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AMID NEW ADMIN RULE DRAMA WALTERS SEEKS PROOF OF PARENTS' CITIZENSHIP

Sasha Ndisabiye, NonDoc, A2

Following public outrage over his proposed administrative rule requiring public schools to report the number of enrolled undocumented students, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters specified the agency will be seeking documentation proving both students' citizenship and their parents' citizenship after Tuesday's State Board of Education meeting.



Federal Funding Freeze, Payment Portal Outage Leave Oklahoma Nonprofits Confused, Concerned
Oklahoma Watch. **A3**

Stuck at the Bottom: Oklahoma Reading and Math Scores Stagnate
Oklahoma Watch. **A5**

Despite Growing Homelessness, Oklahoma Lawmakers Look to Punitive Measures
Oklahoma Watch. **A7**

NATION And Now We're Back to Justice Zero
Word in Black. **A13**

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

Rentiesville
Historic OK All-Black Town. A4

Jobs & Classifieds
Discover career opportunities. A14

Faith In Tulsa
The Eagle Church Directory. A9



FEATURED

Federal Funding Freeze, Payment Portal Outage Leave Okla. Nonprofits Confused, Concerned

Funding Freeze, A3



FEATURED

Despite Growing Homelessness, Okla. Lawmakers Look to Punitive Measures

Homelessness, A7



Protestors stand outside the Oliver Hodge Department of Education building during the Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2025, State Board of Education meeting to protest State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters' recent remarks on immigration.

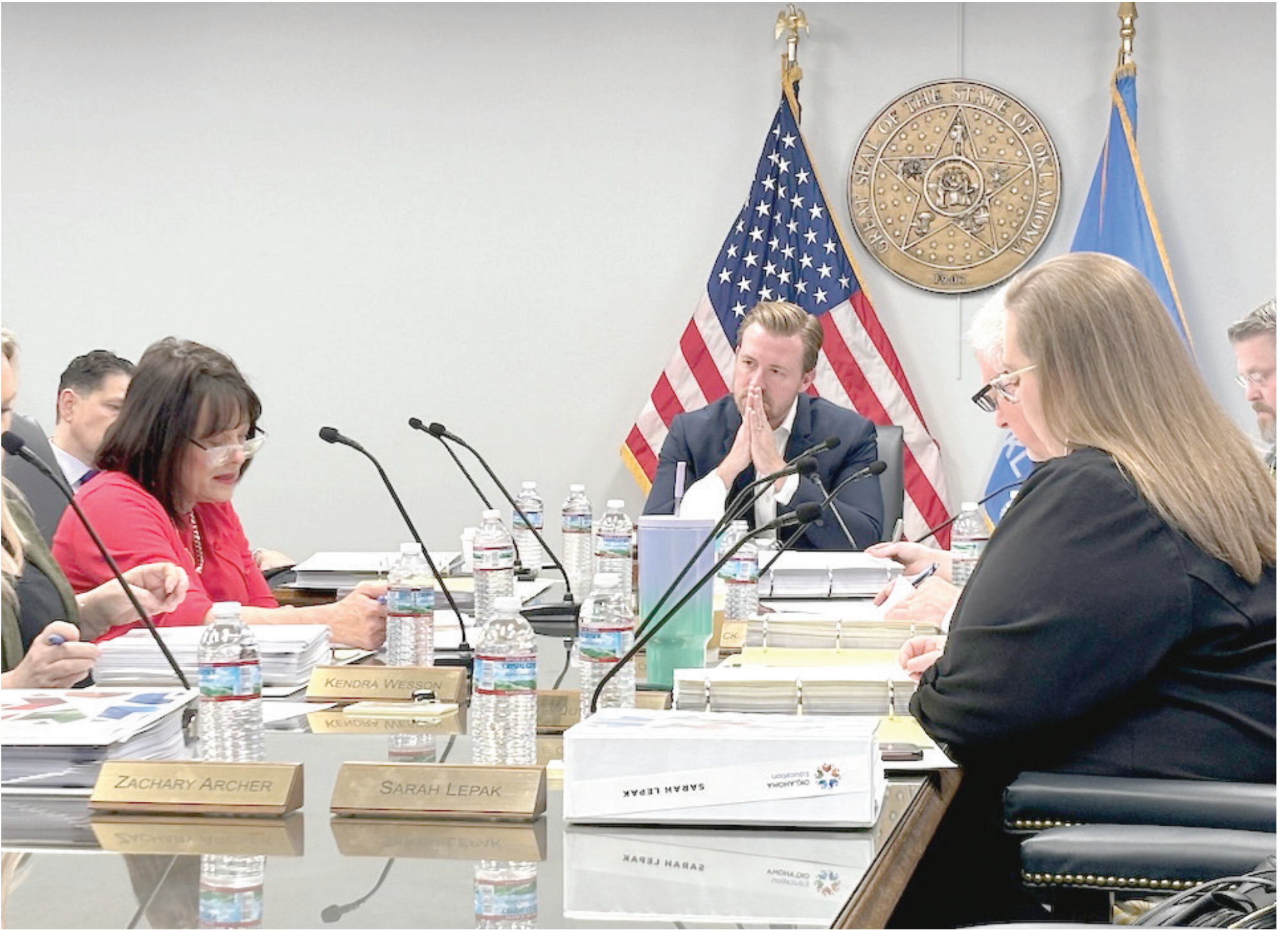
PHOTO SASHA NDISABIYE

Amid new admin rule drama, Walters seeks proof of parents' citizenship

Proof of Citizenship
Sasha Ndisabiye
NonDoc

Following public outrage over his proposed administrative rule requiring public schools to report the number of enrolled undocumented students, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters specified the agency will be seeking documentation proving both students' citizenship and their parents' citizenship after Tuesday's State Board of Education meeting.

Cont. A3, Proof of Citizenship



State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters listened to board member concerns on proposed rule changes during a Oklahoma State Board of Education meeting Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2025.

PHOTO SASHA NDISABYIE

Walter's language suggests agency is looking into the citizenship status of parents.

