



2022

**Public
Policy
Priorities**



CIVIL DISCOURSE

The honest broker lies in an open, sincere, civil discussion inclusive of all persuasions, ideas and strategies, without preference for party involved.



CONSENSUS BUILDING

We believe the people should have a say in their futures and quality of life, so we engage citizens across Oklahoma and involve those citizens in every step of the proposal process.



MOVING IDEAS INTO ACTION

We empower citizens to contact their leaders to enact the necessary changes needed to make Oklahoma a better place to live, work, and play.



Building Awareness, Developing Policies, Inspiring Oklahomans to Move Ideas Into Action!

THE HISTORY OF The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals

The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals was founded in 1967 by one of Oklahoma's greatest statesmen, Henry Louis Bellmon. As the first Republican Governor of Oklahoma, top officials, who were Democrats, surrounded Bellmon. In order to achieve a mark of success in office, Bellmon relied on factual information and rational decision making to work with both the state's lawmakers and the citizenry.

As a politician, Bellmon believed in doing what was in the best interest of the public even if it cost him the next election. Still, he knew the people were an important part of the equation for a successful state. Not only did he seek to engage them in the development of public policy, he understood the connection between a sound quality of life for the citizens and the promise of a prosperous state. Dedicated to fiscal responsibility, Bellmon increased government efficiency and invested in critical government services.

Bellmon's humble upbringing in a farming family and his service in WWII cultivated an honest, thoughtful, nonconformist who valued education, collaboration, and integrity. His vision of The Oklahoma Academy was not unlike a farmer planting seeds in the spring in anticipation of a bountiful crop in the summer. To cultivate an informed, engaged citizenry, the people must first have an opportunity to study the issues and participate in the policy development process.



Henry Bellmon

After his first term as governor, Bellmon knew there was a need for open, nonpartisan dialogue in the young state. He sought to create a public policy organization that was independent, nonpartisan, and inclusive. The purpose of which was to provide citizens the opportunity to participate in a truly democratic process designed to shape the future of Oklahoma. To this day, The Oklahoma Academy upholds Bellmon's vision and the organization's long-standing reputation as the state's premier citizen-based organization for nonpartisan public policy development.

From its inception in 1967, to its revitalization in 1985, to its adoption of the Town Hall process in 2001, The Oklahoma Academy has maintained its relevance in raising awareness and shaping public policy in Oklahoma. Despite its small staff and limited resources, The Oklahoma Academy generates and manages an impressive amount of public policy information, engages the citizens of Oklahoma in discussing and developing policy recommendations, and works ardently with the community leaders and policymakers to implement the resulting ideas through community and legislative action. To date, more than 77 pieces of legislation passed since the adoption of the Town Hall process in 2001.

In a time when politicians often hear only the keyboard warriors and dissenters, the work of The Oklahoma Academy is more important than ever. In this divisive political era, The Oklahoma Academy is dedicated to providing a safe, supportive forum where the art of listening, debating, and collaborating are not only valued but also protected. We've covered a wide range of topics, including education, small business development, government structure, crime, technology and the future, and the state's constitution. We've achieved many milestones and accomplishments, and thanks to citizens like you, we continue to grow in numbers, reach and influence.

It is our sincere hope that you will continue to support us in this endeavor to unite the public in working toward creating solutions for a stronger Oklahoma and its people.



Building Awareness, Developing Policies, Inspiring Oklahomans to Move Ideas Into Action!

ACADEMY PRESIDENT/CEO

A Letter from Julie Knutson

In listening to the members of The Oklahoma Academy as well as other citizens from around the state, we are highlighting and sharing our Public Policy Priorities for the 2022 year. We are singling out four major consensus priority recommendations that have resulted from recently held Town Hall Conferences. These are specifically timely and are critical to our future prosperity. We are also including twenty-three other consensus recommendations that focus on improving our economy, health, and education.



