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Angel Okolie

PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS

# We Live In Troubled Times. Here's How 10 Tulsans Are Coping

**Coping**  
Kimberly Marsh  
The Oklahoma Eagle

**In this unstable period, Tulsans are focused on their local communities, but they are also navigating a period of national and global uncertainty.** The ongoing flurry of policy changes at the federal level is causing economic challenges.

Cont. A3, **Coping**





Duke Durant

PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS



LaQuanda Pippins

PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS

## For Tulsans, rising prices for housing, groceries, healthcare and necessities are concerning

FROM A2

### Coping

While Tulsans press forward in their daily lives, they report higher stress levels, reflecting their heightened concerns about how they will adapt. The first weeks of the Trump administration froze federal funding and threatened cuts to social services that Americans depend upon from the government. They also intensified ideological divisions and polarization.

The Oklahoma Eagle interviewed 10 Tulsans about how they are navigating these challenges. We sought to capture the voices of a spectrum of locals as they grapple with existing and new challenges from economic hardship to government disruptions, social isolation, mental and emotional stress, and the ongoing fight for advancing human rights.

They are all anxious about rising prices for housing, groceries, healthcare, and necessities. After cutting their budgets as much as possible, those interviewed are worried about adapting further as the economic fallout from

“

**Every day, I guess it's kind of in a nutshell how I feel, like a raging fire.**

Duke Durant, father of three and a military veteran.

slashing government budgets and workforce reductions continues.

#### How are Tulsans doing?

To cope, most turn to faith. Many are also intentional about reducing the clutter in their lives and focusing on the most important aspects of life: family, nature, spirit, and mind.

In the coming months, we will continue highlighting government actions' impacts on our community. Please email us at [news@theoakleagle.com](mailto:news@theoakleagle.com) to notify us of impacts on you, your families, businesses, or communities.

#### Duke Durant

Duke Durant, a father of three and a military veteran who owns a tree removal/trimming business and runs a weekly comedy show, is determined to attain his goals despite governmental cuts. He is continuing his education with veteran benefits and is in the process of applying to Spartan Aeronautics to become a private commercial pilot. Using his military credentials, Durant also recently applied to become a federal government contractor.

He recognizes that he and people around him are experiencing fear. He has escalating concerns for his 10-year-old daughter, Paris,

who is experiencing racial and cultural tensions at school. She is president of the student council of her school. Durant and his daughter Paris are African American.

“She's hearing some rhetoric regurgitated at school by some of her friends, who obviously get that at home,” Durant told The Oklahoma Eagle. He added that he advises Paris to be assertive. “I tell Paris, go with your elementary manners, kindergarten respect, and your common sense. Assert yourself to what you know is right. When you feel your heart, when you feel something weird in your chest, when you feel like there's something that wants you to curl up... go against it,” Durant said, also reminding her that her elders fought for civil rights so she can stand up for herself.

An activist, Durant questions his role in making meaningful change. He moves between feelings of anger, rage, and despair. He fights fatigue but remains committed and determined.

“Every day, I guess it's kind of in a nutshell how I feel, like a raging fire. I'm probably like a lot of other people, we get so upset and engulfed in our emotions that it gets tiresome, mentally and emotionally, and you just want to sit down and have a mood brew and not

Cont. A5, Coping

## Greenwood Women's Summit Spotlights AI

### Summit

Kimberly Marsh  
The Oklahoma Eagle

*Editor's Note: AI was used in this story as a notetaker, transcript creator, and to pull sections of information for this story. This ethical disclaimer is an effort to maintain journalistic integrity and trust with our readers.*

The Greenwood Women's Business Center's Third Annual Women's Summit, InnovatHER featured speakers and panels centered on how businesses and creators can use AI effectively and discreetly in their work. Research has shown that women have been more skeptical in adopting AI than their male counterparts. Part of that has to do with trust, or the lack of trust in AI.

The Center held the third annual InnovatHER summit online this year after encountering new pressures and demands from the federal government. The Center is funded through federal grants and with the assistance of the U.S. Small Business Administration. The Greenwood Business Center is located at 102 N. Greenwood Avenue and open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information on its assistance programs, contact [info@greenwoodwbc.com](mailto:info@greenwoodwbc.com). Donna Jackson leads the Center as program director.

“At our Women's Summit on AI, our goal was to bring people together to explore how artificial intelligence can

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**Our goal was to bring people together to explore how artificial intelligence can empower women and revolutionize the way we do business.**

Donna Jackson, program director, Greenwood Women's Business Center

empower women and revolutionize the way we do business,” Jackson said in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle. “The summit was to drive innovation, optimize operations, and create new opportunities. We had people from across the nation join us online, and we are planning to host more events of its kind.”

Conference speakers and panelists said AI cannot replace humans in many aspects such as original ideas, abstract thinking and innovation, which requires imagination and an understanding of where you are going. It needs human oversight, and it lacks qualities that connect people to each other - adaptability, empathy, emotional intelligence, common sense, context and good judgment, to name a few.

AI can provide pattern recognition and execute predefined tasks quickly, the speakers said. They highlighted the use of AI in streamlining communication with certain tools that can improve customer experience with personalized product recommendations and descriptions; simplify grant writing; create content efficiently for use in blogs, social media, and business plans; support financial management, along with the more mundane administrative and scheduling tasks.

#### Data privacy concerns

Summit attendees voiced fears that AI would capture their data and proprietary information or make content more uniform and less authentic. As far as data collection, it is good to be cautious and choose platforms that prioritize security and transparency. Kim Roxie, founder of Tulsa-based Lamik Beauty, noted that we already provide information through social media, and while users should be smart about that, it should not be a deterrent.

Many people don't have the understanding of how to use the AI tools, she explained. For example, many treat Google, a traditional search engine, as an AI tool and expect Google to offer straightforward answers to complex queries, she said.

“I do not believe that AI takes away my creativity. What I believe is it supercharges it. It gives me ideas to build upon,” Roxie said. “I use [AI] to then be that administrative assistant... helping me to come up with the things, write the things, do all those things, type up things, make things go faster. So, my little administrative assistant is also my AI.”

The misunderstanding leads to frustration and abandonment of AI tools, added Cheryl

Cont. A7, Summit



The Oklahoma Eagle

# James Edward Stewart: Civil Rights Advocate

By HANNAH D. ATKINS, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



**A** leader in the Oklahoma City, state, and national Civil Rights movement, James Edward Stewart worked very closely with Roscoe Dunjee, editor and publisher of the Black Dispatch, a weekly Oklahoma City newspaper. The son of Zena Thomas Stewart and Mary Magdeline Fegalee Stewart, James Edward was born on September 6, 1912, in Plano, Texas. He had one half brother, Alfred, and two half sisters, Ella and Johnnie. The family moved to Oklahoma in 1916. Stewart's father died in 1920, leaving James to assist in supporting the family. Stewart attended Orchard Park Elementary School and later Douglass High School. There he and noted author Ralph Ellison both played in the band and became close friends.

In 1928 Jimmy Stewart and his mother moved to Wichita, Kansas. He enrolled in the tenth grade at Wichita High School East, and he transferred the next year to Wichita High School North. In September 1931 he entered the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University). After attending only one year, he moved to Oklahoma City. Stewart married Mae Belle Hayes in 1932 and parented a son. The couple were divorced in 1934. Stewart later married Mae Lois Layne on May 12, 1942,

and to this union were born two children.

In Oklahoma City Stewart found work at various hotels and clubs as waiter and custodian. After connecting with publisher Roscoe Dunjee, he began writing a weekly column, "Jimmy Says," for the Black Dispatch. Because he was acquainted with a top official at Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, Stewart gained employment as a janitor in June 1937; in September 1940 he was named manager of the company's eastside office Northeast Fourth Street. During World War II he volunteered for the U.S. Marines in 1943 and was assigned to the Fifty-first Defense Battalion. He achieved the rank of steward first class and was discharged honorably in December 1945. In 1976 he was appointed vice president of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, and he served in that capacity until his retirement in September 1977.

Very active in the Civil Rights movement, Stewart served as president of the Oklahoma City branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as of the state chapter. He served on the NAACP national board for eight three-year terms. Through his work with Dunjee and the Black Dispatch, his outreach extended across the state and nation. In July 1982 Stewart was elected

chairman of the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority. In 1984 Gov. George Nigh appointed him to the State Narcotics and Controlled Drug Commission. He was president of Oklahomans for Progress, which was dedicated to the elimination of inequities based on race.

Jimmy Stewart's record of public service brought him many awards. In 1975 he received the Service to Mankind award from the Sertoma Club of Oklahoma City and in 1976 accepted the Golden Plate award from the NAACP. In 1980 a section of Northeast Fourth Street was named James E. Stewart Industrial Park. He was inducted into the Afro-American Hall of Fame by the Ntu Art Association (located at the Kirkpatrick Center in Oklahoma City) and in 1986 into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. In 1994 Stewart was given the Pathmaker Award by the Oklahoma County Historical Society. The Oklahoma Parks and Recreation Department named a golf course for him at Northeast Tenth Street and Martin Luther King, Jr., Avenue. In 1997 he was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame.

A loyal and active member of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, James E. Stewart died on April 13, 1997, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

**Jimmy Stewart, Ralph Ellison, and Herbert Ellison**  
(23157.104, Jimmy Stewart Collection, OHS).

**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.

## Featured Last Week



**State Audit Reveals Massive Mismanagement of Funds at TPS**



**SCOTUS throws out Gossip conviction, prosecutors to decide on new trial**



**Neighbors Object to Youth Homeless Shelter Expansion**

The Oklahoma Eagle

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# Optimism about an awakening that could DRIVE CHANGE



(TOP-BOTTOM, L-R)  
**Lacreshia Jackson**  
(PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS),  
**Steven Arellano**  
(PHOTO KIMBERLY MARSH)  
**Amanda Clinton**  
(COURTESY AMANDA CLINTON)  
**Donte Williams**  
(COURTESY DONTE WILLIAMS)

FROM A3

## Coping

even say s\*\*\*, you know, but you feel like you have to," he said, also noting that he stopped drinking alcohol two years ago.

Lastly, Durant is optimistic that many Americans, across racial and economic lines, collectively realize these systemic issues are affecting them. That awakening could drive change.

### LaQuanda Pippins

LaQuanda Pippins did not expect to be a single mom, widowed twice by the age of 48, working three jobs to pay the bills and accumulate some savings. Yet, the political climate of rapid changes in the first eight weeks of 2025 is not impacting her any more than in 2024 or previous years.

Working three jobs – with Keller Williams Realty, Magic Empire Girl Scouts Council, and LensCrafters – Pippins is so busy she has to make time for an interview while shopping. She does not mind working three jobs to provide for herself and three children, but she laments that it takes her working multiple jobs to make enough income to negate the need for credit cards. She would like to work in real estate full-time, but the economy will not support it.

As a real estate agent, she empathizes with first-time homebuyers who are having to use their credit cards to stay afloat. Relying on credit increases their debt-to-income ratio and compromises their credit scores, making it more difficult to be approved for a conventional mortgage loan. Like Oklahoma weather, Pippins said, the economic future is unpredictable.

On the home front, she is looking for ways to adapt simply to lower costs. For example, she is avoiding high-priced eggs by looking for alternatives, such as applesauce, for cake recipes. The shadows cast by political infighting do not concern her, as she does not follow politics or war. She is satisfied with either presidential candidate running in November last year. She calls upon her Christian faith to get by.

