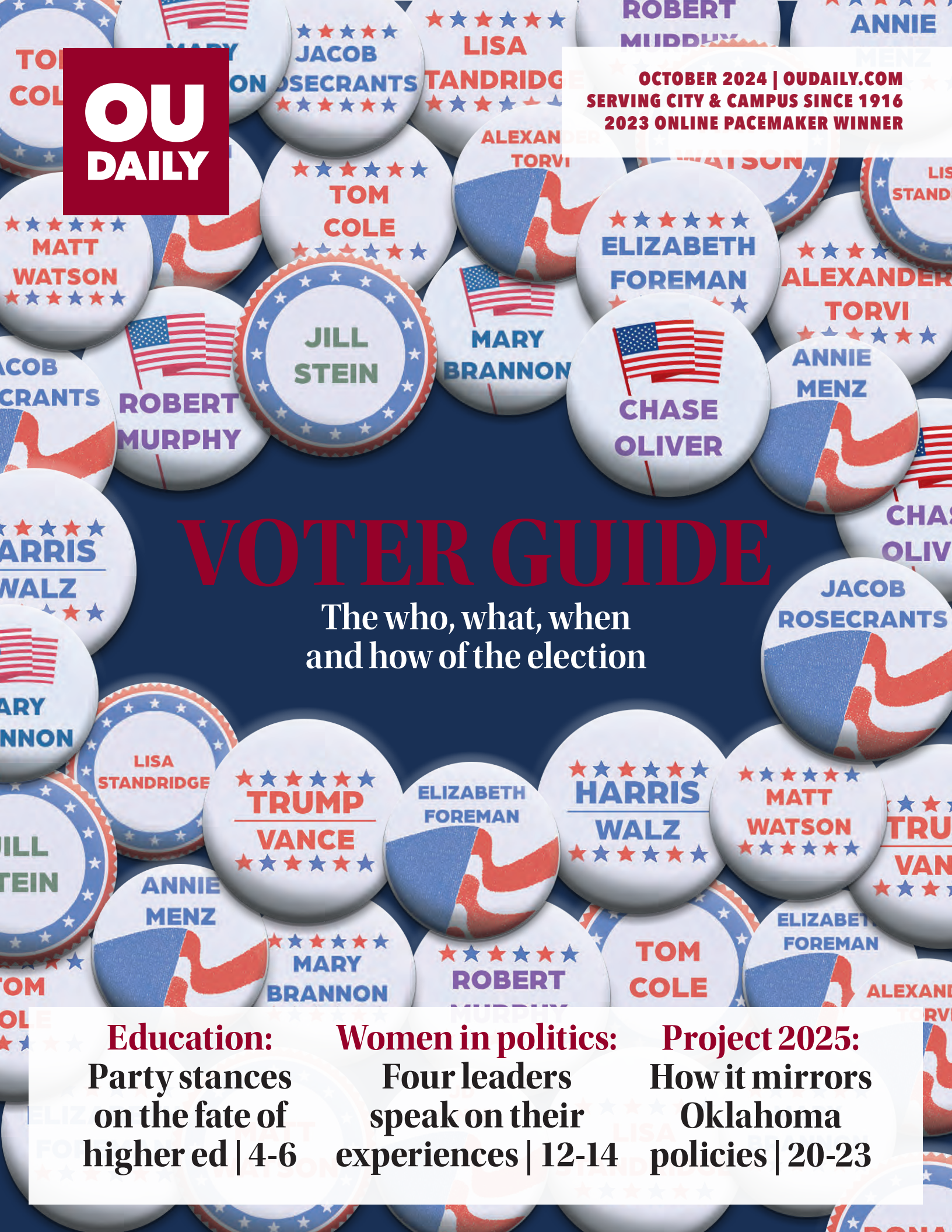




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VOTER GUIDE

The who, what, when
and how of the election

Education:
Party stances
on the fate of
higher ed | 4-6

Women in politics:
Four leaders
speak on their
experiences | 12-14

Project 2025:
How it mirrors
Oklahoma
policies | 20-23

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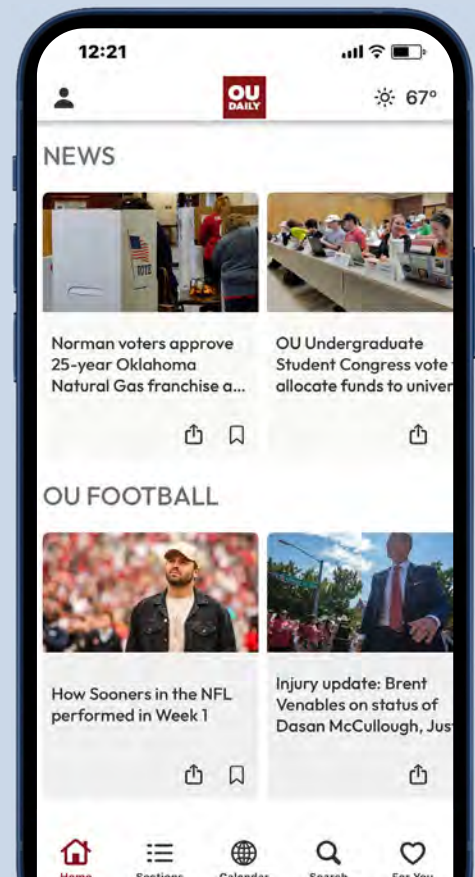


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Party stances on the future of higher education **4**

What items will be on the ballot and where to find the **8**

Four women speak on their experiences in politics **12**

Candidates to know ahead of state and national elections **16**

How Project 2025 mirrors conservative Oklahoma policies **20**



KEVIN EAGLESON/OU DAILY

The fate of the federal Department of Education is on the line in the 2024 presidential election as Republican nominee Donald Trump calls to dismantle or restructure the department.

WHAT COMES NEXT FOR HIGHER ED?

A look at party stances on affordability, education policy, DEI

BY KEVIN EAGLESON • KEVIN.J.EAGLESON-1@OU.EDU

WASHINGTON — While Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump have yet to release comprehensive higher education policies in 2024, both the Democratic and Republican parties have released platforms that include higher education stances and goals.

In 2004, Trump founded Trump University, a for-profit company. The program was not accredited and did not confer college credit. In the face of legal issues and complaints, the company ceased operations in 2010. In 2016, a *National Review* article called the operation a scam.

During her six-year stint as California attorney general, Harris took on for-profit colleges and universities. In 2016, Harris won a \$1.1 billion judgment in federal court for a lawsuit she led against Corinthian Colleges.

In a 2020 *Inside Higher Ed* article, Clare McCann, a former senior policy adviser for

the U.S. Department of Education, said she expects Harris to help find relief for students who fell victim to for-profit colleges.

Affordability, loan forgiveness and funding

Harris is expected to continue President Joe Biden's efforts to implement programs that lower the cost of college tuition and forgive student loans.

"One of the major things that I think is expected from Harris is to continue to fight for debt forgiveness in the vein of Joe Biden," said Alisa Fryar, OU political science professor and department chair. "That was something she worked on as a senator."

In 2017, Harris was one of the original co-sponsors of the College for All Act. The bill was authored by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and called for an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965. The amendment,

which was last referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, would have established a grant program to eliminate tuition and fees for all students at community colleges and two-year tribal colleges and universities. It would have also eliminated tuition and fees for working- and middle-class students at four-year public universities.

In 2019, Harris was one of nine co-sponsors of the Debt-Free College Act, authored by Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii. The bill would have required the Department of Education to award grants for federal-state partnerships aiming to provide debt-free college to students at in-state public institutions of higher education, historically Black colleges and universities and minority-serving institutions. It would have also allowed grants for financial aid to be given to immigrant students who entered the United States before the age of 16 and met certain education requirements.

Harris graduated from Howard University, a historically Black college, in 1986, where she studied political science and economics. Following her time at Howard, she studied law at the University of California in San Francisco and graduated with a law degree in 1989.

Trump began his collegiate studies at Fordham University and transferred to the University of Pennsylvania two years later. He graduated from the Wharton School of Business with a bachelor's in economics in 1968.

According to the 2024 Democratic Party platform, the cost of higher education is a barrier to opportunity that is hurting families, futures and the economy.

In addition to supporting accessible higher education and loan forgiveness efforts, the Democratic Party platform calls for free community college and trade school.

