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## Mayoral Candidates Face Off In Debate

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**FEATURED**

**City Council District 7 Candidates have sharply different views**

District 7, A6



**FEATURED**

**Tulsa Council District 2: Archie, Reisdorph Share similar ideology on community issues**

District 2, A8



Okla. St. Rep Monroe Nichols, Tulsa mayoral candidate.

ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

**Mayoral Race**

## Mayoral Candidates Face Off In Debate

**KIMBERLY MARSH**  
The Oklahoma Eagle

**In the latest bid to inform voters and encourage voter turnout in the Tulsa mayoral election on Nov. 5, the Tulsa World held a debate between the two candidates – St. Rep. Monroe Nichols (D-72) and County Commissioner Karen Keith – on Oct. 22.**

Cont. A6, **Mayoral Race**

Frederick Douglass Moon: African American Educator

By WILLIAM D. WELGEL, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



African American educator Frederick Moon was born on May 4, 1896, at Fallis, Oklahoma Territory. Son of Henry Clay and Pollie Twiggs Moon, Frederick Moon was educated in the segregated schools of Lincoln County, Oklahoma. Because there was no high school for African Americans near his home, he entered Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University) in the ninth grade, and he completed high school and two years of college there. In 1929 he earned a bachelor of science degree. He earned a master of arts degree at the University of Chicago in 1938. During his time at Langston he led an effort to develop a memorial to Inman Page, the college's first president. Moon began his teaching career in 1921 at Crescent, Oklahoma, and he helped the school gain accreditation. In 1929 the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers elected him as

president. In 1931 he taught in and was principal of Wewoka Douglass High School, and he again assisted a school in gaining accreditation with the North Central Association. Moon married Leoshia Harris, of Oklahoma City, on August 28, 1935. In 1940 he moved to Oklahoma City and became principal of Douglass High School. He continued in that position until 1961. Considered the "dean" of African American education, he was elected to the Oklahoma City Board of Education in 1972 and served as its first African American president in 1974. He served at a time when federally mandated desegregation occurred within the Oklahoma City Public School System. During this period the school district carried out a program of busing students across town in order to bring racial equality to the schools. Moon was also a civic leader in the community. He served as a director for the YMCA. He was variously president of the Oklahoma City Urban

League, the Langston Alumni Association, and the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, and he was a member of the National Education Association. He was vice president of the National Association of Secondary Principals and of the American Association of School Administrators and served on the mayor's Human Relations Commission and the Urban Renewal Authority. The Oklahoma School of Religion at Langston awarded him an honorary doctorate in humanities. His publications included Organization and Administration of High School for Negroes in Oklahoma, A Fifth Freedom for the Negro, and Teacher Integration in the Border States. He resigned his position with the board of education due to declining health in December 1974. Frederick Moon died on December 16, 1975, in Oklahoma City.

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.

F. D. Moon Junior High School Band, 1958 (20699.02.197.1620.7, State Museum Collection, Currie Ballard Collection, OHS).

Featured Last Week



"It Was What People Do."



GOP Lawmakers Remain Committed to Anti-ESG



Tulsa District 9: Fowler faces Bush

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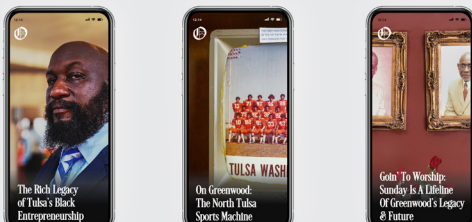
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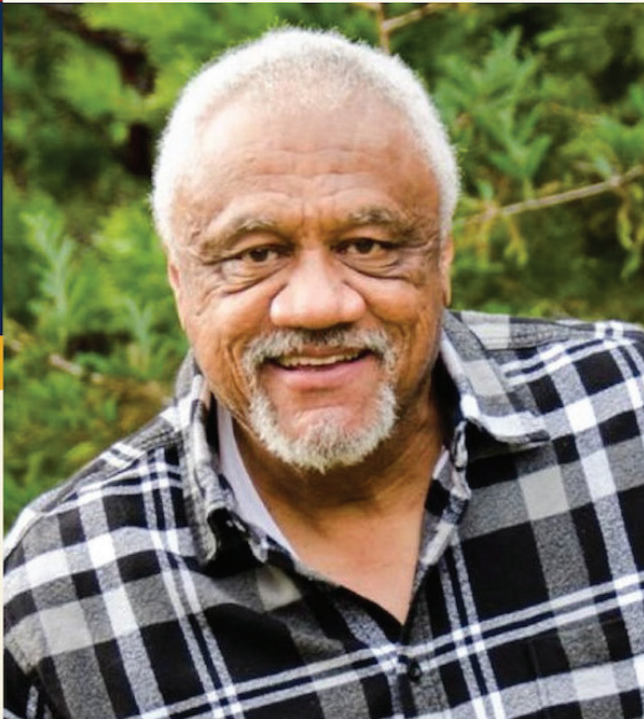
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District 7

“

**I really am committed to serving in a nonpartisan capacity... it's a little frustrating talking about both sides of the aisle.**

Lori Wright, District 7, Incumbent City Council member.

with The Oklahoma Eagle. “I don’t support anything anybody does. I’m honestly...probably more of an Independent. There’s kind of a real battle within the Republican Party. We’re not as united...I’ve been able to unite both sides on my behalf, because I have friends on both sides, and because I really don’t take a side.”

Wright said she is committed to nonpartisanship, which is also meant to define Tulsa municipal elections. The elections were changed under Mayor Dewey Bartlett from party affiliations to nonpartisan candidates with the idea to keep national politics from influencing local races. This year there are four Tulsa run-offs on the Tulsa ballot, including two democrat mayors and three council districts. “I really am committed to serving in a nonpartisan capacity... it’s a little frustrating talking about both sides of the aisle. And I’m like, there is no aisle at City Hall. We are a circle. We are a team.”

However, the neutrality of partisanship is not at all like famously neutral Switzerland. There is no peace in either camp, and the conflict is more attributable to dark money and to each other’s vocal supporters or detractors.

**Less Government**

Huff wistfully recalls Tulsa in the 1990s “when it was still a beautiful city.” He is running for his first elected post by calling for less government. He is less interested in economic development that he says can be achieved through the private sector. “It (government) abdicates us from our responsibilities, like church...I believe if we would put less on the government and more on our own personal responsibility, I think we’d be at a better place.”

He emphasized the main role of government should be to govern, as he says it was originally when the first councils of civilization were formed. Government’s primary role is to protect and serve through law enforcement, fire and emergency services, he said. The government building of an economic engine for businesses and entrepreneurs just leads to too much reliance on government, he added.

Next to public safety funding, Huff said he prioritizes functional roads, traffic management, and well-maintained public areas. He compared Tulsa with nearby cities like Broken Arrow and Bixby, saying he believes the suburbs invest more effectively in foundational infrastructure before pursuing larger projects.

**Learning Curve**

Like most Tulsans who come into city government, Huff says it’s a complex institution and one cannot know how to navigate all the processes and procedures. They usually need a mentor who can run them through it, even if they have been in government in the past. The unofficial job description includes knowledge funding allocations, policies for code enforcement, permitting and zoning, stormwater management, trash and recycling politics, utility fees, abandoned housing, vacant land that could be used for new housing, the intricacies of ambulance service charges and closed Park community centers. It’s a gruesome list of things to learn.

Cont. A7, District 7

**Eddie Huff, a Tulsa businessman who was a regular on a conservative talk show for 12 years, is seeking a vital seat on Tulsa’s City Council.**

Huff is challenging District 7 incumbent Lori Decter Wright, who has been on the Council since 2018, representing Southeast Tulsa. Wright, who is considered by her supporters to be a progressive, nonpartisan, knowledgeable and balanced leader, has been challenged before. With its boundaries in the area of South Sheridan Drive to South Garnett Road bordering Broken Arrow and East 41st to 101st Streets, District 7 is a vital area of Tulsa.

Tulsa City Council District 7 is known for its busy arterial streets and retail spaces, including Tulsa’s largest mall, Woodland Hills,

and the 71st Street retail corridor. The district plays a significant role in the city’s tax revenue, contributing millions in sales tax annually to fund general operations, including street maintenance, police and fire, and an extra penny to support capital improvements.

The tax revenues are key because municipalities in Oklahoma are restricted by law to fund general services through sales taxes only. In Tulsa, the sales tax is an 8.5 percent total, of which the State of Oklahoma receives 4.5 percent, Tulsa County (funded primarily by property tax) receives 0.367 percent and the City of Tulsa receives 3.65%. Tulsa is one of the largest sales tax generators in the state as one of two major metro hubs. The City’s total budget reached a total of \$1 billion within the last five years.

Tulsa historically competed with similar-sized cities such as Wichita and Omaha. But as the suburbs around Tulsa grow, the city has had to become even more competitive to attract industry and retail. For example, an outlet mall proposed by Tulsa was ultimately built in the Jenks City limits. While many surrounding communities were vying for the first area Bass Pro Shop, Broken Arrow received the ring.