Instead, she worries about things closer to home, such as societal trends impacting family, friends, and people in her community, who she fears isolate themselves with their smartphones and disconnect from others.

"We all have some kind of need. We all need each other to be able to reach out. We do," Pippins said. "There used to be a time where you would go and check on that elderly neighbor to make sure that elderly neighbor was okay. So, as we have come into a very big disconnect, and that is worldwide, we don't care anymore."

### Lacreshia Jackson

The Oklahoma Eagle caught up with Lacreshia Jackson, mother of 10, on a day when she had been up for 24 hours working at the Rose Bowl, which was used as a warming station during sub-freezing temperatures in February. A

“

**We all have some kind of need. We all need each other to be able to reach out.** There used to be a time where you would go and check on that elderly neighbor to make sure that elderly neighbor was okay. So, as we have come into a very big disconnect, and that is worldwide, we don't care anymore.

LaQuanda Pippins, single mother, working three jobs

“

**The main thing is to house the homeless population and getting what they need,** which is out of the freezing temperatures in the winter weather.

Lacreshia Jackson, mother of ten

housing specialist with the nonprofit Housing Solutions Tulsa, Jackson was ready for sleep. However, she was adamant about keeping her commitment for the newspaper interview despite her fatigue.

Jackson spends her days doing selfless work through Justice Link, located amid other social services offices on Archer.

"The main thing is to house the homeless population and getting what they need, which is out of the freezing temperatures in the winter weather," Jackson said.

"I'm fair," she said of her own well-being, noting that she deals with stress through meditation and faith. As far as the increased uncertainty in the U.S., Jackson, who was formerly incarcerated, has just had her right to vote restored.

She sees politics through the eyes of a registered Independent voter. She distrusts the two dominant political parties and cannot see that the existing power structure will ever do anything for the common good.

"I don't feel the government was ever honest with us from the gate. So, you just have to see things for how they are, and hope that the scales fall off your eyes to seek a bigger picture," she said.

On a personal level, Jackson struggles with housing issues and cannot change her living situation on the income of one job. She and her 26-year-old daughter have shared a home for five years to meet their monthly needs and still have some savings for emergencies.

Jackson, 45, says their living arrangement creates a hardship for them both. She would like to find a two-bedroom apartment with a \$900-\$1,200 rent, but continued rising prices make it less likely to be able to do it without increased earnings.

"I'm budgeting every dollar, every bill, every penny. I've cut out all kinds of stuff, just so I could really see my money and see where I'm spending it," she said. "I need a second job in order to sustain truthfully. I need a second job for rent only."

### Steven (Max) Arellano

Jocelyn Rojas Carranzo, an 11-year-old elementary school student in Gainesville, Texas, died on Feb. 8 after taking her own life. It was widely reported that at least one student was bullying Carranzo, chiding her with threats that her Latino immigrant parents would be deported, leaving her all alone.

The threats came because of the Trump administration's heightened activity with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to deport illegal immigrants, with a focus on those who came to the U.S. from south of the border.

Steven Arellano, known by friends as Max, organized vigils in Tulsa and Oklahoma City for Carranzo. Arellano, who is Hispanic, said that although he was not related to Carranzo he was moved to lead the vigils out of solidarity. The vigil, which about 50 people attended, was largely made up of white allies. Arellano spoke to the group on behalf of Tulsa Latino Unidos, a youth organization of Hispanic and non-Hispanic Tulsans working to do more for their community using social

media and events.

Since Trump's rise to power for the second time, the potential harm to Latino immigrants and their families has been immense. Protecting and helping them with basic needs is Arellano's biggest undertaking and priority. Part of that is training Latino Tulsans on their rights.

"We teach people they have the right to remain silent. They don't have to talk to ICE," said Arellano.

Arellano spoke about the danger they feel while doing everyday chores, such as going to the grocery store or taking their kids to school. Now they are afraid of losing their kids, he said. Schools report that absenteeism among the Hispanic population is up.

Local business owners are losing money because people are afraid to go shopping, and community members are isolated. Arellano's efforts also aim to hold together the Hispanic community.

Arellano said that young people are hurting right now, regardless of their age, and it is incumbent upon adults to talk to them, to ask them how they are, and specifically ask if they are being bullied at school.

"The most important thing right now is talk to your young ones, your son, your daughter, talk to your niece, nephew. I talked to my niece and nephew this week... and sure enough they were suffering through having some teachers be a little bit more, you know, racist than the others, or principals a little bit more racist than others.

"There've been moments where I've had to step up and be like, 'Hey, don't lose hope. We're still fighting.'"

### Komari Crisp

Komari Crisp, 20, is thinking mostly about education. She has not kept up with the news on the federal government changes because she finds it a drain on her energy, but she is painfully aware of Trump disbanding the U.S. Department of Education.

"That's stressing me out, because I want to go back to school, and I'm like, how is higher ed going to be affected? But I'm also worried about the students that I know and what education will look like for them, because it already wasn't great when I was in school."

One tactic Trump's administration has used is called "flooding the zone," intended to distribute so much information at once that it overwhelms voters, consumers, news media, and opposing politicians.

"So, I try not to get on social media every day, but when I do, I will limit myself. If I need to search out information, that is all I'm searching out. I've been telling students I've encountered that we will all get through this as a community. We will rally together, and we will try to make it feel like we're not living in such a tyrannical oligarchy that is the Trump administration," Crisp said.

"Lean on your family, lean on your friends, lean on your support team, and spend the time with them. Don't let this cloud you. Stay informed and watch out for your people, like, the people that mean the most to you, because





(L-R) Donald Gooden (PHOTO BASIL CHILDERS),  
Joseph Banuelos (PHOTO KIMBERLY MARSH)

## FROM AS

### Coping

something could affect them.”

Crisp is also concerned about the deportation of friends who do not know any other country besides the U.S. She laments that anti-LGBTQ policies are targeting her LGBTQ friends. As an employee of the Mental Health Association of Tulsa, Crisp does not like Trump’s pick for leading the Department of Health and Human Services.

“RFK is leading mental health in America, and he doesn’t believe in it. He doesn’t believe mental health is a thing. He thinks SSRIs (drugs used to treat mental health issues) are something that people are dependent on, and we should defund that,” she said.

“It’s a necessity that a lot of people have to live with, and if they don’t have that the results are drastic. It could lead people to do some really harmful things to themselves.”

### Amanda Clinton

A consultant to tribal governments, Amanda Clinton is running for a seat in the Oklahoma House of Representatives for the first time. She had previously aspired to it, but she said she believes representation matters, especially as the only Native American in the race. Part of her personal mission is to help individuals navigate bureaucracy. Overall, she has witnessed a mix of frustration, exhaustion, and determination among politically engaged Tulsans.

“I think the heaviest thing that’s weighing on my mind is the destruction of our institutions from inside the government. It’s very alarming.”

The visuals of Elon Musk with a chainsaw as he talked about cutting jobs, reducing budgets, and eliminating agencies through DOGE (U. S. Department of Government Efficiency), caused Clinton to defend civil servants.

“You need institutional knowledge for the government to run efficiently. To use a chainsaw to perform a surgery is really alarming to our institutions,” Clinton said, adding that she has not been too wound up about it all.

“I’ve been pretty calm as it’s been unfolding because this is exactly what Donald Trump said he was going to do. And so, it’s hard to be surprised when someone tells you what they’re going to do, and they do it.”

Clinton views herself as a product of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs, benefiting from scholarships, healthcare, and opportunities that helped her succeed. The pushback against DEI is counterproductive and indicative of a group denying individuals the right to live productive lives. Opportunities for marginalized communities does not take anything away from others, she said.

“I don’t know what part of lifting others up makes people think that they get dragged down,” she said. “And by the way, my scholarships were always competitive. I had a valedictorian scholarship. I had a scholarship that was for kids, reserved for kids with a certain GPA who went through Cherokee Nation Head Start. And I had to compete for a scholarship/internship for minority students at OSU that I ended up getting at Channel 9 (television news).”

Clinton had some good advice for handling

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**We teach people they have the right to remain silent.** They don’t have to talk to ICE.

Steven (Max) Arellano,  
community organizer,  
Tulsa Latino Unidos

“

**I think the heaviest thing that’s weighing on my mind is the destruction of our institutions from inside the government.** It’s very alarming.

Amanda Clinton, tribal  
government consultant

the information overload. Modify your news diet. She restricts her (access to news) to just a few news roundups each day.

### Donald Gooden

At 75, Donald Gooden, who provides lawn care and other needs through his company DGA Services, has lived through many issues, changes, and policies. Suddenly all that his generation “fought, bled, and died” for in the human rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s is being discarded under the Trump administration.

“It scares me. And as a Black man, obviously, you know, things haven’t been like I would have wanted them to be,” he said, stating concern for losing all the ground gained in those decades.

However, he sees a lot of the confusion and chaos in semantics. Leaders throw out words carelessly and often change their meaning. Gooden said it’s not the MAGA brand that bothers him as much as it is the actions to defund services in a rash and chaotic way.

“It’s not affecting me right now, but I see it coming. If these proposed cuts to Medicaid and Medicare all actually take effect, it absolutely will affect me. I don’t receive them because I want them. I receive them because I need them, and I’m grateful for those things,” Gooden said. “But I see it coming.”

Gooden said he believes the come has come for major world change regardless of who is in office.

“I can’t be angry with Mr. Trump because he is just merely being used as a tool. I wish it weren’t like that. I would love to be able to encourage him, praise him, and congratulate him, but I can’t, even though I honestly believe I understand what’s happening,” he said, referring to the Corinthians letters in the Bible. Paul implies that challenges, divisions, and ethical and moral decay are ever-present threats to community foundations.

### Donte Williams

Craftsman, teacher and artist Donte Williams also turns to his faith to get through with hope and optimism. Williams came to Tulsa before the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre 100th anniversary, intending to work within the Greenwood District to inspire adults and children to create through their hands.

He created a company called Mr. Fresh Ideas and found a job at Tulsa Job Corps teaching 16–24-year-olds the craft of furniture upholstery, mural and signage painting, and other projects. He was laid off about a month ago. The Job Corps is a program entirely funded by the federal government.

Creating new sources of income is his top priority. “I mean, yeah, it’s impacting me, but I’m trying to keep myself in a positive state of mind, because I feel like just focusing on that you’re gonna worry yourself to death. I stay in a creative flow and just try to stay working on all my different types of art and stuff. I’m keeping my mind occupied.”

Many people use social media to spread misinformation or to debate and argue, heightening the difference between the haves and have-nots. He stresses that social media is a tool that should be used to circulate positive messages and encourage each other to stay healthy during times of uncertainty.

### Joseph Banuelos

Joseph Banuelos also participated in a local vigil for an 11-year-old Hispanic girl in Texas

who took her life after being tormented by other students, preying on her fears that her parents might be deported.

Joining in community vigils and other rituals is one way to cope and stay connected to others. Banuelos said the hardest thing about watching others suffer is keeping his frustration and anger pointed at systems and not blaming people.

“I’m trying to convince other people of that, that way myself and whether it be my peers or not, that we all have our drive and our passion pointed in the right direction,” he said, adding that bad systems are reinforced when blame is placed elsewhere. “Systems are happy to evade blame,” he said.

He turns to organizing groups to return to meeting with people, celebrating successes, and continuing to perpetuate hope for Latino communities. Banuelos said investing time and money locally is important to keeping families and businesses going.

