing boards. I currently serve on five boards in Tulsa myself. Through this work I am able to stay connected and informed on the economic needs of the community. Also, after each workshop I always ask the attendees to complete a survey to provide feedback and receive the community’s perspective. (She is currently a member of the board of directors of Habitat for Humanity, Iron Gate, Tulsa Community College Foundation, Tulsa Regional Chamber (advisory board member),

and Volunteers of America.)

The Oklahoma Eagle: You shared about the goals and objectives overall for Chase and your office. Over the next eight months or for the remainder of the year, what additional goals are you prioritizing?

Ashley Townsend: Well, I’d say personally, I’m a new mom. My child is almost one years old. Accomplishing that and being a working mom is definitely new. I love every minute of it. Professionally, I would say I look to continue doing this work, and broadening (our work) for new partners, and being more visible as I can be to get the information out to people. (I want) to put (the information) out and have other organizations share it with their communities and their members. The free information (offered in the workshops) includes resources that

weren’t taught in school. I encourage individuals to grow your business network and other networking opportunities. After the workshops, we have participants to complete surveys to learn what they want to learn more about and to receive feedback from them. I refer them to our bankers for more information.

The Oklahoma Eagle: How does Chase assist customers with data privacy and protection?

Ashley Townsend: Honestly, the scams are always mind blowing. On Chase’s website, our customers can stay informed about the scams reported to them or that have been experienced by our customers. We will send a letter to you, or we will call you. You will have an actual number that you can call instead of clicking on links. The biggest,

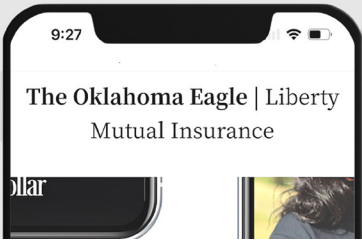
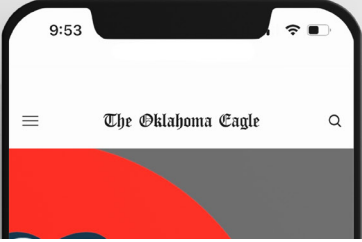
biggest thing that people will do is to click on a link. The email looks real, the logo looks real, but if you sometimes have to look really closely, there is going to be some type of difference. Whether the letters look off, or you know (some letters) are lowercase and uppercase. It could be something that you are just glancing at it and sometimes you just don’t see the differences right away in the email. I recommend that you double check...just double check to the best that you can before you commit to sending anything to anyone.

The Oklahoma Eagle: Can you share past and upcoming projects the bank is supporting or investing in the community?

Ashley Townsend: JPMorgan Chase has invested \$940,000 to support TEDC (Tulsa Economic Development Corporation) since 2019 with the goal of addressing wealth disparities and creating a more equitable business environment across the region. TEDC’s Care Program is an exciting new financial education program offered for low-income entrepreneurs who can’t get small business loans. The program will heavily impact residents in the Tulsa community with low credit scores through personal financial management courses, credit score accountability, mentors, and entrepreneurship curriculum. This program is expected to serve 300 aspiring small business owners over two years. This is one example of an investment we have made locally, but there have been others and there are more to come.

The Oklahoma Eagle: Is there anything additional that can be shared with our readers (i.e., internships for high school and college students, etc.)?

Ashley Townsend: Yes, I would love for you all to share these free resources with your readers. I have even taught from kindergarten and to older adults. We have scam workshops to teach individuals how to avoid scams. I am hosting two free financial health workshops at the 61st and Lewis Chase branch location (6140 S. Lewis Ave.) in April. On April 11 at 1 p.m., I am hosting a budget and savings workshop where we will discuss the best ways to budget and save your money to get on the road to creating generational wealth and knowledge. And on April 19 at 1 p.m., we will be discussing all things credit! How to build and manage your credit. I don’t talk about products and services of the bank. If someone wants to learn more about products and services, then I will refer him/her to a banker at the closest branch to them. Again, all these events are free to the community! Townsend, a native of the Chicago, Ill., area, is a graduate of Oral Roberts University with a bachelor’s degree in business management. She has been living in Tulsa for 15 years. She is married to Jonathan Townsend and has one child – Amara. For more information, contact ashley.townsend@chase.com.





JAYME FOWLER, Tulsa, Oklahoma mayoral candidate. ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Mayoral Townhall

PRIORITIES: *Efficient construction of public roadways; a more robust mass transit system; and education*

From A3

of homelessness that impacts every aspect of life in Tulsa. He cited statistics showing overall homelessness has worsened by about 8.6% since 2021, and family homelessness, in particular, has grown by 34% since 2020. Nine hundred kids are homeless today. One thousand of Tulsa’s families are facing eviction. “The community is losing hope,” he said.

“There was an outside poll done that said that 85% of Tulsans don’t believe that local government can meet this challenge. And so we’re also facing a challenge in which we’ve lost the faith of people out there in the community,” Nichols said. He added that his strategy will get Tulsa “to a place where we end homelessness as we know it” by focusing on five things” including the appointment of a senior adviser to the mayor to lead a city-wide strategy and an Interagency Council on Homelessness, investment in data systems outreach, aligning community investments and add housing stock and flexible funding.

Every Mayor’s Goal: Finish the Streets Faster

The question of the 21st century at Tulsa’s City Hall is: why does it take so long to finish a street construction project? The trouble with streets has been a common theme in every mayor’s race since 2000. The city began in 1999 to catch up on street maintenance, and orange cones and barrels are an all too familiar sight. In the 1980s, the City government focused on building and widening arterial streets. In the 2000s, reconstruction and maintenance projects contributed to a nightmare scenario for drivers encountering closed lanes and detours daily.

The event’s moderator asked: What are some innovative solutions to fix our crumbling streets in the short term and long term?

Nichols promised three things he would do to improve street processes. One is to have complete transparency on projects with real-time information on the timeline that a business will be impacted, the contractor cost, and a contact at the city. While some information is available online, Nichols said he would ensure QR codes are easily accessible so the public may find the information. Regarding internal processes, Nichols said he would ensure that “everybody who has an interest in what’s underneath a street is at the table to ensure we don’t have to rip some up and rip it up again.” The City’s Engineering Department under the Public Works Department does have processes in place for a right-of-way to right-of-way approach that includes replacing any infrastructure under the street at the time of new construction.

Nichols said his first 100 days in office will be spent evaluating the Public Works Department and “coming up with the things that we have to do

“

We have to make sure that as a city and as mayor, I’m not asking the school district to deal with my affordable housing problem but not holding myself accountable for their literacy problem.

MONROE NICHOLS, Tulsa, Oklahoma mayoral candidate, former Oklahoma House Representative of the 72nd District.

over the long haul to make sure that department works well.” Mayor Dewey Bartlett broke apart the Public Works Department in 2011 with leads for Engineering Services, Streets & Stormwater, and Water & Sewer. Mayor G.T. Bynum put it back together again in June 2023 under a different structure and a new Public Works Director.

Keith said the City has too much red tape and limited interest from contractors to bid on the work. She will have a person who is “hyper-focused on this issue” to make the processes more efficient.

“It takes 75 days to wait for an answer, so we have to do things better,” she said.

As a City Councilor, Fowler should be familiar with the street construction process and the complaints. He said the street hold-ups can be due to small details that are difficult to overcome, and delays become costly for contractors. As a result, he said smaller contractors stop bidding for the jobs, and there is less competition to drive down the costs. Fowler said he wanted to eliminate a five percent “hold back” or a percentage of the project that was not paid until the final project had been inspected and approved.

Let’s Hear It For a More Robust Mass Transit System

Although many midtown residents don’t ride the bus, they are interested in alternative transportation and believe a more robust mass transit system will lead to more equitable growth in the city.

The candidates also took on this topic with gusto and spoke of two ways of approaching it.

Nichols shared a story of a justice organization that spent \$25,000 in one month trying to get people to navigate the city to get to court cases and other “What I can commit to is making sure that in the first term of office, we will make sure we change how we move folks across the city,” he said. “I think it’s going to take some time. I think we have it within ourselves to do it. I think there have been many great ideas on how you get there. But I do think it’s going to take a mayor who’s an implementer, not just a mayor who just has a thousand ideas.”

Keith laid out the current situation, saying that there is new leadership with MetroLink Tulsa, formerly Tulsa Transit, who has created an Uber-type system through micro-transit, meaning smaller vans are used to take fewer passengers to major hubs. She said transit ridership has doubled, and there are many innovative ideas, but a transit leader who understands how to make it happen is needed.