FROM A2

Proof of Citizenship

"We are asking for documentation on both, yes, the child and the parent," Walters said to reporters after the meeting. "We want information on who is in the country illegally or not. So that includes the family that's supplying enrollment."

For the first OSBE meeting of the new year, Walters set the stage for his 2025 education policies, outlining numerous controversial administrative rules while scores of protesters gathered outside to contest his recent remarks on students' citizenship status. After a lengthy discussion, board members eventually approved each of the rules Walters and the department proposed in December with one revision.

With the board meeting scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m., protesters toting signs and draped in Mexican flags and traditional clothing began filling the front entrance and grass lawn outside the Oklahoma State Department of Education building. Even though a majority of

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We want to make sure that all that information is gathered so that we can make decisions on where resources go, where personnel goes.

Ryan Walter, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction

individuals were protesting against Walters' recent propositions, some people appeared to be in support of Walters, many of whom displayed American flags and "Trump 2024" campaign merchandise.

OSDE announced the 2025 proposed administrative rule changes Dec. 16, sparking both outrage and support, along with what Walters referred to as "gaslighting" and "lies" by the media.

"I wanted to start off by being crystal clear: Our rule around illegal immigration accounting is simply that. It is to account for how many students of illegal immigrants are in our schools," Walters said during the meeting. "We want to make sure that all that information is gathered so that we can make decisions on where resources go, where personnel goes, and we can continue to make sure that Oklahoma is leading the country in education."

The language Walters used in his statement suggests the state agency is looking into the citizenship status of not only the child seeking enrollment, but the child's parents' citizenship status as well, differing from the proposed rules published to the department's website.

"In order to assess statewide and local educational needs, including without limitation, student needs, language and cultural barriers, current and future needs for English as a Second Language ('ESL') teachers, tutors and tutoring programs, current and future transportation needs, programs, and anticipated future funding needs, a parent or a legal guardian of a child, or an emancipated minor, shall provide proof of United States ('U.S.') citizenship at the time of enrollment," the rule says as written on the department's website.

The rule further states school districts shall record instances when parents or guardians cannot provide documentation proving the citizenship status "of the student." The proposed rule does not say school districts should record the parents' citizenship status. Instead, the rule says, "the school district shall submit only information of the total number of students that lack of documentation" to the department.

Walters attempted to clarify the rule to reporters after the meeting.

"We are going to the parents to get information on their children," Walters

Cont. A5, Proof of Citizenship

Federal Funding Freeze, Payment Portal Outage Leave Oklahoma Nonprofits Confused, Concerned

Funding Freeze

Heather Warlick
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma nonprofits serving the state's most vulnerable residents were among the first to feel the freeze as the Trump administration announced a sweeping, abrupt pause on funding for federal grants, loans and other financial assistance.

Several Oklahoma nonprofits became concerned Tuesday morning when they attempted to access their federal payment management services only to find they were locked out, receiving flags that the system was down or experiencing difficulties.

This lockout happened nationwide and caused mass anxiety as service providers braced for the White House's threatened funding freezes.

White House officials blamed an outage for the disruption of Medicaid, Head Start and other government web portals. By the end of the day Tuesday, most of these government sites were back

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Organizations that were hoping to make draws from their federal grants before the official freeze... weren't able to do so.

Mark Smith, executive director of Housing Solutions

online, but the White House's siege on health and human services, the scope of which is unprecedented, could have devastating consequences on the welfare of millions.

Service providers may have flooded the online payment systems early Tuesday, reacting to news of the funding freezes, said Mark Smith, executive director of Housing Solutions, the lead agency of the Tulsa Continuum of Care.

"Organizations that were hoping to make draws from their federal grants before the official freeze was going to start weren't able to do so today, so that only adds to some of the confusion and anxiety about what this (freeze in funding) looks like and what comes next," Smith said.

Pivot Oklahoma, Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma and Food and Shelter for Norman reported being locked out of Payment Management Services web portal they accessed monthly.

The Trump administration on Tuesday announced via a budget office memo a massive freeze on funding for federal programs,

taking aim at a swath of health and human services, including Medicaid, SNAP and WIC, as well as housing stability programs through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

According to the memo, the temporary pause will provide the administration time to review agency programs and determine the best uses of the funding for those programs consistent with the law and the president's priorities.

The memo set forth a directive that federal agencies identify and review all federal financial assistance programs to ensure they align with the executive orders President Trump issued during his first week in office.

A federal judge temporarily blocked the funding freeze before it took full effect at 5 p.m. Tuesday, but not before the payment portal lockouts stirred a panic among grantees.

The funding freeze, if eventually enacted, could paralyze Oklahoma's vast network of social service providers, who in 2024 received

Cont. A6, Funding Freeze

Rentiesville: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



Rentiesville, founded in 1903 and developed on twenty acres owned by William Rentie and twenty acres owned by Phoebe McIntosh, is located in McIntosh County five miles north of Checotah. The community is one of more than fifty All-Black towns in Oklahoma and one of thirteen still existing. Rev. N. A. Robinson, I. J. Foster, W. D. Robinson, and Rentie organized the townsite company with Robinson serving as president. J. J. Hudson opened the first mercantile business and became the first postmaster when the post office opened on May 11, 1904. B. C. Franklin followed Hudson as postmaster. By this time, as a flag stop on

the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway, the town had five businesses along Main Street, and eighty-one children were enrolled in the school. In 1905 the community elected F. P. Brinson as the first mayor, and Robinson succeeded Brinson in 1909. William Rentie, the town's only lawman, arrested Garfield Walker for drunkenness and disorderly conduct in 1908. Walker later shot and killed Rentie for revenge, taking away not only the marshal but also a principal founder and namesake. The town recovered and prospered for a time, boasting a lumber store, cotton gin, and many thriving businesses.

The Great Depression and lure of opportunities in urban centers caused an exodus of citizens from

Rentiesville. By the late 1930s the population dwindled to 154, and the 1990 census reported 66 residents. A population boom occurred, with 102 residents by 2000 and 128 by 2010. The site of the Civil War Battle of Honey Springs is only a half-mile east of town. A noted attraction is the Down Home Blues Club of nationally famed Blues artist D. C. Minner. Every Labor Day weekend Minner hosts the Dusk 'til Dawn Blues Festival in the town. Rentiesville is also the birthplace of Dr. John Hope Franklin, dean of African American historians and author of the award-winning book *From Slavery to Freedom*.