“We need an understanding of our resources, specifically time and money, investing locally, investing in people around us, voting with our dollar every day, you know, keeping up with boycotts and things like that.” Buying from the people you know who may have gardens or make or sell housewares or services is important.

“You don’t know Target. You don’t know Walmart, but I do know my friends who make similar things, and every time I spend money with them, that’s another connection. We’re here for a limited time...just understanding that within our labor, that within the context of where I put my time, whether it’s coming to a vigil, coming to an organizing meeting, going to a city council meeting, or whether it’s taking care of myself for self-care and just making sure that I can wake up and fight the next day.”

### Angel Okolie

Artist Angel Okolie has been struggling for a few months since being laid off from his job with a credit union. He said the community around him feels different than in previous years. It is not quite as connected, but he senses it is more in a stage of rebuilding.

Every day, he wakes up stressed about money, paying the rent for his home and his art studio, and how to make more money from his art. He is pouring everything he has into his art and must remind himself that the art is no longer a side gig but his business and livelihood.

He yearns for more connection and mentorship from other artists. Okolie is driving toward something greater than himself by creating a space for other Black artists.

“I’m creating my own art shows and community spaces...so people like me can have opportunities,” he said.

### Models of Resilience

While the challenges are real and sometimes overwhelming, the voices of Tulsans show a community trying to hold together. They rely on faith, creativity, and each other to get through this complicated time in our nation. They model resilience by focusing on what they can control – like supporting each other, getting involved locally, and finding small ways to adapt.

Kimberly Marsh, who reported and wrote this story, is a senior contributor to The Oklahoma Eagle. She has devoted a big part of her career to chronicling the policies of Tulsa’s city leaders.



## AI, for many organizations, enhances grant development and operational processes

FROM A3

### Summit

Lawson, founder of Social Media Tulsa and an Oklahoma State University Tulsa instructor.

"They ask it to write a proposal and then get garbage and quit," she said. "Remember garbage in, same garbage out."

"That's why it's important to understand what tools are available and how to use them effectively through generating thoughtful and thorough queries," Lawson said.

### The secret to AI's magic

For many women-owned businesses that depend on grants, AI tools simplify and enhance the process by helping craft compelling need statements and answering specific grant questions effectively, said Carmen Pettie, a grant specialist.

"AI has made it easier now for you to be able to actually write a grant. You have to know specifically how to ask AI to help you write a certain response to questions," she said.

Pettie listed five guidelines to follow when writing queries.

- **Define the task:** "What is the task? Do you want it to create, summarize, analyze? What is that action word that you want the AI tool to do?"
- **Provide Context:** "What is the context, the why, behind this task? Are you approaching this ask and task from a CEO, founder, or marketing perspective?"
- **Include References:** "AI needs references, right? If you have some benchmarks or some examples that you can upload and share with the tool, please do."
- **Iterate and Evaluate:** "AI is constantly an iterative process, right? So, if you get an output that you don't like or love, you can always ask the tool to edit, change, revisit this, recreate this."
- **Be Specific:** "You want to give the tool as much information as possible... if you were talking to me and you were asking me to do something for you, you would be very specific, right?"

Lawson emphasized that women entrepreneurs can be empowered by AI entrepreneurs through transforming business operations, saving time and enhancing productivity.

"AI tools will not replace your unique skills. They will enhance them. As an



(TOP-BOTTOM, L,R)  
Kim Roxie,  
Cheryl Lawson,  
Keisha Mabrey,  
Kat Shepherd  
PHOTO PROVIDED

example, I used Midjourney and Google slides to create the initial version of this presentation," Lawson said. "Then I pass it on to my design team, also known as my magical elves, for refinement. You can use Otter or another transcription service to record meeting notes, but you still lead the strategy development."

Lawson stressed that a person does not have to be tech-savvy to use AI, and it also frees up time to enjoy the finer points of life.

"AI handles the tedious task so you can concentrate on growth, community, and your nephew's basketball game," she said.

Certified Grow with Google Coach Keisha Mabrey presented an introductory session on using Google's platforms to help simplify business tasks and create new opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Many people are already familiar with Google Analytics, which helps analyze data in real time and aid decision-making. Other Google tools for ads are Performance Max and Project Studio for product images, Mabrey said.

"Google Business Profile is a tool that actually has AI built into it... It helps

you write that description.... If you are a restaurant or foodpreneur, AI can also be used to help you create a digital menu in less than 30 seconds," Mabrey said, adding information about AI overviews that can be found using Gemini on Google. She also explained that chat tools are great for jump starting research, including sources and websites for more information.

### Specific AI tools recommended by Keynote Kat Shepherd, SCORE

The final speaker, Kat Shepherd, shared a list of tools for women to explore. Shepherd is district director for SCORE in Southern California and Hawaii and serves as the Western Region Ambassador for SCORE Southern California. She is the owner of The Ultimate Professional, a digital marketing company, and an instructor at the University of California, Riverside Extension.

The list of tools she mentioned is here:

- ChatGPT is a versatile, large language model that can assist with various tasks such as answering grant questions,

brainstorming, social media campaigns, and planning course outlines.

- Gamma creates presentations quickly, allowing input from text, websites, or files.
- Notebook LM is a tool for managing and organizing information effectively.
- Canva (Magic Design) can help create business cards, flyers, and presentations.
- Google Assistant manages tasks, sets appointments, and creates lists.
- Zoom AI can provide transcriptions and summarize meetings.
- Sentra is used for business development, email marketing, and customer support.
- Wave is a free accounting software for categorizing expenses.
- ClickUp is a project management tool that organizes tasks.

Kimberly Marsh, who reported and wrote this story, is a senior contributor to The Oklahoma Eagle. She has devoted a big part of her career to chronicling the policies of Tulsa's city leaders.



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(ABOVE) Jeff Wacoche with now-United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians Chief, watching, Osage Nation Principal Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear shakes the hand of Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. during the state of Oklahoma's inaugural event Monday, Jan. 9, 2023.

PHOTO MICHAEL DUNCAN

(LEFT, L-R) Gina Powell, Kialegee Tribal Town second warrior, Mekko Stephanie Yahola, then-United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians Chief Joe Bunch and assistant chief Jeff Wacoche flank Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt on Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2023.

PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

# Federal memo finds United Keetoowah Band 'successor in interest' to Cherokee Reservation

## Successor In Interest

Tristan Loveless  
Michael McNutt  
*NonDoc*

Ahead of the presidential administration change in January, a last-minute solicitor general memo from the U.S. Department of Interior recognized the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians "has an ownership interest in the Cherokee Reservation as a successor in interest to the tribal signatory of the Treaty of 1846."

The memo could have extensive implications for the UKB's criminal jurisdiction, casino compacts and, as the UKB argues, even health care for UKB members. Inextricably connected, the UKB and the Cherokee Nation have been involved in a long-running dispute over whether the UKB is a "successor in interest" to the Cherokee Nation that signed treaties with the United States. The UKB maintains it is a successor of the tribal nation, while the Cherokee Nation maintains there has been continuity of government and that the modern and historic Cherokee Nations are one and the same.

Robert T. Anderson, a member of the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe and University of Washington law professor, wrote the Jan. 17 Department of Interior memo that declared the secretary of the interior can take land within the Cherokee Nation Reservation into trust for the UKB. For tribes, placing land into a trust with the federal government offers a bevy of benefits, and the UKB has long petitioned to do so.

"I conclude that the [Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act] authorizes the secretary to take land in trust

for UKB, the Cherokee Reservation is the UKB's reservation for the Part 151 Regulations, UKB has exclusive tribal jurisdiction over its trust lands, and that lands taken into trust for the UKB for gaming purposes within the Cherokee Reservation constitute 'Indian lands' eligible for gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act," Anderson wrote. "This memorandum does not in itself constitute the approval of any land-into-trust application, but is binding on the department as it considers any such applications that UKB may file."

Released on the last full business day of President Joe Biden's administration, the memo drew the immediate ire of the Cherokee Nation's leaders, who promised to challenge its implications.

"One lawyer made this decision on his way out the door," Cherokee Nation Attorney General Chad Harsha said. "And I would say that having reviewed that opinion, it is deeply flawed, and it does not reflect the history of the Cherokee Nation. We've challenged this opinion and the flawed legal basis on which it rests. We're pursuing all options, including potential litigation."

While Cherokee Nation leaders took an aggressive tone toward the memo, UKB leaders praised it for affirming that the UKB is "equal" to the Cherokee Nation.

"We have constantly had to defend who we are at this point, to defend who we are and defend our federal recognition," said Tori

Holland, UKB Tribal Council attorney and the UKB unseated delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives. "We've been saying all along that we are equal to the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. They have always said that we are not, and it's nice that the United States finally put it in writing that we are."

## One reservation, two tribes: a complex and shared history

Anderson's memo found that the UKB are the successors of the Keetoowah Society, a group of more conservative "full blood" members of the tribe who organized in secret for traditional political and religious meetings starting in the mid 19th century. Because of the group's secretive nature, an exact formation date is unknown, but Anderson found evidence the organization existed by April 1858. By the 1860s, the society was an active force in the Cherokee Nation's politics. While there was no territorial government in Indian Territory, the Cherokee Nation had its own democratic government with three branches and a bicameral legislature. As Oklahoma statehood approached, many members of the society protested the allotment of the Cherokee Nation's communal lands.

In July 1905, Cherokee Nation Principal Chief William Charles Rogers did not call for new elections in anticipation of the federal dissolution of the nation's government. (Congress never finalized the tribe's

Cont. A9, Successor In Interest



# Memo Implications: *Criminal Jurisdiction, Casino Pacts &* HEALTH CARE



(TOP) UKB Jim Proctor Elder Community Center, Tahlequah. PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

(CENTER) United Keetoowah Band, signage. PHOTO PROVIDED

(BOTTOM) Exterior of the United States Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FROM AS

### Successor In Interest

dissolution.) The Keetoowah Society refused to accept Rogers' decision, held their own governmental elections, impeached Rogers and elected Frank Boudinot as principal chief. (The United States recognized neither Boudinot nor the elected Keetoowah government.)

Anderson, quoting Cherokee author Robert J. Conley, described the official Cherokee Nation's government as "dormant" after a slew of congressional acts to limit the government in the early 20th century.

During the so-called dormancy period, the officially recognized government of the Cherokee Nation consisted largely of presidentially appointed chiefs. Boudinot and likeminded Cherokees continued to organize unrecognized groups and petition the federal government on behalf of Cherokee interests. In 1930, he told Congress the Keetoowahs represented "more than half of the Cherokees by blood" and argued the Keetoowahs could legally act on behalf of the nation.

"The Cherokee Tribe, or, rather, the Cherokee Nation was a political entity, with an independent government, having a varied citizenship of Cherokees by blood, freedmen who had been slaves of Cherokees and their descendants, who were incorporated in the nation in 1866, and a few intermarried whites, 286 in number," Boudinot testified while seeking reimbursement for legal expenses. "According to my theory, which has been passed on by the Supreme Court, a part of a tribe or some of the tribe, or a reasonable portion of the tribe, may act for and on behalf of the others."

After the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act passed in 1936, several Keetoowah factions — pronounced "Kih-too-wah" — began the process of applying for recognition as a Cherokee band. Tribes can become federally recognized by any one of the U.S. federal government's three branches. The executive branch can recognize a tribe through a complex Bureau of Indian Affairs process, the judiciary can recognize a tribe during litigation (although the court will technically find a prior executive or legislative action that recognized the tribe), or Congress can pass a bill declaring the tribe federally recognized.