Fowler said Keith’s assessment of MetroLink is spot on. He also said they recognize the need to modify and move according to market conditions, weather conditions, or other factors. The bigger buses are going away because, as he said, “what once were economies of scale where you needed to be really big to do things are now what we call diseconomies of scale. You need to be small, agile,

and very flexible. We are right on the cusp.”

Education in 45 Seconds or Less

Each candidate was given 45 seconds to talk about what Nichols said was one of the most important subjects: Education. The recommendations range from being an ambassador to the Tulsa Public School District to redefining the Tulsa mayor’s role in education.

Nichols has devoted most of his career to education. He co-founded Impact Tulsa and works with his nonprofit Strive Together.

“So we take a comprehensive look at how we’re serving particularly those who are vulnerable,” Nichols said, noting that 900 students in TPS are homeless and 1,000 families are facing evictions.”

“We have to make sure that as a city and as mayor, I’m not asking the school district to deal with my affordable housing problem but not holding myself accountable for their literacy problem,” he added. “And so the reality is, it’s taking ownership of this issue, to redefine the role of the mayor, and we’ve put out particular ways that we can do it.”

Both Fowler and Keith said they come from a family of educators. Fowler said Tulsa must reimagine Tulsa schools with a combination of corporate engagement, corporate dollars, philanthropic dollars, and tax dollars to rebuild vibrant high schools that are college preparatory and trade schools to get kids ready for a skill. He noted that he is a Reading Partner to a second grader, and he established a \$100,000 endowment for the Teacher of the Year Award at Marshall and McClure Elementary Schools, which will continue in perpetuity.

Keith said the headlines and the hostile rhetoric coming out of the Oklahoma Superintendent’s office have clouded the accomplishments in the Tulsa schools and the fact that Tulsa has amazing teachers.

“I think the mayor needs to be a champion for education and talk about the great things that our public schools are doing,” she said. “But all this negative rhetoric is making it much harder to recruit teachers and we need to make sure that Tulsa is a place where people want to come and these teachers want to come here and live. So as a mayor, I’m going to be a champion for our educators, for our students, and for our schools, lifting them and celebrating all the wonderful things they’re doing.”

The general election for mayor of Tulsa will be held on August 27, 2024. A runoff election, if needed, is scheduled for November 5, 2024. The filing deadline for candidates for this election is June 12, 2024.

Voter registration for the election ends on Aug. 2.

KIMBERLY MARSH is a contributing writer at the Oklahoma Eagle. She is a native Oklahoman. Public education is one of her passions.

Mayoral Contenders

Focus on the contenders for *Tulsa Mayor*

Kimberly Marsh
The Oklahoma Eagle

The three candidates registered for the Tulsa Mayor’s race are City Councilor Jayme Fowler, Tulsa County Commissioner Karen Keith, and Monroe Nichols, former Oklahoma House Representative of the 72nd District. Other candidates may still enter the race.

Keith is a former KJRH news reporter and anchor who transitioned to local government as Mayor Bill LaFortune’s Communications Director. She spent much of those four years carrying the ball for the City on Vision 2025. The major initiative was a series of four propositions to increase Tulsa County’s sales tax rate to fund capital improvements and provide economic development incentives. Fowler was devoted to talking to the public about the proposed unprecedented capital program package. It included funding 32 projects for \$885 million, including the iconic BOK Center that catalyzed a significant change in downtown Tulsa. She was elected to the County Commission in 2008 and is serving her fourth term.

A native of Muskogee, Keith has a folksy charm about her, punctuated by a get-down-to-business, can-do attitude. Keith thrives on collaboration, as she mentioned working together several times, and she emphasized the importance of community engagement in forums where candidates may hear the community’s needs.

Spotlight on Nichols

Nichols is a graduate of the University of Tulsa with a Master’s in Public Administration. He joined Mayor Kathy Taylor’s staff in



ILLUSTRATION: ADOBE IMAGES

2006. As former mayoral staffers turned elected officials, Keith and Nichols created plans for several issues facing the city and had strong opinions on all the subjects presented at this forum.

Nichols, a Texas native who once publicly said he wanted to be the governor of his home state, is a

successful Tulsa transplant, moving among organizations and circles that provided an abundance of leadership opportunities in education and government and resulted in his election to the Oklahoma House of Representatives at the age of 32. His booming voice and broad smile exude a friendly and witty

personality. He repeatedly speaks of transparency in governance as a high priority for his administration. If elected, Nicholes would be the first African American mayor of Tulsa.

Fowler: a devoted Tulsan

Fowler proclaims he is not a politician.

But he says he is experienced in municipal government and that Tulsa needs a mayor who understands economics and how to grow the city. He was born in Tulsa and raised by two Tulsa Public School educators. He graduated from Memorial High and received his Bachelor’s in Finance and a higher degree from The Wharton School of Finance and Harvard. Jayme has built a 35-year career in the private sector, gaining invaluable business experience, solving complex challenges, and creating jobs. He is serving a second term as Tulsa City Councilor for District 9.

He has positive energy, infectious optimism, and a relaxed presentation style.

Fowler showed his love of community in this closing statement: “Whatever, however, whoever you are - love you very much, and I just really think that Tulsa’s best chapters have yet to be written.”

Keith and Nichol’s competitive spirit as the front runners was evident in just a few comments.

Keith made it clear that the job of Mayor is not a stepping stone for her.

“I’ve been 16 years at Tulsa County, and I know there are things that need fixing for Tulsa County. I think I can put all of my experience working with other people and collaborating across party lines to work for the city. And that’s what exactly I want to do.”

Nicholas said the positive change for the Tulsa community “won’t happen if we simply choose to elect somebody who we may have known the longest.”

KIMBERLY MARSH is a contributing writer at the Oklahoma Eagle. She is a native Oklahoman. Public education is one of her passions.



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TPS District 5

TPS District 5: *Incumbent John Croisant* faces challenge from Teresa Peña

Tristan Loveless
NonDoc

Midtown residents in Tulsa Public School Board District 5 face a choice between keeping current representative John Croisant in office or replacing him with retired TPS administrator Teresa Peña during an April 2 election. Early voting is set for March 28 and 29 at the Tulsa County Election Board.

Croisant, the only incumbent running for reelection in three TPS races, has campaigned largely on touting district improvements made during his tenure. But Croisant has also faced questions about district management during his tenure, including the embezzlement of \$603,992 by former TPS administrator Devin Fletcher.

“I’m at every meeting, which is not the case for everyone on our board,” Croisant said. “I want to hear from teachers, I want hear from students, I want to hear from all of the public.”

Peña’s campaign has focused on her decades of experience working in TPS and her work teaching English as a second language to students and parents. Citing her experience, Peña has advocated for a stronger voice for non-English speaking parents on the Board.

“If you look at our data within Tulsa Public Schools, we have 37 percent who are Hispanic and they need a voice. If we want local control, we need to have a voice from our parents,” Peña said. “I teach English language to refugees so they can speak and be able to communicate with the schools.”

But allegations that she has been endorsed by the chairwoman of the Tulsa chapter of Moms for Liberty — a controversial organization simultaneously praised and criticized for trying to pull books with mature content from school libraries — have trailed Peña throughout her campaign. However, Peña has denied being affiliated with Moms for Liberty and has attempted to distance herself from the organization.

While final fundraising figures will not be released until after the election, early numbers indicated the race in TPS District 5 may be the



JOHN CROISANT, Tulsa Public Schools Board District 5 incumbent faces challenger Teresa Peña on Tuesday, April 2, 2024. PHOTO NONDOC

most expensive school board race of the cycle, with both candidates raising about \$10,000 by January.

Croisant has an incumbency advantage and endorsements from the Tulsa World and Protect TPS, but Peña’s fundraising and education background present a formidable challenge for the incumbent board vice president.

Croisant and Peña share education background

First elected in 2020, Croisant launched his reelection campaign Aug. 10.

“I’m not a politician. I’m a teacher, coach, and parent first and foremost,” Croisant wrote in his reelection campaign announcement. “However, extremist, partisan

politicians are making blatantly false statements about Tulsa Public Schools and trying to usurp the will of the public-school families and residents in Tulsa. I am here to say that I will not tolerate this kind of rhetoric.”

Croisant owns an Allstate Insurance agency, and he graduated from the University of Tulsa with a bachelor’s degree in education and political science in 1999. After starting his teaching career in New Orleans, he returned to Tulsa and taught at Edison Middle School while coaching girls’ soccer at Edison High School between 2006 and 2018.

Peña launched her campaign in November. She’s a retired Tulsa Public Schools teacher, administrator

and an alum of Will Rogers High School. She taught at Disney Elementary, Carver Middle School, Memorial Middle School, Clinton Middle School, Rogers High School, Franklin Youth Academy and Wilson Learning Academy.