John Hope Franklin's old home in Rentiesville (21446.TO.M184.51.1.9, Larry O'Dell Collection, OHS).

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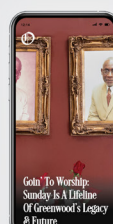
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A parent or a legal guardian of a child, or an emancipated minor, shall provide proof of United States ("U.S.") citizenship at the time of enrollment.

citizenship, relationship between an individual and a state to which the individual owes allegiance and in turn is entitled to its protection. Citizenship implies the status of freedom with accompanying responsibilities. Citizens have certain rights, duties, and responsibilities that are denied or only partially extended to aliens and other noncitizens residing in a

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES; GENERAL PROVISIONS 210:10-1-5 (d)

ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Walters unsure how the funding freeze would affect education in Oklahoma

FROM A3

Proof of Citizenship

said. "It's laid out in that rule, and we will continue to walk through that as it goes to the Legislature now, but we want information on every student in the schools, their parents, as they enroll in school."

Walters had initially decided to speak to reporters after the meeting to address a funding freeze announced by President Donald Trump causing confusion and panic nationwide. Walters said he was at the time unsure how the funding freeze would affect education in Oklahoma. Minutes before it was set to go into effect, a federal judge ordered a temporary stay on the freeze until Feb. 3.

OSBE approves proposed rule changes

The proposed rule changes were up for public comment through Jan. 21 to allow Oklahoma residents to provide feedback and voice grievances before the changes were up for approval by the board. Walters said "some tweaks were made" following last week's public comments hearing and subsequently addressed the rule changes in question.

Aside from the now-approved immigration status policy, Walters voiced excitement regarding a rule allowing the Classic Learning Test as an option for state testing and a new requirement for teachers to pass the U.S. naturalization test.

"We've also included here, as part of teacher certification, that all of our teachers will be required to take the U.S. naturalization test to ensure that they understand the basics of America, American history, American government and civics," Walters said. "What this does is ensures that every one of our teachers also meets the same requirement as every citizen in this country."

In most cases, the U.S. naturalization test is an exam given to those seeking to become

“We are going to the parents to get information on their children... It's laid out in that rule, and we will continue to walk through that as it goes to the Legislature now.”

Ryan Walters, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction

a U.S. citizen. As of 2021, students in the state must also pass the exam to graduate high school.

Walters also highlighted a rule requiring schools to report any donations exceeding \$18,000.

"If you all remember, about a year or so ago, we found out that a school had entered into an agreement with an organization that was attached to the CCP, and we didn't want Communist China getting into our schools and beginning influencing the information that our kids were getting," Walters said. "We think is very important for Oklahomans to know when schools get these donations, where the donations come from. Are there strings attached to those donations? It also helps us when we're making decisions around resources."

Walters also pushed new policies promoting patriotism, following an incident at Edmond North High School where a school district forced a student to remove an American flag from the student's truck.

"We absolutely want our kids to be proud to be an American," Walters said. "We're now requiring districts to protect those rights. And so I think it's of the utmost importance we continue to emphasize exceptionalism (and) American patriotism of our schools. I believe that that's absolutely necessary after seeing some rogue districts take those positions."

To conclude his remarks, Walters emphasized two rule changes on student safety and health.

Walters has been an advocate for removing teachers, administrators and any personnel suspected of misconduct or being involved in inappropriate relationships with students.

"We also want to continue to make sure that our kids are safe, and any bad actors there will be removed from the school administration entirely," Walters said. "We want to do this to be sure to prevent what we've seen with some of these teachers and coaches, where there's an incident, and they go on to another school or another district."

This will ensure us the ability that once these rules are broken, that individual will not be around kids in our schools again."

Walters also addressed school meals Tuesday. In both his personal and professional capacity, Walters has been an adamant supporter of the Trump administration, including those Trump is appointing to his Cabinet. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., nominee to become the U.S. secretary of health and human services, has pushed to remove processed foods and dyes from cafeterias.

"We're going to be a leader in making America healthy again," Walters said. "We have already begun to work with our child nutrition team, and we'll be giving information in districts that we will be complying and working very closely with RFK Jr. and his 'Make America Healthy Again' initiative."

Although Walters spoke about the rules the board "[received] the most feedback on," he did not mention the complete revocation of the civil rights subchapter, which stated commitment to including "cultural awareness and sensitivity for a school age population which reflects diverse backgrounds, races, cultures and attitudes" in education.

Following discussion, the board moved to approve the proposed administrative rules. The rules will now be sent to the Legislature for its approval.

Board suspends nearly a dozen teacher certifications

Toward the end of the meeting, board members entered into executive session to discuss and take action on over a dozen teacher certifications. Board members suspended the teacher certificates and sent applications to revoke the certificates of 11 teachers:

- John King, a Sperry Public Schools teacher and coach;

Cont. A8, Proof of Citizenship

Stuck at the Bottom: Oklahoma Reading and Math Scores Stagnate

Scores

Jennifer Palmer
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma students' scores in reading and math stagnated in 2024 and remained well below the U.S. average, according to national test results released this week.

The data is from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as The Nation's Report Card, which tests a sample of students every other year in fourth and eighth grades.

Scores plummeted in 2022 across the nation in the first data collection since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The 2024 results show U.S. students have not recovered academically.

In reading, Oklahoma's scores were not significantly different than in 2022; fourth-grade scores declined one point and eighth-grade scores dropped two.

Forty-six percent of Oklahoma's fourth graders and 41% of fourth graders scored below basic in reading. Those students can't, for example, sequence events from a story in fourth grade or determine the main idea of a text in eighth.

Oklahoma fourth graders improved four points in math, while eighth-graders' scores were the same as in 2022. That mirrors national trends.

Twenty-six percent of Oklahoma fourth graders and 47% of eighth graders scored below basic in math.