More recently, with Wright’s support Tulsa attracted a major retailer, Tulsa SHEELS at Woodland Hills Mall. The sporting goods store opened its retail experience with 319,000 square feet of space that features family attractions - a 56-foot Ferris wheel, a 16,000-gallon saltwater aquarium with more than 600 fish, a wildlife mountain, and Fuzziwig’s Candy Factory.

**Nonpartisan Government**

While Huff is a registered Republican, he says he is more of an Independent. When asked about the view of the current Republican presidential candidate, he said he does not really understand what MAGA is. And he is not a fan of all of Trump’s vitriol about the U.S.

“I’m a conservative Republican, but I don’t necessarily support everything Donald Trump [does],” he said in an interview

# City Council D-7

## CANDIDATES HAVE SHARPLY DIFFERENT VIEWS

KIMBERLY MARSH

**Mayoral Race**

# A political stage set by the Aug primary

From A1

The face-off grew tense at times, with the candidates voicing their views on issues ranging from the use of dark money in campaign advertising to how their leadership of the city would change Tulsa. The forum, held at the Lorton Performing Arts Center at the University of Tulsa, was one of many debates, community discussions, and forums since the Aug. 27 mayoral primary to generate more interest from Tulsans in their city government.

Only 26 percent of all Tulsa voters – just over 56,000, participated in the mayoral primary. The primary resulted in a runoff of Nichols and Keith. Both are Democrats and have city government experience and similar views on many topics. However, as they vie for the job to lead Tulsa, their styles and approaches are different. Facing off on stage head-to-head, it was clear that both democrats are seeking to draw in Republican voters. Businessman Brent Van Norman, who ran for mayor on the Republican ticket, was eliminated in the August primary.

In the Oct. 22 event, three leading Tulsa

journalists, Tulsa World staff writer Kevin Canfield, Tulsa World editorial team lead Ginnie Graham, and The Oklahoma Eagle Managing Editor Gary Lee, participated in the panel.

Mayor G. T. Bynum, who served two four-year terms, will leave the job for the private sector in January. Either Nichols or Keith will replace him. While more than 70 percent of Tulsa’s eligible voters declined to vote on Aug. 27, more are expected to vote in the general election because it includes the hotly contested bid for United States president between former President Donald J. Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris. Thus, more than 200,000 voters are expected to hit the Tulsa polls.

**Informing Tulsa Voters**

Despite the rush of debates and public events featuring Keith and Nichols and the fact that both have been in crucial governmental leadership positions for Tulsa County and the City of Tulsa over the last 20 years, many Tulsans will not know who they are. Thousands of Tulsans will have yet to read local accounts in The Oklahoma

Eagle or other papers, seen local television interviews, or attended community forums and meetings. They may fill in a box on the ballot without knowing anything about either candidate. They may choose a name because they have seen it on a sign, remember it from previous campaigns, select one for no good reason, or leave the box blank.

To learn more about the mayoral candidates, go to monroeformayor.com and karenkeith.org. Both have Facebook pages, where you can see them in action and also provide commentary on each candidate, mostly from supporters of either candidate.

**Candidates Address Issues**

During the Oct. 22 debate, the three panelists sought to ask questions that community members had voiced.

Keith was asked to answer questions as to why the Tulsa County Commissioners did not do something earlier about the alleged abuse at the Family Center for Juvenile Justice that prompted a lawsuit filed by 20 juveniles alleging abuse and neglect. She maintains that the abuse was revealed to the commissioners for the first time in April of

2024, just as the municipal campaigns were in full swing.

The TU Lorton Performance Center crowd met her replies with groans, showing a continued concern about the facility owned by Tulsa County but operated by Tulsa County judges according to state law, Keith said. On July 19, by unanimous vote, the commissioners took over administrative duties of the center and appointed David Parker to oversee the center. Parker reportedly worked in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections for 30 years before he oversaw the David L. Moss Adult Detention Center from 2017 to 2020.

Keith maintains that none of the commissioners knew about the alleged abuses until it was revealed publicly. Nichols maintains that the Tulsa County Commissioners knew earlier but did not act then.

Both candidates were asked about bad advice they have been given during the campaign and how they would be more discerning in what advice they take as Tulsa’s mayor.

Cont. A7, Mayoral Race

## Mayoral Race

# Reparations not at the top of the agenda

From A6

In her response, Keith chose to draw attention to the “dark money” flier, waving it in the air and accusing Nichols of supporting the use of “dark money” to create false messages about her. The mailer echoed sentiments that Nichols has made publicly as well: “Karen Keith is still ignoring widespread rape, molestation and abuse of children. Karen Keith Failed our Community and Betrayed Our Trust.”

She called out the Nichols campaign for being behind the circulation of the mailer as well. Nichols denied any involvement, saying he was unaware of the flier until he saw it just before the debate.

The circulation of the flier is a sign of just how contentious and competitive this race is between two similar Democrats who have strong support from members of their own party. Keith strongly advocated for opening a new, larger center for juveniles within the Tulsa County Court system, with many upgrades. The controversy now centered on the abuses alleged by detainees has become her Achilles heel in this campaign.

The flier is sponsored by The Oklahoma Project, a political action committee based in Oklahoma City, which also has ramped up campaigns against state Republican leaders (facebook.com/theoklahomaproject/). “Dark money” refers to organized campaigns created privately to influence elections, public policy, and political discourse. The source of the money is not disclosed to the public.

Keith said that the commissioners who are defendants in the case would likely be dismissed because they were not responsible parties for operating the center over a 50-year period. It was the unsupervised juvenile justice court judges. The oversight was changed after April, and Keith said the new management group has been open, granting tours to media and others to show their actions.



Karen Keith, Tulsa mayoral candidate.

ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

### Nichols Responds To North Tulsa Topics

Nichols was asked about issues important to Tulsa’s Black community, questions surrounding future work on reparations, and support for re-routing the I-244 highway bridge that served to remove Black Wall Street businesses and buildings and divide the district. Lee said the questions for Nichols stemmed from discussions with other state legislators and Tulsa community leaders. In response, Nichols said he has been a workhorse for community issues, even if he is not always a “show horse” at rallies. He admitted that reparations are not

the biggest issue in his campaign, as so many other concerns impact the community that can be addressed in the first 100 days of office based on plans posted on his website that he continually refers to in public settings.

In this debate, the questions were tailored to the candidate based on issues that have arisen as community priorities during their campaigns. Some Nichols supporters questioned why the reparations question was posed only to Nichols and not to Keith, accusing the hosts of “insinuating that Nichols is not Black enough” because he hasn’t placed reparations at the top of his

platform.

But Nichols gave an answer consistent with what he had said privately. Reparations, in particular, are not at the top of his agenda. He will support what the community advocates for the removal of the I-244 highway crossing through Greenwood. He will rely on other highly capable, experienced community leaders who are carrying the ball on these issues. If he is elected as Mayor, he said he will rely on other community leaders, sometimes through delegation, to lead certain issues while he tends to City executive business and personally advocates for various issues and

policies as needed.

Keith has not made reparations an issue in this campaign, and she does not have a strong response when asked about issues prioritized by Black Tulsans. Keith talks about the importance of remembering the history of Greenwood and privately discusses a few items she is considering that could help the Greenwood District.

**Nam qui Bus est** tem di cuptiae pro mos aut et vid maione velectae nisci as ulparum que vendeles et, core, cum quas soluptatis sit vellab iundigent laut doluptatem. Apedit, ut ape moluptatur, unt omnium num audam dit.

## District 7

# What is the city’s role in economic development?

From A6

### Fixing Utopia

In the 1970s, there was a shining city on a hill that wasn’t part of Oral Roberts University. It was on the corner of 61st Street and South Memorial Drive, near the brand-new Woodland Hills Mall. It was called The Falls and resembled a waterfall cascading down the hill. Forty years later, it became an example of what happens when private absentee landlords do not take care of their property and ultimately abandon it.

In 2021, the neglected property owned by several layers of LLCs, according to a Griffin Media report, became uninhabitable and one of the most problematic properties in Tulsa. Tulsa’s Shangri La of the 1970s became the city’s Pompeii, destroyed by fire and water. The Vista Shadow Mountain Apartments was a shadow of its former self, a fire and structural hazard and had to be quickly shut down even while the pandemic was still sweeping the country. Tenants were faced with moving out of the unstable, unsafe complex within a short period of time, and the place was boarded up. It remained a place for squatters and became an eyesore for the corridor. It was a sign of the faded glory of the South Memorial Drive corridor.

All there is to do now is to wait on the absentee owner to take responsibility for the mess or find a buyer to redevelop the lot.

### The question is, should the city really play a role in economic development?

Wright agrees that the abandoned Vista is an important safety and economic issue for the district. She said the city has taken action to prevent further decline and potential crime. But those new to government may not realize there is a longer process that the City is required to follow with private property owners to ensure due process.

“I don’t pretend to come in, you know, like I’ve got a magic wand, and I’ve got all the answers. I have to go in and see for myself,”



Huff said of his learning curve.

