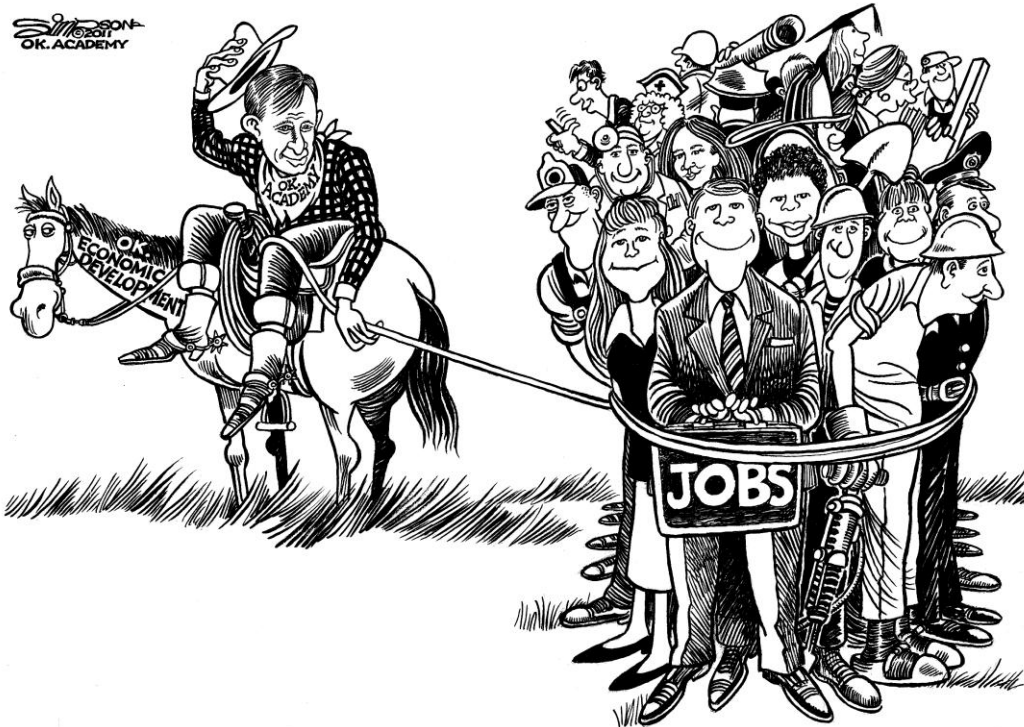




ISSUE BRIEFS

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



THE 2011 TOWN HALL

DEVELOPING THE OKLAHOMA ECONOMY

FOREWORD

2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall
DEVELOPING THE OKLAHOMA ECONOMY



The Oklahoma Academy Board of Directors selected this topic in June 2010. It was considered from a list of important issues provided from a survey of Academy members and nonmembers, business and community leaders, educators, chamber executives and members, leadership groups, legislators, agency leaders and more. We believe the 2011 Town Hall has explored the right issue at the right time, with the right group of participants representing Oklahoma's diverse population. The Town Hall addressed economic development, not as it has always been approached, but as it must be considered to effectively move Oklahoma into a place of national and global marketplace importance. The Town Hall produced eight significant findings and recommendations. They are included here, and are being presented to all involved Oklahoma policymakers and interested citizens and organizations.

Tom McKeon, 2011 Oklahoma Academy Chairman and Susan Winchester, 2011 Town Hall Chair

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STUDENTS

University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma
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Recommendation 1

OUR WORKFORCE

The 2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall



CREATE AND DEPLOY A WORKFORCE MASTER PLAN

The Town Hall considered all recommendations of the Governor’s Task Force on Economic Development. The Town Hall also independently developed recommendations. In both cases Workforce Development was the highest priority determined by the Town Hall. The Governor’s Task Force stated: “We recommend that Governor Fallin lead the development of a Business Plan for Workforce/Talent Development that will focus on keeping students and adults engaged in developing the skills and credentials employers need.” **Our Town Hall agreed but found the suggested action steps to be incomplete and limiting – and must be expanded. Timelines and accountability elements must be added with emphasis on aggressive implementation. Recommendations from the Oklahoma Academy 2009 Town Hall should be included.**

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION - The Town Hall suggests the abovementioned workforce development plan be prepared, and approved by the Legislature if necessary, no later than December 31, 2013 with implementation beginning immediately thereafter.