"Four year college is not the only pathway to a good career, so Democrats are investing in other forms of education as well, including career and technical education," the Democratic Party platform read.

While the Republican Party platform does not mention a vision for career trade schools, Trump showed support for them when he was in office.

In 2018, Trump signed legislation updating the Department of Education's \$1.2 billion Career and Technical Education program. The legislation increases the program's authorized funding from \$1.2 billion in 2019 to \$1.3 billion in 2024. It also supports state and local grant recipients with STEM-focused programs featuring activities meant to encourage participation by underrepresented groups.

The Democratic Party is also pushing for subsidized tuition at all minority-serving institutions for students with families earning less than \$125,000 annually.

Harris has worked to solidify her support of HBCUs. From fiscal year 2021 to fiscal year 2024, the Biden-Harris administration has worked to allocate over \$17 billion in funding for HBCUs.

Despite federal investment, 16 states have continually underfunded HBCUs by over \$12 billion, according to a 2023 report by the Department of Education. In Oklahoma, Langston University has been underfunded by \$400 million over the past 30 years. As a response to the underfunding of Langston University, Oklahoma House Democrats have called for an audit.

In 2019, Trump signed a bill reauthorizing \$225 million in mandatory funding for minority-serving institutions including \$85 million in recurring funds for HBCUs.

While Harris is expected to continue Biden's push for loan forgiveness, Trump has spoken against the idea.

In 2023, the Supreme Court voted 6-3 to



Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt speaks during the inauguration ceremony of OU's 15th President Joseph Harroz Jr. **FILE/OU DAILY**

block Biden's plan to cancel up to \$400 billion in student loans. The Supreme Court said the administration had overstepped its authority. In August, the Supreme Court temporarily barred the Biden administration and the Department of Education from implementing what is known as the SAVE Plan.

The SAVE Plan is a new income-driven repayment plan that would have lowered undergraduate borrowers' monthly payments to 5% of their discretionary income.

"He did that with the tuition and that didn't work out too well, he got rebuked," Trump said at a campaign rally in Wisconsin. "Then he did it again, it's going to get rebuked again, even more so, it's an even more vile attack."

Project 2025, a policy document from The Heritage Foundation, calls for the dismantling of a variety of loan forgiveness programs and the Department of Education. Trump has repeatedly denied involvement with the project, but a CNN review found at least 140 people who worked in the Trump administration have been involved with Project 2025.

The policy document calls for an end to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and loan forgiveness like Income-Driven Repayment plans.

"I think those folks who are professionals, who are working, who are getting their loans forgiven through this program, that money that they would be paying in student loans, they're paying back into the economy in different ways. They're consuming more, they're purchasing better cars or whatever, and that money is matriculating into the economy in

a different fashion," said Emily Stacey, political science professor at Rose State College. "I think that's a consideration that needs to be had because, again, these are not folks that are just trying to squelch on their loans."

Fate of the Department of Education

Trump and the Republican Party platform both support dismantling or restructuring the federal Department of Education. The decision relies on the department's adherence to Trump's goals. For Stacey and Fryar, the idea is concerning and half-baked.

"The danger with this is, whenever you're talking about eliminating the Department of Education, are you talking about completely eliminating the department and all of its services, or are you talking about moving those services to an existing entity?" Stacey said. "It's a real dangerous topic."

The fate of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid poses one of the biggest questions regarding the restructuring or dismantling of the Department of Education.

Beginning in 2023, students faced issues with the revamped FAFSA process. These issues led to trickle-down effects, such as universities not being able to make financial aid decisions within a normal timeframe, Fryar said. FAFSA issues also forced students to make tough decisions about when and where to enroll.

"Eliminating the Department of Education raises so many questions about how federal financial aid especially, also a lot of other kinds of core functions in higher ed, would be



ADEN CHOATE/OU DAILY

In December 2023, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt signed an executive order calling for a formal review of diversity, equity and inclusion in state agencies and universities including OU.

managed,” Fryar said. “Those questions are going to be largely around federal financial aid, accreditation, also a lot of other legal frameworks the federal Department of Education is quite involved in. It’s hard to imagine what that could look like structurally if someone were to implement that change.”

The Republican Party’s platform indicates that Republicans will fire “Radical Left accreditors,” suggesting a shift from the current accreditation system.

Trump has repeatedly said higher education institutions across the country are “too woke” and indoctrinate students with “radical left” ideologies. He has implied he wants to overhaul the current higher education system.

“The time has come to reclaim our once great educational institutions from the radical left, and we will do that,” Trump said in a campaign video published in May 2023.

In the same video, Trump said he would fire accreditors he perceives as “radical leftists” and replace them with accreditors who would impose new standards. Trump said the new standards would include a new focus on American tradition and Western civilization; protecting free speech; eliminating administrative positions; removing diversity, equity and inclusion programs; new options for accelerated and low-cost degrees; job placement and career services; and entrance and exit exams.

In addition to accreditation changes, Trump has floated the idea of a new institution he calls the American Academy. Trump hopes to fund

the institution by taxing the endowments of private universities. He said the institution would be free of charge and provide a world-class education.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

In 2023, Gov. Kevin Stitt signed an executive order defunding diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in Oklahoma higher education. The executive order led to the review and dismantling of DEI programs at universities and colleges across the state, including OU.

In 2020, Trump issued an executive order banning federal agencies and departments from engaging in DEI training.

In the video released in May 2023, Trump promised to remove all “Marxist” DEI bureaucrats.

Since Harris became the Democratic nominee, she has been referred to as a “DEI hire” by some Republicans. In this context, some claim Harris is in her position due to her race and gender rather than by merit.

Harris has been a proponent of DEI throughout her career and will likely work to protect DEI initiatives if elected president.

“We understand that you can’t truly invest in the strength of our nation if you don’t pay attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion,” Harris said during a vice presidential event in Atlanta.

Trump has called for the deportation of students he calls “pro-Hamas radicals.” He first shared this sentiment in the wake of the pro-Palestinian protests that swept university

campuses, including OU, toward the end of the spring 2024 semester.

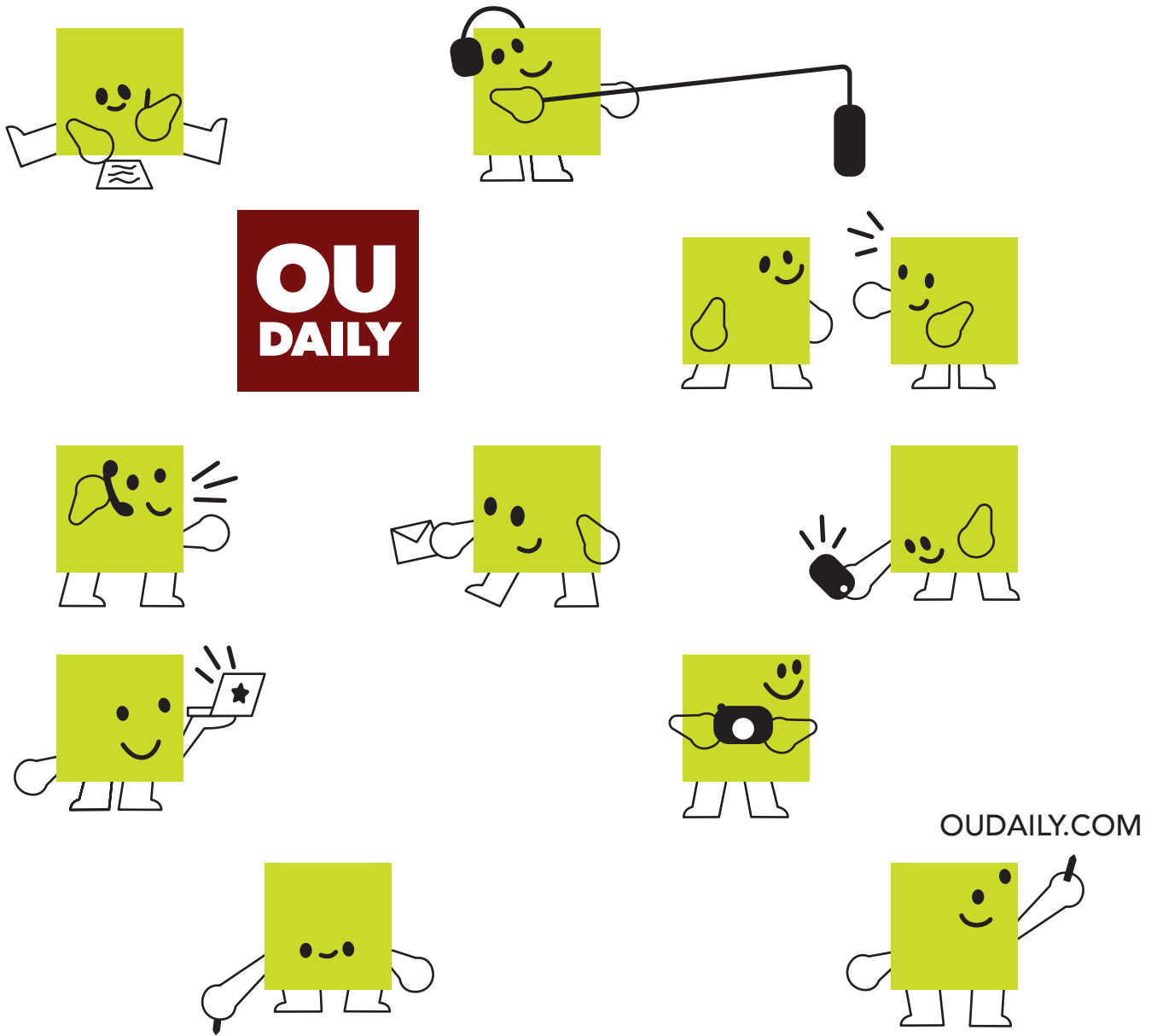
“It’s hard to know what that could mean. Deporting American citizens for political activism is hard to square with our current legal system and expectations,” Fryar said. “Deporting noncitizens for similar activities would also be a departure from norms, especially when we don’t have any meaningful physical violence, and even with some physical violence, deportation is rarely part of that conversation.”