In order to address situations like The Vista, in August 2023, Wright championed the passage of new ordinances to strengthen the city’s code enforcement for rental properties.

### Huff’s campaign supporters

Huff said he decided to run after being asked many times. In this last year, Tulsa County Commissioner Kelly Dunkerley, the former mayor of Jenks and also an insurance businessman, and his Deputy Commissioner Darren Gantz, also of Jenks, also an insurance professional finally played the right card to get Huff to run for office. The campaign kickoff was a who’s who of Republican insurance executives. Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner John Doak hosted the party. Other patrons included Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell, also of Jenks, and John O’Connor, former attorney general and State Rep. Mark Tedford.

### Who is Eddie Huff?

Huff, born to a German mother and African American soldier who served in occupied Germany during World War II, came to Tulsa via Philadelphia and other stops after his father was finally allowed to return to Germany to take Eddie and his mother home to the U.S. In Philadelphia, Eddie found a much different urban environment from the small Bavarian village where he spent his first five years of life. He learned to survive through gangs and drug deals, all the way through Texas Tech where he played football. Eventually Huff met a man in a coffee shop who led him to become a born-again Christian. He created his insurance business and realized he had a gift for gab, siding up to Pat Campbell in KFAQ Radio, where government officials winced and shuddered when they received the call to appear on the show. Huff has raised his family in Tulsa. He attributes their success

not to special incentives, but to hard work and determination.

The same philosophy he used for child rearing holds true for Huff’s views on reparations. He said his idea of reparations for survivors or descendants are not aligned with that of many Tulsans. “Things happen and you just have to try harder,” he said. He compares it to a time when his son told him about the B he made in math in high school. Huff didn’t say a word. But his son worked harder to become the success he is today, Huff said.

“It just bothers me that I keep hearing these people say that it was the “riot” in ‘21 that is causing all the problems today. When, when we know that it became more prosperous, and what people should be focusing on is the North Tulsa businessman, the black businessmen that got together and saved North Tulsa after the massacre.

### Who is Lori Decter Wright

Wright has more than five years of experience working with City budgeting and policy. She is well-spoken on the details of all City business, and she shared with The Oklahoma Eagle her insights on several areas. An operatic singer, she is the executive director of the Tulsa Opera.

### The issues

#### Road and Infrastructure Projects

- Wright has supported a TIF district for the 71st Street corridor “that will begin generating some revenue to reinvest.”
- On road improvement, Wright is a critic of the Pavement Condition Index system that puts more resources into rehabilitating crumbling roads and less into maintenance to prevent disrepair. “I do think we’re going to have to come up with a better strategy than just saying, if your street’s crumbling, it’s going to continue to crumble... I do think we need to address it.”

Cont. A11, District 7



ABOVE **Stephanie Reisdorph**, mental health therapist, candidate for Tulsa City Council, D-2. PHOTO STEPHSD24U.COM

LEFT **Tulsa City Council Election**  
ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



## District 2

# Tulsa Council District 2: Archie, Reisdorph Share similar ideology on community issues

**SASHA NDISABIYE**  
NonDoc

Beating out three other candidates in the Tulsa City Council District 2 primary election, former minister and small business owner Anthony Archie and mental health therapist Stephanie Reisdorph are headed to the Nov. 5 general election with similar community focuses on homelessness, housing and public safety.

Since 2022, incumbent Councilwoman Jeannie Cue has held the Tulsa District 2 seat, which covers western and southwestern portions of the city. Instead of seeking reelection, Cue made an unsuccessful bid this year for the Tulsa County Commissioner District 2 position.

In the five-person Tulsa District 2 primary, Archie received 41.53 percent of the votes, and Reisdorph finished second with 19.61 percent in the Aug. 27 election.

Archie, 36, was born and raised on the south side of Chicago. He came to Tulsa in 2006 to attend Oral Roberts University where he met his wife, Chelsea, who is a Tulsa public school teacher. Archie worked as a pastor and youth minister for Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church before partnering with his wife in 2017 to found and operate the Oklahoma Toffee Company.

"We were talking about the deficit that we had in Oklahoma, and the cuts to education that was very concerning to us," Archie said. "We thought, well,

what can we do to try to help teachers who were in the classroom? We went back and forth, and long story short, we started a small candy company. (...) And what teachers will do is they will email us their Amazon wish lists, and we will use a part of our profits to fulfill their requests."

After starting the business, Archie also began teaching geography and social studies in the Tulsa Public Schools district.

Reisdorph, 37, is originally from Washington and moved to Tulsa after completing her undergraduate education at Trinity Lutheran College earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. Reisdorph continued her education at the University of Oklahoma in Tulsa to obtain a master's degree in social work. She went on to work as a mental health therapist for adults — focusing on severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression — before transitioning to work with youth in schools. Reisdorph currently works as a mental health therapist at Daniel Webster Middle and High School.

Over the years, Reisdorph has started multiple passion projects and founded neighborhood and community organizations. As an undergrad, Reisdorph established the a outreach ministry and more recently founded Lovolution, Eugene Field Neighborhood Watch and Eagle Outreach.

Noting her professional history, Reisdorph said she was compelled to

run for the Tulsa City Council because the position aligns with her passion for community work and volunteering.

"I have more of a heart and passion for macro-level work, so helping neighborhoods, communities and cities," Reisdorph said. "I obviously care about the community and the city and just wanting to expand what we've already been doing in our district. (...) I also had it on my heart. I felt a divine call."

Archie said he had not considered running for the City Council until he learned the Tulsa District 2 seat would be open.

"I had really no desire to go into public service, but [Cue is] a tremendously hard worker for the west side of Tulsa that historically has been under invested in," Archie said. "She has done a tremendous job drawing attention and getting funding to critical services and representing the west side at the city level. And so, long story short, when I was told and talked with her that she was not running for another term, I was very interested in running, and talked to some mentors, and she supported us the entire way."

In-person early voting begins Wednesday, Oct. 30, at the Tulsa County Election Board. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

### Candidates focus on homelessness, housing

Addressing Tulsa's homelessness issue has been at the forefront of many local election campaigns, including both remaining mayoral candidates and both

Tulsa District 2 candidates.

Archie said the housing crisis is an issue that municipal leaders have to address together.

"Then there are neighborhoods where homelessness is a challenge," Archie said. "I think what Tulsa has to do first thing is elect a mayor that is passionate and super focused on the issue of homelessness. And I've talked to both candidates. I'm willing to work with both of them, but we've definitely got to have a candidate that has a clear, straightforward plan on it."

Reisdorph said homelessness can often be directly linked to mental health and substance abuse issues.

"I have experience working with the homeless, and about 50 to 60 percent of homeless people struggle with mental illness, and even more struggle with substance abuse disorders," Reisdorph said. "I feel like I have a good understanding about not just getting the homeless people housed but keeping and maintaining their housing so they don't end up back on the streets again and just turn into a cycle of homelessness."

Archie said the city cannot decrease its homeless population without adequate housing options.

"Housing and homelessness are connected," Archie said. "I've met with developers that have said, 'Anthony, you know, it's very difficult to navigate the permitting process and the inspections process.' [I support having] our city begin to develop pre-approved permitting plans





LEFT **Anthony Archie**, Tulsa small business owner, candidate for Tulsa City Council, D-2.  
PHOTO ARCHIE4DZ.COM

ABOVE **Tulsa City Council Election**  
ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

## District 2

# Housing, homelessness, public safety & constituent engagement, leading issues

From A8

for certain zoning areas, making it easier for developers to build duplexes and quads, so that as folks who are homeless receive mental health and addiction services, they're able to find supportive housing and stable housing."

Before transitioning into social work, Reisdorph worked for the Tulsa Housing Authority for almost eight years. She said housing aimed at addressing homelessness must provide more support than just a roof and four walls.

"I think we need specific types of housing for the homeless to keep them housed," Reisdorph said. "Housing that has a support structure offering therapy on site and things like that, which Mental Health Association in Tulsa does currently have. I think we need more mental health components added to housing. I don't think we have to necessarily create more of that housing, but just add more supportive services into existing housing or rehousing."

### Crime, public safety pose other concerns

Another similarity between the candidates' campaigns for the Tulsa City Council District 2 seat is their support for more recreational activities and community common places in an effort to lower crime rates and increase public safety.

"On 61st and Peoria, I was on a crime committee there, and years ago when we had the crime committee and the program grant funds for that, I felt like crime was lowering, and the area wasn't as bad as it is now," Reisdorph said. "I think that we need to find sustainable ways to keep that area up to par, and I think that we need to increase the recreational activities for youth in that area. I think there's a lot of single mothers in

**In-person early voting begins Wednesday, Oct. 30, at the Tulsa County Election Board. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.**

that area, raising kids and teenagers, and sometimes it causes some of the problem. I think that that's leading to some juvenile delinquency and crimes over there, so I think we need some more activities for them as well."

Archie also said there are areas in his district that would benefit from more parks and recreation opportunities.