“We need local control,” Peña said at a Feb. 27 candidate forum. “We have to have a good school system, because if we don’t have a good school system, that will also move into our city. And we must have good workers, we must have good business owners, and we must be able to bring in different businesses to our community.”

Fluent in English and Spanish, Peña helps teach English language classes to immigrants in Tulsa. She earned degrees from Tulsa

Community College, the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University.

At the February candidate forum, Croisant was asked what he would do to prevent future embezzlement at TPS, a reference to Devin Fletcher’s theft of about \$603,992 from TPS and the Foundation for Tulsa Schools.

“I’m the chair of the finance committee, and I came in just a few months before Devin was caught,” Croisant said. “In any large organization, there may be people that try to defraud students, that try to defraud the public. You have to have everything set up to where those things can’t happen.”

He also said the district had hired new auditors since the incident and updated policies to prevent future embezzlement.

“We’ve been able to implement some new regulations to try to make sure these things don’t happen again,” Croisant said. “A lot of this is if you hire the wrong people, and they want to hurt kids by taking money from them, I feel like if there is anything we can throw at them it (should) get thrown at them.”

Criticism of Peña has largely stemmed from hiring Charity Marcus to manage her campaign, which has raised some eyebrows among Tulsa’s political observers because Marcus previously managed the campaign of controversial board member E’Lena Ashley.

Asked at the forum about her supposed relationship to Tulsa’s Moms for Liberty chapter, Peña denied being affiliated with the group.

“So, I have never met with anybody from Moms for Liberty. I know nothing about their leadership, and I’ve never accepted a dime from Moms for Liberty,” Peña said. “I believe in Tulsa Public Schools’ school union. I was a member my whole career. I don’t believe in banning books.”

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



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EPIC CHARTER SCHOOLS CO-FOUNDERS Ben Harris and David Chaney and CFO Josh Brock. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Epic Charter Schools

Preliminary Hearing Continues for Epic Charter Schools Founders

Jennifer Palmer
Oklahoma Watch

Day One — Monday, March 25, 2024

A former school board president and an Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation agent testified on the opening day of a week-long court hearing in the criminal case against the founders of Epic Charter Schools.

The state’s attorneys will attempt to convince Oklahoma County District Special Judge Jason Glidewell there is enough evidence to bind the defendants over for trial.

David Chaney, 44, and Ben Harris, 48, each face 15 charges related to their operation of the online charter school, including embezzlement, money laundering, computer crimes and conspiracy to defraud the state. They have denied wrongdoing.

Chaney, wearing a gray jacket and glasses, appeared with his attorney, Gary Wood. Harris, in a blue suit and pink tie, attended with his attorneys, Joe and Kate White.

Much of OSBI agent Mark Drummond’s testimony, the first witness, focused on multiple companies involved in Epic and their bank records. Prosecutors allege Chaney and Harris used shell companies to conceal millions in illegal profits. Drummond has been the lead investigator on the case since 2020.

One bank account belonging to Epic Youth Services, Chaney and Harris’ for-profit company, collected money from the school through a 10% management fee. The company made payments mainly to five entities: Chaney, Harris, a technology company owned by Harris’ wife, chief financial officer Josh Brock through his consulting firm, and lobbyist Bobby Stem.

Thousands of pages of bank records from multiple accounts were submitted as evidence but won’t be available in the court file. The judge agreed to admit the records under a protective order.

Doug Scott, former chairman of Epic Charter

The state’s attorneys will attempt to convince Oklahoma County District Special Judge Jason Glidewell there is enough evidence to bind the defendants over for trial.

Schools’ board, took the stand in the afternoon. Scott, an attorney in Tulsa, has known Chaney since they were children.

Prosecutors questioned Scott about the learning fund, a unique feature that allowed parents to select some educational items. Each year, the school directed a set amount per student to the learning fund, managed by Epic Youth Services.

Some of the embezzlement charges accuse Chaney and Harris of diverting money in the learning fund to themselves as profit or to other charter schools they managed.

Prosecutors argued that Epic Youth Services was responsible for managing the learning fund money on behalf of Oklahoma students and weren’t authorized to spend it however they wanted. Attorneys for Chaney and Harris argued that the money was no longer public funds once paid to Epic Youth Services.

The hearing will resume Tuesday at 9 a.m. Epic’s former chief financial officer, Josh Brock, is expected to be called to testify. He faces the same charges but waived his right to a preliminary hearing.

Day Two — Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Day two of a preliminary hearing for Epic Charter Schools’ co-founders concluded in the midst of testimony from Jeanise Wynn, the school’s deputy superintendent of finance since 2021. That year, the online charter school was managing fallout from a critical state audit and a contract termination that threatened to close the school.

Wynn considered it a challenge to right the school’s finances and accepted the job offer, she said in court Tuesday. Right away, some financial practices concerned her. One was the student count Epic used to pay Epic Youth Services for the learning fund, which was higher than the average enrollment. “There was a distinct difference between those two numbers,” Wynn said. “About \$8 million if I remember.”

Legal wrangling over whether Wynn could

describe comments Harris made in an executive session of a meeting of the school’s board ate nearly an hour of the day. Defense attorneys objected, arguing the conversation was privileged and confidential.

Ultimately, Judge Glidewell allowed Wynn to answer a question about what was said in the meeting, which took place in 2021.

Harris, Wynn said, informed the board and others in the closed session that Epic Charter Schools had paid money to the Epic charter school in California. Harris’ comment was meant as a heads-up to the board because the information would soon be released in a report.

Throughout the day’s testimony, prosecutors hammered several learning fund policies — that religious curriculum could not be purchased and that parents could not keep items because they belonged to the school — to support the argument that the money being spent was public. Defense attorneys have argued the dollars became private once paid to Epic Youth Services.

Chandler Winningham, who was hired by Epic in 2018 as director of the student learning fund, also testified.

Both Winningham and Wynn described how Epic employees processed learning fund orders for students at Epic California, despite being employees of Oklahoma. Some of the embezzlement charges accuse Chaney and Harris of diverting money in the learning fund to themselves as profit or to other charter schools they managed.

Renee McWaters, program manager for the state Education Department’s state aid section, also testified Tuesday, describing different funding allocations schools receive and statutory limitations on some of those dollars, such as for textbooks.

The hearing continues at 9 a.m. Wednesday.

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Tougher Shoplifting, Domestic Abuse Penalties

Lawmakers Seek Tougher Shoplifting, Domestic Abuse Penalties

Keaton Ross
Oklahoma Watch

Proposals cracking down on retail theft and domestic violence have momentum at the state Capitol.

Several reform measures have also advanced at the Legislature’s unofficial halfway point, though ambitious efforts to mandate pretrial data collection statewide and impose a death penalty moratorium were not heard on the full House or Senate floor and are effectively dead.

Oklahoma’s prison population is down 15% since March 2019 but has increased in recent years as the justice system fully recovers from COVID-19 pandemic delays. Criminal justice reform advocates fear efforts to require more prison time for certain offenses and roll back parts of State Question 780 could cause the prison population to keep trending up.

With nine weeks left in the 2024 legislative session, here’s a look at where criminal justice bills stand:

Anti-Shoplifting Bill Rolls Back State Question 780

Citing an uptick in retail crime, lawmakers have advanced two bills that would enable prosecutors to file more felony shoplifting charges.

House Bill 3694 by John George, R-Newalla, lowers the felony threshold for shoplifting offenses from \$1,000 to \$500. That’s a partial reversal of State Question 780, the 2016 voter-approved criminal justice reform initiative that reclassified several drug and property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors.

Senate Bill 1450 by Pro Tem Greg Treat, R-Oklahoma City, increases the period during which prosecutors can aggregate multiple thefts from 90 days to one year. The change was recommended by the Oklahoma Organized Retail Crime Task Force, which began meeting in October.

Both measures cleared their chamber vote with overwhelming Republican support. Debating in favor of HB3694 on March 6, George said failing to act on the proposal would cause prices to rise and small businesses to shutter.

“I do agree we need to help people who want help, but we also need to protect our law-abiding citizens and businesses,” said George, a former Oklahoma City Police Department officer who led the OKC Fraternal Order of Police for several years.

Rep. Jason Lowe, D-Oklahoma City, said the Legislature is moving backward in increasing criminal punishments and should instead focus on bolstering diversion and treatment programs.

“We’re creating a situation where our prison population is going to increase again,” Lowe said. “At one time our state had the highest incarceration rate in the nation for women. We don’t want to go back to that.”