The Republican Party platform also states rolling back Biden’s Title IX changes as a goal of a Trump presidency. During his first term, Trump rolled back Title IX changes instituted by former President Barack Obama.

Biden’s new regulations took effect on Aug. 1 and introduced shifts in how institutions handle sexual assault and harassment as well as an expansion for 2SLGBTQ+ and pregnant students.

The changes made by Biden eliminated mandatory live cross-examination hearings for sexual assault disciplinary proceedings. The change also implemented a new definition of sexual harassment; extended universities’ jurisdiction to off-campus and international incidents; and clarified protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy and parenting status.

On a conservative podcast, Kayal and Company, in May, Trump said he would terminate Biden’s changes and roll them back on day one.



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FILE/OU DAILY

Norman residents voting during the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

BALLOT BREAKDOWN

Learn about the items on your ticket, where to find the

BY ABBY YOUNG • ABIGAIL.F.YOUNG-1@OU.EDU

State questions are laws or constitutional amendments on the ballot for voters to decide. The right to vote on state questions is guaranteed in the state constitution. In November, Oklahomans will vote on two state questions.

Oklahoma's state questions 833 and 834 will appear in the "ballot measures" section of the ticket.

These state questions are legislative referendums, meaning they were proposed by the state legislature to be voted on by the public. State questions can also be sent to vote through initiative petitions proposed by citizens.

Funding infrastructure improvements

State Question 833 seeks to amend the Oklahoma Constitution to allow municipalities to create districts that provide support and funding for public infrastructure initiatives.

Public infrastructure are systems or facilities that improve quality of life, including road

maintenance, water supply and public parks. A district is a financing tool used to fund these initiatives.

According to the resolution, 100% of surface property owners in a potential district must sign a petition agreeing to create it. The public infrastructure district would be governed by a board of trustees that has authority to issue bonds.

Every four years, the American Society of Civil Engineers creates a report card to grade America's infrastructure. In 2021, the nation received a "C-," an improvement from 2017 when it received a "D+."

The report card states that infrastructure in Oklahoma is "deteriorating," and 10.2% of bridges are "structurally deficient." To fix drinking water issues, the state would need around \$6.9 billion.

In 2021, the Biden administration passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to fund infrastructure projects.

A fact sheet provided by the White House states that \$6 billion in funding was announced for infrastructure projects in Oklahoma, including internet access, clean energy and transportation improvements.

The state has started 28 projects funded by over \$119 million as of Sept. 19, according to the Department of the Interior.

Voting clarification

State Question 834 proposes amending the Oklahoma Constitution to clarify that only U.S. citizens may vote in elections.

According to the resolution, the constitution currently states that "all" citizens over the age of 18 who live in Oklahoma may vote. The amendment would change the language to clarify that "only" citizens may vote.

Proponents of the amendment say it protects the integrity of future elections.

"What we are doing is safeguarding the intent of the constitutional language for the

SAMPLE BALLOT

OFFICIAL BALLOT
GENERAL ELECTION
November 05, 2024

PRECINCT 240204-REGNP

Page 1 / 1

TO VOTE: FILL IN THE BOX NEXT TO YOUR CHOICE(S) LIKE THIS:	CONGRESSIONAL OFFICERS	STATE QUESTIONS
  STRAIGHT PARTY A straight party vote is a vote for all candidates of that party in partisan races. STRAIGHT PARTY VOTING (Vote for One) ☐ REPUBLICAN  ☐ LIBERTARIAN  ☐ DEMOCRATIC  PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORS FOR PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT (Vote for One) ☐ DONALD J. TRUMP JD VANCE REPUBLICAN ☐ KAMALA HARRIS TIM WALZ DEMOCRAT ☐ JILL STEIN BUTCH WARE GREEN ☐ CORNEL WEST MELINA ABDULLAH INDEPENDENT ☐ CHASE OLIVER MIKE TER MAAT LIBERTARIAN	FOR OKLAHOMA SENATOR DISTRICT 15 (Vote for One) ☐ LISA STANDRIDGE REPUBLICAN ☐ ELIZABETH FOREMAN DEMOCRAT FOR OKLAHOMA REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 45 (Vote for One) ☐ ANNIE MENZ DEMOCRAT ☐ ROBERT MURPHY LIBERTARIAN ☐ MATT WATSON REPUBLICAN FOR OKLAHOMA REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 46 (Vote for One) ☐ JACOB ROSECRANTS DEMOCRAT ☐ ALEXANDER TORVI REPUBLICAN FOR UNITED STATES HOUSE DISTRICT 4 (Vote for One) ☐ TOM COLE REPUBLICAN ☐ MARY BRANNON DEMOCRAT	STATE QUESTION 833 LEGISLATIVE REFERENDUM 376 This measure adds a new section, section 9E, to article 10 of the Oklahoma Constitution. Section 9E will permit the creation of public infrastructure districts to provide support, organization, operation, and maintenance of services. To create such a district, proponents for creating the district must file a petition with the municipality. The petition must include the signatures of one hundred percent of all surface property owners falling within the district's proposed boundaries. The municipality possesses the right to impose limitations on the district's powers prior to approving the district. Once approved, the district will be governed by a board of trustees. Through the board, the district may issue bonds to pay for all or part of all public improvements implemented by and for the public infrastructure district. The district will be limited to issuing bonds issued for such improvements not exceeding ten (10) mills. For repayment of the bonds, the district, acting through its board of trustees, will levy and assess a special assessment on all property benefiting from the improvements in the district. Section 9E also authorizes the Legislature to enact laws necessary for the implementation of public infrastructure districts. SHALL THE PROPOSAL BE APPROVED? ☐ FOR THE PROPOSAL - YES ☐ AGAINST THE PROPOSAL - NO STATE QUESTION 834 LEGISLATIVE REFERENDUM 377 This measure amends Section 1 of Article 3 of the Oklahoma Constitution. It clarifies that only citizens of the United States are qualified to vote in this state. SHALL THE PROPOSAL BE APPROVED? ☐ FOR THE PROPOSAL - YES ☐ AGAINST THE PROPOSAL - NO

TERRY CHISHIMBA/OU DAILY

Sample ballot with 2024 candidates and state questions. Note this is not a real ballot.

STRAIGHT PARTY VOTING

Voters can select a single box that designates their votes to candidates of a political party for partisan elections. Voters can override straight party voting by selecting a candidate from a different party in a single race. If a candidate of the chosen political party does not appear in a race and voters do not override the vote, the race will be left blank.

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

Voters can fill in the box selecting their choice for the president and vice president of the U.S.

DISTRICT STATE REP. OPTIONS

Voters living in designated districts can vote for their choice of Oklahoma senator or house representative.