Oklahoma ranked near the bottom nationally in both reading and math. Just two states scored significantly lower in fourth grade reading and none did so in eighth grade. Just four jurisdictions scored lower than Oklahoma in fourth-grade math and two did so in eighth-grade math.

Oklahoma hasn't scored above the national average in reading or math in either grade since the late 1990s. The Nation's Report Card is considered the gold standard for state-by-state comparisons in K-12 schools and participation is federally required.

National average scores were below pre-pandemic levels in all tested grades and subjects. Only Louisiana exceeded its pre-pandemic fourth-grade reading score and only Alabama exceeded its pre-pandemic fourth-grade math score.



Second grader Kaniece Cargle learns about words that include "igh" at Epic Charter Schools' Stonegate Virtual Learning Center in Oklahoma City on Feb. 28, 2023.

PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Jennifer Palmer has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2016 and covers education. Contact her at (405) 761-0093 or jpalmer@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter @jpalmerOKC.

For local nonprofits, the risk of being forced to cut services is a reality

FROM A3
Funding Freeze

about \$14.27 billion in federal grants that supported programs and services, including child care, transportation, law enforcement, housing, food security, health care, and more.

Oklahoma receives far more federal money than what Oklahoma taxpayers pay the federal government.

On Tuesday morning, Pivot Oklahoma found themselves locked out of the payment portal they use to access federal grant money. The Oklahoma City-based nonprofit serves teens and young adults, providing a community of tiny homes for their clients who are at risk for homelessness and incarceration.

Pivot receives funding from a variety of federal grants and contracts. The tiny home campus includes a counseling center, a drop-in shelter for youth ages 18 to 24 and a licensed shelter for youth ages 12 to 17.

"We also have a partnership with the Regional Food Bank to continue to keep our pantries stocked with food for young people who might need those basic needs met," said Elizabeth McLeckie, manager of marketing and communications at Pivot. "So the freeze touches lots of areas on our campus."

Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma City was also apparently locked out of the federal payment portal it uses, issuing a statement that despite funding freezes, they would continue providing food for partners like Pivot.

Also locked out of its payment portal, Food and Shelter of Norman receives funding grants that pay for its rehousing initiative.

The grant dollars pay rent for 10 households in Norman that were formerly homeless.

"It's money that, if it doesn't come back to us, would eventually mean those folks go back to homelessness," Food and Shelter Director April Doshier said.



Norman residents who previously were homeless pose outside the new homes along with a case worker. They received new homes through Food and Shelter's rehousing program which receives federal funding.

PHOTO COURTESY OKLAHOMA WATCH

She said if Food and Shelter doesn't have access to its funding soon, the nonprofit's clients could face eviction.

"I can't pretend to understand the motivation why our federal government would intentionally wage war against people who are poor, but that certainly feels like what has happened," Doshier said.

Vague language used in the White House budget office memo put Oklahoma's entire nonprofit community on edge Tuesday, Smith said.

While Smith said Section 8 Housing Choice programs likely won't be frozen, since the White House specified payments made to individuals won't be affected,

some other rental assistance programs may face freezes.

"Nonprofits operate on very tight budgets and cash flow is very important," Smith said. "So uncertainty on when they're going to be reimbursed for expenses, or what changes may come with some of these federal programs, creates a lot of anxiety."

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



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(ABOVE) **Casey Brantley**, a Norman man experiencing homelessness, sits alone in a field near A Friend's House emergency shelter in Norman. A bill before the Oklahoma legislature would largely defund the Norman shelter. PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH

(LEFT) **At Norman Public Library West**, people experiencing homelessness work at computer terminals. PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Despite Growing Homelessness, Oklahoma Lawmakers Look to Punitive Measures

Homelessness
Heather Warlick
Oklahoma Watch

In the wee hours of Jan. 23, volunteers took to the frigid streets to find, count and survey people sleeping unsheltered in Norman. These volunteers not only count the homeless, but also register them into the Homeless Management Information System to connect them with case workers for future assistance.

The Point in Time counts were performed simultaneously in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Lawton and Norman.

Recent Point in Time counts revealed a 25% increase in homelessness from 2023 to 2024 in Oklahoma. During that period, coalitions of service providers have actively been rehousing people experiencing homelessness, but rising rents, shortages in low-income housing and growing eviction rates slash hope this year's count will drop.

If proposed legislation is an indication, some Oklahoma lawmakers plan to spend session time peddling bills aimed at penalizing the more than 4,000 Oklahomans experiencing homelessness in their own communities.

Broadening Oklahoma's Camping Ban

HB 1764 by Rep. Dell Kerbs, R-Shawnee, amends the anti-camping law of 2024, expanding the ban to include not just state-owned property, but also county and city-owned lands.

Homeless people violating this camping ban would face the same penalties as those charged with sleeping on state property: \$50

fines and up to 15 days in jail.

The 2024 legislation that created the original laws criminalizing sleeping on state-owned property was derived directly from model legislation provided by The Cicero Institute, a conservative think tank in Austin influencing receptive states such as Oklahoma.

Expanding the scope of the camping ban aligns with The Cicero Institute's campaign. An article on the group's website touts the success the Austin group has enjoyed in Oklahoma, stating: "This is Oklahoma, not Seattle or San Francisco—we do things differently here. When a neighbor is struggling, we offer a helping hand."

The article continues, "Camping restrictions provide a path forward to positive change, one that is foreclosed under failed federal Housing First policies."

A Norman 'Dumpster Fire'

Senate Bill 484, filed by Sen. Lisa Standridge, R-Norman, received national media attention and created local contention. The bill would prohibit cities with fewer than 300,000 residents from using municipal money to support homeless services such as emergency shelters and food banks.

Oklahoma only has two cities with populations greater than 300,000 — Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Standridge clarified that the bill would not

affect the work of nonprofits and churches to provide services to people experiencing homelessness; it would only dictate city spending.

Standridge's bill directly aims at her hometown shelter, A Friend's House, which receives a large portion of its funding from the city of Norman. It also seems to target Norman libraries.

Standridge spoke at a mid-January Original Constitutional Principles Affecting Culture meeting, explaining why she authored the bill.

"This is a constituent bill from my town of Norman, which is absolutely a dumpster fire right now in what they've done to allow the homeless to establish a vagrant nation if you will," Standridge told the OCPAC group.