"On the west side, the northwest side, there's a single-family community — or single residential community — called Woodview Heights with hundreds of kids that live there," Archie said. "Those hundreds of kids don't have a recreational place to play or (find) recreation on the weekends, or after school or during the summer. We need to create spaces where kids and young adults can make positive choices so that they don't fall into criminality."

Archie also sees a need for more police in Tulsa District 2, but he said an increase in policing is not the sole solution to addressing the community's crime rates.

"Public safety, of course, is really important," Archie said. "We have 140 police (officers) that need to be recruited. Police are critical. They are a piece of the public safety puzzle, but they're not the entire picture."

### Improving constituent involvement

Archie credits receiving almost 42 percent of District 2 votes Aug. 27 to his time knocking on doors during the campaign. He said the experience of talking to constituents will ultimately allow him to make decisions for the betterment of his community.

"My desire is to help to make your quality of life better," Archie said. "I have to step back and allow you to express how you

feel. I want you to feel heard. I want you to feel seen. And then obviously, if there's a problem, the person who's closest to the problem probably has the solution at hand. So, I need to be willing to listen long enough to hear that, and then using the power of the office to connect those folks or those communities that are going to bring them a solution."

Reisdorph also said she feels the Tulsa City Council needs to improve how it communicates with and involves the public.

"[Tulsa City Council's] Wednesday meetings, nobody shows up — barely," Reisdorph said. "I think that maybe advertising more and in different ways would generate some more interest, and some more people that want to be involved in the district (...) I think that changing the way that information is provided and making it a little more accessible, I think would be helpful for everybody."

Reisdorph said she often calls herself a "stateswoman" and feels the meaning of the word encompasses her beliefs and approach to serve the people in District 2.

"I feel like I'm not a politician and won't be a politician," Reisdorph said. "I feel like I consider myself a stateswoman. (...) Someone that does everything for the common good of the people he or she represents."

Archie said he feels the best is yet to come for Tulsa and wants community members to remember to work together.

"One thing I always tell our folks when I'm talking to them at town halls, I say, 'Before we call ourselves Democrats or Republicans, we have to first call ourselves neighbors,'" Archie said. "These municipal elections are not about political ideology. They're about quality of life in neighborhoods."

**Sasha Ndisabiye** grew up splitting her time between southern California and southern Arizona before moving to Oklahoma to attend Langston University. After graduating from Langston with a bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism and a minor in sociology, she completed a NonDoc editorial internship in the summer of 2024. She became NonDoc's education reporter in October 2024.

## Housing Inspections

# OKC Fails Housing Inspections, Tulsa Embraces HUD Transition

HEATHER WARLICK  
Oklahoma Watch

Sanjaysia Caruthers' bathroom sink dangles from a deteriorating wall, dangerously close to crashing to the floor. Caruthers tries to keep her two sons, ages six and eight, from lingering around the dangerous sink.

Maintenance repair staff from Oklahoma City Housing Authority have used caulk to reattach the sink more than once, but the caulk can't support the heavy porcelain, Caruthers said.

Pipes under the sink leak constantly. A saucepan collects the drips. Caruthers said she's had those problems since February and has submitted maintenance requests to her landlord, Oklahoma City Housing Authority.

A leaking toilet was fixed recently, but Caruthers said she still has a \$1,300 water bill to show for the leak.

The tenant said she mentioned those issues when officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development showed up to inspect her NE 17th Street home as part of regular inspections of OCHA's asset management projects, or AMPs, conducted



Children play outside Sanjaysia Caruthers' rent house on NE 17 in Oklahoma City. The home is owned by Oklahoma City Housing Authority and was one of a sampling of 30 homes inspected by HUD this year. OCHA received a failing score of 7% for the inspections of its scattered site public housing. PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH

April 16-18.

Oklahoma's public housing this year is being inspected under a new protocol, National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate or NSPIRE.

Matt Mills, the operations director at OCHA, said NSPIRE inspection standards have the state's largest housing authority grappling with staffing and budget limitations that make complying with the new standards a challenge. The struggle is compounded by the need to address deficiencies while providing regular maintenance.

The inspections resulted in an unusually low score of 7 out of 100 for OCHA's 448 scattered public housing sites, significantly lower than OCHA's previous failing score of 48.

About 4,470 extremely low-income tenants live in Oklahoma City Housing Authority's 2,700 public housing units. Those tenants receive rental assistance through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and they pay no more than 30% of their monthly income for rent.

OCHA owns and manages 10 public

Cont. A12, Housing Inspections



As Oklahoma State Department of Education staff members prepare to answer legislative questions, Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters speaks with Rep. Rick West (R-Heavener) ahead of a Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency Oversight Committee meeting Tuesday, Oct. 29, 2024.

PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

## OSDE

# ‘Transparency is always good’: OSDE funding report panned by Walters, valued by legislators

TRES SAVAGE  
NonDoc

A report reviewing five segments of Oklahoma State Department of Education funding released by the Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency this morning found concerns about communication with public school districts but “did not observe any activities” that “warranted referral to law enforcement entities for criminal investigation.”

The 56-page report, created over the last two months after legislators heard complaints from some school superintendents about delayed and mistaken notices about federal funding, included a handful of recommendations on establishing additional policies and procedures and improving communication with districts.

While much of the two-hour House LOFT Oversight Committee meeting involved statements, questions and answers about bureaucratic processes, Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters used his initial remarks to criticize journalists and remind people that LOFT had recently completed a separate review of OSDE federal funding in June.

“It’s really unfortunate we are here today. This is a waste of time for the people of the state of Oklahoma. We have been transparent in everything we do,” Walters said. “It’s unfortunate that lies perpetuated by the media, by the teachers union and some bad actors have us here again today.”

The LOFT inquiry examined five segments of education dollars:

# “

**It’s unfortunate that lies perpetuated by the media, by the teachers union and some bad actors have us here again today.**

Ryan Walters, Oklahoma  
Superintendent of Public Instructions

- Federal title funds;
- Pay raises for teachers at off-formula schools;
- Money for paid maternity leave;
- School resource officer funding; and
- An appropriation designated for inhalers at schools.

Each of the five topics had drawn controversy and confusion in recent months, and four of the five involve new funding priorities approved by the Legislature since 2022. Despite Walters’ criticisms, the federal title funds portion of the report (linked below) drew the day’s deepest discussion, with LOFT analysts painting a picture of the inter-agency confusion that has been reported by some former OSDE employees and criticized by some school leaders.

Specifically, the report examined claims that OSDE had been unusually delayed in reporting federal funding numbers to school districts to start the 2024-2025 school year.

“SDE employees were unaware that the prior administration had given districts early notice of allocation figures (preliminary allocations) in prior years. The agency was overconfident in their belief that these communications had never occurred, and consequently they dismissed legitimate complaints from districts,” the report states. “When final allocations were delayed this year, it presented a bigger problem than SDE realized: whereas SDE thought the figures were delayed by a few weeks, for districts, it represented a delay of several months. Although federal law protects districts from large reductions in Title funds, districts were understandably upset by the delays. Late or nonexistent communication was also an issue: after publishing districts’

final allocations, SDE zeroed out Title funding amounts without notifying districts there had been an error in the calculations, and only communicated the error after the reduced amounts were again visible to districts.”

Walters, however, pushed back on the critique, saying districts benefit from a provision guaranteeing at least 85 percent of a prior year’s federal funding and arguing that this year’s timeline was not wildly inconsistent with prior years. The claim was corroborated by a chart and explanation on Page 14 of the LOFT report.

During the meeting, Walters said the federal government had provided the inaccurate chart that triggered the six-day absence of data described above.

After the meeting, Walters continued to deride Tuesday’s discussion, term-limited House Appropriations and Budget Subcommittee Chairman Mark McBride (R-Moore) and term-limited House Speaker Charles McCall (R-Atoka).

“We will not be deterred by these type of impeachment efforts from Speaker McCall,” Walters said, referencing public calls for a House impeachment process that McCall has declined to pursue. “We’re still reviewing the recommendations from LOFT, but listen, here’s what you saw today. We have executed on the legislative mandates given to us. We have held taxpayer dollars accountable. We have brought more accountability to the dollars going in your schools. We just went through a whole hearing where we highlighted how much more accountability we brought to the taxpayers of Oklahoma.”

“It is absurd that Mark McBride and Charles McCall wasted Oklahomans’ time today with a pure political stunt trying to

Cont. A11, OSDE



Members of the Oklahoma House Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency Oversight Committee meet Tuesday, Oct. 29, 2024.

PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

OSDE

## Increased scrutiny led to better communications

From A10

damage me by undermining the will of Oklahomans.”

In a statement, McCall said he appreciated LOFT’s “through investigation” and “comprehensive report.”

“The process played out exactly how it should, and LOFT has provided guidance to SDE, and the state superintendent, that should help increase communication between the department, the Legislature and school districts throughout our state. I hope that all involved parties will accept the results of this report and use the recommended guidance as a way to strengthen the lines of communication moving forward,” McCall said. “Government is structured with checks and balances to hold elected officials accountable and ensure the will of the people is being done. No one person, or agency, is above that scrutiny and the Legislature will always exercise their constitutional authority when necessary.”