U.S. HOUSE REP. OPTIONS

Voters living in designated districts can vote for their choice of U.S. House representative.

STATE QUESTIONS

Voters can read the resolution and vote for or against the state question proposed.

future to avoid confusion,” Sen. Micheal Bergstrom, R-Adair, an author of the resolution, told Enid News and Eagle.

“Ensuring that only citizens can vote is not just about protecting our elections; it’s about honoring the rights and responsibilities that come with citizenship,” Sen. Shane Jett, R-Shawnee, said in a press release.

Opponents of the amendment say the change is unnecessary and would sow doubt in election security.

“I failed to see where the confusion might lie when it is currently a felony to register to vote in the state of Oklahoma if you are not a U.S. citizen,” Sen. Carri Hicks, D-Oklahoma City, told Enid News and Eagle.

Noncitizens are already prohibited from voting in federal elections and can be charged with a felony as established by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.

Recently, Oklahoma tightened illegal immigration policy by passing House Bill 4156 in April, which makes entering the state without legal authorization to be in the U.S. a crime called “impermissible occupation.”

“The federal government has disregarded the safety and security of Americans by letting the influx of illegal immigrants at our southern border continue,” Sen. Casey Murdock, R-Felt, said in a statement.

The Department of Justice and an advocacy group called Padres Unidos de Tulsa filed lawsuits against the state in May. U.S. District Judge Bernard M. Jones settled the disputes with a court order that created a temporary hold on the law.

Attorney General Gentner Drummond filed an appeal of the court order with the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in July.

Oklahoma is not the only state voting to solidify election language. Iowa, Kentucky, South Carolina and Wisconsin will vote on similar constitutional amendments in November.

The proposed constitutional language changes are nearly identical in each state’s proposed amendment.

“Voting is our greatest freedom as U.S. citizens, and we must ensure that our elections are not disrupted by illegal voting,” said Sen. Brent Howard, R-Altus, an author of the Oklahoma resolution, according to a press release.

Voting, ballot information

During a general election, many voters only vote for their presidential pick, leaving a majority of their ballots empty.

According to the U.S. Vote Foundation, over a third of submitted ballots are partially incomplete.

This phenomenon, known as “down-ballot roll-off,” is when voters vote for candidates at the top of their ballot but not the bottom, forfeiting their right to impact local decisions.

Incomplete ballots are still valid, and marked votes are counted.

Many voters are unaware of what ballot measures are being voted on, and they generally appear lower on ballots according to Journalist’s Resource.

Local government services impact citizens daily. Public transportation, police, education and park services are more impactful than voters realize, according to the U.S. Vote Foundation.

A youth poll conducted in March by the Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics found 75% of Americans ages 18 to 29 are registered to vote this November.

Many first-time voters are college students, who can choose to register to vote in their home state or where they currently live.

STEPS, or Student Training & Education in Public Service, provides a first-time voting guide describing how to register online, choose a party affiliation and cast a ballot. To register in Oklahoma, voters can visit the Oklahoma Voter Portal.

To vote on Nov. 5 in Oklahoma, voters must register by Oct. 11, and absentee ballots must be requested by Oct. 21, according to the state voter information calendar.

While some schools have canceled classes on election day, others have not, including OU. STEPS’ voting guide recommends students talk to professors and employers in advance about missing class to vote.

OU employees are allowed a two-hour window on election day to vote, unless they have enough time to vote before or after their workday. Eligible employees must notify their employers ahead of time and provide proof of voting, according to the staff handbook.

In order to vote, voters must bring a government or tribal photo identification; a voter registration card; or file a provisional ballot, which allows voters to cast a ballot that will later be counted if their registration can be verified.

USA.gov recommends voters bring notes, a voter’s guide or a sample ballot to their polling place to help cast their votes.

State, local elections

Several statewide offices will appear on November’s ballot, including a seat on the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. The race includes Libertarian Chad Williams, Republican Brian Bingman and Democrat Harold Spradling.

Republican Marilyn Williams and independent Lisa Meyer will face off in the Cleveland County court clerk race.

Three seats on the Oklahoma Supreme Court are up for reelection: James E. Edmondson, Noma D. Gurich and Yvonne Kauger.

On the Court of Criminal Appeals, three seats are up for reelection: David B. Lewis,

Scott Rowland and William J. Musseman.

Six seats on the Court of Civil Appeals are on the ballot: Timothy J. Downing, Robert D. Bell, E. Bay Mitchell, Brian Jack Goree, Thomas E. Prince and James R. Huber.

HOW TO VOTE

Register to vote:

Voters can register online, by mail or in person at their local County Election Board office. Oklahoma voter registration can be submitted online through the OK Voter Portal website.

Residents must have a valid Oklahoma driver’s license or state ID and a signature on file with Service Oklahoma to register online.

Absentee ballots:

Absentee ballots can be requested online through the OK Voter Portal or printed to be mailed or hand delivered to a voter’s County Election Board office. Nonresident voters can check with their state’s voting website for absentee ballot information.

Absentee ballots must be delivered to the County Election Board by 7 p.m. on election night, and most absentee ballot affidavits are required to be notarized and may require witnesses. In Oklahoma, notaries may not charge a fee to notarize an absentee ballot. Visit the State Election Board website to learn about notarization requirements and locations offering notary services.

Early voting:

Early voting is available to all voters in Oklahoma. Residents can vote at a designated early voting location from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on the Thursday and Friday preceding the election.

Early voting is also available from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the Saturday prior to a state or federal primary election, runoff primary election or general election and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on the Wednesday prior to the general election.

Votes must be cast in the county where the voter is registered. Visit the Oklahoma State Election Board website to find the closest early voting location.

Election day:

To vote in the Nov. 5 election, voters must be registered by Oct. 11 and absentee ballots must be requested by Oct. 21. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on election day, and designated polling sites can be found on the OK Voter Portal website.

Source: Oklahoma State Election Board website

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Available: Call for Availability	Available: Call for Availability
Email (405) 281-4855	Email Call
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\$565 - \$719	Per Person Only
Available: Call for Availability	Available: Now
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Email Call	Email (405) 561-6640
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Off-Campus Housing Fair
Thursday, Oct. 24 | 6 - 8 p.m.
Couch Storm Shelter





BOB NGUYEN/OU DAILY

Former Mayor Breea Clark served Norman from 2019 to 2022 and currently serves as director for OU's JCPenney Leadership Center.

'THEY JUST DIDN'T SEE ME'

Four leaders share their experiences as women in politics

BY ISMAEL LELE • ISMAEL.M.LELE-1@OU.EDU

Atop former Norman Mayor Breea Clark's bookshelf lies the gavel she would use to keep decorum during city council meetings she presided over. Clark's gavel became a method to command the respect she said is harder to attain as a woman.

"The city clerk, who sat to my right, told me that no one had ever used a gavel that much in their tenure," Clark said. "I had some pretty tough issues. As a woman, you have to run a tighter ship, or they will walk all over you."

During her time on council, Clark said she was bullied, harassed and made to feel unsafe on several occasions. Comments would be made about her appearance and uncomfortable questions asked, including, "Aren't you the prettiest mayor I've ever seen?" and "Shouldn't you be at home with your children?"

In one council meeting, Clark said she had to use her gavel to silence two residents speaking longer than their allotted time. Shortly after, one told Clark to "shut up" and a local preacher called her "the Jezebel of Norman."

One night, after being recognized, Clark was yelled at and insulted by a man who followed her outside of a bar on Main Street. The man continued to berate her as she waited for an Uber to pick her up.

Around this time, Clark filed a police report for death threats in a Facebook post that read, "Mayor dipshit needs to be pulled out of office and tried on the courthouse lawn ... the problem with politicians, they don't get hung in public anymore ... #bringbackpublichangings!"

According to Clark, interactions like these are just a few examples of the trials women face while working in male-dominated spaces, particularly in politics.

A 2022 data collection conducted by Princeton University's Bridging Divides Initiative and the Anti-Defamation League, a nonpartisan "anti-hate organization" fighting antisemitism, found that among over 400 cases, women accounted for 42.5% of all threats and harassment towards local officials, 3.4 times more than men.

"I feel like once I had gotten elected mayor, I had this shield that could protect me from what normal women go through," Clark said. "That was not the case at all."