OTHER RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE INCLUDED IN PLAN ABOVE

1. **BUILD UPON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MODELS** - Oklahoma needs to build upon its nationally recognized early childhood education model and revitalize its education system by emphasizing strong basic education skills, including math, science, reading and writing, with a transition to workforce skill training and life skills during intermediate and high school education.
2. **USE PUBLIC/PRIVATE EXPERTISE** - Education system administrators and representatives from private industry should collaborate on designing curricula and mentoring programs.
3. **ENCOURAGE ALTERNATIVE MODELS** - Innovative alternatives to the K-12 system should be encouraged to provide a competitive landscape in the K-12 environment.
4. **EMPHASIZE STEM** - A comprehensive plan for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) including all levels of education, policy makers, and the private sector should be developed to support a more talented workforce.
5. **RETAIN TALENT** - The connection between states/regions with sustained, successful economic development and the number of individuals with college degrees is well established. In an effort to attract and retain college graduates in Oklahoma, incentives for student loan forgiveness or tax credits on interest paid for students settling in Oklahoma could help increase those numbers.

Recommendation 2

STRATEGIC PLAN

The 2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall



EXPLORE TRANSFORMING DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

The Town Hall developed a series of suggested actions that logically fit under a category of “strategies”. Some are very comprehensive and others more limited. It is suggested that Oklahoma government pursue one, or more, or all of these recommendations and that the Oklahoma Department of Commerce provide the leadership.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION - Explore the transformation of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce to a Public-Private Partnership (PPP). Involve the collateral recommendations below as appropriate.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **CONDUCT ASSET MAPPING** - Oklahoma must define the assets that differentiate it from competitive markets and determine their relevance to the target audience. The State should begin with asset mapping (i.e. a survey to discover the foreign companies and presence within the state as well as look at the needs of non-foreign companies heavily involved in import/export).
2. **EXPAND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT** - The Oklahoma Department of Commerce should solicit participation from local and state stakeholders in the formation of the state strategic plan.
3. **SOLIDIFY MESSAGING** - There should be a consistent message in a centralized clearing-house for education, ombudsman and information that target business and entrepreneurs from all sectors.
4. **DEVELOP UNIVERSAL BRAND** - Create a task force to conduct a brand study to determine a universal, consistent brand with a recognizable image/icon. While we aspire Oklahoma to be a “technological innovator and center for creativity,” it is important that the brand study determine a position we can claim that is differentiated against our competitive set, relevant to our target audiences and may be experienced across all brand touch points.
5. **LEVERAGE ADVANTAGES OF THE PORT OF CATOOSA** - Maximize the Port of Catoosa as the nation’s most inland seaport and such a unique asset should be maximized to create an importing/exporting hub.

Recommendation 3

A MAJOR INVESTMENT

The 2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall



“BET THE FARM” ON A \$1 BILLION STATE BOND ISSUE

The 1998 Oklahoma Academy Conference produced four scenarios for the future of Oklahoma. The most optimistic scenario was called “Prosperity Unleashed”. It called for Oklahoma to “bet the farm” on investments to spur economic growth, therefore this lead-in. Access to capital is critical to entrepreneurs and business startups. State resources should be leveraged to increase institutional funds and increase access to capital. Private industries need to be more proactive in funding programs that help facilitate innovation and enterprise.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION - The Town Hall believes Oklahoma should pass a \$1 billion bond issue to be dedicated to funding research and development. This bond issue proposal, including financing options, has been described in detail by the Governor’s Task Force on Economic Development.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **ENCOURAGE ADVANCED EDUCATION** - Oklahoma must foster an environment that encourages students to pursue advanced degrees in areas related to technology R&D.
2. **EXPAND TAX BREAKS** - Oklahoma should consider creating tax breaks for individuals or companies to invest in local Oklahoma Technology funds.
3. **EXPAND TAX CREDITS** - Oklahoma should also consider providing tax credits for capital investments, and replacing business specific tax credits with tax credits available to a wide array of businesses.
4. **USE PRIVATE SECTOR REPRESENTATION** - The private sector should have significant representation in making research and development decisions to ensure it fits their needs.