“The people of Oklahoma deserve a State Department of Education, and Legislature, that can work together to tackle tough issues. It is my hope that the LOFT process has laid the foundation for cooperation both now, and in the future.”

Walters has clashed with McBride and McCall before, accusing McCall of trying to undermine him as a precursor to a 2026 gubernatorial matchup in a Republican primary. McCall did not attend Tuesday’s committee meeting, but McBride did. However, the outspoken Republican who helped seal the historic 2018 revenue raising agreement and teacher pay raise asked no questions and made no statements in what could be his final public meeting as a legislator.

After the meeting, McBride spoke in the hallway with Matt Langston,

“

**The process played out exactly how it should, and LOFT has provided guidance to SDE, and the state superintendent, that should help increase communication between the department, the Legislature and school districts throughout our state.**

Charles McCall, House Speaker  
(R-Atoka)

the controversial Texas-based political consultant whose contract with OSDE McBride has questioned for more than a year. Asked if they had “made up,” Langston said he and McBride have a good relationship. McBride said their history of mutual criticism has been “part of the game.”

While Walters said Tuesday’s meeting was a waste of time, he declined to answer whether he felt similarly about his recent appearance in front of the state’s multi-county grand jury, a state investigative body that issued a report highly critical of Walters’ “grossly negligent” handling of federal pandemic-relief dollars. (Like the LOFT report, however, the grand jury report alleged no criminal behavior by the superintendent.)

“Hey look, I’m here today to talk about this,” Walters said before walking off.

**‘We can’t make them open emails’**

In all, Tuesday’s meeting left some lawmakers, legislative staffers and observers wondering what they had watched for two hours. The hearing offered the embattled superintendent a chance to go on offense, telling vague anecdotes about districts’ inappropriate federal funding claims that OSDE has rejected under his watch and tying a 32 percent school district response rate for LOFT’s questionnaire to the communication problem he argued is not his fault.

“This survey suggests the overwhelming majority of districts have no issues communicating with the State Department of Education,” Walters said during the meeting. “We can’t make them open emails. We can’t make them attend Zooms.”

Noting that he was likely asking his final questions as a legislator, term-limited House Majority Floor Leader Jon Echols (R-OKC) supported Walters’ position on the inhaler funding brouhaha that recently yielded

a letter of advice from Attorney General Gentner Drummond, another likely 2026 Republican gubernatorial hopeful. OSDE’s attorneys have said legislative direction to approve a \$250,000 sole-source contract for a nonprofit to distribute inhalers violated state statute, and Echols argued it also violates the Oklahoma Constitution.

“The argument against pre-payment is not statutory, it is constitutional,” said Echols, himself an expected 2026 Republican candidate for attorney general.

Echols then asked Walters about an allegation he made twice Tuesday that a school district superintendent had applied for federal funds to renovate a four-plex housing unit near school grounds that the superintendent personally owned.

Walters told Echols he would be “happy to give you the full list” of problematic federal funding requests denied by his agency.

“The claim comes in that there’s going to be renovation, and it’s not documented very well,” Walters said of the situation he had highlighted. “Then as our team dug in through the process, that’s when we were able to uncover that the superintendent actually owned that four-plex.”

Despite the LOFT report’s strongest criticism involving OSDE’s communication with school districts, Rep. Melissa Provenzano (D-Tulsa) and Rep. Meloyde Blancett (D-Tulsa) released statements highlighting some of Walters’ comments Tuesday.

“The continued lack of accountability from the Oklahoma State Department of Education further emphasizes the state superintendent’s willful negligence. This puts our school districts and our kids squarely in second place to his own self interest,” Provenzano said. “We have a state agency head unwilling to commit to

Cont. A12, OSDE

District 7

## Quality of life & accountability on the agenda

From A7

**Housing Issues**

- Wright emphasizes housing challenges, saying, “Housing is a total community response... At every level we’ve stagnated over the last 10 to 20 years,” and she supports diverse solutions like quadplexes and townhomes. She mentioned that “home prices have doubled in the last four years” and tied this to wider impacts, such as eviction and workforce issues.

**Public Safety**

- Wright underlined the importance of public safety funding and grants, noting, “The departments who can successfully write grants get the dollars... police and fire are doing a great job of that.” She advocates for bringing in dedicated grant writers to secure funding for improvements in public

safety.

**Permitting Process and Bureaucracy**

- Wright critiques the permitting process, noting that past reforms “sometimes aren’t practical if you put these tools in place, but they can’t use them, or don’t know how, or it doesn’t make sense.” She emphasizes the need for a “collaborative” approach to reform and practical solutions that involve the input of the people affected.

**Addressing Panhandling and Homelessness**

- Wright was part of bringing in The Better Way program, a panhandling initiative designed to give the unhoused a hand up, rather than a handout. While the program has made some progress, motorists see people on nearly every major street median and street corner. Some are there to collect a few dollars, but others are there because

they were approached by faith-based organizations that bring people to the street to panhandle in exchange for shelter and food to give their collections to the organization in what sounds very much like trafficking. Wright encourages Tulsans to change how they give by looking for signs on the medians encouraging motorists to text donations to the coalition that helps the unhoused, A Way Home for Tulsa, instead of handing money directly to panhandlers

**Equity and Reparations**

- Wright is on the Beyond Apology Commission and advocating for an equity-focused approach to reparations. “Housing is very much aligned to it. Education is aligned to it. Entrepreneurship, generational wealth building through land and housing.” She stressed that “the community needs to lead it. “We all win when everyone’s doing well.”
- Huff said he views reparations in a very

different way - not as a payment but as a way of living, where Black business people go into other communities to make their money, then bring it back into the Black community. “So I think the best way to get reparations, if you will, or to turn things around, is to encourage Black investment, Black businesses, Black entrepreneurship and job growth, i to go out into the other communities, and then if you want to come back into the community and spend your money, invest your money there, then that’s how you do it. And so, I think as far as reparations, we’re going to keep spending money. It was Booker T Washington’s philosophy, that we had to be able to show that we can compete.”



Chemya Melvin shows the sink that hangs from the bathroom wall in the public housing rental where her fiancé, Sanjaysia Caruthers lives. The home on NE 17 in Oklahoma City was one of 30 recently inspected by HUD as part of the Oklahoma City Housing Authority's regular HUD inspections.

PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH

## Housing Inspections

# New NSPIRE protocols focus on interior details

From A9

housing asset management projects, seven of which have been recently inspected under the NSPIRE protocol. Four of the AMPs are designated for seniors and disabled tenants: Jeltz Senior Center received a 93, Towers Classen scored 81, and Shartel Towers and Andrews Square have yet to be inspected this year.

Four OCHA asset management projects are apartment complexes: Will Rogers Courts scored 76, Ambassador Courts and Oak Grove scored 59, and Fred Factory Gardens scored 58. Planned inspections of JFK Duplexes have been canceled multiple times by the inspector.

### Shift to NSPIRE is Time-Consuming and Costly

Some Oklahoma public housing professionals say HUD has placed an unfunded mandate on housing authorities with its new inspection protocol, adding costly upgrades and repairs to the list of inspection points and requiring immediate fixes for many deficiencies.

Mills said that the shift to NSPIRE

inspections has also introduced a new source of administrative red tape.

The transition was in the works before the Covid-19 pandemic, Mills said. It was waylaid for several years but was finally implemented in 2023.

The new protocol focuses on interior details of public housing and replaces HUD's Uniform Physical Condition Standards.

OCHA was familiar with NSPIRE long before its first regular inspections under the new protocol. In 2022 the housing authority volunteered to act as a demonstration site where HUD trained its inspectors on the NSPIRE protocol. During the two years HUD performed training in Oklahoma City, Mills said the housing authority was not subjected to regular inspections. OCHA also received no scores during training inspections, just lists of deficiencies.

OCHA's extremely low inspection score for its scattered sites has much to do with the nature of keeping single-family homes ready for inspections — houses usually score lower than apartments, Mills said.

"Our scattered site houses have always been challenging," Mills said. "They're

spread out. They're different. I mean we have hundred-year-old houses. Some have crawlspace; some have chimneys."

The single-digit score placed OCHA's scattered sites in HUD's troubled category and resulted in a mountain of follow-up paperwork for OCHA's maintenance employees.

A sampling of 30 houses in OCHA's scattered sites was inspected, which resulted in 114 deficiencies categorized as life-threatening. Many of these citations were for missing smoke alarms, now required in every bedroom under NSPIRE.

Smoke alarms must be installed within 24 hours, but the deficiency didn't include a point deduction during inspections. OCHA is still working to outfit all bedrooms with smoke alarms, Mills said.

Other life-threatening deficiencies that resulted in point deductions were numerous citations of exposed electrical wires and plumbing problems.

Infestations of roaches and mice, at least one instance of lead paint, and even a home with no working toilet were listed as severe delinquencies.