George also claimed the state’s shoplifting rate tripled after State Question 780 took effect. While the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation’s crime statistics page shows a considerable increase over the six-year period, that’s because law enforcement agencies were transitioning to the agency’s current crime reporting system, OSBI Statistics Coordinator Kara Miller said. All agencies have transitioned to the National Incident-Based Reporting System as of January 2021.

Oklahoma law enforcement reported an incremental increase in shoplifting offenses after State Question 780 took effect in July 2017, Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation statistics compiled prior to the January 2021 transition show. There were 15,231 shoplifting offenses reported in 2023, an 8.7% decrease from 2018.

Bills Seek More Prison Time for Domestic Abusers

Several bills would crack down on Oklahoma’s domestic violence rate, which consistently ranks among the top three in the nation and reached a 20-year high at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Senate Bill 1211 by Kristen Thompson, R-OKC, raises the maximum penalty for domestic abuse by strangulation from three to 10 years. Researchers have found strangulation can cause long-term injuries and trauma and is often a precursor to homicide. Despite that, it was not classified as a violent crime.

House Bill 3784 by George and Darrell Weaver, R-Moore, adds domestic assault upon an intimate partner or a family or household member with a deadly weapon to the list of crimes for which offenders must remain incarcerated for at least 85% of the sentence. The Oklahoma Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board recommended the change in its 2023 annual report, noting that the state’s criminal code is more lenient towards someone who assaults an intimate partner than a stranger.



SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE GREG TREAT, R-OKLAHOMA CITY, LEFT, AND HOUSE SPEAKER CHARLES MCCALL, R-ATOKA, chat before the State of the State speech at the Capitol in Oklahoma City on Monday, Feb. 5, 2024. PHOTO LEGISLATIVE SERVICES BUREAU

Oklahoma law enforcement reported an incremental increase in shoplifting offenses after State Question 780 took effect in July 2017, Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation statistics compiled prior to the January 2021 transition show. There were 15,231 shoplifting offenses reported in 2023, an 8.7% decrease from 2018.

More than 25,000 domestic abuse incidents were reported to Oklahoma law enforcement in 2022, according to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation. Of those, 105 victims were murdered.

Some Reform Bills Advance

While significant justice reform efforts have not gained traction this session, several incremental changes remain before lawmakers.

House Joint Resolution 1053 by Regina Goodwin, D-Oklahoma City, would modify the state constitution to clarify that a tie clemency vote from the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board in death penalty cases does not constitute a denial. The resolution proposes adding three alternate board members who could settle a tie if a full-time member recuses.

The resolution advanced through the House on a 90-3 vote last week. If approved by the Senate, the question would appear directly before voters, likely on the November general election ballot.

The resolution comes after the Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board voted 2-2 to deny Richard Glossip’s clemency recommendation last April. Former board member Richard Smotherman recused himself from the vote because his wife was a prosecutor on Glossip’s case.

Senate Bill 1470 by Treat would allow courts to consider the physical, sexual or psychological injuries a person endured as a mitigating circumstance. Offenses that require sex offender registration or carry the possibility of the death penalty are exempt.

The measure, known as the Oklahoma Domestic Violence Survivor’s Act, includes a retroactivity clause for those currently incarcerated. Among its advocates include April Wilkens, a Tulsa woman serving a life sentence for killing her ex-fiancé and alleged abuser Terry Carlton in 1998.

“Oklahoma’s legal system is structured to punish survivors who defend themselves,” said Tara Tyler, Executive Director of Ponca City’s Survivor Resource Network, in a statement after the bill cleared the Senate. “The Oklahoma Survivors Act is a beacon of hope for domestic abuse survivors across the state.”

Other reform bills up for consideration include:

Senate Bill 1663 by Todd Gollihare, R-Tulsa and Collin Duel, R-Guthrie: Allows a person to petition for early release from probation.

Senate Bill 1770 by Adam Pugh, R-Edmond and Nicole Miller, R-Edmond: Allows multiple expungement petitions to be consolidated into one file.

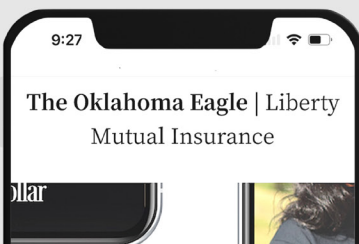
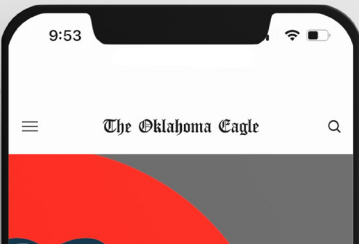
House Bill 3499 by Tammy West, R-Oklahoma City and Dave Rader, R-Tulsa: Specifies that affordable housing applicants cannot be denied tenancy based on their criminal record, with certain exceptions.

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Homelessness and mental health



(LEFT) RASHIDA RICHARDSON AND MARC HOLCOMB, outreach workers for the Mental Health Association Oklahoma, speak with people at an encampment Wednesday, Nov. 22, 2023. PHOTO PROVIDED. (RIGHT) ITEMS AND INDIVIDUALS in a homeless encampment sit under a bridge near downtown Oklahoma City on Friday, March 1, 2024. PHOTO MATT PATTERSON.

Outreach workers risk compassion fatigue while building trust with clients.

Matt Patterson
Oklahoma Watch

Life on the streets comes with few perks. Beyond the daily quest for food, fresh water and somewhere to use the bathroom, the luxury of a shower proves intermittent at best. Home can be a bench or a ramshackle assortment of old boxes and ragged tents. There is the constant fear of personal danger, which can come in many forms. Often left untreated, physical and mental illnesses are exacerbated by the circumstances and stresses of not having housing. In a world where falling asleep could prove to be dangerous, amphetamine use can seem appealing.

There is a widespread public perception — and stigma — that most homeless people are unhoused owing to some form of mental illness or habitual abuse of alcohol and other substances. And there can be a connection. About 30 percent of those who are unhoused have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness, ranging from severe depression to schizophrenia to substance use disorders, according to a federal study.

But other federal agencies cite lower statistics more in line with the overall American population. The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration states that about 21 percent of those who are unhoused deal with mental illness, and about 16 percent have chronic substance abuse problems.

Put another way, that means the majority of those unhoused do not fit the stereotypical picture often painted by someone being heavily intoxicated or experiencing a psychotic episode in public. At the same time, organizations working with the Oklahoma City Key to Home program regularly encounter homeless individuals whose variety of challenges include substance abuse and other mental health conditions.

The dynamic leaves outreach teams fighting to break the stigma of homelessness while also having to pursue evidence-based interventions for those who need treatment. As a result, people who have lived experiences are often the best advocates for those living on the street.

Stephanie Byerly-Everett works as program manager for adult outpatient services at NorthCare, a leading community behavioral health center serving the OKC metro. While numbers provide some insight into the connection between homelessness and mental health, Bylerly-Everett said it's more complicated than that.

"I think a lot of people that don't work in this field [think] that if you see someone that is homeless, their perception is that they must have this severe substance use issue going on or this severe mental health issue going on," she said. "And what I have seen through this program in particular is that doesn't necessarily have to be the case."

NorthCare's Rebecca Hensley also works with unhoused people in the field as a peer recovery support specialist, a training certification that empowers people often in recovery to help others facing situations they have overcome in the past.

"There are always people with mental health struggles," Hensley said. "It doesn't matter if they're homeless or they're not homeless. We're going to see those people in grocery stores in everyday life. So, to say it intersects a lot, yes it does. It intersects quite often. But life is hard. And if you can imagine how hard life is for us that have normal routines and a home to go to, can you imagine how difficult it is for somebody that has to sleep outside and is overstimulated by all the noise?"

Hensley knows this because she's lived it, a key part of being a peer recovery support specialist. She and others who work with the

homeless have often been there themselves, bringing with them knowledge and experiences that can help relate to someone currently in need.

Stephanie Newman, the street outreach and rapid response case manager for the Mental Health Association Oklahoma, was at one time unhoused and had substance abuse issues.

"I am a person in long-term recovery from mental health, substance use, and some justice involvement in Oklahoma County, Oklahoma City," Newman said. "So my lived experience gave me the background. My opportunities throughout my 16 years of long-term recovery have given me the experience that I needed."

Newman said her job now has become "a calling."

"It was a missing piece for me," she said. "The people who sleep outside are the most vulnerable. They are the ones that do not have a voice. They are the ones that sometimes we tend to see but not see."

Newman's reputation among her peers at MHAO is that of a person who knows what they're talking about. Shelah Farley, a licensed clinical social worker who works alongside Newman in street outreach, said lived experience is one of the best ways to build trust.