TOWN HALL RESOURCE BOOK

“It’s time for Oklahoma to retool, streamline and scale science, technology and innovation economic development Relying on annual appropriations via general tax revenue has proven ineffective and is a symptom of Oklahoma’s dramatic decline in science and technology rankings. Oklahomans should make a national statement by adopting research and innovation as our core economic expansion strategy. We need a statewide campaign that convinces the citizens of Oklahoma to vote on an economic expansion package that adequately funds research and innovation out of non-general revenue funds, providing predictability and a path to economic success for the next decade.” *Tom Walker, CEO, i2E*



IMPROVE THE OKLAHOMA TAX SYSTEMS

Many believe that the systems of taxation in Oklahoma need attention, and improvement in efficiency, effectiveness and balance. There is no consensus on what needs to be done – or how to do it. The recommendations below are suggested actions to help.

1. **BE PRUDENT ON TAX REFORM** - The **state income tax should not be eliminated** until further independent studies have been conducted on the impact and a budget-neutral strategy has been developed.
2. **MUNICIPALITIES AND SALES TAX** - It is imperative that our state's Constitution be amended to remedy municipal dependence on sales tax. Changing how municipalities are funded will facilitate their working together. In light of the severe revenue challenges faced by municipalities across Oklahoma, the recommendations of the 2010 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall - Municipal Finance, regarding diversification of municipal revenue sources and examining the state sales tax allocation formula are reaffirmed.
3. **REVIEW TAX CREDITS** - Oklahoma should periodically review the offered tax credits. These reviews should consider the effects on both rural and urban areas to ensure the effects are fair and consistent.
4. **FOCUS TAX CREDITS** - In determining which tax credits/incentives to continue, expand or adopt, the Town Hall believes we should focus on performance based credits/incentives and focus tax credits/incentives on aerospace, healthcare, medical research, clean energy and other sectors with high average wages.
5. **TRANSPARENCY AND SUNSETS** - The Town Hall believes that the Oklahoma Tax Commission should improve its ability to report the effects/effectiveness of all tax credits/incentives. To improve the effectiveness of tax credits/ incentives, Oklahoma should, as a standard, include Sunset provisions
6. **REVIEW IMPACTS OF TAXES AND FEES** - The panels recommend examining the total impact of all forms of taxation and fees on businesses and individuals in correlation to the services provided by the state.

Recommendation 5

CLOSING FUND

The 2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall



CLARIFY STATE CLOSING FUND

HB 1953 creates the Oklahoma Quick Action Closing Fund in the State Treasury for use by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce (ODOC).

The measure outlines various sources of revenue and stipulates that monies in the Closing Fund are to be used for economic development, specifically in situations in which spending these funds would likely be a determining factor in locating or retaining a high-impact business project or facility in Oklahoma. However - the Legislature has not provided any revenue to the Fund.

The following recommendations are offered in the event the Fund is activated.

1. **EXPAND ELIGIBILITY** - Eligible projects should include both out of state attraction opportunities and in-state expansion opportunities. Providing this flexibility for the Governor's Closing Fund minimizes discrimination against employers currently operating in the state, and allows discretionary funds to be used to their best use to grow Oklahoma's economy. Existing local businesses could benefit from these funds for recruitment, investment in infrastructure, staying in Oklahoma, and performance measures.
2. **EMPHASIZE ACCOUNTABILITY** - It's important to create specific, detailed criteria for access to the fund/incentives and accountability standards. Transparency and full-disclosure of who receives funds and for what purpose is critical. Those responsible for awarding the funds should be held accountable for the quality of the projects incentivized and must operate within an approved framework. A cost-benefit analysis will determine if we are achieving the results intended.