Housing agencies are required to

repair all life-threatening and severe delinquencies within 24 hours. Moderate and low-threat deficiencies are required to be remedied within 30 or 60 days.

OCHA employees are now required to submit photos and other documentation as proof of repair for all deficiencies noted in inspections, which Mills said has added a significant administrative challenge to staying in compliance for the OCHA operations staff.

### Inspections are Part of the Process

All properties that accept Section 8 housing vouchers through HUD are subject to annual inspections. HUD conducts separate inspections for public housing AMPs, project-based multifamily complexes and individually-owned Section 8 units.

HUD is transitioning inspection standards for all those properties to the NSPIRE protocol, which prioritizes the interiors of homes. Mills said that the previous inspection standards, UPCS, placed more weight on outdoor spaces.

Landlords, whether individual owners or housing agencies like OCHA,

Cont. A13, Housing Inspections

## OSDE

# Conflicting objectives, OSDE & Walters

From A11

improving service to schools. We have a state agency head unwilling to share how he plans to spend unused payroll dollars. The repeated calls by the public to, 'Do something about Supt. Ryan Walters,' continue to go unanswered."

Blancett pointed to a comment Walters made about having a priority to "shrink" government.

"The state superintendent says the Oklahoma State Department of Education's objective is to 'shrink government,' but the objective should be establishing OSDE's ability to effectively manage a multi-million-dollar state agency for a functional education system," Blancett said. "I come from a business background, and if you had a CEO whose chief (of) staff could not communicate effectively either internally or externally with primary stakeholders, they would be fired. My question is if OSDE is unable to effectively create a functional working relationship with school districts and the Legislature, how can we possibly expect success to happen in schools for our kids? We need leadership at OSDE who have the capability and humility to take a step back and be willing to partner with the Legislature to improve this system. If there is an inability for OSDE to acknowledge they can do better, that is a serious issue."

LOFT Oversight Committee Co-Chairman Kevin Wallace, who is exiting the House owing to a surprising defeat after six years as chairman of the House Appropriations and Budget Committee, concluded what could be his final meeting with a reminder to Walters

that the Legislature has a right to check how public money is being used.

"I know that a comment was made that (this was) 'a waste of time here today,'" said Wallace (R-Wellston). "I do think good information came out of the presentation today. I think [people are] better informed, better educated. I always like to be educated myself. Transparency is always good."

House Appropriations and Budget Committee Vice Chairman Trey Caldwell, who is expected to succeed Wallace as his chamber's budget chairman, said Tuesday's conversation and report are "a perfect example of why we need an agency like LOFT to come and do an impartial review of the facts."

"I think anytime we can have data and facts, then we can make that public and people can understand and see," Caldwell (R-Lawton) said after the meeting. "My biggest takeaway was there probably is a level of incompatibility in the communication between the state superintendent and the school districts in the state. I think that's something that could probably be improved upon. My biggest concern going into it was some of the rumors of stuff we'd heard around Title I funding. I think all those fears have been allayed on my end. I think they have a legitimate process set in place to make sure those taxpayer dollars are well managed and well taken care of."

Tres Savage (William W. Savage III) has served as editor in chief of NonDoc since the publication launched in 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and worked in health care for six years before returning to the media industry. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor and serves on the board of the Oklahoma Media Center.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



PHOTO UPSPLASH

## Housing Inspections

# “Unfunded Mandate” claimed by local officials

From A12

can lose HUD reimbursement and even be debarred from future HUD subsidy contracts for continually failing inspections.

OCHA's recent inspections of its scattered sites were performed by a quality assurance inspector who instructed a QA inspector trainee, Mills said. He said the inspector's extra-high training standards may have contributed to OCHA's low score.

### Updated Inspections are Costly to Housing Agencies

Jennifer Ricker, executive director of the Guthrie Housing Authority, said the new inspection protocols amount to an unfunded mandate from HUD.

Rickers said the new standards introduce extra costs to agencies attempting to comply.

She and her team are in the process of updating Guthrie's stock of public housing. The housing agency owns and manages 187 public housing units, all of which are single-story duplexes where preference is given to disabled and elderly tenants.

She said her agency has worked for three years to ensure Guthrie's public housing units measure up to a long checklist of inspection standards in the NSPIRE protocol. She sent her staff to trainings and has hired new maintenance staff to contend with the change.

Ricker said that Guthrie Housing Authority received a score of 90 for its recent NSPIRE inspection, the highest it

has ever scored. That places the agency in HUD's high performer designation, meaning it will be three years until the next HUD-required inspection.

"We'd already been doing these updates and upgrades," Ricker said. "If we had not been, it could have been catastrophic."

Ricker said that one of the biggest financial burdens the Guthrie Housing Authority incurred during the shift was installing and updating GCFI and single-source electrical outlets for refrigerators and other large appliances. She said those outlets can't be within six feet of a water source and in small units, that can be tricky.

Those upgrades often require licensed professionals and associated costs add up quickly when a housing agency has many units.

"That's the kind of stuff, though, that we had been preparing for as soon as we started hearing about NSPIRE," Ricker said.

"Many (housing authorities) were going to kind of wait and see how their inspections turned out before they made those repairs because the new protocol actually mandates that every item that was identified must be repaired, which was not the case before," he said.

### RAD Program Opens Funding Streams For Modernization

Public Housing is typically funded by HUD, which allocates federal money earmarked for housing, but that money barely covers the costs of basic maintenance by housing agencies. Installing new outlets and smoke alarms is expensive, and many housing authorities like OCHA have found themselves with unmet capital needs.

Tulsa is leading the way in Oklahoma toward ensuring its public housing supply meets NSPIRE standards of modernization and renovation. Tulsa Housing Authority has converted 1,380 public housing units to a project-based Section 8 platform.

This conversion is through HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration, or RAD, a program that's been open for a decade and offers housing authorities more flexibility in funding modernization projects.

HUD explains: "Under Section 8, the property has access to the new financing tools safely used by the rest of the affordable housing industry and, with the long-term Section 8 contract, the property is insulated from the Federal funding decisions impacting public housing."

HUD estimates housing agencies are struggling with a \$115 billion backlog of public housing capital needs. Public housing agencies that have converted their housing stock through RAD have generated an estimated \$11.7 billion in

construction improvements across 1,380 properties, raising \$13 for each HUD dollar allocated.

Tulsa soon will convert its remaining 240 public housing units through RAD, but in the meantime, its Hewgley Terrace scored 93 on its first NSPIRE inspection in February.

Oklahoma City Housing Authority also plans to convert its public housing inventory to HUD's project-based Section 8 platform through the RAD program.

"That's part of our strategy on some of those properties that have the under 60 scores," Mills said.

OCHA has already converted two senior living communities and one other complex through the RAD program.

"So when we switch under RAD like Tulsa's done, then it lets (OCHA's development department) go out and get low-income housing tax credits," Mills said. "We can get loans, we can get other grants."

### OCHA Makes Necessary Repairs, Lags in Requested Maintenance

Caruthers said she is glad HUD has rolled out NSPIRE, focusing more on the inside of public housing units. She said it's important for homes to pass inspections for the safety of those who live there.

But Caruthers is concerned that the new inspection protocol may be forcing OCHA to prioritize things like smoke alarms and GCFI outlets while she is left waiting for other important maintenance requests to be addressed.

Caruthers was at home when her rental house was inspected in April as part of the sampling of 30. She said a group of about five inspection officials spent about five or six minutes going through her home.

"They go room to room and they look at the doors, the locks, the windows and the smoke detectors," Caruthers said.

Only two deficiencies were noted on the inspection report for Caruthers' house — a damaged fascia on the roofline and accumulated litter in an undesignated area.

Caruthers said she requested the inspectors look at the items for which she had submitted maintenance requests, including her broken sink, broken latches on her windows and water leaks, but those items weren't noted on the inspection report and weren't immediately addressed.

OCHA did add smoke alarms to the bedrooms in Caruthers' home, she said.

"They're fixing everything that HUD is requiring them to fix," Caruthers said. "But my sink's been messed up since February."