Clark's time as mayor was full of contention. In 2020, grassroots organization Unite Norman attempted to recall Clark from her position after city council reallocated over \$800,000 of the Norman Police Department's proposed \$23 million budget to other facets of the city.

According to Clark, this decision led to online and in-person harassment, making her time as mayor more strenuous than she had hoped.

"It's ridiculous what I went through in a three year period," Clark said. "My kids have been bullied. During COVID, I received death threats that the (district attorney) refused to prosecute. I've had creepy letters mailed to my home. I've seen pictures of my home on social media. It's a very risky thing."

Clark served as Norman's Ward 6 council member for three years before running for

mayor in 2019. Clark lost her bid for reelection in 2022 to current Mayor Larry Heikkila, a defeat she said lifted a tremendous weight off her shoulders.

"I thankfully lost. I wasn't planning on it because it was so difficult, personally and professionally," Clark said. "I have kids, so I got kind of pushed into it because I had to protect the seat."

Despite feeling relieved stepping down from her position, Clark said she continues to advise and encourage young women to be leaders. Clark serves as the faculty adviser for IGNITE, a student organization for young women interested in politics at OU.

"I still think that people look up to me, especially young women," Clark said.

Unite Norman's recall for Clark and other city council members came during a contentious time in American politics. Former Ward 6 Councilmember Elizabeth Foreman said this unique time is when national politics began to blend with local government.

Foreman was sworn into Norman's Ward 6 seat in July 2020, three weeks after council voted to reallocate a portion of NPD's proposed budget.

In 2020, the U.S. was reeling from the effects of COVID-19 and a summer of protests over the murder of George Floyd. The last few months of 2020 began with a controversial presidential election.

Foreman said she was surprised by the concerns she would hear from residents when campaigning, confused as to what people thought local politicians could actually do.

"I would have people blowing me up, like, 'What're your feelings on gun rights?' and 'Do you support abortion?' and, you know, 'the gay community?'" Foreman said. "A lot of people

"I still think that people look up to me, especially young women."

BREEA CLARK,
FORMER NORMAN
MAYOR

conflate all of national politics with (city council), and I would say, 'You know, city council is not partisan.'"

Foreman described her first term on council as difficult, but she said she always understood that her time as a

council member was intended to be the first step toward running for a state Senate seat.

In November, Foreman will face Republican Lisa Standridge in the election for state Senate District 15.

Foreman said she had to be hyper-conscious of how she conducted herself in person and online, and though she would never do anything to compromise her own character, there were restrictions that came with being a woman in power, especially during such a turbulent time.



FILE/OU DAILY

Oklahoma House Rep. Annie Menz during the Norman candlelight vigil for Nex Benedict.

"You have to really be very meticulous and plan how you present yourself. If you're too serious you're a 'bitch.' You're not serious enough, then you're a 'bimbo.' Or you don't smile enough, or you smile too much. It's a really fine line," Foreman said.

Despite being cognizant of how she acted for the sake of her future campaign, Foreman said, similar to Clark, she experienced in-person and online harassment and misogyny.

"My recycling and trash cans are still in my garage, because people would come and knock over our trash cans, vandalize our homes, take off our mailboxes. That only happens to women," Foreman said.

Less than a year after Foreman joined council, Vice President Kamala Harris became the first woman to hold that office, four years after former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton became the first woman to win the Democratic primary race.

In 2023, women made up 28% of Congress. In Oklahoma, women accounted for only 19.4% of state elected officials, according to IGNITE.

Women are making gains in elected positions, according to the Pew Research Center. As the Democratic nominee for president, Harris is now the second candidate in eight years who has a chance to become the first woman elected president of the United States.

Though Clinton and Harris represent politics on a national level, like Clark they have been scrutinized because of their gender. A Sage Journal study found that women leaders will face political and social repercussions

whether they speak about their gender or not.

"Clinton did suffer for a lot of sexism during that race," Allyson Shortle, an OU professor of political science, said.

According to a study conducted by Shortle, white women in Oklahoma City voted against Clinton more than white men.

"It's really important to know that sexism can be held by anybody," Shortle said. "You don't have to be a man to be sexist."

Unlike Clinton, Harris has garnered support from younger voters who feel she may bring a deeper level of understanding compared to President Joe Biden.

"In 2016, the young people were millennials. Now the young people are Generation Z," Shortle said. "What we're finding for the first time in a very long time is that young people — who are women, LGBT — are engaging more in politics than men, young men, and not only that, but they are very progressive."

Harris' race and gender have been a topic of conversation among her political opponents. Republican candidate Donald Trump's current running mate, Sen. JD Vance, R-Ohio, referred to Harris and other women politicians as "childless cat ladies." Trump himself has also questioned Harris' racial identity.

Despite political attacks against her identity, Shortle believes that Harris being mixed race gives her the ability to appeal to a multitude of demographics in the U.S.

"(Harris) and I kind of have that in common," Rep. Annie Menz, D-Norman, said. "Talking about our gender, our race, those identifiers, it's just kind of like tired. It's just an



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Former Norman Ward 6 Councilmember and current candidate for Oklahoma Senate District 15 Elizabeth Foreman.



OU Undergraduate Student Congress Chair Hope Rhoads during the 2024 SEC Exchange, a three-day leadership conference hosted in Norman.

old playbook.”

Menz, who represents District 45 and is seeking reelection, is the first Latina and one of few openly queer people in the Oklahoma House.

She said representation is an essential component to making sure all voices are heard.

“I wasn’t a young guy, you know, that had a lot of potential and showed a lot of promise. I was a young girl who had a lot of potential and showed a lot of promise.”

ANNIE MENZ,
OKLAHOMA HOUSE
REPRESENTATIVE

excited about,” Menz said.

According to Menz, the older political leaders in Oklahoma thought she was “brand new,” ignoring the fact she had been in Oklahoma for most of her life. She said it wasn’t until she became a representative that those same leaders actually took note of her existence.

“They just didn’t see me,” Menz said. “I wasn’t a young guy, you know, that had a lot of potential and showed a lot of promise. I

was a young girl who had a lot of potential and showed a lot of promise.”

In her time as a representative, Menz said she has witnessed many situations where her peers were unable to relate or understand how their decisions could impact people that they wouldn’t personally know due to their different lived experiences.

“You have different lived experiences. I guarantee you that there are people like that in every single House district in this state, every single one,” Menz said. “Not all House representatives are listening to all the voices in their district.”

Among the younger generation, women’s voices have continued to grow stronger in recent years.

Hope Rhoads, chair of the OU Undergraduate Student Congress, said her leadership experience began as early as elementary school. In high school, she was junior class president, and in college she participated in the Student Government Association and Crimson Leadership Association.

As chair, Rhoads said she enjoys working alongside fellow students but said there is a stark difference between being politically engaged on a college campus like OU and being politically engaged in Oklahoma.

“Going up to the (state) Capitol, especially after the DEI executive order, was nerve-racking,” Rhoads said. “I do think that sometimes when you’re in those settings, I have to be a lot more serious and tone down myself a lot more when I’m speaking to adult men so they take me seriously.”

In her experience as a young leader, Rhoads said her male counterparts are often mistaken to be in charge when in the same room as her, a bias she thinks can be quelled by more representation in politics.

“I do think a lot of people still see males as being the only people in leadership roles, even if they’re not trying to,” Rhoads said. “If we have a woman president, more girls will think, ‘That is something I can do. That is something that’s possible for me.’”

Rhoads said for there to be more representation in political spaces, both men and women must cooperate. A Gallup analysis shows young women are becoming more liberal in comparison to their male counterparts.

“Young people are very, very liberal, but that’s being driven almost entirely by women, people of color and LGBT identifiers,” Shortle said.

According to a Pew Research survey conducted in 2023, 40% of men younger than 50 who support Trump believe gains made by women in politics have been made at the expense of men.

Rhoads said just seeing a woman run for president is an exciting experience she believes will help motivate younger generations.

“I remember just being excited to see a woman running in elections because it’s possible it could happen,” Rhoads said. “It hasn’t yet, but I hope it does because I think that’ll help break down a lot of barriers for women in politics.”

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FILE/OU DAILY
ALL OTHER PHOTOS PROVIDED

The next general election will take place Nov. 5. Oklahomans can use the OK Voter Portal to preview their ballot.