"I think what's important about Stephanie and other people like Stephanie working in this field is when she says, 'I know how you feel, I know what this feels like,' she truly means that," Farley said. "That's so important when you're working with this population."

Marc Holcomb is another MHAO street outreach team member who has lived experience. A substance abuse problem put him on the streets.

"I was homeless at one time, and I'm in recovery for drug addiction," he said. "I'm in recovery, so I know what the disease of addiction does. That's why a lot of people are out here. I met a guy the other day who said he just does drugs because of his situation being homeless, but he can't see that he's homeless because of his drug problem. I understand that situation where a lot of people don't understand."

Not all members of the outreach teams have lived experience. For some, it's the continuation of a need to help others. Rashida Richardson joined the Air Force and became military police. She grew up in New York City, far from OKC.

On a chilly November morning, she and Holcomb visited a homeless encampment the day before Thanksgiving, encountering two men and a 19-year-old who had been kicked out of his parents' house living in makeshift shelters clustered together. Such moments of initial contact have their pitfalls but, in this case, all three of those living at the encampment near Southeast 51st Street were receptive to help.

"When I got out of the military, I worked at a group home with kids, and I felt good working with kids, so I wanted to try working with adults because it's a different feeling," Richardson said. "I believe in paying it forward. It gives me a sense of pride. I grew up in New York, and I saw so many people end up in jail or die. I wanted to be part of the solution."

Mental illness and homelessness sometimes intersect

Following a Wednesday morning meeting of the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency's Board of Trustees, those experiencing homelessness in Tulsa could see additional support for mental health issues in the coming months.

The trustees voted unanimously to award \$1.2 million of National Housing Trust Fund money to the Mental Health Association Oklahoma for the purpose of fixing up 16 multifamily units in a 27-unit development in Tulsa to provide transitional housing for people who need to be close to support services while they



Quick Facts

U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration

A branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. SAMHSA is charged with improving the quality and availability of treatment and rehabilitative services in order to reduce illness, death, disability, and the cost to society resulting from substance abuse and mental illnesses. The Administrator of SAMHSA reports directly to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. SAMHSA's headquarters building is located outside of Rockville, Maryland.

Oklahoma City Key to Home

A collaboration of over 40 organizations committed to preventing and ending homelessness in Oklahoma City. In 2023, the Key to Home Partnership set a goal to pair housing with wraparound services to house 500 people by 2025, reducing Oklahoma City's unsheltered population by 75%. Work is underway, with future initiatives expected.

NorthCare

NorthCare offers a variety of services for children, adults, and families, designed to help you, your child, and your family recover from mental illness, substance use, trauma, or crisis to live a life in recovery.

About 30 percent of those who are unhoused have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness, ranging from severe depression to schizophrenia to substance use disorders

get back on their feet.

"There's this step from homelessness to having a permanent home — there's this gap that's missing," said board chairman Michael Buhl. "That's where I think [MHAO is] trying to hit. You have to have a place to put them in, then you have to have the supportive services of mental health issues, drug issues. You have to have those supportive services to be able to keep moving them through a system, not just take them off the street."

NorthCare's clients receive various services including therapy, peer support, case management, medical services and medication. Those who work with unhoused people on the streets are often tasked with assessing what direction their clients need to go. For some, it's substance abuse treatment or counseling to help them address mental health problems, but the housing-first philosophy emphasizes that having a safe and secure place to reside is a precursor to mental wellness.

"One of our primary roles is to be care navigators that help people get housed," Byerly-Everett said. "We're trying to be that bridge that gets people into mental health services or substance abuse services."

“There are always people with mental health struggles... It doesn't matter if they're homeless or they're not homeless..

Rebecca Hensley, Peer Recovery Support Specialist, NorthCare

We know we can get people housed. We've seen that. But a lot of those we work with also need to get help so they can keep their houses when they get in them."

What outreach workers see on the streets can vary. For some, post-traumatic stress disorder may have been induced by being unhoused. In other cases, a previous illness may have returned now that someone is unmedicated.

For all people, mental health conditions are generally episodic. With treatment, someone previously diagnosed with a mental health disorder is more likely than not to recover. Conversely, someone who has never experienced a mental health disorder can be at risk of developing one following a string of adverse life events. The most common types of mental health illness are anxiety and depressive disorders, which often co-occur with substance use disorders.

People dealing with SMI or severe mental illnesses — such as bipolar disorder and



▲ A SMALL HOUSING ENCAMPMENT along railroad tracks near the Oklahoma County Jail on March 1, 2024.
PHOTO MATT PATTERSON

◀ MEMBERS OF THE OKLAHOMA HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES chat before a meeting Wednesday, March 20, 2024.
PHOTO BENNETT BRINKMAN

Homelessness and mental health

Living on the streets can trigger or exacerbate depression

From A11

schizophrenia — can experience types of psychosis, a loss of contact with reality such as visual or auditory hallucination.

“We’ll see psychosis from time to time,” Newman said. “It’s hard to describe. It’s like a reality that is not our reality. They can be very public, and they can be demonstrative about the fact they’re having a hard time. And they are the most vulnerable.”

Studies indicate that people experiencing psychosis owing to SMI are far more likely to be the victims of violent crime than to commit violent crime. But to the uninitiated, seeing someone experience a mental health crisis in public can be alarming or threatening.

“When it comes to the general public, it can look really scary,” Farley said. “That builds on that stigma that people with mental health issues are scary or dangerous or that unhoused people are scary or dangerous. And that’s not necessarily true. I think the general public doesn’t know what that looks like, and so it’s scary.”

In other cases, living on the streets can trigger or exacerbate depression. About 21 million adults in the United States have a diagnosis of severe depression in any given year, according to Mental Health America.

“It doesn’t have to be someone with schizophrenia who is constantly talking to themselves or reacting to other stimuli or a situation where a person is actively using right in front of you,” Byerly-Everett said. “Some of the people we work with are experiencing slight depression or severe depression because they’ve fallen on hard times.”

Helping people with those issues can be an uneven experience for all involved. Heather Hannah is one of the street outreach team members at NorthCare and is certified in case management.

“It’s like a roller coaster,” Hannah said. “It’s great one day, and one day it’s not so great. I think being able to work with people dealing with those problems comes with experience. Yes, we have training at NorthCare, and we have trauma-informed care and community-based safety, things like that, but so much of it is on-the-job training. Seeing different mental health symptoms and how they manifest in people, when people are actively using substances, what does that look like? At some point, you get out there and see it for yourself, and you have to determine what is and what’s not a safe situation.”

Hensley can identify with some of those problems because she is in recovery herself. But she said many people who do not think of themselves as vulnerable to becoming unhoused are not that far from it. That’s something she regularly takes stock of given her living situation.

“Essentially, most people are one paycheck away from being homeless,” she said. “People like myself who are single moms, if I was to lose my job right now, it would be tough. And there would be a good chance I’d never recuperate financially without help from my family, and

“
Essentially, most people are one paycheck away from being homeless.

Rebecca Hensley,
Peer Recovery Support
Specialist, NorthCare

we’d be homeless. So the reality is depression is real. Anxiety is real. Life in general is hard, and we are all struggling right now.”

And even when outreach workers can connect people to treatment programs, there are always barriers to break down. Many lack an ID or a phone, making it hard to keep tabs on them as they enter something like OKC’s Key to Home program. All of the NorthCare and Mental Health Association Oklahoma street outreach team members interviewed for this article offered ideas about what is needed.

“I think transportation is such a huge barrier,” Hannah said. “I wish more people were willing to work with this population that would just be willing to provide transportation. I’m such a solution-focused person that when I hear, ‘I just need a ride somewhere to get something,’ I just say, ‘Why not?’ OK, let’s go and take you where you need to go. It’s just such a simple solution.”

Oklahoma provides about \$360 million annually for programs treating mental illness and substance abuse across the state. That total has increased slightly in recent years. But often those services are out of reach or in the wrong place, Hensley said.

“I feel like a lot of our resources are jumbled in the same area,” she said. “That’s a big concern, because not all of our homeless population is in this area. We’ve worked camps on the north side and in far west OKC. It’s difficult for them to get to places they need to be sometimes.”

Street outreach team members face compassion fatigue

While those with whom the outreach teams work need help, sometimes the helpers need some as well. Compassion fatigue can affect people who work with others in need.

That can take the form of sleeplessness, depression, anxiety and irritability. In some cases, it’s unavoidable. But for those who work in fields often exposed to sad or complicated situations, self-care can be valuable.

“That can be anything,” Hannah said. “It can be taking the time to sit quietly for a while reading a book or going for a walk.”