PHOTO UPSPLASH

The Oklahoma Eagle

FEATURED

## Introducing Youth to the Lives of Great Black Scientists

Highlighting the stories of amazing Black scientists

Black Scientists, A1

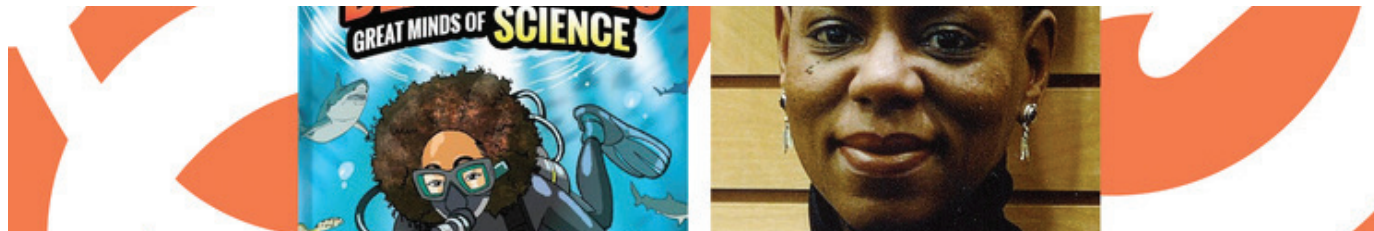


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

### Food Revolution

### Black Scientists

**Rev. Dr. Heber Brown III's grandma passed on her love for nature.**

*He pays it forward in a network of 230 churches growing food.*

## From Tending Grandma's Garden to Starting a Food Revolution

REV. DOROTHY S. BOULWARE  
Word In Black

In Baltimore's Govans neighborhood, what started as a simple vegetable garden beside Pleasant Hope Baptist Church has grown into a nationwide movement of more than 230 congregations fighting food insecurity through self-sufficiency. And at the center of this transformation stands Rev. Dr. Heber Brown III, a third-generation preacher who's reinventing how Black churches address hunger in their communities.

"If we embrace and renew our ability to feed ourselves, it will have an outreaching effect in so many other areas of our industry," Brown says.

He started the Black Church Food Security Network (BCFSN) in 2015 with a revolutionary premise: rather than merely distributing food, churches can help their communities grow it. His vision extends beyond immediate hunger relief to rebuilding lost connections between people and land.

The network "co-creates Black food ecosystems anchored by Black churches working in partnership with Black farmers and other organizations,"

tackling a crisis that disproportionately affects Black Americans.

Recent data from the Food Research & Action Center underscores the urgency of this work. While one in seven U.S. households faces food insecurity, the rate for Black households (23.3%) is more than double that of white households (9.9%). An estimated 13.8 million children lived in food-insecure households in 2023, marking a 3.2% increase from the previous year.

"The Black Church Food Security Network has been an invaluable partner in helping our church to establish a vegetable garden," said Rev. Dr. Sammie Logan III, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Chesapeake, Virginia, "that has energized members of our church and deepened our relationship with residents of our community."

The seeds of this movement were planted through a personal connection. Maxine Nicholas, a grandmother in Brown's congregation, reminded him of his own childhood experiences gardening with his grandmother Geraldine. This remembrance sparked the initial church garden project, which quickly evolved beyond simply growing vegetables.

Cont. A15, Food Revolution

## Introducing Youth to the Lives of Great Black Scientists

*By highlighting the stories of amazing Black scientists, "Great Minds of Science" allows Black youth to understand the importance of diversity in propelling scientific discovery.*

D. KEVIN MCNEIR  
Word In Black

History is full of amazing Black scientists whose lives and accomplishments have routinely been ignored and forgotten because of their race and gender. But being overlooked doesn't mean they have not had a profound impact on the world because of their talent, imagination and courage. In fact, their stories represent not only tales of personal triumph but also confirm the impact that an openness to diversity can have in propelling scientific discovery and progress to new heights.

To shed light on the lives of great but lesser-known Black scientists and innovators, award-winning author Tonya Bolden and illustrator David Wilkerson have collaborated and recently published "Black Lives: Great Minds of Science."

This fun and accessible graphic novel for middle grade readers serves as a kid-friendly introduction to some of the greatest scientists in history – Black men and women who were doctors, engineers, mathematicians and biologists.

While each of them faced challenges, they refused to give up or back down, rising to the top of their professions and making significant contributions along the way.

Bolden, who began her career writing book reviews for Black Enterprise before working on "how to" books for clients, like "how to start a business at home," or "how to get into the mail order business," said this time she wanted to try something different.

"I wanted to introduce young readers to professions and fields that you wouldn't normally connect to Black people," she said. "As I began my research, it occurred to me that while we all know about George Washington Carver, we may not know that there were and are Blacks who have made their mark in the world as marine biologists, robotics engineers and ornithologists. That made working on this book particularly exciting."

Bolden added that she also wanted to illustrate the variety of experiences and backgrounds that helped shape the lives and

Cont. A15, Black Scientists



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



Rev. Heber Brown. If we embrace and renew our ability to feed ourselves, it will have an outreaching effect in so many other areas of our industry.

PHOTO DR. HEBER BROWN

## Food Revolution

# A new perspective of farming & food

From A14

Read on to find out what else Brown told us about the network.

**Word In Black:** What do you want people to know about the Food Network?

**Rev. Heber Brown:** Our ability to feed ourselves is connected to so many of the other aspirations and dreams that we have as a community. It literally helps to create the runway and open the door for economic opportunity, for improved health outcomes, for youth and young adult mentoring and apprenticeships, for supporting our families with respect to heirs' property and ensuring that family legacies remain long into the future.

There are so many different avenues this work can support. It's important to me that people know this is not just an effort for people with a green thumb. But in actuality, we see food as the necessary runway for our collective empowerment. And if we could all find whatever lane this work attracts us to and just put all hands on deck to do this, so

many other things will come.

**WIB:** You're a Maryland guy. Where'd you get your love for the earth?

**HB:** I am old enough to remember spending the summers down the country when school let out. For us, my maternal line of my family is in rural Virginia, a little town called Kilmarnock, Virginia, in Northumberland County. And my Momma Geraldine lived in one of those houses that sat like a mile off the main road.

Some of my most vivid memories of summer are tied to my experiences growing up under the care of my Big Momma.

She had a different idea of conservation because there was a well and the water had to be fetched. She made me, the preacher, and my brother Anthony, who's now a worldwide known gospel music star, take a bath in the same bathtub and said, 'y'all share that water because I'm not going back out to that well.'

Summers down in the country introduced me to a different rhythm of life. It brought me closer to the land. It brought me closer to

“

**Summers down in the country introduced me to a different rhythm of life. It brought me closer to the land. It brought me closer to farming and where our food came from.**

Rev. Heber Brown

farming and where our food came from. It was a real education beyond anything the classrooms had ever taught.

That experience is not the norm for younger people coming up today; so I feel a particular obligation to be a part of the bridge that connects those experiences from yesteryear with the lived experiences of young people today. The urgency I feel is related to the fact that as the elders pass off the scene, if we don't bridge that and do all we can to download that wisdom and those experiences into younger people, we will be a generation of Black people who do not have a collective of reference.

**WIB:** What are the young people missing without this frame of reference?

**HB:** It feels like for the first time what is beginning to emerge is a Black America that does not have that point of reference to land or farming or food, and perhaps is not even interested. If you're selling grandma's land down the country for a couple of dollars, and if you're not appreciating fully what your

Cont. A16, Food Revolution

## The Black Church Food Security Network

**BCFSN is the fruit of Maxine's Garden at Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in Baltimore, MD.** After years of seeing the benefits of integrating a vegetable garden into the ministry of the church and growing frustrated with food access and charity models, Rev. Heber Brown, III began dreaming of what could happen if more Black churches started growing food on their land and worked in coordination with other congregations and farmers to co-create, local Black-owned food systems.

## Black Scientists

# Introducing young readers to professions and fields

From A14

dreams of those featured in "Great Minds of Science."

"In the end, I really found myself assuming the role of a teacher," she said. "But first, I had a lot of homework to do because I am not what you'd call a science person. I began to look at different eras within the last several hundred years as well as the different socio-economic backgrounds of Black scientists of the past and I was amazed.

"In the book, we feature an inventor, Frederick Jones, who was born into poverty in Kentucky in 1893 and became an orphan at a young age. But in 1961, the year he died, Jones, who would become the father of refrigerated transportation and later dubbed 'The King of Cool,' sold his company, Thermo Control (renamed Thermo King), which produced refrigeration units that he invented, to Westinghouse Electric Company for about \$35 million. Still, as he never applied for patents for his earliest inventions, he never made a dime on them and others were able to use them for free. His story represents the kinds of accomplishments I wanted to salute and share with young readers," Bolden said.

Wilkerson, the only child of parents from South Georgia and Waterloo, Iowa, said he first became interested in art and illustration during his years in elementary school. Now living in Largo, Md. in Prince George's County, he said he had to work hard to develop his craft.

"I wish I had been naturally talented but I really wasn't," he said. "I put about six years into formal training including studying animation as a college undergrad and then completing my master's degree so I could teach. As for this book, I think it

Cont. A16, Black Scientists



## Food Revolution

# Summoning the courage to follow a vision for life rather remaining in a prevailing model of ministry.

From A15

daddy did in blood, sweat, and tears to get that land and pass it down to the children — if you sell it to Walmart or Costco or whatever big box store or somebody to make a parking lot, you don't appreciate it.

**WIB:** Who were your role models?

**HB:** The first who comes to mind is Rev. Vernon Johns, who was preceded Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. He was a great preacher, theologian, all of that, religious leader, seminary president. He was also a farmer and set an example of growing food and selling his watermelons and produce at the church, I just preached in Brooklyn, New York, two weeks ago at the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights, and the pastor, in introducing me, said, 'Family, I'm so glad to have one who I perceive to be the Vernon Johns of our generation.'