CHECK OUT YOUR CANDIDATES

Who to know ahead of state and national elections

BY TRISTEN LEWIS • TRISTEN.B.LEWIS-1@OU.EDU

OKLAHOMA'S 4TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:



Rep. Tom Cole, Republican

Cole was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, and currently resides in Moore. A fifth-generation Oklahoman and enrolled member of the Chickasaw Nation, Cole attended Grinnell College for his bachelor's in history, Yale University for his master of arts and OU for his doctorate in British history. He serves as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and has represented Oklahoma's 4th Congressional District in the U.S. House since 2003. Cole is an advocate for preserving the Second Amendment and opposes abortion. He believes in strong national defense and preventing military pay cuts. Cole is endorsed by the Oklahoma Republican Party, National Rifle Association, the State Chamber of Oklahoma PAC and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Ag PAC.



Mary Brannon, Democrat

Brannon was born in Ada and graduated with a bachelor's in education from OU in 1976 and master's in human relations in 1998. Brannon is a retired Purcell Public Schools teacher and counselor who ran for Oklahoma's 4th Congressional District in the Democratic primary for the first time in 2018. She supports Oklahoma schools, protecting social security, affordable health care, abortion rights and veterans. Brannon is endorsed by the Oklahoma Democratic Party and the Oklahoma Democratic Party Veterans Federation.

OKLAHOMA SENATE, DISTRICT 15:



Lisa Standridge, Republican

Standridge grew up in Noble and currently resides in Norman. Standridge is a health care professional and graduate of the OU College of Pharmacy. Her husband, Rob Standridge, has served as District 15's state senator for 12 years, the term limit for serving in state Legislature. Standridge and her husband manage two pharmacies, Blanchard Drug & Gift and LegendCare Pharmacy in Norman. Standridge opposes abortion and advocates for the Second Amendment. She seeks to decrease homelessness and illegal immigration, eliminate state income tax and increase funding for law enforcement. Standridge is endorsed by Norman Mayor Larry Heikkila, the Oklahoma Republican Party, the NRA and Oklahomans for Health and Parental Rights.



Elizabeth Foreman, Democrat

Foreman grew up in Noble and graduated with a bachelor's in chemistry and a master's in public administration from OU. For nearly a decade, Foreman managed all non-police operations as the finance director for the OU Health Sciences Center Police Department. Foreman supports public education, health care and mental health care. She served as Norman's Ward 6 council member from 2020 to 2024 and strongly opposes the proposed ACCESS Oklahoma turnpike through eastern Cleveland County. Foreman is endorsed by the Oklahoma Democratic Party, Oklahoma Democratic Party Veterans Federation and the Oklahoma Federation of Stonewall Democrats.

OKLAHOMA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DISTRICT 46:



Rep. Jacob Rosecrants, Democrat

Rosecrants has lived in Norman for over 30 years and attended OU for his bachelor's in history. Rosecrants has represented Oklahoma House District 46 since 2017 and previously worked as a social studies teacher in Oklahoma City Public Schools. He supports public education, suicide prevention and public safety resources and advocates for working families and retirees. Rosecrants is endorsed by the Oklahoma Democratic Party Veterans Federation and the Oklahoma Democratic Party.



Alexander Torvi, Republican

Torvi has lived in Cleveland County since he was 10 and has owned and operated Torvi Construction for 16 years. He advocates for oil and gas in Oklahoma and keeping property taxes low at the state level. Torvi supports competitive teacher pay, funding for the J.D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities and improving the school resource officer program. Torvi is an advocate for police and gun rights and is endorsed by the Oklahoma Republican Party.

OKLAHOMA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DISTRICT 45:



Rep. Annie Menz, Democrat

Menz was born in Oklahoma City and currently resides in Norman. Menz graduated with an associate of arts degree from Oklahoma City Community College. Menz has represented House District 45 since 2022. She is an advocate for protecting natural resources, public education, expanding mental health care access and supporting working families. Menz made history as the first Latina member of the Oklahoma House of Representatives. She is endorsed by the Oklahoma Democratic Party, Oklahoma Democratic Party Veterans Federation and the LGBTQ PAC.



Matt Watson, Republican

Watson grew up in Tuttle and currently resides in Norman. He attended Oklahoma City Community College and the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma before graduating with a master's in public administration from Texas A&M. A Marine Corp veteran, Watson currently works as a cybersecurity consultant at Guernsey, an Oklahoma City-based architectural and engineering consulting firm. Watson is an active member of the Oklahoma Defense Industry Association and The State Chamber, an organization advocating for business in state policy. He is an advocate for national security and defense. Watson is endorsed by the Oklahoma Republican Party and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Ag PAC.

Robert Murphy, Libertarian

Murphy was born in Detroit but currently resides in Norman. He attended OU and San Diego State University College of Engineering. Murphy served in the Marine Corps from 1965 to 1968. At OU, he has worked as a telecommunications and data technician and has been a member of the OU Hourly Employees Council and staff senate. He supports abortion and a free market for medical care. Murphy ran for U.S. Senate in 2016, 2020 and 2022 and is endorsed by the Oklahoma Libertarian Party.

OU Daily chose not to include a photo of Robert Murphy due to print quality concerns.

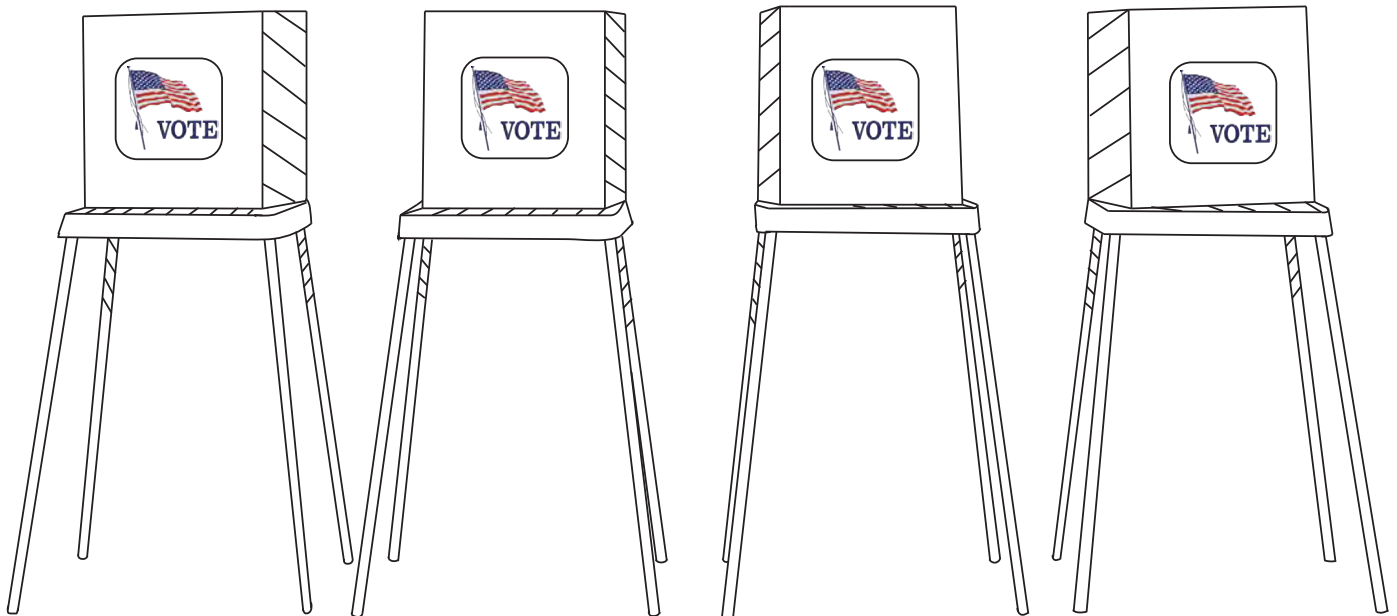


ILLUSTRATION BY MELANIE SUERTH



Vice President Kamala Harris, Democrat

Harris was born in Oakland, California. Harris attended Howard University for political science and economics and law school at the University of California in San Francisco. She served as district attorney of San Francisco, attorney general of California and later as U.S. senator. Harris has served as vice president of the United States since 2020 under President Joe Biden. She made history as the first woman, Black American and South Asian American vice president. Harris announced her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president after Biden withdrew from the race in July. She supports a number of progressive proposals including tax cuts for working and middle class families, labor unions, affordable health care and paid family and medical leave. Harris advocates for abortion rights and is endorsed by Biden and the national Democratic Party.