"If you can imagine taking my son to the west side library and having to see a police officer stand at the door because of the vagrants that are camped out at all of the computers," she said.

Oklahoma Watch visited Norman Public Library West, where eight patrons appeared to be homeless, with bundles of their personal belongings. A couple read quietly at yellow library tables while six used library computers.

A bank of children's computers sat empty. The library observed its signature silence.



A group of people experiencing homelessness take refuge from rain on a patio outside A Friend's House, a Norman emergency shelter.
PHOTO: HEATHER WARLICK/
OKLAHOMA WATCH

Local churches and nonprofits are actively providing services to homeless

FROM A7

Homelessness

"We don't have any policy against homeless people," said Michael Pierson, branch manager at Norman Public Library West. "They can use the services just like everybody else does. They have library cards."

He said off-duty police officers serve as security guards during business hours when he is not present, but there are few problems.

A Tenuous Lease in Norman

City Care recently signed a six-month contract with the city of Norman to take over operations of A Friend's House, which has 52 beds. The Salvation Army is the only other shelter in Norman, with 35 beds.

Last year's Cleveland County Point in Time count found 240 people, including 27 children, sleeping outdoors or in a shelter, primarily in Norman.

Heidi Smith, director of the Thunderbird Clubhouse, the lead administrative agency for the Cleveland County Continuum of Care, said that while Norman has an excellent network of social service nonprofits, they are always underfunded and under-resourced.

"The biggest thing that I've heard from people who want to defund homelessness issues is that the churches and nonprofits, they want to step up and operate shelters," Smith said. "I don't know of any church or any nonprofit that's not already doing the very best they can with very limited resources."

Without city funding, Smith said, A Friend's House would lose 75% of its capacity.

Rachel Freeman, CEO of City Care, said

“
We don't have any policy against homeless people... They can use the services just like everybody else does. They have library cards.

Michael Pierson,
branch manager at
Norman Public Library
West

Norman Mayor Larry Heikkila wants to see A Friend's House closed down. She said the city has also been discussing relocating the shelter to the Griffin Hospital grounds in the near future.

That's why City Care signed a relatively short six-month lease with Norman, Freeman said.

At a recent mayoral debate, Heikkila said he favors Standridge's bill and that Norman can't afford to continue supporting the city's homeless population.

His opponents, Stephen Tyler Holman and Riley Mulinix, said they oppose the bill. Mulinix called it heartless; Holman said Norman doesn't want the state telling the city what to do.

Concern in Lawton for Pass-Through Funding

Most rural towns in Oklahoma have no homeless shelters, city-funded or nonprofit. Even suburban Yukon has very few social services for people experiencing homelessness.

Where shelters do exist, such as Lawton's Family Promise, they are often funded wholly, or in large part, by federal grants and contracts with the federal government. That money comes from the U.S. Treasury to HUD, FEMA and other federal agencies.

The money is then sent either to county-level agencies leading the local continuums of care, or to city governments to be disbursed or passed through to service providers.

Sarah Svec said she is concerned that SB 484 could affect the pass-through funding and in-kind donations she depends on to operate Lawton's Family Promise 16-bed shelter.

"The county owns my building, and as an in-kind donation, we get to stay here without paying rent," Svec said. "So those kinds of things definitely affect me."

Rural service deserts have no shelters and very few services available, but homelessness in rural areas is different than in urban areas, Svec said.

"I think the taxpayers should have the opportunity to say where they want their dollars to go," Sven said. "I think (Standridge) probably doesn't know anything except for numbers."

Oklahoma Watch called and emailed Standridge and her assistant multiple times for comment, but received no response.

Standridge told OCPAC she had received hate emails about the bill from people experiencing homelessness.

"I think if you have the wherewithal to understand this bill, to hear it, to go to the library and email me about it then I think you have what it takes to maybe hold down a job," Standridge told the OCPAC group.

Data shows that between 40% and 60% of people experiencing homelessness have jobs.

Freeman said that during the first weeks after taking over A Friend's House, City Care is working on connecting Norman's unhoused population with supportive housing.

She wants the Oklahoma Legislature to know that providing supportive housing to unhoused Oklahomans is 50% cheaper than the costs incurred by service providers combating the effects of homelessness.

"It's not even just a moral issue, if that doesn't ring the bell for you," she said. "It's a fiscal one. It's fiscally responsible to support our community's most vulnerable neighbors."

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

Board suspends nearly a dozen teacher certifications

FROM A5

Proof of Citizenship

- Robert Park, a Sperry Public Schools teacher and coach who has been accused — along with another unnamed Sperry coach, according to Tulsa's 2 News — of covering up a sexual assault incident between students in a locker room in October;
- Richard Akin, the former principal of Sperry High School;
- Michael Briglin, a former Putnam City Public Schools teacher who was arrested for alleged domestic abuse in 2023. Although a criminal probable cause affidavit was filed in Oklahoma County District Court, no charges appear to have been brought against him;
- Gerald Pruitt, a former Altus Public Schools teacher who is facing a felony child abuse charge after he allegedly slapped and threw to the ground a 5-year-old;
- Billy Schuster, a former Norman Public Schools teacher who was arrested by Edmond police in August and charged with numerous counts of distributing child pornography;
- Rocky Flint, a former Flower Mound teacher who is being charged with assault and battery on a student;
- Susan Hartman, an Ardmore Public Schools teacher charged with child abuse after allegedly abusing a developmentally disabled 7-year-old at the elementary school where she taught;
- Candace Western, a Moore Public Schools

teacher who resigned after allegedly bringing a registered sex offender to the elementary school where she worked;

- Stephanie Stehl, a Collinsville Public Schools teacher who resigned in November; and
- Tony West.

The board also accepted voluntary certificate surrenders from:

- Jennifer Enyart, who previously taught at Wyandotte Public Schools;
- J. Trent Gibson; and
- Suzanne Parker, who died at the age of 81 in December. Parker taught at the Westminster School in Oklahoma City for 21 years, according to her obituary.