**If the memo is upheld and enforced, its effects could mirror the effects of the McGirt decision in Oklahoma** by creating several new legal questions regarding the extent of each government's jurisdiction on the reservation.

#### The Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936

#### Also known as the Thomas-Rogers Act

A United States federal law that extended the 1934 Wheeler-Howard or Indian Reorganization Act to include those tribes within the boundaries of the state of Oklahoma. The purpose of these acts were to rebuild Indian tribal societies, return land to the tribes, enable tribes to rebuild their governments, and emphasize Native culture. These Acts were developed by John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945, who wanted to change federal Indian policy from the "twin evils" of allotment and assimilation, and support Indian self-government.

Prior to the end of treaty making with tribes in the 19th century, the president could also recognize tribes through treaties and executive orders.

By February 1942, a large portion of the Keetoowah factions united to apply for federal recognition as the "United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma." On Aug. 10, 1946, Congress officially recognized the tribe through legislation as a "band of Indians residing in Oklahoma." After the act was passed, three Keetoowah groups approached the U.S. Department of Interior seeking to be recognized as the official UKB government. A constitution for the band was approved by voters in 1949 and officially ratified in 1950. Despite the UKB's newfound recognition, however, the federal government continued to recognize the existing Cherokee Nation and its Principal Chief W.W. Keeler, who served in appointed and elected capacities from 1949 to 1975.

"As of 1950, the Cherokee Reservation was occupied by two federally recognized Cherokee tribes: the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians of Oklahoma led by its council and chief, and the Cherokee Nation led by its executive committee and principal chief," Anderson concluded. "Congress did not provide detailed instructions regarding how these two tribes were supposed to relate to each other and to the Cherokee Reservation."

#### Limited memo with expansive implications

In writing his memo, Anderson limited its effects to the question of taking land into trust for the UKB within the Cherokee Reservation, but other jurisdictional issues will be implicated by his memo's findings to support that conclusion.

"I conclude that the Cherokee Reservation is UKB's reservation, and that the [Department of the Interior] should review UKB's fee-to-trust application using the on-reservation criteria of [C.F.R. Title 25 Section 151.9]," Anderson wrote. "This conclusion is based on the following two findings: (1) that UKB has an ownership interest in the Cherokee Reservation as a successor in interest to the Treaty of 1846; and (2) that Congress intended for UKB to possess governmental jurisdiction over the Cherokee Reservation and enjoy the benefits of the OIWA on its own reservation

when it enacted the Keetoowah Recognition Act."

While the immediate legal effect of the memo is limited to fee-to-trust applications, the underlying findings also support the argument the UKB has other rights within the Cherokee Reservation. Highlighting the expansive implications, a UKB press release heralded the memo as finding "the rights over the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation once exercised by the historic Cherokee Nation continue today through both the UKB and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma equally."

"This determination by the [Department of the Interior] should end any misinformation about the relationship between the CNO and UKB," the release said. "The UKB and CNO are equal successors to the historic Cherokee Nation, equal and independent sovereigns in every way."

In addition to clashing over land-into-trust applications, the Cherokee Nation — which does not include "of Oklahoma" in its formal name — and UKB have publicly argued over criminal jurisdiction within the Cherokee Reservation. In October, Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. wrote an op-ed in the Cherokee Phoenix maintaining the UKB has no criminal jurisdiction within the Cherokee Reservation, while the UKB maintains it possesses criminal jurisdiction throughout the entire 14-county reservation. Before Anderson's memo, litigation between the tribes over criminal jurisdiction was likely. After the memo, it is almost certain.

"In the dying days of the Biden administration, the solicitor general at the Department of (the) Interior issued a shameful and cowardly ruling that inaccurately and wrongly interprets the Cherokee Nation's treaties. The solicitor's opinion is unsupported by law and history, and is offensive to the Cherokee people," Hoskin said in a Jan. 17 statement. "Tribes and lawmakers alike should be deeply alarmed by a federal lawyer rewriting generations of historical and legal precedent with a stroke of his pen. We plan to ask the courts to correct this wrong interpretation and to follow the well-established historic and legal precedent. But the truth remains: the Cherokee Nation has sovereign authority and exclusive tribal jurisdiction over our 7,000 square-mile reservation in Oklahoma. We look forward to working with the members of our congressional delegation to ensure this ill-advised opinion is not implemented."

If the memo is upheld and enforced, its effects could mirror the effects of the McGirt decision in Oklahoma by creating several new legal questions regarding the extent of each government's jurisdiction on the reservation. While the memo's effects could be significant, critics are likely to emphasize that the jurisdictional confusion is being created by one mid-ranking executive official's memorandum instead of by the U. S. Supreme Court, the head of the judicial branch.

#### Casino question prompts solicitor general memo

Beyond the question of criminal jurisdiction, Anderson's opinion also gives UKB officials hope that the tribe can once again operate a casino, something it has been impeded from doing for more than a decade. The opinion states that land taken into trust for gaming purposes within the Cherokee Reservation would qualify as "Indian Lands" under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, meaning such property would be eligible for gaming.

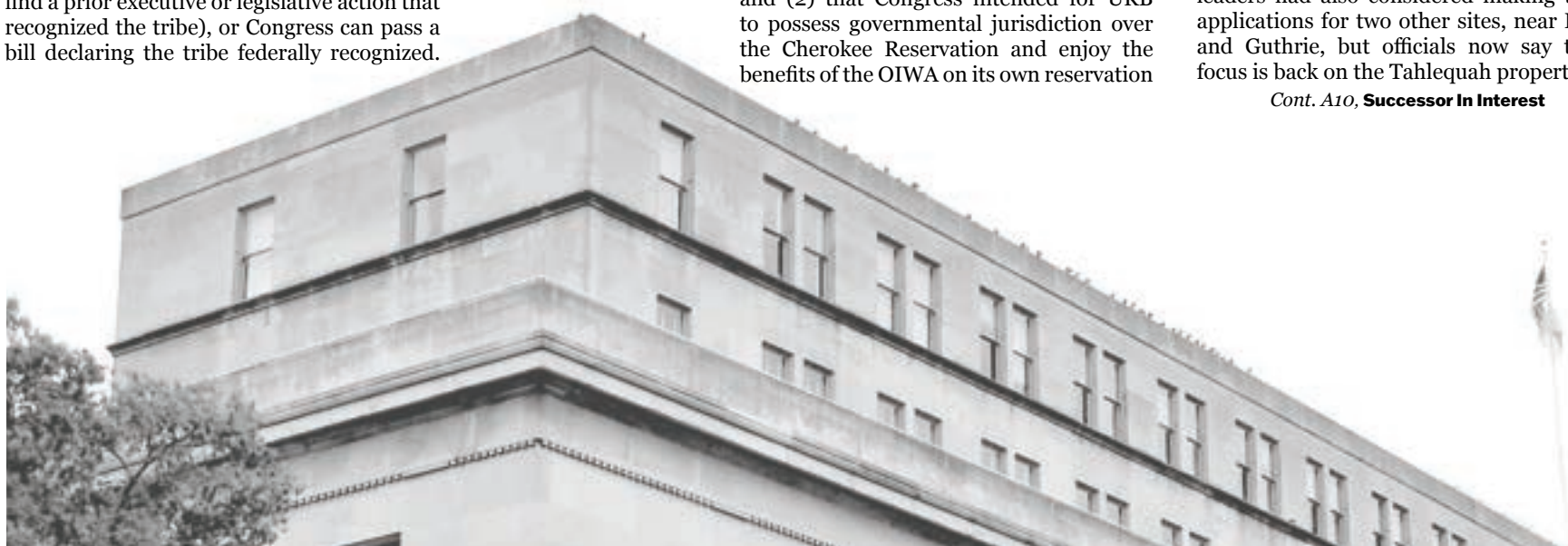
The UKB has a pending application with the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs seeking to put of tribal land in Tahlequah into federal trust to be used for gaming purposes, and UKB leaders are focused on developing the two-acre tract, which was the site of its old casino. Ahead of Anderson's memo, UKB leaders had also considered making trust applications for two other sites, near Enid and Guthrie, but officials now say their focus is back on the Tahlequah property.

Cont. A10, Successor In Interest

#### McGirt v. Oklahoma

#### A landmark United States Supreme Court case ...

which held that the domain reserved for the Muscogee Nation by Congress in the 19th century has never been disestablished and constitutes Indian country for the purposes of the Major Crimes Act, meaning that the State of Oklahoma has no right to prosecute American Indians for crimes allegedly committed therein. The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals applied the McGirt rationale to rule nine other Indigenous nations had not been disestablished. As a result, almost the entirety of the eastern half of what is now the State of Oklahoma remains Indian country, meaning that criminal prosecutions of Native Americans for offenses therein falls outside the jurisdiction of Oklahoma's court system. In these cases, jurisdiction properly vests within the Indigenous judicial systems and the federal district courts under the Major Crimes Act.





# UKB AWAITING LAND & TRUST Determination

FROM A9

## Successor In Interest

For nearly 30 years, the UKB operated a casino on Muskogee Avenue in south Tahlequah. But in 2013, the tribe closed its casino, which opened in 1986, after it lost an appeal to put the land into trust as required by the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. In 2012, the Department of the Interior approved the UKB's fee-to-trust land application for gaming purposes, but the approval was challenged in U.S. District Court by the Cherokee Nation. In March 2020, a district court judge issued an opinion holding that the Department of the Interior had authority to take the land into trust, but that the agency had not sufficiently established a basis for concluding the land was eligible under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act's exception for "former reservations" in Oklahoma.

In his memo, Anderson wrote that statutes and regulations long referred to reservations in Oklahoma as "former reservations" because many of them were presumed disestablished. However, in the *McGirt v. Oklahoma* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Muscogee (Creek) Reservation was never disestablished, and the subsequent *Hogner v. State* decision concluded the Cherokee Reservation also remains intact. As a result, the Department of the Interior withdrew its 2012 approval of UKB's application and successfully requested the U.S. 10th Circuit Court to vacate the March 2020 district court approval so the

federal agency could reexamine the issue in light of the *McGirt* ruling.

Anderson invited the UKB and the Cherokee Nation to submit briefs, which included expert reports and numerous exhibits. UKB officials argued the band is a "successor in interest" to the treaties signed by the Cherokee Nation under the United States v. Washington litigation, saying that as such, UKB shares coequal jurisdiction with the Cherokee Nation over the Cherokee Reservation. The Cherokee Nation argued the UKB cannot qualify as a successor in interest, claiming a treaty right to exclusive tribal jurisdiction over the reservation.

Meanwhile, UKB officials and Gov. Kevin Stitt signed a gaming compact in July 2020, which authorized the tribe to operate a casino within one mile of a state or federal highway or turnpike in Logan County. But the Oklahoma Supreme Court found the UKB compact — and a compact Stitt signed with the Kialegee Tribal Town — to be invalid for not being approved by the legislative Joint Committee on State-Tribal Relations.

Because the state court decisions were issued after the compacts had been approved by default when then-Secretary of Interior David Bernhardt took no action on his department's federal review after 45 days, the Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation and Citizen Potawatomi Nation sued in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to prevent the compacts from taking effect under federal law. The defendant tribes, including the UKB, moved to dismiss the case in an effort to protect the approved status of their new compacts. In November 2022, the court dismissed the UKB and the KTT as defendants in the case because the two smaller tribes are not operating casinos, meaning the larger plaintiff tribes lacked standing to challenge their compacts.