Harris' running mate is Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. He was born in West Point, Nebraska, and attended Chadron State College, Minnesota State University and Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, graduating with a bachelor's and master's in education. Walz was a member of the National Guard and worked as a teacher before being elected as a House representative in 2007 and assuming office as the governor of Minnesota in 2019. Walz has consistently supported access to reproductive health care and abortion.



Former President Donald Trump, Republican

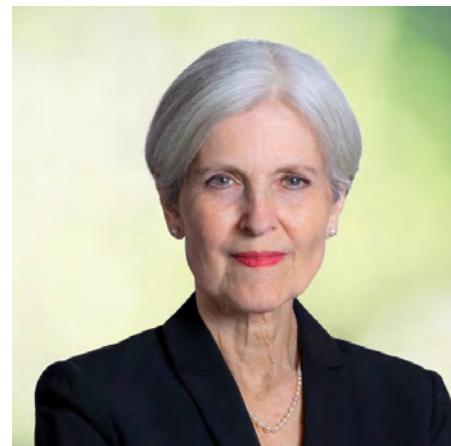
Trump was born in Queens, New York. He attended Fordham University and the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating with a bachelor's in economics. Trump joined his family's real estate company and renamed it the Trump Organization in 1971. He served as the 45th president of the United States from 2017 to 2021 before losing the 2020 presidential election to Biden. Trump launched his presidential campaign in November 2022, aiming to become the second president to win nonconsecutive terms. He supports strong border security, domestic energy production and promoting domestic trade. Trump opposes abortion and believes states should decide the issue. Trump is endorsed by the national Republican Party.

Trump's running mate is Ohio Sen. JD Vance. Vance was born in Middletown, Ohio, and attended Ohio State University, graduating with a bachelor's in political science and philosophy. He graduated from Yale Law School in 2013 and is the author of "Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis." Vance is a Marine Corps veteran and has served as a member of the U.S. Senate since 2023. He opposes abortion and supports strong border security.



Chase Oliver, Libertarian

Chase Oliver was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and currently resides in Atlanta. Oliver is a political activist who secured the Libertarian nomination after seven rounds of voting at the party's convention in May. Oliver's campaign is centered on withdrawing the U.S. from all foreign conflicts, including those in Ukraine and Gaza. Oliver supports abortion, reducing government interference in the economy and abolishing the Department of Education. Oliver is endorsed by the Libertarian Party.



Jill Stein, Green

Stein grew up in Highland Park, Illinois, and currently resides in Lexington, Massachusetts. Stein graduated from Harvard College with a bachelor's in social relations in 1973 and Harvard Medical School in 1979. Stein works as a doctor and environmental activist. Following political activist Cornel West's decision to run as an independent, Stein claimed the Green Party nomination. Stein's campaign focuses on combating Biden's support for Israel's war effort in Gaza. She supports a guaranteed livable income, public education, renewable energy and abortion. Stein is endorsed by the Green Party.

A CONSERVATIVE BLUEPRINT

How Project 2025 mirrors Oklahoma's education, health care and immigration policies

By Peggy Dodd, Anusha Fathepure and Thomas Pablo • dailynews@ou.edu

25

Pulling national headlines and earning loud condemnations from high-ranking Democratic officials, Project 2025 offers a vision for the future of the United States under the next Republican administration.

The project pitches a government and society infused with conservative Christian values, should former President Donald Trump be reelected in November. Trump has repeatedly claimed he is not involved with and has not read Project 2025.

The over 900-page roadmap was published in April 2023 by conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation, with 34 authors and over 200 contributors. Reporting by CNN found six former Trump Cabinet secretaries helped write or collaborated on Project 2025, and at least 140 people who worked in Trump's administration had a hand in the project.

The Heritage Foundation lists 100 Project 2025 coalition partners on its website, including the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs, a conservative think tank founded in 1993. OU Daily reached out to the OCPA for comment, but it declined to speak.

Other coalition partners include Turning Point USA, Young America's Foundation and Moms for Liberty.

Project 2025 looks to shift partisan control of sections of the federal government including the Department of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Homeland Security.

Project 2025's lengthy list of goals includes abolishing the federal Department of Education; rejecting abortion as health care; removing legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; detaining and deporting "immigration violators;" and terminating diversity, equity and inclusion offices.

"The next conservative President must make the institutions of American civil society

hard targets for woke culture warriors," Project 2025 states.

While sending ripples through the national political scene, some of Project 2025's goals have already been achieved in Oklahoma at the state level. In state Superintendent Ryan Walters' Department of Education and the halls of Oklahoma's Capitol under Gov. Kevin Stitt, policies and bills fall in line with the mission of Project 2025.

Rachel Blum, an OU political science professor, told OU Daily that Project 2025 is a historical anomaly. While previous presidential candidates have advertised their policy positions, Blum noted Project 2025 is publicly available in a comprehensive format.

"Project 2025 is just remarkable because we have so much detail on what some of the biggest movers and shapers in conservative political thought and politics since the 1970s want to do if they're able to get a president who will do what they want," Blum said.

Project 2025 is divided into five sections. The first, "Taking the Reins of Government," presents recommendations for actions that should come directly from the next Republican president. Section two lays out a plan for national defense and foreign affairs.

The third section covers departments in the federal government that aim to ensure the welfare of Americans and their education, health and housing. Section four lays out an economic agenda for the next Republican administration. The final section covers independent regulatory agencies and how they would function under this project.

"Conservatives should be confident that we can rescue our kids, reclaim our culture, revive our economy, and defeat the anti-American Left—at home and abroad," Project 2025 reads. "We did it before and will do it again."

According to Blum, states like Oklahoma and Texas have become models for Project

2025. Regarding school vouchers, public education, abortion and DEI, Blum said Oklahoma could be viewed as a success case for the architects of Project 2025.

Blum said Project 2025 has the power to override the democratic will of the people.

"Some of the domestic portions of (Project 2025) have already been realized by many states, and that's because nothing in this project is a surprise to people who've been following the intellectual patterns on the right," Blum said. "The people behind it believe so deeply that those policies are right that they're willing to override the democratic will."

'Woke education cartel'

One of the largest changes listed in Project 2025 is the elimination of the federal Department of Education. The writers of Project 2025 believe this would lead to more parental rights in public schools.

"The department is a convenient one-stop shop for the woke education cartel, which—as the COVID era showed—is not particularly concerned with children's education," Project 2025 reads. "Schools should be responsive to parents, rather than to leftist advocates intent on indoctrination—and the more the federal government is involved in education, the less responsive to parents the public schools will be."

In March 2023, the Oklahoma State Department of Education unanimously approved a Parents' Bill of Rights proposed by Walters.

The bill establishes the right of parents to "direct the education" of their children and to "object to public schools imposing unwanted instruction on questions of sex, morality, or religion." This includes notifying parents of names and pronouns used by students while at school and any developments in students' physical and mental health.



FILE/OU DAILY

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt has signed into law many of the state's conservative policies, including banning abortion in nearly all cases and calling for a review of DEI in Oklahoma universities.

Project 2025 states the federal secretary of education should “insist” the Department of Education serve parents and “American ideals,” rather than political ideas. These include ideas that children can “choose their own sex” and “America is ‘systemically racist.’”

Critical race theory, an academic framework centered on the idea that racism is systemic in American institutions, is discussed throughout Project 2025. The theory has been banned by the state Legislature through House Bill 1775, which Stitt signed into law in 2021.

HB 1775 banned eight concepts, including teaching that one race or sex is inherently superior to another and an individual's moral character is determined by their race or sex.

OU's Black Emergency Response Team, OU's chapter of the American Association of University Professors and other plaintiffs sued the state over HB 1775 soon after its signing. The case is currently in the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

“The noxious tenets of ‘critical race theory’ and ‘gender ideology’ should be excised from curricula in every public school in the country,” Project 2025 reads. “These theories poison our children, who are being taught on the one hand to affirm that the color of their skin fundamentally determines their identity and even their moral status while on the other they are taught to deny the very creatureliness that inheres in being human and consists in accepting the givenness of our nature as men or women.”

After Stitt signed an executive order in December 2023, Oklahoma universities were ordered to complete reviews of their DEI programs. OU decided to change its DEI programs and curricula, including renaming its DEI office to the Division of Access and Opportunity.

Aniketh Koneru, OU Undergraduate Student Congress human diversity committee chair and internal vice president for the India Student Association, said he was disappointed by Stitt's executive order and the removal of university programs such as the DEI office.