Enyart — along with her husband Keith — is accused of abusing her adopted disabled child, according to Fox 23, and has been indicted in U.S. District Court with one count of child neglect and one count of assault and battery with the use of a deadly weapon. During last month's meeting, the board took action on two months' worth of teacher certifications, including that of Enyart, whose certification the board applied to revoke.

On Tuesday, the board voted to dismiss their prior application in order to accept the voluntarily surrender of Enyart's certification.

After executive session, board member Katie Quebedeaux moved to send the application to revoke former Elk City Public

Schools teacher Rick Dillinger to a hearing officer for further review. Dillinger is accused of embezzlement.

The board also announced their final determination "to adopt the hearing officer's proposed findings of fact" regarding the certification of Russell Fincher — a Tuskahoma resident and former high school history teacher who pleaded guilty to one count of selling ammunition to prohibited persons in May 2024.

On Nov. 19, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Oklahoma published a press release stating "Fincher knowingly sold 60 rounds of .40-caliber ammunition to an individual he had reason to believe was a felon" in May 2023, and "unlawfully engaged in the business of dealing in firearms without a license between February 2021 and June 2023."

Also during the meeting, the OSDE Accreditation Standards Division presented an update on Sankofa Freedom Academy Charter School and Deborah Brown Community School, two Tulsa-based charter schools that were put on probation in July 2023. The Accreditation Standards Division made no recommendation to upgrade the schools' status, but said both institutions were improving and would be reevaluated in for the next academic year.

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.



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Minister RJ Smith

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

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

Pastor Ruthie I. Howard



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Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Bible Study & Prayer Wednesday 7:00 p.m.
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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

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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

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Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p

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Ph: (918) 425-2077

Pastor Rick Bruner

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Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.

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Northside Christ Gospel Church

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

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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

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Worship Service 10:00 am

Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm

Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

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



Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

For Further Information call (918) 835-1525.

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Fax: 918-584-1958
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FEATURED

What Do We Do Now? 10 Action Steps for the Next 4 Years

Here's how to stay focused

Action Steps, A11



FEATURED

And Now We're Back to Justice Zero

Cleaning up the port and roadway pollution sickening Black and Brown communities

Justice, A13



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Schools Can Still Teach Black History — Very Carefully

Black History
Aziah Siid
Word In Black

Education experts say there are ways around President Trump's threat to defund K-12 schools who "indoctrinate" students with honest Black history

In January, on the eve of Black History Month, President Donald Trump signed an executive order cutting off federal funds for K-12 schools he says indoctrinate kids based on "discriminatory equity ideology" — A.K.A. diversity, equity, and inclusion programs — in the federal government.

Upset, angry and confused, teachers take to social media to express their fears about honestly teaching Black history, a subject that's been under attack in recent years. They worry they might lose their jobs if they say the wrong thing or teach the wrong lesson in the classroom.

But education experts say teachers should not give in to fear. Instead, they say, educators should be diligent but wary and use different strategies to teach the honest history of Black people in America.

Pay Attention to State Legislation

"If you're in a red state, you wanna be

very cautious," historian and TikTok star Ernest Crim III says. "Blue states, depending on the governor's, you probably don't need to be as cautious because they'll probably have certain protections in place."

Last November, the Florida Department of Education released a list of over 700 books that were either challenged or banned from K-12 schools — a tactic multiple school districts have used to remove Black and queer themes from bookshelves.

States like Florida, Texas, and Utah have made it clear they will not encourage or protect efforts to teach Black history. In Illinois, where Crim resides, districts are mandated to include Black history, but that may not be a priority, depending on the school's leadership.

"Pay really close attention to any

Cont. A12, Black History

What Do We Do Now? 10 Action Steps for the Next 4 Years

Action Steps
Keith Boykin
Word In Black

Donald Trump brings daily chaos. Here's how to stay focused, not just to survive the next four years, but to win the future.

"Black Vote, Black Power," a collaboration between Keith Boykin and Word In Black, examines the issues and

Cont. A12, Action Steps

Black History: A rich history experienced by all Americans



A statue representing the protest by U.S. black athletes at the Mexico City Olympic Games on display at National Museum of African American History and Culture.

FROM A11

Black History

information your district has put out already that communicates how they feel about these things,” Crim says. “Have they made statements about ICE and protecting kids? Have they made statements about securing a teacher’s freedom to teach these diverse perspectives? That’s important.”

Make Everywhere a Classroom for Learning

Last February, teachers sent home letters asking parents for permission to teach basic lessons on Martin Luther King Jr., and allow students to read books by Black authors or

“we’ve always found ways” to educate ourselves and our children, El-Mekki says. “We learn from the cradle to the grave, and we can’t take this concept of learning from the cradle to the grave and say, ‘We only do it between eight and five.’”

With over 400,000 followers on TikTok, Crim is skilled at using social media to learn, teach, and connect. From his “Crim’s Black History Field Trips” series to connecting anti-Black racism to the lack of universal health care in the U.S., he can educate hundreds of thousands of people — without restrictions — in a single post.

There are dozens more educators like him, producing Black-themed educational content, out there in cyberspace.

“They might try to ban TikTok again, but they ain’t banning social media, so follow folks who are putting that information out there,” Crim says. “I’m posting several times

“

Everywhere is a classroom... And everywhere [are] learning opportunities

CSharif El-Mekki, founder and CEO of the Center for Black Educator Development

watch a movie about Ruby Bridges. This year, Trump’s executive order has some teachers fearful about bringing Black history into the classroom.

Sharif El-Mekki, founder and CEO of the Center for Black Educator Development, encourages teachers to return to the practices of the ancestors, and create innovative ways to teach Black history — regardless of executive orders or district mandates.

“Everywhere is a classroom,” and can be treated accordingly, El-Mekki says. “Everywhere [are] learning opportunities, and in our history in this country and beyond, but particularly in the context of this country, that’s always been.”

Whether it was on a Mississippi steamboat, in a cave, in an attic or a house of worship,

a day. Follow my page.”

He recommends following other content creators who promote Black history, like Khalil Green, and sharing this information with your students. Let them know who are good pages to follow and do things like fact check.”