In October 2023, Stitt's office asked that the new UKB and Kialegee compacts be considered by the Joint Committee on State-Tribal Relations, but the legislative body unanimously rejected the agreements. If the UKB ultimately receives approval to place land in trust for gaming, it would need to operate under a renewed version of the state's Model Tribal Gaming Compact.

**Tahlequah trust application pending, 'nothing will happen soon' in Enid, Guthrie**



Seal of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



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

**Michael McNutt** became NonDoc's managing editor in January 2023. He has been a journalist for nearly 40 years, working at The Oklahoman for 30 years, heading up its Enid bureau and serving as night city editor, assistant news editor and State Capitol reporter. An inductee of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame, he served as communications director for former Gov. Mary Fallin and then for the Office of Juvenile Affairs. Send tips and story ideas to [mcnutt@nondoc.com](mailto:mcnutt@nondoc.com).

With the Anderson memo now stating their successor interest within the Cherokee Reservation, UKB leaders are waiting for a Department of Interior ruling on the tribe's request to place the 2.03-acre site of its former Tahlequah casino into trust "to improve and advance the economic status of its members."

The UKB is waiting for a land and trust determination on the parcel, UKB Attorney General Clint Cowan said Monday, Jan. 27.

"We own it, but it's not held in trust by the federal government, so we're asking the federal government to take it into trust which should then enable us to game on it," Cowan said.

Holland, the UKB Tribal Council attorney, said Anderson's opinion is a boost to the tribe's application with the BIA. She said the tribe doesn't have a time frame on when such a determination will be made by the federal agency.

"The 2.63 acres is currently pending approval for trust, and that would be done by the Eastern District of the Bureau of Indian Affairs," Holland said.

The UKB has also looked at attempting to develop casino operations at two other sites, one west of Enid in Garfield County and the other near Guthrie in Logan County, far west of the Cherokee Reservation.

"The tribe is still talking about all of its options, but nothing will happen soon, because there's been no final agency action yet to take land into trust for gaming for us and wherever the tribe attempts to do a gaming facility," Cowan said. "The land would need to be taken into trust for gaming for the tribe, and that's not going to happen quickly, so there's nothing really happening at this point with the western Oklahoma parcels. We haven't even submitted a land and trust application for that for either Guthrie or Enid, so there's not even anything pending at this point for those properties. That would be a years-long process — I mean, years — so it's nothing that will happen soon. The general idea is to wait until the BIA decides whether to take the land in trust in Tahlequah and then proceed."

# House Committee Advances Bill to End No-Excuse Absentee Voting

## Absentee Voting

Keaton Ross  
Oklahoma Watch

A proposal to end no-excuse absentee voting in Oklahoma narrowly advanced 4-3 through the House Elections and Ethics Committee last week. Critics fear the measure could discourage voter participation and fuel election fraud paranoia.

House Bill 1515 by Rep. Molly Jenkins, R-Coyle, requires voters to certify why they're unable to vote in-person on election day or during early voting. Acceptable excuses include being 75 or older, travel, work and military service.

Jenkins said she could not cite an example of someone abusing the absentee voting system. She said she did not foresee a need for election officials to deny an application or further investigate why someone wishes to vote absentee.

"The goal of this is to strengthen the integrity of the election," Jenkins told the committee. "When a person has to list a reason it gives them pause to think about what they're doing."

Rep. Mickey Dollens, D-Oklahoma City, criticized the proposal, arguing that the state doesn't survey residents on why they'd like to purchase a firearm or attend a religious institution.

"No fundamental right in the U.S. requires citizens to justify why they're exercising it," Dollens wrote on X.

Two Republicans, Reps. Denise Crosswhite Hader and Clay Staires, joined Dollens in voting no against the bill. It was tied 3-3 in committee, but Speaker Pro Tempore Anthony Moore voted yes to break the tie. It's now eligible to be considered in a House oversight committee, where it faces a March 6 deadline to continue on in the legislative process.

Several other notable election bills have advanced during the first three weeks of the legislative session, including:

- House Bill 2106 by Mike Osburn, R-Edmond: Reduces the number of election dates, setting four to five dates in odd-numbered years and seven to eight dates in even-numbered years. Senate Pro

“

**No fundamental right in the U.S. requires citizens to justify why they're exercising it.**

Rep. Mickey Dollens,  
D-Oklahoma City



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

• Tem Lonnie Paxton, R-Tuttle, is running a similar bill in the upper chamber.

- House Bill 1151 by Chris Banning, R-Bixby: Aligns school board elections with general and primary election dates.

• Senate Bill 890 by Julie Daniels, R-Bartlesville: Requires local and municipal candidates to file campaign finance reports with the Ethics Commission.

Have thoughts, questions or story ideas? Let me know at [Kross@Oklahomawatch.org](mailto:Kross@Oklahomawatch.org).





James Lankford, U.S. Senator, speaks at the Bricktown Event Center in, 2018.

PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

## Senators Want to Know if DOGE's FAA Layoffs Will Make the Skies Less Safe

### DOGE

Em Luetkemeyer  
Torrence Banks  
*Oklahoma Watch*

Everyone wants answers on whether it's safe to fly — including senators.

The public is on edge over recent high-profile accidents, including the crash between a helicopter and a passenger flight near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. The cause of the deadly crash is still unknown, but lawmakers say it's made clear that this is an area where safety needs to tighten up.

Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, which has one of the largest Federal Aviation Administration field facilities in the country, said the FAA still needs more air traffic controllers because "as was highlighted three weeks ago in the crash, it's incredibly important that people are there."

But there's plenty of concern about how the Trump administration's broader goal of scaling back the federal workforce could translate to the FAA.

The FAA laid off several hundred of the workforce's 45,000 employees at the Trump administration's direction, with Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy arguing that the staff released were all probationary and not "critical safety personnel," like air traffic controllers.

But on Friday, Politico reported that those cuts did include workers critical to ensuring safe air travel, often by directly supporting air traffic controllers' work.

Lankford said he was still waiting for the FAA to articulate where the layoffs happened and said it's too early to see if these layoffs will deter new applicants to the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center in Oklahoma City.

Other senators showed concern about the layoffs.

"The FAA is going to have to become way more accountable," Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, a Republican, said. "I fly in Florida all the time, and unfortunately, the FAA often is understaffed and not able to handle all the traffic."

Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia said he was closely monitoring the cuts.

“

**We're all concerned about safety,...**  
"And I've talked to people, and people are nervous."

Raphael Warnock,  
Democrat, Georgia



"We're all concerned about safety," Warnock said. "And I've talked to people, and people are nervous."

A spokesperson for the FAA said in a written statement it is not concerned about the layoffs causing safety issues or dissuading people from joining the profession, adding that it will remain "proactive, consistent and deliberative" in advancing "the safety of the nation's aviation system."

"The FAA continues to hire and onboard air traffic controllers and safety professionals, including mechanics and others who support them," the FAA said in a written statement. "The agency has retained employees who perform safety critical functions."

There's plenty of pressure on the FAA to ensure safe flight travel, and there's even some rare bipartisan consensus on what needs to be addressed. Both parties, for example, agree that air traffic controllers are crucial, and that something must be done to stop the years-long exodus from the profession. Duffy has even expressed support for letting them work past the mandatory retirement age.

The Professional Aviation Safety Specialist union, which represents more than 11,000 (mostly FAA) employees from both the FAA workforce and the Department of Defense, said last week it is still trying to get a list of all the employees who were laid off from the administration.

But the union did have its own list of members who had been laid off, which included 59 people who worked in technical operations, 39 in flight standard service, 19 from mission support services and 15 in air traffic services.

Philip Mann, who used to train probationary employees as an FAA Training Program Manager in Oklahoma City, said the layoffs could mean longer tenured mechanics will have to make up the work of the laid off probationary employees, adding to the burnout and stress that already exists in the industry.

"What we're going to see is, as those people

kind of start retiring out or as those people kind of start just aging out of the system, basically, we'll start seeing the maintenance capacity of the maintenance and supervision capacity of the agency start to be stretched," Mann said.

Some lawmakers shared Mann's concerns about what the layoffs could mean for future recruiting into the industry, which the Wall Street Journal reported is considered the largest civilian operating agency in the federal government.

"It's certainly going to discourage people from joining that important workforce, or really any other," Sen. Adam Schiff said. "Air traffic controllers are overworked and stressed, and cutting their budget and reducing their workforce is going to make that much worse."

Some Republican senators were confident that no problems would come of the layoffs.

Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama said his state — which heavily relies on its aerospace industry to drive its economy — has had no problems.

"Everything's good," Tuberville said. "A good evaluation never hurt anybody."

Sen. Ted Cruz agreed that the cuts aren't substantial enough to have an effect on his state.

"I don't anticipate any impacts," he said regarding travel to and from his home state of Texas. "The secretary of transportation has made clear that the cuts were less than 1% of the entire workforce, and they did not include any air traffic controllers or any safety critical position."

This story was produced as part of a partnership between NOTUS, a publication of the nonprofit, nonpartisan Allbritton Journalism Institute, and Oklahoma Watch.

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The entrance to the Seminole County Jail is seen in this 2023 file photo. While officials there applied for and received a portion of 781 funds, several other rural counties have not.

PHOTO ASHLYND HUFFMAN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

## Bill to Boost Rural Mental Health and Diversion Programs Advances

### Mental Health

Keaton Ross  
*Oklahoma Watch*

Officials in Oklahoma and Tulsa Counties were among the first to apply for a share of \$12.5 million deposited into the County Community Safety Investment Fund in 2023.

The grant opportunity, made possible after lawmakers settled on a formula to calculate the savings from State Question 780 and offer the money to counties as directed in State Question 781, meant more than \$2 million to hire new employees and build up programs to keep people out of the criminal justice system.

But in places like Cimarron County, which was allotted \$7,583, there's been less incentive for officials to go through the legwork of submitting a bid. The sparsely populated county in the panhandle is one of dozens that hasn't applied for a share of the money, commonly referred to as 781 funds.

"If you or I had the opportunity for \$7,000, that looks a lot different," said Brittany Hayes, the policy director at Healthy Minds Policy Initiative. "For a county to invest time in the application and reporting, it really has to be worth their while."

Mental health and criminal justice reform advocates are hopeful a bill moving through the Legislature, Senate Bill 251 by Todd Gollihare, R-Kellyville, will take effect and

help boost rural participation.

The proposal requires the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to allocate at least 0.5% of the safety investment fund to every county in the state. The change would set a floor funding amount of about \$62,500 and benefit 35 counties. The measure would likely not immediately impact larger counties because the 781 fund is continuing and participation remains below 60%.

Gollihare's bill also expands programming options to include jail intake screenings, which are designed to reveal information about a person's mental health and substance abuse history. The measure passed 11-1 out of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on Feb. 10 and is eligible to be heard on the Senate floor.

Kris Steele, the executive director of The Employment and Education Ministry and strong proponent of State Questions 780 and 781, said organizers initially operated on the logic that more people meant a greater need. He said that understanding has shifted as the challenges of running certain programs without a full-time employee have become apparent.

"We want the counties to be able to experience the value of applying for these dollars," Steele said. "It needs to be enough for them to do some very tangible and practical things."

Several urban and suburban counties have used the 781 money to hire one or more full-time reentry coordinators who can connect individuals with housing, counseling and employment. Others have contracted with Turn Key Health Services to hire a part-time on-site mental health counselor.