Hensley said she long ago found it necessary to understand that she cannot help anyone if she’s fails to take care of herself.

“You have to remember to set boundaries,” she said. “It goes back to (how) you can’t work harder than they do. There are some people that you can push and push and try to be creative, and you may get turned down 115 times, but not on the 116th time. It’s going to get exhausting, and you’re going to be fed up some days, but you’ve still got to go, and when you’re done you have to find ways to take your mind off it so that you can be fresh and ready to do it again.”

For Holcomb, his own experiences help him deal with compassion fatigue and the worry of what his clients are dealing with when he’s not with them.

“I always worry about them, but the thing that has helped me is that a lot of them have been out here doing this for a while, so they know how to survive,” he said. “It really sucks because it’s a terrible way to live, but most of them know how to get through another day and survive, and so knowing that keeps some of my anxiety away.”

Newman and Farley said they cope with compassion fatigue and job-related sadness by doing what they tell others to do.

“You practice what you preach,” Newman said.

Farley agreed.

“You can imagine there are highs and lows with this job, and when someone passes away or you can’t reach them, you go to therapy,” Farley said.

‘We’re out here to make people’s lives better’

For all of those highs and lows and the complications of lifting people out of homelessness and into housing, there can be some pretty big wins, too. Most outreach workers remember their first clients and what it was that helped win their trust. Those victories are to be celebrated, not just as a tick of a box, but because it’s the very root of what they’re working for. “We’re helping people that need it, and I think that’s a great reason to get out of bed every day,” Hannah said. “Moving days are my favorite. When a client gets into their new home, and they get their furniture delivered, it becomes their place. That’s the best thing about this job for me is seeing those moments where that initial contact with them led to something that could change their life forever.”

Hensley loves working her way into the lives of her clients in ways that can be subtle but, in the end, yield big results. And in some cases, the more complicated the scenario, the greater feeling of satisfaction.

“I love everything about my job, but the most satisfying is when I have a complicated client or a difficult client that doesn’t want to trust me, and I just etch myself into their little circle, so a month or two down the road I’m getting to a point where they can trust me,” she said. “Just watching those walls break down, that’s a highlight for me.”

For Richardson, the wins are more important than anything.

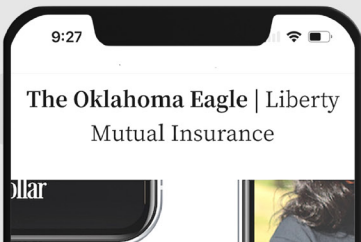
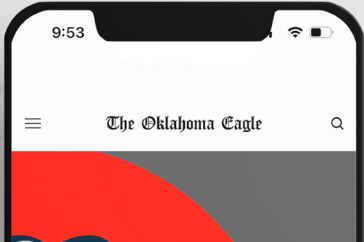
“We’re out here to help make people’s lives better,” she said. “It’s hard to describe that feeling when you help someone and they get to that next step, whether it’s sobriety or finding a home or a job, and you know you played some role in setting them up for that. I can’t think of too many things more rewarding than that.”

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

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

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

CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

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

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

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

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3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship 11 a.m.
Bible Study Wednesday 7 p.m.
Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr. Pastor

Gethsemane Baptist Church

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

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School 9:00 a.m.

Church Services 11:00 a.m.

Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

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

Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons
Sunday Worship: 1pm
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p
"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

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

Sabbath School (Saturday) 9:30-10:45 a.m.
Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal Wednesday 6:00 p.m.
"The Seventh Day Is Still God's Sabbath"

Northside Christ Gospel Church

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

Sunday School - 10 am

Sunday Morning Worship - 10:45

Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm
Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm
Wednesday worship - 8pm

Rev. John W. Anderson

VERNON AME CHURCH

307-311 N. Greenwood Ave. P: 918-587-1428 F: 918-587-0642
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

Sunday Church School 8:30 am
Worship Service 10:00 am
Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm

Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

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

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Rev. David Wiggs Senior Minister
Sunday Worship 8:30 and 11:00 a.m.
Sunday School 9:40 a.m.
Sunday TV Worship 11:00 a.m.
KTUL Channel 8

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
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Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.
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Pettie Chapel CME



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

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

Church In Power

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Wednesday Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.

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

For Further Information call (918) 835-1525.

"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"

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Phone: (918) 836-6823
Fax: (918) 836-6833

Eclectic Praise, Extraordinary Worship, And Spirited Preaching.

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

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AS BLACK MAYOR HANDLES BRIDGE
TRAGEDY, RACISTS BLOW DOG WHISTLE| A16

BISHOP LEAH DAUGHTRY BREAKS DOWN
WHY YOU NEED TO VOTE'| A16

Shirley Chisholm's Legacy

CLAIMED A SEAT AT THE TABLE FOR BLACK WOMEN



"UNBOUGHT AND UNBOSSSED," Shirley Chisholm, 1972 Democratic Party's presidential primary campaign poster. PHOTO NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Shirley Chisholm's Legacy

Chisholm knocked down barriers and opened doors that led to Black women refusing to wait for an invitation to claim a seat at the table.

A celebration of her legacy

Aprill O. Turner
Word In Black

Shirley Anita Chisholm
November 30, 1924 – January 1, 2005

The life of the great Shirley Chisholm was punctuated with pivotal firsts: She was the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress in 1968, the first Black candidate to seek a major party nomination for president in 1972, and the first Black woman to stare down the political system and declare her status: Unbought and Unbossed.

In a style that defiantly recast the mold for Black women in politics that has stuck over the decades, she famously proclaimed: "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

This November as we mark Chisholm's 100th birthday, we also celebrate her living legacy. Daughter of immigrants, she aspired to transform her community and the nation, crowned the quintessential leader inspiring a generation of women to think and act boldly.

As the first Black woman to serve in Congress, Chisholm planted a seed of political activism that transcended race in America. Her legacy inspired leaders like Congresswoman Barbara Lee, a Democrat from California, to run for office. She also locked arms with white feminists who were

part of the exploding women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Chisholm boldly changed the face of leadership by challenging the status quo. She once said, "I am, was, and always will be a catalyst for change." She enormously impacted women's leadership, particularly Black women, and how they perceived political power and leadership.

Elected representation was essential for Chisholm's lasting legacy. She knocked down barriers and opened doors that led to many other firsts witnessed in recent years, including the first Black woman U.S. Senator, Carol Moseley Braun; the first Black woman Vice President, Kamala Harris; and Supreme Court Justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Higher Heights for America, the political home for Black women, lives the legacy of Shirley Chisholm in their daily lives. Their most recent research indicates that Congresswoman Chisholm's one seat in Congress in 1978 has grown to 31 seats.

A Voice for Women's Equality and Civil Rights

Congresswoman Chisholm provided a comprehensive voice for women's equality and civil rights. She tirelessly championed many of the same issues that the nation is still grappling with, from the inequities in

Cont. A16

Bridge Tragedy, Racism

As Black Mayor Handles Bridge Tragedy, Racists Blow Dog Whistle

When they call Brandon Scott of Baltimore a "DEI mayor," everyone knows they want to use the N-word in public — but don't dare.

Joseph Williams
Word In Black

America's anti-DEI crusaders — or, more accurately, the nation's shameless racists and unabashed white supremacists who want to say the N-word publicly but don't have the guts — are at it again.

Hours after the Francis Scott Key Bridge disaster unfolded in his city, Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott appeared with fire department and rescue squad commanders for a press conference. As rescue divers continued searching the frigid Patapsco River for possible survivors, Scott appeared shaken as he began his remarks, carried on live TV nationwide.

"This is an unthinkable tragedy," Scott,

Cont. A16

Why You Need to Vote

Bishop Leah Daughtry

Breaks Down Why You Need to Vote

Rev. Dorothy S. Boulware
Word In Black

Bishop Leah Daughtry was born in Brooklyn, New York, into a family where church was their life, which is the definition of a preacher’s kid. She began teaching Sunday school at 13 but carries none of the usual “PK” cynicism. “Usher, church administrator; being a preacher’s kid in a smaller church, you had to do all these things. We didn’t get to sit and wear pretty clothes,” she says.

But a PK component emerged when asked if she’s ever cleaned the church bathroom.

“Yes, Ma’am, the bathroom, the kitchen, sweep the floor, make the bulletins in the old days with the mimeograph machines,” she says when I interject, having to clear mistakes on the bulletin master with a razor blade. She continues, laughing, “Buy the chicken, fry the chicken, serve the chicken, raise the money, count the money, take the money to the bank.”

Daughtry had no expectation of formal ministry until the call came in 2000. And she answered in a wholehearted way.