**WIB:** And you were smiling right? Who else?

**HB:** That's high praise. Extremely high praise. It's not the first time I've heard it. Another one is Rev. Albert Clegg and the Shrine of the Black Madonna. In the '60s and '70s, they were talking about the need for Black America to feed itself. They have more land — 4,000 acres in South Carolina — than any other Black church in the United States. They bought this land 24 years ago, right before the founder passed away. Because the founder had said Black America needed to control its own food sources and needed a mega farm. While they had church gardens, they had various local

“

**If you're selling grandma's land down the country for a couple of dollars... If you sell it to Walmart or Costco or whatever big box store or somebody to make a parking lot, you don't appreciate it**

Rev. Heber Brown



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

satellite congregations in Detroit, Atlanta and Houston, but he wanted something bigger for all of Black America.

**WIB:** And the third?

**HB:** Bishop Ida B. Robinson, who some call the first woman bishop in this country. Her congregation was based in Harlem and they purchased 144 acres of farmland in Southern New Jersey. And that land is still there as we speak as well. They would invite people in the cities to come stay on the land, some time in nature because Robinson was concerned during the Great Migration that our distance from the land was causing mental, emotional, and health-related challenges in us. And they would do convocation and baptism and everything else on the land, too.

**WIB** Last question. How did you summon the courage to follow your vision for your life rather than remain in a prevailing model of ministry?

**HB:** When I announced I was leaving the church, one of my deacons said, "Rev. Brown, I'm sad, but not surprised." Because they'd seen me delivering sweet potatoes, driving a truck, singing, and doing videos. I had to pay attention to what made my heart sing, what made me smile. It was hard work. But it was doing something to really give me life and joy. And that can be contagious for whatever field. Once you find your thing, when people come around, they're going to be drawn to it just because it's really powerful when you align with your purpose.

Responses have been lightly edited for length and clarity

## Black Scientists

# A work of inspiration and a model for what is possible

From A15

represents some of my strongest work — it was certainly challenging," Wilkerson said.

Contributing illustrations for a graphic novel required Wilkerson to read the manuscript numerous times until he could imagine each of the nine scientists featured in the book in everyday situations — situations common to the work they did.

"This is the first in a series of books and I think it's going to be well-received," he said. "In terms of the layout, I guess reading about science, especially if you're a child, can be rather boring. So, my job was to grab the attention of our readers — to find the best fit for the words and the drawings.

"I've done 11 or 12 children's projects in the past but this is my first graphic novel. To be clear, I once had a day job as a construction worker and did illustrations as a freelancer in the evenings. There were roadblocks and for a while, I bounced from place to place and from couch to couch. But if you want it badly enough, you adjust. You learn how to be diligent. You consistently put time into your craft. Some of my friends have yet to see their dreams come true. Fortunately for me, I am seeing years of hard work and patience begin to pay off," Wilkerson said.

The book will be the highlight of an upcoming event in Baltimore. Bolden will be featured at the Enoch Pratt Free Library's Cherry Hill Branch on Thursday, Oct. 30, from 4 to 5 p.m.



**Enoch Pratt Free Library - Cherry Hill Branch**

**Located in the Cherry Hill Town Center,** the Cherry Hill Branch serves the Cherry Hill, Westport, and Lakeland neighborhoods.

**Event: Tonya Bolden: "Black Lives - Great Minds of Science"**

**Award-winning author Tonya Bolden** will discuss her new book, *Great Minds of Science*, which celebrates the lives and contributions of Black scientists throughout history. Oct. 30, from 4 to 5 p.m.

**David Wilkerson,** illustrator of the book, "*Black Lives: Great Minds of Science*," is just 32 years old. The title is a kid-friendly graphic novel on lesser-known, but still great, Black scientists.

PHOTO DAVID WILKERSON

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# Theater Review

CELEBRITY ATTRACTIONS BRINGS THE FAMOUS COMEDY TO TULSA NOV. 12

KIMBERLY MARSH, The Oklahoma Eagle

# A Love Letter To Mrs. Doubtfire

If you love the Mrs. Doubtfire movie starring the iconic Robin Williams and Sally Field, get ready for a whole new experience when the Mrs. Doubtfire musical comes to Tulsa's Performing Arts Center Nov. 12 through Celebrity Attractions.

"We definitely send a love letter to Mrs. Doubtfire and to Robin Williams," said Romelda Teron Benjamin, the actress who plays the court-appointed family liaison in this endearing story of a family going through a divorce. "We don't like to say that the show mimics the movie. I think it pays homage to the movie. It pays respect and love and gratitude to Robin Williams and that entire cast."

Tickets for the show are available online at [CelebrityAttractions.com](http://CelebrityAttractions.com) for the Tulsa performances November 12-17. To buy tickets in person or by phone, visit the box office at 101 East 3rd St. or call 918-596-7111. The story is about parents who have broken up and the dad is not able to spend the time he wants to spend with his children. When his former wife advertises to hire a nanny he engages his brother and his brother's partner to help him create a disguise as an older woman that is so elaborate even his ex-wife doesn't see through it. The court appointed liaison is evaluating his parenting ability to make recommendations to a judge. Hilarity ensues.

Teron Benjamin said there are some things that the musical cast takes from the movie, "because, of course, it wouldn't be Mrs. Doubtfire if we didn't have certain aspects from the movie in the musical." Like the movie, the musical hits emotional buttons, laughter and then tears of compassion.

"By the end of the show, people are on their feet crying after laughing for two hours and that's when we know we've done our job very well."

Don't be on the fence about seeing the show because there is no way to compare with Robin Williams, and they don't try. Still the musical delivers and is touching, especially to family members who have been impacted by divorce. While the movie doesn't dwell on the reasons for the divorce, the musical goes into the back story through the conversations on stage, Teron Benjamin said.

"We give you more background into what happened and why it happened and how it happened," she said of the storytelling technique. "Our cast has done a really great job with holding that story together and bringing that story to life. We get more into the relationship of Daniel and Miranda. When I look back at the movie, we know that there are problems, but we don't know the background. In the show, we're giving you the background to the problems. We're giving you an insight into what broke this marriage up."

### Playing the "straight man"

Teron Benjamin has the job of playing the "straight man," the character in a comedic

show that is not purposely funny but much of the comedy is the result of how the lines hit her character. The comedy is based on how the jokes are landing on Wanda Sellner, the court liaison who visits the family several times throughout the story, catching the lead character Daniel and his alter ego, Mrs. Doubtfire, at the same time resulting in some hilarious switch-ups.

One who has usually played in a comedic role of a show, Teron Benjamin said this is a big departure that has caused her to gravitate to roles like Wanda Sellner in the future because of the complexity. Her character is key to the jokes landing with the audience. The comedy of her character is in how she responds to the comic actors and their lines.

"It is a craft I have never encountered before...So, every night is a challenge, and I have to stand there (not

laughing)...It's extremely difficult. It goes back to the great comedians of Abbott and Costello, Sammy Davis Jr., Dean Martin, the old genre of comedy where it wasn't so in-your-face," Teron Benjamin said. "I now want to play roles like this more frequently. It's a tool that I will take into the rest of my career."

The character of Wanda Sellner is a strong, regimented court official who takes her job very seriously. She does what she does for the kids in the family above all, Teron Benjamin said.

"As soon as she comes out on stage, the audience knows, 'oh, God, don't mess with her,' and as we go on into the production, the audience is more afraid of Wanda. Because her whole, her whole thing is the kids, it's like she's seen so many deadbeat dads who were not worthy of their kids. By the time we get to the end of the show, Wanda is seen as an awesome woman."

Finally she sees that Daniel might not be as much of a screw up as she originally thought because she realizes the great lengths he has gone to in order to be with his children every day.

### Inspired at a young age

Teron Benjamin was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pa. A self-described hyper energetic child, she put on shows in her room and the family backyard, inviting neighbors.

"I would set up theaters in my mom's house. And then once I realized that I wanted to do this seriously, my mom allowed me to go to a creative performing arts middle school. Once that happened, she thought it was just a passing fancy." But it stuck with Teron Benjamin who went into college to study theater after high school. She booked her first tour during her junior year of college, and booked an international show two months later in The Netherlands where she performed for a year and a half. From there, Teron Benjamin moved back to New York City and began pursuing roles, while also working a "survival job."

### Advice for Young Performers

"I went to a Fine Arts High School so I know the importance of actors coming to visit, because it helped develop me," Teron Benjamin said. "So I think for young kids, they should know it's a lot of hard work. It's not easy. It is not easy whatsoever. There's going to be moments where you're like, okay, I don't think I can do this anymore." But the applause and the success of a show will be the inspiration for actors who want to make a career of it, she said.

On tour for a year, Mrs. Doubtfire will be closing on Nov. 23. Teron Benjamin said don't miss it. The musical is for the whole family and promises to be an emotional journey.

"Come with an open heart and know that you're going to leave filled with joy...And for me... I just feel really blessed, honored that I get to bring Wanda to so many people across the country, and I'm going to miss her tremendously."



### Our Mission

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