Healthy Minds published a report last week detailing several other program possibilities, including life skills training and employment placing.

"When you maximize these opportunities in rural Oklahoma, prosecutors and judges are going to use them," Hayes said. "As much as we can get funding to these areas, we'll see a major impact in how individuals with mental health disorders or behavioral health issues end up interacting with the criminal legal system."

Keaton Ross covers democracy and criminal justice for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or [Kross@oklahomawatch.org](mailto:Kross@oklahomawatch.org). Follow him on Twitter at [@KeatonRoss](https://twitter.com/KeatonRoss).

## Oklahoma Lawmaker Sues Governor Over State Employee Return-To-Work Policy

### Governor Lawsuit

Paul Monies  
*Oklahoma Watch*

A Democratic lawmaker is challenging Gov. Kevin Stitt's return-to-work order for state employees, claiming the governor overstepped his authority into policies that should be decided by the legislative branch.

Rep. Andy Fugate, of Del City, filed the lawsuit on Friday in Oklahoma County district court. He's asking for a temporary injunction against Stitt's executive order issued on Dec. 18.

Fugate said state employees work for the people, not the governor, and the order has caused chaos for state employees. He said work-from-home flexibility has provided significant benefits for state employees, including more time with family, reduced expenses and an improved work-life balance.

"Today's workers are knowledge workers, not factory workers, and we measure workers by their productivity, not by their presence," Fugate said. "Ultimately, this lawsuit is not about whether it's more productive to have butts in seats. It's about the office of the governor overstepping its authority."

Stitt's executive order called for all state employees to return to the office, with limited exceptions, by Feb. 1. Agencies that eliminated office space in the last few years and would have problems accommodating a full return to office could get an exception from the policy. Agency executives can also approve teleworking for employees with non-standard work hours.

Attorney Richard Labarthe, who is working on Fugate's case on a pro bono

basis, said Stitt's original work-from-home policy came during the emergency powers granted to him during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. He said if the Legislature wanted to debate and pass wholesale changes to state employment terms, they are free to do so.

"We do not have laws made by executive or gubernatorial fiat," Labarthe said. "That is not provided for in our governing document, the state constitution. So this is very much something that's outside Gov. Stitt's purview."

In his state of the state address, Stitt touted his approach to cutting government spending and his return-to-work policy.

"For years, I've instructed my cabinet secretaries and agency directors to shrink employee count and cut unnecessary contracts," Stitt said in the Feb. 3 speech. "I am committed to having fewer state employees at the end of my term than when I took office in 2019. I also mandated an end to work from home policies for state employees to better serve the people of our state."

In a written statement, Stitt said Fugate's lawsuit was typical big government, Democrat behavior.

"State employees work for the taxpayer," Stitt said in the prepared statement. "The data is clear, employees are more productive and accountable when they are working in the office. For the good of the taxpayer, work from home is over."

Some lawmakers, including Republicans, have expressed reservations about Stitt's return-to-work policy. In a budget subcommittee hearing last month, Sen. Adam Pugh, R-Edmond, wondered if it could contribute to a loss of talent to the private sector, especially among younger state employees. Pugh

worried that agencies would have to come back to the Legislature to request more money for higher salaries since work-from-home wasn't an option or benefit anymore for state employees.

"I can tell you younger generations are actually looking for things like remote work and virtual work and flexible time instead of pay," Pugh said in a Jan. 15 hearing for the Commissioners of the Land Office. "Now I think any employee will always ask for more money, but I think quality of life decisions, how they're able to raise a family, how they're able to not have to go ask their boss for an hour off so they can go to the doctor. I think those things are very important to a modern workforce."

The state's largest agency, the Department of Human Services, has more than 6,300 employees. Just 9%, or about 600 employees, were working fully on-site, the agency disclosed in budget documents in January. The rest were split almost evenly between fully remote or hybrid work arrangements.

The Office of Management and Enterprise Services is collecting responses from agencies about their progress or exceptions requested under the executive order. A report is supposed to be issued by the end of March. Oklahoma Watch has a pending open records request, filed Feb. 4, for agency responses so far.

Lawmakers have sued Stitt several times since he became governor over separation of power issues. The lawsuits largely dealt with disputes over how much authority the governor had to sign or change compacts with various tribal governments. The Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled for the Legislature in separate lawsuits brought in 2020, 2021 and 2024.

But the Supreme Court ruled 8-0 in January that the governor had the right to hire his own counsel in disputes with tribal governments, rejecting an argument from Attorney General Gentner Drummond that the AG had the sole authority to litigate those matters on behalf of the state.

Paul Monies has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2017 and covers state agencies and public health. Contact him at (571) 319-3289 or [pmonies@oklahomawatch.org](mailto:pmonies@oklahomawatch.org). Follow him on Twitter at [@pmonies](https://twitter.com/pmonies).



Attorney Richard Labarthe stands at the lectern to answer questions from reporters at a press conference at the Capitol in Oklahoma City on Friday, Feb. 21, 2025. Labarthe is representing Rep. Andy Fugate, D-Del City, in a lawsuit filed against Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt over his return-to-work executive order for state employees.

PHOTO PAUL MONIES/OKLAHOMA WATCH



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FEATURED

## How Children's Health Fares in 5 Key States

What does the data say about the health of Black children across the country?

Children's Health, A15



FEATURED

## White House Suspends Chief Education Data Commissioner

Data Commissioner, A17



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Mediocrity: Why Black Women Have to Work Twice as Hard and It's Still Not Enough

Not Enough  
ReShonda Tate  
Word In Black

**B**lack women are tired of having to overextend themselves to receive a fraction of the opportunities white men are offered.

Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett recently set the record straight on CNN, voicing what so many Black women know to be true: we are tired of the mediocrity of white men being rewarded while our excellence is policed.

It was a moment of raw, unfiltered truth—a truth that too many institutions and decision-makers refuse to acknowledge. Black women in America are expected to be exceptional just to receive a fraction of the recognition routinely handed to white men for doing the bare minimum.

### Mediocrity Is Protected. Excellence Is Policed

Black women are the most educated demographic in the U.S., yet we continue to earn less than our white counterparts, including white women. We hold degrees, break barriers and shatter expectations, yet we are routinely passed over for leadership roles in favor

of less qualified candidates. The reason? Structural racism, gender bias and the deeply ingrained protection of white male privilege.

When Black women advocate for ourselves, we are labeled as “intimidating” or “too aggressive.” When we challenge the status quo, we are told we are “angry.”

Meanwhile, whitemenwhodemonstrate the same level of assertiveness are praised for their confidence and leadership. This double standard is not just frustrating—it is a systemic problem that actively works against our advancement.

### The 'Twice as Hard' Mantra Is a Trap

For generations, we have been taught to work twice as hard to get half as much. While resilience is a virtue, this mentality is also a trap. It places the burden of systemic inequities on Black women instead of on the institutions that perpetuate them. The exhaustion we feel

Cont. A16, Not Enough

## How Children's Health Fares in 5 Key States

Children's Health  
Anissa Durham  
Word In Black

What does the data say about the health of Black children across the country? Here's what needs to change to improve health outcomes.

A measles outbreak that has claimed the life of a child, increasing rates of uninsured children, and a maternal health crisis — those are all worrisome problems that put the health of kids at risk. But add in the Trump administration putting Medicaid on the chopping block,

Cont. A16, Children's Health



# Challenges to the system often find themselves pushed out rather than promoted



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

FROM A15

## Not Enough

is not just from working harder—it is from constantly having to prove ourselves in a rigged game.

### Tackling Systemic Biases

Black women's exclusion from leadership and decision-making positions is not accidental—it is systemic. Organizations claim to value diversity and inclusion, but the numbers tell a different story. Black women hold only 4% of C-suite positions in corporate America. Pay disparities persist, leadership pipelines remain overwhelmingly white and those who challenge the system often find themselves pushed out rather than promoted.

The myth of meritocracy collapses when Black women with Ivy League degrees and decades of experience are still overlooked for opportunities given to less qualified white men (can someone say Kamala Harris). Excellence alone won't save us because the system was never designed to reward us equally in the first place.

## Black women hold only 4% of C-suite positions in corporate America.

### What We Must Do

The status quo is unacceptable. If institutions and individuals truly want to see change, it's time to move beyond empty rhetoric and take real action.

#### For Black Women:

- Know that your worth isn't defined by how hard you work in a system that was never built for you.
- Build networks of support and solidarity with other Black women and allies who value and respect your contributions.
- Protect your mental health. The fight for equity is important, but so is your well-being.
- Demand better—whether in the workplace, politics, or everyday life. Your excellence deserves recognition without compromise.

#### For Employers and Institutions:

- Stop expecting Black women to outperform just to earn a seat at the table.
- Conduct honest audits of your hiring and promotion practices. Identify and eliminate biases that block Black women from advancing.

- Address pay gaps by ensuring Black women are compensated fairly and equitably.
- Invest in leadership pipelines for Black women, and stop treating diversity as a performative checkbox.

#### For Allies:

- Speak up when you see inequity. Silence is complicity.
- Challenge systems that reward mediocrity while punishing Black women's excellence.
- Use your privilege to advocate for change in the rooms where Black women are often excluded.

Black women are tired—tired of carrying institutions on our backs, tired of being told we must prove ourselves again and again, tired of systems that celebrate mediocrity while sidelining brilliance. If real change is going to happen, it will require more than just acknowledgment—it will demand accountability and action. Until then, we will continue to speak out, stand tall, and demand the respect we have more than earned.

**ReShonda Tate Billingsley** is a journalist, public speaker, publisher, editor, ghostwriter, and producer; however, it is for her work as an award-winning national bestselling author that she is most known.

Since publishing her first novel, *My Brother's Keeper* (2001), through her own publishing company before Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books began publishing it, she has authored more than forty additional novels and contributed to several anthologies.

# How are kids faring in key states: California, Texas, Mississippi, Florida and New Jersey

FROM A15

## Children's Health

and Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy looking to change the childhood vaccine schedule, and suddenly the future of children's health in the United States looks even more precarious.

But how are kids actually faring in five key states — California, Texas, Mississippi, Florida, and New Jersey? Data from nonprofits and advocacy groups reveals plenty of challenges, from racial disparities in health care access to gaps in preventative screening. And even though some states are making strides toward greater health equity, millions of children remain vulnerable. Here's a closer look at what the data shows us, and what's being done.

### California

With more people than any other state, the Golden State is often seen as the golden standard, in terms of health care policy. About 13 million children (about twice the population of neighboring Arizona) live in California's 58 counties.

Children Now, an Oakland-based nonprofit organization focused on improving children's health and education, is tracking how well California kids are doing. Its 2025 statewide scorecard reveals that, on average, 31% of children with Medi-Cal were screened for lead by their second birthday. But when examining 10 counties with a Black population of more than 6%, only about 25% of children were screened for lead by age 2.

"We know that there's no safe level of lead for kids, but some kids are more exposed to the dangers of lead — as a result of housing injustice and environmental racism," Mike Odeh, senior director of health policy at Children Now, told us last year. "This is a result of multiple systems failing Black kids."

From ages zero to 18, children need dozens of preventative care screenings ranging from developmental screening to autism screening to immunizations to vision screening — all to protect the health of a child. But on average, only 30% of children with Medi-



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Cal received a developmental screening by age 3. That leaves millions of children in the state unchecked for any number of potential health issues.