She is now the presiding prelate of that church, a Pentecostal Assembly founded in 1929 by her grandfather, Bishop Alonzo Daughtry. It’s formally called The Church on the Mount, but the national fellowship of churches is called The House of the Lord.

That fellowship describes its mandate as prophetic, political, pastoral, priestly, pedagogical, and programmatic.

A Church Full of Registered Voters

“We believe in the small church model, which is biblical,” she says. “It’s important that the shepherd be able to count the sheep. Know them by name. Know what their conditions are. There’s no need to go through lots of layers to get to the shepherd.”

The members of The House of the Lord are educated in the necessity of voting and required to register; they are enlightened about the issues.

“We give them tools to make assessments for themselves. We don’t tell them who to vote for. They don’t have to vote, but they do have to register. When candidates come to speak, they know they’re addressing a church full of registered voters.”

So they immediately see the dichotomy in a platform that declares itself pro-life but has no care about the quality of the child’s life once it’s here.

“Abundant life in all its phases. Food. Shelter. Water. Good schools. Safe streets,” the Bishop says.

“I want to be clear that I am not fighting for abortions. I’m pro-choice, but not pro-abortion. That’s between the women and their God. Everyone has a God-given right and a God-given ability to make personal decisions, including who you want involved in those decisions, but definitely not the government.”

She said we should have autonomy over our being and personhood. We are endowed with

the right and freedom.

The Bishop responds to the revisionist history being propagated. “The boldness of the lie is quite stunning,” she says. “That people learned skills, had housing. What housing? Our responsibility is to challenge the lie. It’s just a lie.”

And her tone softened as she recalled the family history that recorded her then fourth-grade-age grandmother having been raped, and chosen as the bed partner for the slave master. He legally claimed the son as his own, but who would deny the violence perpetrated upon a child?

Bishop Daughtry says the same force wants to make decisions for us — basic life decisions and choices: “It is the same force that made decisions over our grandparents. People outside myself make decisions. It’s the same demonic force.”

A Capitol Hill Start

“My first vote was for Jesse Jackson for President in 1984. In my junior year of college, I interned for U.S. Rep., the Rev. Ed Townes of New York,” she says.

She says working on Capitol Hill for those four years gave her an on-ramp into the Washington political establishment through his values lens, which reflected her own values and showed that faith and politics could be intertwined without losing their parameters.

She also worked for Democratic National Committee Chair Ron Brown and had a hand in logistics for the 1992 convention. She was also an administrative assistant for Alexis Herman, the first African American to be Secretary of Labor

Trump Surprise? Not.

Bishop Daughtry says she’s not surprised that Trump is once again the Republican front-runner.

“Because this country is what it is. We’ve never really repented for the sins of slavery, racism, sexism. When you dehumanize God’s creations, making them less than you...you commit a sin. Because our country refuses to deal with the sin of racism and sexism at its core, we’ll keep coming back to the consequences... Trump is one of the consequences,” she says.

“My deeply held faith drives me to believe that every single human being is a person of worth, in whom God has invested His own time and His own breath to bring into being. I am compelled therefore to love and care for God’s handiwork — my sisters and brothers on this earth — and to see them as reflections of God’s love, grace, and joy.”

For Bishop Daughtry, voting means choosing the person who represents her and her values. “Trump in no way represents my values. I don’t want my young nephews spending four years looking at him as a leader, as president, or thinking his views areOK.”

What about the young people who are threatening to withhold their vote from the Biden administration because of Gaza?

“I’m really disappointed in the administration

and the way it’s managed Gaza. There are 30,000 innocent dead people, people who had absolutely nothing to do with Hamas. They just happened to be living where Hamas is the political party in power,” she says.

“And our country is funding the weapons Israel is using to kill Palestinians. They’re pushing them from Gaza to Rafa. Where are they going to end up?”

She prays every day and works every day to get the current administration to do the right thing.

“I’m devastated at what’s going on in Gaza. But I’m also concerned about what’s happening on the South Side of Chicago, what’s happening in Bed Stuy. In Oakland. In Atlanta,” she says.

“Trump ain’t going to help with none of them. If Trump was president now, Israel would have obliterated Palestine by now. That’s what he said.”

What Have I Done?

What have I done? That expression of regret is what Bishop Daughtry wants no voter to feel the morning after any election. Regret at having chosen the wrong candidate, or no candidate at all for the wrong reason. Everyone’s worst nightmare.

There has been much conjecture as to the number of votes that will be lost because of the way the Biden administration has acted during the war in Gaza.

“The Democrats are my party, and I support them. I don’t support everything that they do. And I definitely don’t support the way they’ve handled the situation in Gaza,” she says.

“I was happy to hear President Biden say he was going to build a port city so the U.S. and other countries could provide food, clothing, medicine, and other essentials of which they are currently deprived.”

But what if Trump had been president when this happened? “Israel would have obliterated Palestine by now. He said out of his own mouth that Israel should just get it over with.”

And, says Daughtry, “President Biden said something no recent president has said, that there needs to be two states. The Palestinians should be able to govern themselves, without oversight of [Prime Minister] Netanyahu.”

A Missed Opportunity

Some people, especially Christians, say they’ll vote for the House and Senate, but not the top of the ticket.

“They should read Project 2025. it’s the Trump manifesto. It states what they plan to do if they get another go at the White House,” the Bishop says. “They’re going after everything they want with executive orders, all the that don’t require congressional approval.”

She says they’re planning to deport Muslims, and half her family members are Muslims.

“I’m concerned. They’re going to overturn laws — replace them with new laws. The top of the ticket matters,” she says.

Not voting is a missed opportunity.

“And you end up with, ‘Oh my God, what did I do?’”

Shirley Chisholm’s Legacy

A legacy of strength



SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, future member of the U.S. House of Representatives (D-NY), announcing her candidacy. PHOTO UNITED STATES LIBRARY OF CONGRESS'S PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION

From A15

public education and civil rights to an all-out assault on women’s reproductive rights.

In 1968, she became the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws’ (NARAL) first honorary president, joining her white counterparts by providing a Black woman’s perspective. She believed that her leadership on abortion rights would grant access to the full range of family planning services, regardless of race or socioeconomic status.

In a month dedicated to women’s history, Congresswoman Chisholm’s story is featured in a new Netflix film “Shirley”, which premiered March 22. She is portrayed by Academy Award-winning actor and director Regina King who has worked to bring Congresswoman Chisholm’s story to the screen for nearly 15 years.



BRANDON SCOTT, Baltimore Mayor, talks with the media after a cargo ship ran into and collapsed the Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 26, 2024 in Baltimore, Maryland. According to reports, rescuers are still searching for multiple people, while two survivors have been pulled from the Patapsco River. PHOTO ROB CARR/GETTY IMAGES

Bridge Tragedy, Racism

An unthinkable *tragedy*

From A15

39 and the youngest Black mayor in Baltimore history, told reporters. “We have to first and foremost pray for all of those who are impacted, those families, pray for our first responders and thank them. We have to be thinking about the families and people impacted. We have to try to find them safe.”

Maybe it was the fact that Scott is a young Black man with a neatly trimmed beard and modest Afro. Perhaps it was the fact that he was wearing a baseball jacket with the seal of Baltimore and his name embroidered on it. It could have been Scott’s unscripted, heart-on-his-sleeve concern for the road repair crew that vanished into dark, frigid waters when a cargo ship veered into and knocked down the bridge.

Regardless of the reason, Scott’s TV appearance triggered multiple bigots on X, formerly known as Twitter, who decided to drag the mayor for no clear reason. One of the most popular posts declared that the Black man leading Charm City through crisis is, in their opinion, a “DEI Mayor,” whatever that means:

The nonsensical tweet by @iamyesyouareno — what is a DEI mayor anyway? Why are things going to get worse? What’s up with that X handle? — immediately began trending,

racking up nearly 10,000 likes and more than 7,000 shares at last count.

Other like-minded people put on their tin foil hats and quickly jumped in, drawing imaginary lines between DEI programs and the Key Bridge disaster, the company that owns the ship that hit the bridge, Baltimore’s crime rate, and even how well the Port of Baltimore is managed.

At this moment, authorities don’t know exactly why the massive cargo ship Dali lost control and slammed into the Key Bridge, sending six workers to all but certain death. But it’s safe to say that DEI didn’t build the bridge, didn’t load the ship, and wasn’t steering it when it veered into the Key Bridge support pillar at 1:30 EDT Tuesday morning. DEI didn’t even elect Scott, a native Baltimorean, in the 2020 mayoral race: more than 70% of Baltimore voters did.