Before it had its own officially recognized month, Crim says, Black history education took different forms, including informal get-togethers outside of school and community-sponsored events. But parents and community leaders, he says, also have to step up.

“Look, our kids should be learning our history at home anyway, and I don’t just mean by the parents,” he says. “We should be teaching it in our communities,” including

Cont. A13, Black History

Not merely surviving the next 4 years, but winning

FROM A11

Action Steps

what’s at stake for Black America.

There’s so much going on right now that it’s impossible to keep track of it all, and that’s the point. They want us to be overwhelmed so we can’t keep up or fight back, but today, I want to give you 10 action steps you can take to stay engaged, make a difference, and protect your peace.

The new administration is breaking laws and pushing boundaries in a desperate attempt to remove the guardrails that protect democracy, weaponize government, repeal civil rights laws, erase Black history, platform billionaires, open up a concentration camp at Guantanamo, revoke LGBT rights, disrupt vital government programs, purge government workers, pardon an army of militant insurrectionists, endanger the lives of former government officials, fire government watchdogs, and threaten Mexico, Canada, Greenland, Colombia, and Panama.

And we’ve only just begun. So what are we going to do about it?

I spent four years covering the previous Trump administration as a political commentator for CNN, and it was exhausting. Nearly every day, there was a reckless tweet, an unvetted announcement, or a new law or norm broken. What I learned is that Trump is a chaos agent who needs as many distractions as possible to stay in power.

So here are 10 action steps we can take to stay focused, not just to survive the next four years, but to win the future.

1. Stay informed but not overwhelmed.

We cannot tune out and sleepwalk into fascism, but neither can we allow ourselves to become depressed by the enormity of the challenge. So don’t try to do everything. Start by following your expertise and interests. Focus on issues important to you. And protect your peace by stepping back from all the trees in front of you so you can see the larger forest.

2. Share truthful, factual information with friends, family, and followers.

Part of the reason Trump is in office today is because the right wing built a media



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

infrastructure to serve as an echo chamber of lies and misinformation. It’s your job not to recirculate that propaganda. Instead, seek out reliable truth-tellers and factual posts. Share them regularly and widely with your friends, family, and social media followers. Do not share misinformation unless you’re rebutting it.

3. Raise your voice to elected officials.

I know it’s old-fashioned, but visit the offices of the people representing you or write a letter. A study by the OpenGov Foundation during the first Trump administration found that in-person visits, personal letters, and social media were the best tools for being heard by members of Congress. Share a personal story of how an issue affects you. “The more effort a constituent puts in, the more engagement and impact they can expect,” the study found.

And as political commentator Reece Colbert notes, target vulnerable Republicans who won their races by less than 2%.

4. Run for office.

The people in Congress, your state legislature, and city council are no smarter than you. So launch your campaign. Talk about the issues that resonate with you

and your community. Raise some money. And run for office.

5. Go to court.

If you’re a state attorney general or practicing attorney, you’ve probably already thought of this. But even if you’re a government worker, a federal contractor, or a private citizen adversely affected by right-wing MAGA policies, call a lawyer, and sue for your rights.

6. Reward the good.

We have economic power in where we spend our dollars. In the face of the current anti-Black assault, some companies, like Costco, Delta Airlines, Patagonia, Apple, Pinterest, and even JPMorganChase are standing behind their DEI programs. Support Black-owned businesses that are down for the cause and businesses that support you. And donate to nonprofits and organizations that work on issues important to you. If you’re not ready to boycott, try a “buycott” or a “buy-in.”

7. Punish the bad.

The list of companies capitulating to MAGA’s anti-DEI threats is long. Target, Walmart, Meta, McDonald’s, Ford, Coors, Amazon, Lowe’s, Harley-Davidson, and others are rolling back their DEI programs.

Some are easy to quit, but others are integrated into our lives, making it difficult to cut them off completely.

So let’s organize creatively to develop new ways to make an impact. We may not get everyone to participate in an endless boycott of all these companies, but we can create targeted campaigns that leverage pressure points to achieve specific goals.

8. Create a conscious culture.

Now more than ever, we need music, film, art, TV, culture, and institutions that reflect and protect us. If you have that platform, don’t be afraid to use it to tell our stories. And if you’re not an artist or a content creator, support those who are.

9. Organize for the short term.

Donald Trump is a 78-year-old man term limited by the Constitution. We have special elections, gubernatorial elections, and mayoral elections taking place this year, midterm elections in 2026, and another presidential election in 2028. We can’t wait until the last minute to organize, so let’s get busy now with voter registration and education campaigns instead of scrambling to pull it together in the final few months of the next election.

10. Plan for the long game.

The crisis we’re in right now didn’t happen overnight. Right-wing conservatives have spent the past century slowly plotting to roll back the workers’ rights gains of the 1930s, the civil rights gains of the 1960s, the women’s rights gains of the 1970s, and the LGBT rights gains of the 2000s.

Conservatives knew that presidents, senators, and members of Congress come and go, but long-term control of the Supreme Court would set us back. Now they have it, and it’s our job to develop our own long-term strategy, build our own media infrastructure, and create a different future.

These 10 steps are just a starting point. But we can do this — and so much more. Now, let’s get to work.

Keith Boykin is a New York Times–bestselling author, TV and film producer, and former CNN political commentator. A graduate of Dartmouth College and Harvard Law School, Keith served in the White House, cofounded the National Black Justice Coalition, cohosted the BET talk show My Two Cents, and taught at the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University in New York. He’s a Lambda Literary Award-winning author and editor of seven books. He lives in Los Angeles.

Teachers encourages to “find your community” of like-minded educators as a support system



The Edmund Pettus Bridge was the site of the conflict of Bloody Sunday on March 7, 1965, when police attacked Civil Rights Movement demonstrators with horses, billy clubs, and tear gas as they were attempting to march to the state capital, Montgomery. The marchers crossed the bridge again on March 21 and walked to the Capitol building.

PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

FROM A12

Black History

churches.

Creating and Building Community

Platforms like the pulpit or Instagram can help keep K-12 students engaged with Black history, even if their schools ignore or control it. But it's just as important for teachers to stay connected, too.