Why aren't kids getting screened? Odeh says it's complicated. Some of the factors include language barriers, pediatricians not having enough time with their young patients, and additional time spent on child behaviors and parenting techniques.

"I think what's happening is that we expect a lot of services to happen at these well child visits," he said in a February interview. "Sometimes things don't get done, just to be frank. Not to anyone's fault."

Solutions: "California policymakers must make kids the first priority in health care and improve families' access to culturally appropriate health care providers for their children in a timely way," according to Children Now. "There must be a more proactive focus on reducing the racial, linguistic, geographic, and other disparities in children's health care access and

outcomes."

### Texas

More than 8 million children live in Texas throughout its 254 counties. But with a measles outbreak in West Texas, some of the strictest abortion bans affecting the state, and an increase in infant deaths, the Lone Star State is dealing with numerous challenges.

Every Texan, an Austin-based nonprofit policy organization, tracks the well-being of Texas children. In its 2024 Texas Kids Count Data Book, the nonprofit identified the rates of uninsured children, prenatal care, food insecurity, mental health, and death.

In 2022, Black children had the highest death rate, with 100 deaths per 100,000 children. "These statistics point to the urgent need to address systemic, unequal access to health care and the social conditions that contribute to higher death rates among Black children," the report states.

In 2021, Black or African American

mothers were the most likely to have had no prenatal care during pregnancy. A lack of prenatal care is linked to higher rates of maternal mortality, especially for Black women who are 3 times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.

Solutions: Every Texan's report calls for expanded access to family planning resources and targeted efforts to address disparities in prenatal care, particularly for Black mothers.

### Mississippi

The Magnolia State, home to about 800,000 children across 82 counties, faces multiple challenges, particularly around mental health and preventative care. The Children's Foundation of Mississippi, an independent foundation, produces data driven information on the welfare of these children. The 2025 Mississippi Kids Count Factbook identified the rates of childhood

Cont. A17, Children's Health



# White House Suspends Chief Education Data Commissioner

## Data Commissioner

Quintessa Williams  
*Word In Black*

*Removing Peggy Carr, who earned bipartisan praise, could lead to suppression or manipulation of data proving racial disparities in K-12 schools.*

The White House sent shockwaves through the education community last week when it suspended an esteemed federal official responsible for “the nation’s report card.” The move, experts say, could hamper the collection of data that exposes racial disparities in the nation’s K-12 schools.

Peggy Carr, a career Department of Education administrator who runs the National Center for Education Statistics, has played an “unmatched” role in helping the country understand how students perform in school. While some reports suggest that budget cuts may have played a role, the Trump administration placed her on administrative leave on Feb. 24 without explanation.

“I’m still processing and have no words to share right now. It’s a lot to take in,” Carr said in an email to The74, an education news website, declining to answer further questions.

Carr’s suspension comes less than a month after the release of the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores and less than a week after Department of Education officials canceled an upcoming math and reading test for 17-year-olds. The NEAP showed continued declines in student performance, especially among historically marginalized students.

As commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics in 2021, Carr helped education stakeholders track data and trends without partisan interference. If she were fired — which has been the pattern after a Trump administration suspension — it could disrupt its work measuring student achievement.

The National Center for Education Statistics has been a lifeline for education data across the U.S. If its data on student performance were manipulated or buried, it would become harder for civil rights advocates, educators,

**As commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics in 2021, Carr helped education stakeholders track data and trends without partisan interference.**

### The National Assessment of Educational Progress

**NAEP**  
The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest continuing and nationally representative assessment of what U.S. students know and can do in various subjects. NAEP is a congressionally mandated project administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the United States Department of Education.



Peggy Carr, a career Department of Education, and former administrator of the National Center for Education Statistics.

PHOTO ALEX BRANDON / GETTYIMAGES

and families to hold policymakers and schools accountable for inequities inside and outside the classroom.

Catherine Lhamon, former assistant secretary of the Ed Department’s Office for Civil Rights, said Carr “is the foremost data head in the country in terms of what statistics mean, what the right data questions are to be asking, and how to analyze the data.” Without Carr, she asks, “will we have data to know about opportunities for kids in school, how they’re performing, and what we need to do about it?”

### Why Peggy Carr Matters

For more than 30 years, Carr has played a major role in helping the country understand how students perform in school via the NAEP. Andrew Kolstad, her senior technical adviser in the 1990s, tells The74 that Carr “did a lot of homework preparing and rehearsing for presentations of NAEP results, so that she knew the results thoroughly and could answer any questions.”

“People in the department and in the testing industry called on her for her experience,” he says.

Chester Finn, president emeritus of the conservative Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an education policy think tank, said Carr won his respect for “meticulously” fact-checking his 2022 book, *Assessing the Nation’s Report Card: Challenges and Choices for NAEP*.

She offered a number of critical judgments “without ever once trying to compromise my authorial integrity or get in my face,” he told

The74. “In her day job, she’s been superb at explaining and interpreting NAEP data without spinning it or crossing the line into causation.”

### The Civil Rights Implications: What This Means for Black Students

Carr’s unexpected removal could disrupt critical data collection that exposes racial educational disparities. Without trusted, independent data, Black students, who are impacted by such hurdles the most, and their families could lose the ability to challenge inequities in school funding, disproportionate discipline rates, access to advanced courses, and so much more.

Lhamon says Carr’s suspension could set a dangerous precedent: if government officials can remove expert administrators at will to control data, they could possibly attempt to do the same for any other government data reports.

“It’s not only civil rights data collection,” she says, — it’s about all the data collections.”

Some education experts remain hopeful that research institutions and advocacy groups will step up in the event that President Donald Trump cuts funding for data collection.

“I hope and expect that we find new funding avenues even during the Trump years,” Henry Smith, assistant professor of education policy at Johns Hopkins University, tells Education Week. “Perhaps by securing funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services if not the Education Department.”

**Quintessa Williams**, is an education data reporter, deeply committed to reporting on the multifaceted experiences of Black culture, womanism, and social justice. Her work has appeared in The Root, MadameNoire, Travel Noire, and Medium. Williams graduated with honors from the University of North Florida in 2018 with a degree in English. She enjoys writing, storytelling, and engaging with books and documentaries.

# Solutions: Increased investments & data- driven policies

FROM A16

## Children’s Health

mental health challenges, low birth-weight babies, number of insured children, and obesity.

Between 2018 and 2023, children in Mississippi had higher rates of one or more mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral condition than children nationally. Year over year Mississippi children ages 3 to 17 with MEBD reported rates 4% to 7% higher than kids in other states.

Similar to California, about 30% of Mississippi children have not had a well child visit. And Black children are more likely to report no preventative health care visits in the past 12 months — about 10% higher than the national average for all children.

Solutions: “Throughout their journey to adulthood, even the most mentally resilient children and youth can encounter unanticipated mental health crises,” the report states. So Mississippi is working to bolster mental health services and coordinate care across organizations to better support children’s health.

### Florida

The Sunshine State is home to about 4.5 million children across its 67 counties. The Florida Policy Institute, an independent non-profit organization conducts research to drive policy change. In the 2025 Florida Child Well-Being Index, the organization tracked child food security, economic well-being, education, and health.

In five Florida counties with a population of more than 30% Black Americans, the rate of uninsured children increased between 2017 and 2022. Jefferson county saw a 2% increase within those five years.

Solutions: Florida Policy Institute’s report calls for more investments in children and families so that all Floridian children have access to affordable and quality health care.

### New Jersey

The Garden State is home to about 2 million children across its 21 counties. The nonprofit Advocates for Children of New

Jersey, researches issues and produces reports to inform its policymakers. In the 76-page New Jersey Kids Count 2024 pocket guide, the organization tracked family economic security, child health, child protection, and education.

In five New Jersey counties with a population of more than 15% Black Americans, Black children were the most likely to be born preterm in 2021. In Camden County, nearly 14% of Black children were born preterm compared to 9% of white children.

Solutions: Advocates for Children of New Jersey emphasize the need for data-driven policies to improve child well-being and “help inform critical decisions for children and families.”

**Anissa Durham** is the health data journalist for Word In Black. She reports on healthcare inequities and mental health in the Black community.



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Langston University, founded in 1897, has four campuses across the state. The HBCU is now recognized as a Research College and University by the Carnegie Classification of Higher Education Institutions.

## Langston University Named 2025 Carnegie Research College And University

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Langston University has been designated a Research College and University by the Carnegie Classification of Higher

Education Institutions. Oklahoma's HBCU (Historically Black College and University) is one of only 216 institutions nationwide to hold this classification.

"This recognition highlights the hard work and dedication of our researchers, faculty, and staff who strive to strengthen the academy," said Dr. Alonzo Peterson, vice president for Academic Affairs. "We have very smart people at Langston University. I

am always inspired when I visit the labs or sit down with my colleagues."

Faculty, staff, and students at Langston University conduct research in a variety of areas across multiple disciplines. The university is known internationally for its E. (Kika) de la Garza American Institute for Goat Research. Additionally, the higher education institution has research programs for horticulture and agronomy, aquaculture and aquaponics, biotechnology, and agribusiness and rural economic development.

Notably, the university's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center was renewed for a third five-year cycle of funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research in late 2023.

Since 1973, the Carnegie Classification has been the leading framework for recognizing

and describing institutional diversity in higher education across the United States. Administered by the American Council on Education (ACE), the Carnegie Classifications are updated every three years. It gives institutions designations based on their sizes, types of degrees conferred, and other characteristics.

ACE, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Carnegie Classification have been interested in the amount and types of research conducted at institutions. Traditionally, the designation is reserved for coveted Research 1 (R1) and Research 2 (R2) doctoral institutions with high research spending. For 2025, the Carnegie Classification has updated its metrics to clarify distinctions between R1 and R2 institutions while adding a third research designation for non-doctoral institutions: Research College and University.

"On average, institutions in this category spend at least \$2.5 million annually on research and development," said President Ruth Ray Jackson. "Langston University's research expenditures totaled \$10,505,000 in fiscal year 2023. This recognition underscores Langston University's commitment to expanding research excellence and advancing our institutional impact."

The threshold for an R2 designation is \$5 million in research spending annually, which Langston University exceeds. At least 20 research doctorates are awarded annually. Langston University offers one doctoral program, the Doctor of Physical Therapy, which is a professional rather than a research doctorate.

There are more than 4,300 higher education institutions in the United States; of these, 542 institutions received some level of research designation. Seven of 542 universities are in Oklahoma, and 40 are Historically Black Colleges or Universities. Nineteen of the country's 1,890 land-grant institutions, including Langston University, have received a research designation.

### Langston University

As Oklahoma's only HBCU, Langston University, formerly known as Colored Agricultural and Normal University, was founded as a land grant college in 1897. Today, the university provides its students with a world-class education that includes hands-on learning through impactful research and beneficial internships. The administration, faculty, and staff prepare the students for life after college while letting them enjoy an open and vibrant community that wants to help them grow and develop into a world-class professional. For more information, visit <https://langston.edu/>.

## La Fayette Completes National Association Institute



Excell La Fayette Jr. (c) joins fellow 2024 Next Generation Leadership Institute graduates. La Fayette is pictured with (l-r) Kirk Daniel, Vincent Thompson, Glenn Takai, and Kelli Brown.

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The National Association of Conservation Districts, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, announced its graduates from the 2024 Next Generation Leadership Institute at its national conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, Feb. 8-12. The conference theme was "Bee the Change."