DEI tweets aside, Scott — who went to high school in Baltimore and returned after college to become one of the youngest members of the city council in history — has checked all the right boxes for a big-city mayor managing a catastrophe so far. In public and written statements, he has shown leadership, empathy, and concern for the victims as well as first responders. He has also kept the city informed through his social media accounts.

And his love for the city has come through.

“My heart is with those families tonight and in the days ahead,” he wrote on Twitter, referring to those who lost loved ones in the bridge collapse. “Let us wrap our arms around them and our entire community. Baltimore, we will get through this together.”

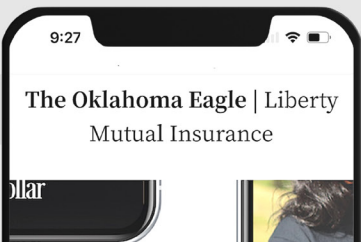
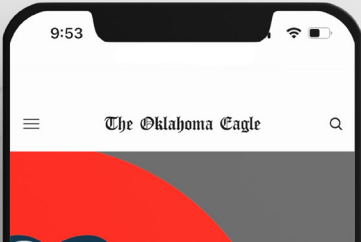
A veteran journalist, political analyst, and essayist, Joseph Williams has been published in a wide range of publications, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Politico, The Boston Globe, The Atlantic, and US News & World Report. A California native, Williams is a graduate of the University Of Richmond and a former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He lives and works in metro Washington, D.C.

JOSEPH WILLIAMS A veteran journalist, political analyst, and essayist, Joseph Williams has been published in a wide range of publications, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Politico, The Boston Globe, The Atlantic, and US News & World Report. A California native, Williams is a graduate of the University Of Richmond and a former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He lives and works in metro Washington, D.C.

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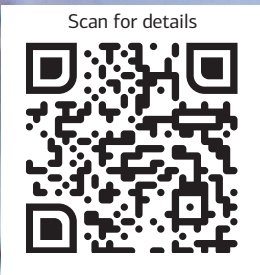
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'GOD-TALK: REIMAGING FAITH IN THE 21ST CENTURY' is executive produced by Kevin Young, Andrew W. Mellon director at the National Museum of African American History and Culture; produced by Teddy Reeves, NMAAHC curator; and directed and written by Kim Moir, NMAAHC museum specialist. PHOTO PROVIDED

National Museum Of African American History And Culture To Show Documentary, 'gOD-Talk: Reimagining Faith in the 21st Century'

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

*Phillips Theological Seminary
to host local screening*

Phillips Theological Seminary, 901 N. Mingo Rd., is one of the stops on the multi-city film screening tour of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture's documentary film, "gOD-Talk: Reimagining Faith in the 21st Century," including panel discussions exploring how and why African American millennials are creating new ways to engage with religion and spirituality. The film is a result of a five-year study

exploring the lives of seven Black millennials – Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Ifa, and Spiritualist – and how they reimagine faith in the 21st century.

"gOD-Talk" is charting new ground in the exploration of Black faith both in the scholarly study of religion and cinematic expression," said Teddy Reeves, NMAAHC curator and the producer for the film.

The documentary premiered in October 2023. It is the first feature-length film from NMAAHC developed in partnership with the Pew Research Center.

"The film gives millennials, the world's largest living generation, the space to not only wrestle with the complexities of their faith—from issues pertaining to gender and sexuality, abuse and trauma, hip-hop, gentrification and more—but

to discuss how they are fearlessly reconstructing their spirituality within or beyond the confines of their traditional upbringings," said Reeves.

Additional contributors to "gOD-Talk" include Executive Producer: Kevin Young, Andrew W. Mellon director at NMAAHC, and Director and Writer: Kim Moir, NMAAHC museum specialist. Other film participants are Narrator: Javicia Leslie Walker, Music: Fantastic Negrito, and Film Poster Design: Nikkolas Smith.

Prior to the screening, a reception will be held at 5:45 p.m., and the film will begin at 6:30 p.m. After the documentary, a panel discussion will follow with principals from the film and leading millennial voices. The film is rated PG-13.

For more information, visit <https://ptstulsa.edu/events/>

Christopher Selected Scholar Athlete Of The Week



CHARLIE CHRISTOPHER (C) is recognized for his scholastic and athletic achievements by the Sunnyvale Independent School District in Texas. He is shown with (l-r) Head Football Coach Cody Stutts; his father, Charles Christopher II; his mother, Cassandra Miller Christopher; and Superintendent Matt Kimball. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Charles "Charlie" Christopher III was selected by WFAA, ABC-TV affiliate in Dallas-Fort Worth, as Scholar Athlete of the Week. He has a 3.97 GPA. He is graduating from Sunnyvale High School in May.

Other honors received by Christopher include National Honors Society (2022-Present); "A/B"

Honor Roll (2023); "A" Honor Roll (2022 and 2021); Texas High School Coaches Association Football Academic All-State (2023); Defensive Player of the Year – Basketball (2023); Newcomer of the Year – Track (2023); Academic All-District in Football (2021 and 2022), Basketball (2023), and Track (2023); District MVP Football Defensive Player (2023); Outstanding Sophomore of the Month (Fall 2022); First Team All-District Defense – Football (2022); and Second Team All-District Offense - Football (2021).

His plans to attend Howard University, Oklahoma State University, or the University of Oklahoma in the fall and study orthopedic medicine. His professional goal is to be a pediatric osteopathic surgeon. He is currently a pharmacy technician trainee licensee and is working at a local pharmacy.

Christopher's parents are Charles and Cassandra Miller Christopher of Sunnyvale, Texas. He is the grandson of the late Drs. Charles and Anita Christopher of Tulsa.

Oklahoma Historical Society Awards Banquet Recognizes Local Authors And Elected Official



Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Oklahoma Historical Society held its annual awards banquet at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City. Several Tulsans were recognized at the program.

Honors were given for the following categories: Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame Inductees: Hannibal B. Johnson and Debra Echo-Hawk; E. E. Dale Award for Outstanding Book on Oklahoma History: "Built from the Fire: The Epic Story of Tulsa's Greenwood District, America's Black Wall Street" by Victor Luckerson; and Guardians of History Honorees: St. Sen. Kevin Matthews among other honorees.

For a complete list of additional awardees, visit <http://www.okhistory.org/about/awardsbanquet>.

(LEFT) VICTOR LUCKERSON is the critically acclaimed author of "Built from the Fire: The Epic Story of Tulsa's Greenwood District, America's Black Wall." Street." PHOTO PROVIDED (RIGHT) Hannibal Johnson, curator of Greenwood Rising History Center, is the recent author of "10 Ways We Can Advance Social Justice: Without Destroying One Another." PHOTO PROVIDED

Events

March Women's History Month

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.

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 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

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.

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. Alfre Woodard will serve as the honorary chair. For more information, call (918) 596-1020 or visit www.greenwoodculturalcenter.com.

Apr. 26

100 Black Men of Tulsa Annual Gala – 30th Anniversary is planned for the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 7 p.m. For more information or tickets, see Eventbrite.

Apr. 27

Sisserou's Restaurant celebrates its 10th anniversary with an event at Guthrie Green, 111 Reconciliation Way. The "Caribbean Carnival on The Green" is scheduled for 5 p.m. – 10 p.m. The event will be "bringing all the island vibes with authentic live music, art, dancing, shimmering costumes, and the finest Caribbean refreshments. Dive into the vibrant cultures of the West Indies" according to the organizers. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to A Pocket Full of Hope. For more information, contact (918) 576-6800.

Apr. 29-30

Phillips Theological Seminary, 901 N. Mingo Rd., will be hosting "Halim Flowers – Something New, Black Birds (2121)" exhibition on April 29 at 5:30 p.m. Flowers' art features paintings exclusively created for this event. It is a collection of 21 original paintings inspired by the painter's research of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. On April 30 at 6:30 p.m., a reception will be held at Greenwood Rising followed by a discussion with Flowers. The exhibit will be available for the public to see through July 14 at Phillips. For more information, see Art Exhibitions at Phillips Theological Seminary or call (918) 610-8303.

May 4

Tulsa Symphony is hosting the Flint Family Foundation Concert Series. It is a series of concerts around town, including St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, 4045 N. Cincinnati Ave., at 11 a.m. The concert series is related to music from recognizable movies. The movie-themed selections for the "Winds" instrument performances will be from "Colors of the Wind" ("Pocahontas"), "How Far I'll Go" ("Moana"), "Neverland" ("The Story of Peter Pan" in poetry and music (with narration)), "Peter and the Wolf" (with narration), and "Under the Sea" ("The Little Mermaid"). For more information, visit <http://www.tulsasymphony.org/flint/>