A 2022 study found that a quarter of all teachers say limitations on lessons involving race or gender influenced their choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices. That indicates what lawmakers do directly affects what happens in the classroom.

It's important for teachers to “find your

“

We need bold people who are going to break those barriers

Ernest Crim III, historian and TikTok star

community” of like-minded educators as a support system, El-Mekki says. “They could be right there within the building, it could be in proximity — but you got to find your village, so to speak, to help, even as adults.”

Crim agrees.

“We need bold people who are going to break those barriers,” Crim says. Still, “Don't do this without support... Don't do anything alone. Check with your teacher's union first: ‘Will you support me if I do this? Can we do this collaboratively?’”

“If you don't have support from the union and other teachers, do it covertly,” he says. “But be careful because we don't need good teachers losing their jobs this season.”

Keep Parents and Students Informed

Before the era of Classroom Dojo, Google Classroom, and other interactive platforms that keep schools and families virtually connected, teachers used letters or phone calls. When it comes to the curriculum regarding Black history that'll be taught in the classroom, Crim says, it's time to go retro to protect both the teacher and the student.

“Now it's on us as educators because again, we have the power — not alone — but we have a big impact on impacting the future,” Crim says. “And if kids begin to learn the truth they know that that can ultimately change the power structure because when kids learn the truth, they want truth to be empowered.”

And Now We're Back to Justice Zero

Justice

Willy Blackmore
Word In Black

The axing of Justice40 reverses Biden's efforts to clean up the port and roadway pollution sickening Black and Brown communities.

Among the many, many programs and initiatives established by the Biden Administration that President Donald Trump sought to end at the very outset of his second term in office was Justice40. Enacted through an executive order shortly after Biden himself took office in 2021, Justice40 set a goal across federal agencies to direct at least 40% of spending on climate and related issues toward frontline communities — which often happen to be predominantly Black and Brown and poor, too.

The initiative represented a historic shift in the federal approach to climate issues: it has long been understood that Black and Brown Americans bear a disproportionate risk from the climate crisis, not to mention the ongoing burden of being exposed at a higher rate to industrial pollution, and the Biden Administration was finally making it so government spending reflected that reality.

But now, just like seemingly every other government-related effort that celebrates any minority group or attempts to address any inequity they experience, both Justice40 and also the great environmental justice approach taken by departments like the Environmental Protection Agency in recent years are being stamped out by Trump.

“The lawyers are ready,” Robert Bullard, the father of the environmental justice movement and the founding director of the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice, told Inside Climate News. “We've got to fight to make sure we don't roll over and let things happen to us, but be ready and prepared to fight back,” he said.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

While DEI has quickly become both a four-letter word and the go-to scapegoat for the second Trump Administration — blamed even for the mid-air collision of a passenger jet and a military helicopter over the Potomac last week — many of the executive actions being taken on DEI programs are also affecting environmental justice too as both a phrase and an approach to governance.

Trump's executive order ending all DEI positions in the federal government, for example, also applies in practice to environmental justice. A follow-up memo from the Office of Personnel Management said, “In accordance with that order, each agency, department, or commission head shall take action to terminate, to the maximum extent allowed by law, all DEI, DEIA, and environmental justice offices and positions within sixty days.”

The page on environmental justice that had been on the White House website has

been removed, as well as the official Justice40 website (as well as many but not all pages pertaining to the program that were on the website of individual agencies). There are concerns too that the administration might also scrap the \$1 billion in environmental justice community grant money, funded through the Inflation Reduction Act, which has yet to be awarded (there are also awarded grants that have yet to be paid out that seem in limbo now as well).

Justice40 applied to federal investments in a number of areas that, together, provide a broad definition of both the climate crisis and of arenas where Black and Brown Americans have long been disadvantaged or suffered disproportionate effects: Climate change, clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, development of critical clean water and wastewater infrastructure.

(This is the exact language for how the covered areas were named in the memo that codified Justice40, which is no longer on the White House website.)

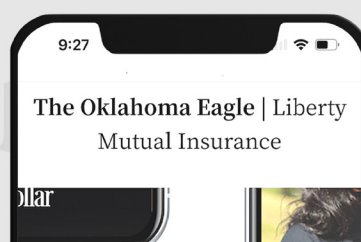
While it was widely expected that the Trump administration's approach to climate issues would be in contrast to Biden's, the tact the President has taken thus far makes his first-term climate policy look practically woke in comparison. When Scott Pruitt was EPA administrator during the first Trump administration, he once said environmental justice was “critical to improving environmental and public health outcomes.” Even if that was lip service, it's hard to imagine the new administrator, Lee Zeldin, even saying such a thing — never mind actually doing anything about it.

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

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WED. FEB. 5TH AT 10:00 AM
ITEMS LOCATED AT: 1140 S. JOPLIN AVE, TULSA, OKLA. INSPECTION: MON. FEB. 3RD & TUES. FEB. 4TH FROM 8:00 AM TO 5:00 PM AND STARTING AT 8:00 AM DAY OF AUCTION
AUCTION HELD AT: DAKIL AUCTIONEERS, INC. 200 NW 114TH ST, OKLA. CITY, OKLA.
(W. Side Service Rd of the Bdwy Ext. between 122nd & Hefner)
CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE AUCTION, BID LIVE ON-LINE AT WWW.DAKIL.COM
MOST ITEMS BRAND NEW OR IN LIKE NEW CONDITION
2018 Chevy Silverado 1500, 1999 Ford F150, Daewoo G25E 4,650lb. Propane Forklift, Daewoo G20E 4,000lb. Propane Forklift, 16' PJ Car Hauler/ATV Trailer w/TS9500 Winch & Ready Rail System, Charbroilers, Grills, Convection Ovens, MultiCook Ovens, Wrappers, Sandwich Press, Proofing Cabinets, Rotisserie's, Hot Food Cases, Donut Glazing Station, Fryers, S/S Tables, Mixers, Meat Grinders, Sausage Stuffer, Faucets, Mixer Bowls, Hooks, Beaters, Etc; Equipment Parts, Office Furniture & Equipment. This is only a partial listing! Buyers premium will apply.
PLEASE SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILED LISTING & PICTURES

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