Koneru said many politicians have never actually engaged with DEI programs and services, so they don't fully understand the impact the programs have on students.

“I feel like they're just vaguely attacking things that they don't understand. What people don't understand, they fear, and they try to instill that sense of fear in other people,” Koneru said. “They're trying to make it a problem when in reality it's not actually a problem.”

Koneru said he would be scared to see DEI

eliminated on a national scale.

“We would just be taking a step back in time to the 1950s, you know, where people's problems were not even acknowledged,” Koneru said. “If we keep taking steps back, we're going to crumble as a country. In my opinion, I feel like it will just lead to a downfall of the U.S. because the U.S. is a place of so many cultures and people of different backgrounds.”

Project 2025 also proposes ending “abuses” in student loan forgiveness, which includes eliminating student loan forgiveness plans put into place by President Joe Biden; privatizing subsidized, unsubsidized and PLUS loans; and terminating the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. It adds that “borrowers should be expected to repay their loans.”

Madeline Canning, vice president of OU's chapter of Turning Point USA, said she originally wanted to be a teacher. After realizing she could not repay her student loans on a teacher's salary, Canning said she changed her major to criminology.

“Conservatives should be confident that we can rescue our kids, reclaim our culture, revive our economy, and defeat the anti-American Left—at home and abroad. We did it before and will do it again.”

PAGE 2

"These theories poison our children, who are being taught on the one hand to affirm that the color of their skin fundamentally determines their identity and even their moral status while on the other they are taught to deny the very creatureliness that inheres in being human and consists in accepting the givenness of our nature as men or women."

PAGE 5

"I would never pay back my debt by being a teacher," Canning said. "That's terrible because we need teachers."

To combat Oklahoma's teaching shortage, OU has several programs and partnerships aimed at helping lessen student loan debt for future educators. The Inspired to Teach program offers teachers who stay in Oklahoma up to \$25,500. The TEACH Grant program provides up to \$4,000 a year in grants to students who intend to teach at schools that serve low-income families. The federal government also offers four loan forgiveness plans aimed at educators.

Canning said while college tuition is high, debtors and their families should be responsible for repaying student debt. She added receiving loan cancellation would be unfair to her predecessors.

"I know how hard it is to be a college student and know that you have to pay back for your education because most people don't go into college having enough money," Canning said. "That being said, it doesn't change my view on the fact that I still don't think it's someone else's responsibility. I wouldn't want to place that burden on someone else to repay my loans."

'Abortion and euthanasia are not health care'

Project 2025, which defines life as beginning "from the moment of conception," states that the Department of Health and Human Services should become known as the Department of Life. According to the mandate, all programs and activities within this department should promote anti-abortion ideology.

"The Secretary must ensure that all HHS programs and activities are rooted in a deep respect for innocent human life from day one until natural death: Abortion and euthanasia are not health care," Project 2025 reads.

Following the U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, Oklahoma was one of 13 states that had a "trigger" law in place designed to immediately scale back abortion rights once the decision was passed down.

A month before the landmark decision,

Stitt signed one of the nation's strictest abortion bans into law, making Oklahoma one of the first states to effectively end access to the procedure.

In March 2023, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that the state constitution protects a pregnant person's right to an abortion only if the health of the individual is at stake, overturning a portion of the extensive ban.

Kathryn Brooks, social media chair of Students for Reproductive Justice — an action fund council of Planned Parenthood — said Oklahoma's current abortion policies follow the same ideology present in Project 2025.

"The vision that Project 2025 has for America is also the vision that politicians have for the future of this state," Brooks said. "I do believe that (Stitt's) vision for reproductive health care aligns very much with what is proposed in Project 2025."

Brooks said, similar to those writing Project 2025, Oklahoma politicians who write abortion legislation are not familiar with the medical needs of women.

Of the 34 authors of Project 2025, only one person has a background in health care. Dr. Ben Carson is a retired pediatric neurosurgeon and politician who ran for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination. Carson retired from medicine in 2013.

Project 2025 advocates to outlaw pornography, described within the mandate as being manifested in "the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children."

The project calls for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to re-publicize the 2016 decision against providing a national coverage determination on gender reassignment surgery for Medicare beneficiaries. The mandate asks the centers to recognize "the growing body of evidence that such interventions are dangerous."

In May 2023, Oklahoma's Senate Bill 613 banned gender-affirming care for transgender and gender-nonconforming people under the age of 18. This law makes it illegal for medical providers to provide puberty blockers, hormones and surgery to minors.

"On the list of important priorities for (Students for Reproductive Justice) is gender-affirming care," Brooks said. "In states like Oklahoma, I don't think that people always have access to the kinds of health care that they absolutely should."

'Victimization should not be a basis for an immigration benefit'

Blum said whether Trump is involved with or has read Project 2025, the stances on immigration within the mandate are reflective of his own.

"There are many places where (Project 2025) is super Trump, right?" Blum said. "With immigration, it's exactly what he wants to do."

Project 2025 notes Immigration and Customs Enforcement would be responsible for arresting, detaining and removing "immigration violators" anywhere in the U.S. without warrants "where appropriate."

In April, Stitt signed House Bill 4156, creating the crime of "impermissible occupation." The bill notes upon first offense, immigrants lacking permanent legal status would be punished with one year in county jail, fined up to \$500 or both. A second offense would be labeled a felony, and violators would be sentenced to two years in prison, fined up to \$1,000 or both.

Canning said she agrees with Project 2025's stance on immigration.

"Those resources are being taken up by people who are here illegally, which isn't fair," Canning said. "We aren't founded on people being here illegally."

Canning said immigrants lacking permanent legal status use social services that could benefit U.S. citizens.

"I don't think they should have access to the stuff that the people who pay taxes and who are citizens of the United States need because there are people here now that aren't getting what they need because it's being taken up by people here illegally," Canning said.

Koneru said Project 2025 pushes a dangerous narrative that all immigrants without permanent legal status are criminals, which isn't true.

Koneru said, rather than demonize immigrants lacking permanent legal status, it's important to have accessible education about what the proper procedure is to become a legal citizen because the American naturalization process is extremely difficult.

"The story of the U.S. is a story of immigrants. Our ancestors, no matter who you are, at one point in time, immigrated to the U.S. Technically, the first colonists were illegal immigrants because this was Native territory," Koneru said. "The U.S. can become a place where we respect each other's backgrounds and histories."



FILE/OU DAILY

An advocate holds a sign during a Feb. 6, 2023, rally in opposition to Oklahoma Senate Bill 129, which would ban gender-affirming care and use of hormone replacement therapy for anyone under the age of 26.

'We're in territory we haven't been in before'

According to Blum, Trump's "Make America Great Again" philosophy originated from Barry Goldwater, the 1964 Republican presidential nominee, and reflects a desire to return to a pre-Civil Rights Movement era. Blum said Project 2025 hopes to make this prospect a reality, creating a more "restrictive" American society.

Blum said while the majority of Americans don't agree with many of Project 2025's

policies, Trump could override majority rule, citing the Supreme Court's ruling in *Trump v. United States*, which granted the executive branch presumptive immunity for "official acts."

"We have this three-part tug-of-war, and because there are three equal and independent branches, no tyranny can happen," Blum said. "But if two of those branches collude by creating a pathway to get around the third branch ... then the entire premise of what keeps us from King George is kind of undermined. We're in

territory we haven't been in before."

According to Canning, a Trump victory in November does not guarantee the enactment of Project 2025. She said Trump is pro-democracy, and Project 2025's enactment could diminish the authoritative power of both conservative and liberal officials.

"For anyone who's connecting the two, I would say not to worry, ... he wouldn't implement it," Canning said. "There's corruption on both sides. I think the aim (of Project 2025) is to diminish that corruption but equally."

Blum said Project 2025 envisions an America not unlike versions depicted in dystopian novels. While citizens read about these possible futures, Blum believes Project 2025 is closer to reality than fiction.

"There are some really powerful people in our country who don't really care what the majority of people want and who don't think that everybody is equal or should be equal. They think some people should be more equal than others," Blum said. "It seems like a distant thing, but countries can change very, very quickly, especially democracies, when the people stop mattering as much."

"The Secretary must ensure that all HHS programs and activities are rooted in a deep respect for innocent human life from day one until natural death: Abortion and euthanasia are not health care."

PAGE 450

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