Recommendation 6

WORKER'S COMPENSATION

The 2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall



FIX THE REST OF THE WORKER'S COMPENSATION SYSTEM

Oklahoma made reforms to Workers Compensation during the 2011 Legislative session with Senate Bill 878. The Town Hall agrees the reforms should be given time to demonstrate their potential efficacy, yet has concerns about persisting high cost to employers, involvement of the judicial system and the prevalence of fraudulent claims continue. Clearly more work must be done to create a better system that yields maximum benefits to workers while minimizing overhead.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION - The Town Hall supports the creation of additional options (opt-out for employers, employee pay programs) regarding Workers Compensation.

These options should be considered and costs associated with these options explored. Suggestions for reforming this system include moving completely away from a court-based adversarial system to an administrative system including the use of mediators.

TOWN HALL RESOURCE BOOK

“Oklahoma made headway with the reforms adopted during the 2011 session, and we applaud the legislators and working group members for the progress that was made. In 2012, many of us in the business community hope the legislature will consider an alternative to workers’ compensation called the “Oklahoma Injury Benefit Option” (the Option). The Option would give employers a choice: be part of the workers’ compensation system, or design an ERISA benefit plan providing similar benefits to injured employees. “

“Disputes would be guided by ERISA or through mediation and arbitration, but would be handled completely outside of the Workers’ Compensation Court. This Option would provide an additional economic benefit to the state of Oklahoma and allow us to compete with Texas. Senator Patrick Anderson has requested an interim study for this Option, and we hope language will come out of that study to introduce the Option in 2012.” *Becky Robinson, Hobby Lobby*

“Workers’ compensation is an across-the-board issue that impacts every employer in the state. It truly is the #1 economic development issue for Oklahoma.” *Mike Seney, The State Chamber*

Recommendation 7

TRIBAL ALLIANCES

The 2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall



RESTART AND ENERGIZE TRIBAL RELATIONS

The Oklahoma Academy devoted an entire Town Hall (2007) to exploring the benefits, processes and relationships required to optimize the value of alliances with tribal governments. In this Town Hall it is suggested that these relationships have heretofore been personal and opportunistic rather than built upon institutional relationships. Therefore these opportunities ebb and flow based upon individuals. This can change.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION - The Town Hall recommends that state officials, federal delegation and tribal governments make a major and unprecedented effort to re-establish relationships with a goal of preparing for Oklahoma's future. Initial leadership should come from state government.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **ADOPT SNAP** - The Town Hall recommends implementation and support of the State-Native American Partnership Zones (SNAP) recommendation from the Governor's Economic Development Task Force Bold Ideas for Oklahoma Report.
2. **ADD A POSITION TO CABINET** - The panels unanimously reaffirm the Oklahoma Academy 2007 Town Hall recommendation that a cabinet level Secretary of State & Tribal Relations position be created and staffed.
3. **NURTURE EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS** - Cities, counties and local councils of government should continue to consult and partner with Tribal Nations and their commercial enterprises to spur development at local and regional levels.

TOWN HALL RESOURCE BOOK

"It is also very important to realize that tribal nations are governments just like the state and municipalities that generate revenues (i.e. taxes and fees) to provide social services to their tribal members, who are of course also citizens of Oklahoma. The tribes also build roads and construct parks, recreation complexes, and other quality of life facilities that are enjoyed by all Oklahomans. So it is clear that Oklahoma's Native American tribes are critical to our state's economy. Those who live in the rural areas really understand this and can provide direct testimony to the importance of tribal enterprises in their communities. *James C. Collard, PhD, Citizen Potawatomi Nation*

Recommendation 8

RAIL SYSTEMS

The 2011 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall



RENOVATE EAST-WEST RAIL SYSTEMS

The economic success of Oklahoma continues to be largely based on the twin growth engines of energy and agriculture.

The actual production of crude oil, natural gas and petroleum based liquids in the energy sector, and the production of grains, cotton, soybeans and other commodities in the agricultural sector mainly occurs in rural Oklahoma.

A significant cost in getting the commodities to market is transportation. The nearest east-west rail transportation is in Texas and Kansas. There is none in Oklahoma.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION - The Town Hall supports Governor Fallin's Task Force recommendations that state, "We recommend that Governor Fallin lead the effort to rehabilitate freight rail infrastructure in Oklahoma with emphasis on East-West freight lines."

GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE REPORT

"While some petroleum-based products are marketed through existing privately owned pipelines, agricultural-based products are marketed through the use of the surface transportation complex of state highways and privately owned rail lines.

Because of the great weights involved, rail is the primary mode of transportation to market for most agricultural commodities. In addition, rail transportation has become an important key to moving crude oil and other petroleum products in the state either for temporary storage in Cushing or to refineries located within or outside the state. "

"Finally, rail provides the only economic alternative for the transportation of coal, rock, gravel, sand, aggregate and other heavy products that can be moved on a less than time-sensitive basis. Thus, rapid modern rail service is essential not only to the rural economic development of the state but the state as a whole.

The Study Group believes that the importance of first class rail service has been overlooked and underappreciated as a driver of state economic health and growth."

Chris Meyers and Gary Sherrer, Task Force Leaders



ENDORSE THESE THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Governor's Task Force on Economic Development and Job Creation forwarded 13 recommendations to Governor Fallin for consideration. The Task Force Report was reviewed at the Town Hall. Three recommendations were determined by the Town Hall to be the highest consensus priority for consideration and action. They were:

1. **WORKFORCE:** See accompanying Oklahoma Academy Issue Brief.
2. **OKLAHOMA IMAGE:** "We recommend that Governor Fallin ... consolidate state-wide marketing responsibilities under the Secretary of Commerce and then create a key new position: Director of Marketing for the State of Oklahoma."
3. **CAPITAL AVAILABILITY:** "We recommend that Governor Fallin ... launch the Oklahoma 21st Century Leadership Initiative and fund its activities with the proceeds from a \$1 billion bond issue to be voted by the people." Also see the Investment Issue Brief.

GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE REPORT

Dear Governor Fallin,

September 19, 2011

Last January you asked us to assemble a Task Force on Economic Development and Job Creation for Oklahoma. We have done that. In the intervening months, 45 dedicated Oklahomans have spent dozens of man-weeks generating suggested initiatives for Oklahoma to pursue that will boost our state's economy and provide much needed jobs. The strength and depth of the initiatives recommended in this report lie in the collective profile of those who did the work and the manner in which the work was undertaken. More than half of the 45 Task Force members are CEO's of successful businesses. The balance of the team is comprised primarily of private sector professionals who are very experienced in economic development. Taken as a whole, it is difficult to envision a group more qualified to address your request.

... In addition, it is encouraging that The Oklahoma Academy, with whom we interacted regularly over the past several months, will be continuing its excellent work in October with a three day Town Hall on Economic Development. The work of this Task Force will be a centerpiece of that effort and will accordingly be further vetted and enhanced. ...

Robert J. Sullivan, Jr. Task Force Chairman

MEMBERS

2011 Academy Town Hall

DEVELOPING THE OKLAHOMA ECONOMY



Gordon Andersen, Pelco Products Inc., Edmond; **Blayne Arthur**, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Oklahoma City; **Vicki Ayres-McCune**, City of Guymon and PREDICI, Guymon; **Monica Barczak**, Community Action Project, Tulsa; **Howard Barnett**, OSU-Tulsa and OSU-CHS, Tulsa; **Len Becker**, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma City; **Chris Benge**, Tulsa Metro Chamber, Tulsa; **Paul Bickford**, Cherokee Data Solutions, Claremore; **Roger Blais**, The University of Tulsa, Tulsa; **Whitney Box**, City of Enid, Enid; **Alan Brinkmeyer**, JUMP Technology Services, LLC, Oklahoma City; **Denise Brinkmeyer**, JUMP Technology Services, LLC, Tulsa; **Kim Brown**, Newcastle Chamber of Commerce, Newcastle; **Ray Brown**, Rogers State University, Claremore; **Bill Bullard**, OG&E, Oklahoma City; **Tim Burg**, Shawnee Economic Development Foundation, Shawnee; **Mary Jane Calvey**, Real World Management Solutions, Oklahoma City; **Bruce Campbell**, Francis Tuttle Technology Center, Oklahoma City; 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Policymakers are encouraged to access and acquire the Academy's 196 page Town Hall Resource Book and the complete "Proceedings of the Town Hall" document.

Both are available at www.okacademy.org.