Excell La Fayette Jr., a former Fortune 500 management executive and business consultant, recently completed the institute sponsored by the National Conservation Foundation in Washington, D.C. He was selected as one of six individuals to participate in sessions on various topics, including generational intelligence, emotional

intelligence quotient, personal leadership styles, diversity, and conflict.

He is a board member and treasurer of the Creek County Conservation District in Bristow, Okla.

When his selection was announced last year, Fayette said: "It is an honor to be selected to this year's Next Generation Leadership Institute." He is a graduate of Langston University.

See related article for more information, Goodwin, J. (2024, February 3). La Fayette named to national leadership institute. The Oklahoma Eagle,

<https://theokeagle.com/2024/02/03/la-fayette-named-to-national-leadership-institute/>

For more information, visit [www.nationalconservationfoundation.org](http://www.nationalconservationfoundation.org) and

<https://www.nacdnet.org/>.

### National Association of Conservation Districts

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 individuals who serve on their governing boards. Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands in the United States.

## Events

### Mar. 7

Black Gold in Oil Town exhibit opening at 101 E. Archer St., 6 p.m. The display will highlight the history of Negro league baseball in Tulsa. The collection of art was curated by W. Jacob Cornwell, the creator of the Oklahoma Baseball Archive. Live music from Poppa Foster will be provided, and a cash bar and refreshments will be offered. Sponsored by the Oklahoma Center for the Humanities. For more information, visit <https://humanities.utulsa.edu/>.

### Mar. 7

Greenwood Rising, 23 N. Greenwood Ave., is hosting "Freedom Fridays." Oklahoma residents will receive free admission and can visit between Jan. 31 and March 7. The free admission is courtesy of a donation from Tulsa Teachers Credit Union. For more information, contact (539) 867-3173.

### Mar. 7-29

She Makes Art + Music exhibit, poetry and performances, and music concert to be hosted at Liggett Studio, 314 S. Kenosha. The exhibit will be on display from March 7-27, with an opening on March 7 at 5 p.m. The poetry and performances will be on March 27. The music conference is scheduled for March 29. For more information, visit [www.liggettstudio.com/shemakesart](http://www.liggettstudio.com/shemakesart).

### Mar. 13

Chase Bank is sponsoring Small Business: Power of Capital program at its branch at 6140 S. Lewis Ave., 12 p.m. - 1 p.m. Ashley Townsend, vice president and community manager, will be the presenter. RSVP by March 12. To register for the event, visit <https://events.chase.com/300057010>.

### Mar. 21

Black Wall Street Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting at the 36th Street Event Center, 1125 E. 36th St. N., 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. For more information, visit <https://www.bwschamber.com/>.

### Mar. 22

The Dance Affair and Fashion Show will be held at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave. The fashion show will begin at 7:30 a.m., and the dance will be from 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. DJ Silky Soul will provide the music. The semi-formal events are BYOL and BYOF. MVP Dance Productions is hosting the program. For more information, contact Howard Barnes at (918) 951-5466 or Sheila Herbert at (918) 946-6697.



## Events

### Mar. 28

"Sister Act - The Musical" will be performed by the Theatre Department at Booker T. Washington High School, 1514 E. Zion St. The scheduled performances are March 28, 7 p.m.; March 28, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; and March 30, 4 p.m. Majeste Pearson is the music director. For more information, see [Sister Act - The Musical](#).

### Mar. 29

The Links, Incorporated is sponsoring Black Family Wellness Expo at Tulsa Community College, Northeast campus, 3727 E. Apache St., 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. The program is a part of the organization's National Impact Day of Service. For more information, contact [tul-salinksbfwe@gmail.com](mailto:tul-salinksbfwe@gmail.com) or (918) 852-7456.

### Apr. 3

Booker T. Washington High School Distinguished Hall of Fame Foundation Ceremony and Scholarship Dinner will be held at 6 p.m. at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave. Honorees include Inez Black, Kevin Lockett, Nicole Lynn, Sabrina Goodwin-Monday, Bill Nelson, J. Kavin Ross, M. Reginald "Ice" Terry, and Pastor LeRon G. West. The guest speaker will be Milliard House II, superintendent of Prince George's County Public Schools. For more information, contact [tulsabtw.hof@gmail.com](mailto:tulsabtw.hof@gmail.com).

### Apr. 16

Travis Guillory - Senior Concert at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 6:30 p.m.

### Apr. 17

Greenwood Cultural Center is presenting its Legacy Award Dinner. Nate Burleson of "CBS Mornings," "The NFL Today," and host of "Hollywood Squares" will be the Legacy Award honoree. For more information, call (918) 596-1020 or visit [www.greenwoodculturalcenter.org](http://www.greenwoodculturalcenter.org).

### Apr. 30

2025 Women's Leadership Summit will be held at the River Spirit Casino Resort, 8330 Riverside Pkwy. According to the organizers, the full-day program will be dedicated to empowering, elevating, and celebrating women leaders. The program theme will be "Courageous Leaders Driving Impact." The full-day summit For more information, contact <https://leadershiptulsa.org/womens-leadershipsummit/>.

### May 18

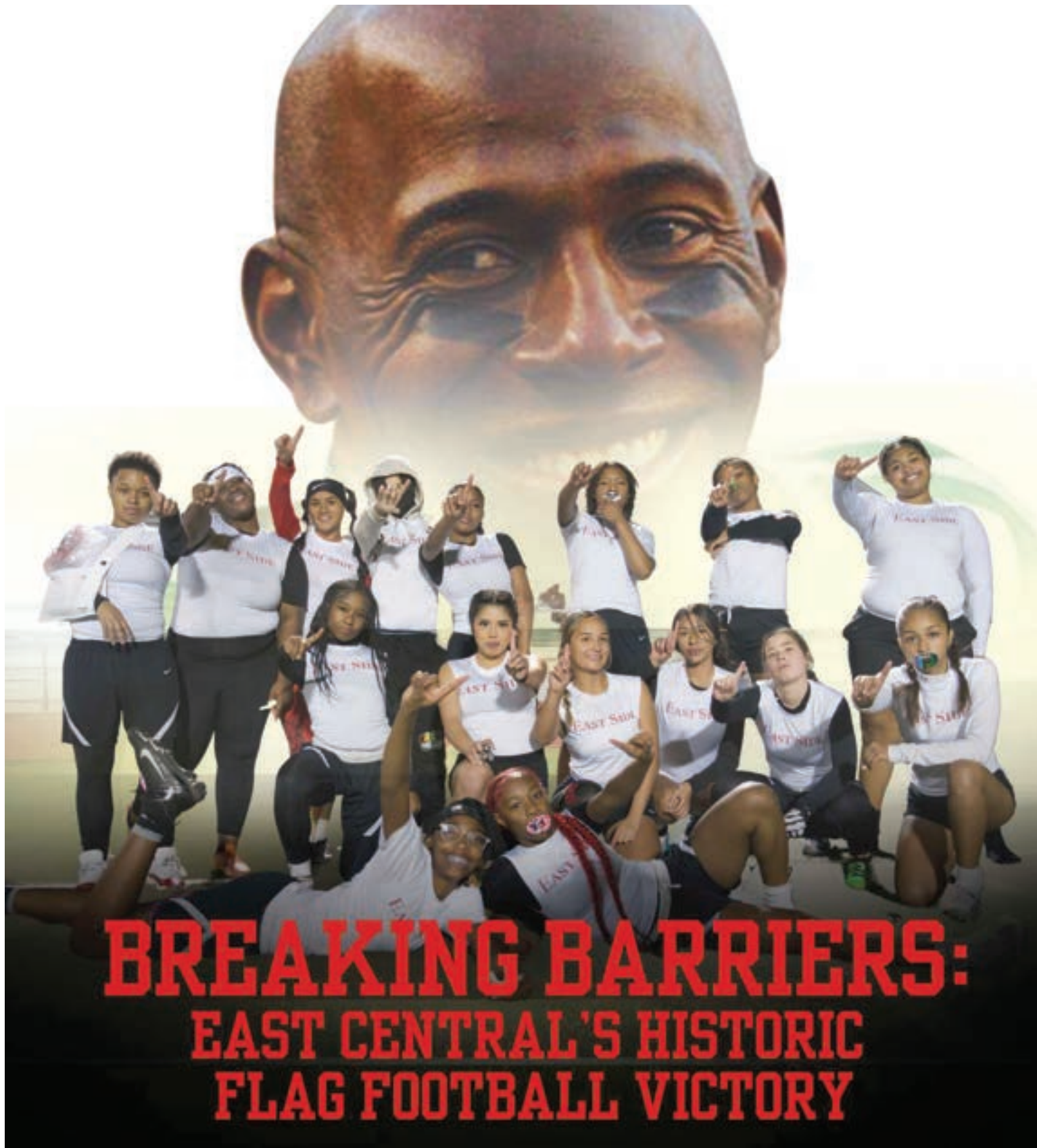
Witness! An Evening of Spirituals will be held at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. Doors will open at 5 p.m. The sounds of rich history in the tradition of the spirituals, also known as "freedom songs," will be performed. The featured singers will be Joel-Lyn McCormick (Soprano), Phil Armstrong (Tenor), Joseph Bias (Baritone), and Donald Ryan (pianist). The program is a benefit concert for the Greenwood Cultural Center. For more information, visit [eventbrite.com](http://eventbrite.com)

### Jun. 13-14

African and Indian Table Talk presents "Across Generations: The Freedman's Journey in Indian Territory" conference. More information to be provided soon.

### Aug. 17-23

National Business League will host its 125th-anniversary pre-conference at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Ala., Aug. 17-20, and conference in Atlanta, Ga., Aug. 20-23. For more information, visit <https://national-businessleague.org/>



"Breaking Barriers: East Central's Historic Flag Football Victory" will be shown at Circle Cinema, 10 S. Lewis Ave., on March 22.

PHOTO PROVIDED

## Women's Month: East Central's Historic Victory To Premiere At Circle Cinema, March 22

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

East Central has etched itself into the history of athletics in the state. In November 2024, the Girls Flag Football team won an inaugural program championship. This monumental accomplishment was captured on film to be shown at Circle Cinema, 10 S. Lewis Ave., on March 22.

Filmmaker and executive producer Dr. Tamecca Rogers has documented the team's road to victory. With support from the young women filmmakers of Keepin' It

REEL: Truth 2 Screen, they have recorded the groundbreaking story of Oklahoma's first Interscholastic Girls' Flag Football championship.

A red-carpet premiere will highlight more than just football. The film will share stories of breaking barriers, redefining possibilities for young women in sports, and celebrating the support from the community who helped to uplift and empower the women.

"This isn't just a game. It's a movement," said Rogers, founder of Keepin' It REEL: Truth 2 Screen. "These young women aren't just playing football - they're paving the way for future generations. And these young filmmakers aren't just telling stories - they're

shaping history."

Interviews in the film will include City of Tulsa Mayor Monroe Nichols and former NFL Super Bowl champion and Green Bay Packer's Donald Driver among others. Driver is a founding partner of the Driven Flag Football League ([www.drivennflflag.com](http://www.drivennflflag.com)).

The event is a fundraiser to support future film camps and festival entries for students.

The program is scheduled for March 22 at 11 a.m. at Circle Cinema, 10 S. Lewis Ave. For tickets, visit [www.circlecinema.org](http://www.circlecinema.org).

For more information about Keepin' It REEL: Truth 2 Screen, contact [inspirepublishingllc@gmail.com](mailto:inspirepublishingllc@gmail.com).



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