Some of the policies are short-term in nature and could possibly be implemented within a year or two. Others are more long-term in nature and will take thoughtful and collaborative work to prepare properly for implementation. All have been developed by Oklahoma citizens through our annual Town Hall Conferences. That is the important part --- these are grassroots recommendations, not top down driven, and they were developed through a nonpartisan process that incorporates evidence-based research, deliberative thinking and discussion, civil discourse, and results in sound consensus recommendations.

We need you and your involvement! Take the time to look at these, be open to the ideas, and recognize that likely you know or are aware of several of the participants who developed the recommendations in one or more of the Town Halls these public policy recommendations represent.

The role and mission of The Oklahoma Academy is to help citizens across the state be more aware and familiar with the policy issues that affect them. Most all items surrounding the economy, health, and education, directly affect each of us. As citizens are better informed, the more control they actually have in making good, productive change. The Academy encourages “inclusion” of ALL people -- all ages, geographic location, vocations, all ethnicities. We must work together for the betterment of Oklahoma.

The background resource documents prepared in advance of the Town Hall Conferences and the full sets of recommendations developed from the Town Halls are on the Academy’s website at www.okacademy.org under the Library tab. If you see a policy priority that resonates with you, please contact your elected officials and share the information. It’s with your help we are creating solutions for a stronger Oklahoma.

Thank you,

Julie Knutson, President and CEO



Solutions for a Stronger Oklahoma

Dedicated to strengthening our state, one public policy at a time.

We are Dedicated to:

Economy: We work together as an honest broker to develop and enhance the economic climate and quality of life.

Health: We develop and promote good public policy designed to produce a stronger and healthier Oklahoma.

Education: We focus on education policy that best prepares students for life and work in a global marketplace.

We are Moving Ideas Into Action

The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals has been instrumental in public policy development in Oklahoma for more than three decades. This unique nonpartisan organization has had an enormous impact on policies affecting education, economic growth and development, health statutes and services, and the list goes on with issues directly related to these three areas.

Key Policy Priorities

- **Preventing ACEs** is essential for life-long health, and life-long health is essential for a prosperous Oklahoma.
- **Legalization of Sports Betting** will grow both the Oklahoma and tribal economies.
- **Broadband** and high-speed Internet access is a necessary tool in the lives of Oklahomans.

We are the Honest Broker

Honest Broker: Is an entity (individual or organization) that is accepted by all sides in the policy-making process as impartial. Neutrality does not equal an absence of interest; rather, the interest of the honest broker lies in an open, sincere, civil discussion inclusive of all persuasions, ideas and strategies, without preference for either party involved.

FEATURE POLICY PRIORITY



Oklahoma should move to a Top Two Open Primary System for all primaries except presidential primaries.

- A Top Two open primary election is a primary in which all candidates are listed on one ballot, and only the top two vote-getters in the primary election – regardless of party preference - move on to the general election. It is most often noted that the Top Two system does not change the party composition of your elected bodies but allows all voters to vote and in turn produces elected officials that work harder for their constituents.
- From a practical standpoint, any proposal that reduces inefficiencies, cost, runoffs, and voter fatigue deserves attention. The current electoral system is cumbersome and inefficient, in that there are so many elections between party primaries, runoffs, generals, special elections, and local elections. Adopting the Top Two system will shift more of a burden off voters and will increase confidence in the election system.
- Even if a voter is affiliated with one of the three recognized parties in our state, their options are limited in the current Oklahoma – “closed-primary” – system. If Democrats, Republicans or Libertarians want to vote for a candidate they like from a different party, they cannot. That means, Oklahomans are unable to vote for whom they consider the best candidate. Elections are paid for by the taxpayers and not the parties. The closed-primary system is undemocratic.
- There are extensive benefits to the Top Two system when used for all primaries except presidential primaries. Reducing the number of times a voter must go to the polls should lead toward enhanced voter turnout, engagement, and voter buy-in, which can be accomplished through consolidating elections and implementing a Top Two primary system in Oklahoma. The need for primaries that let all voters vote, regardless of political affiliation, will only increase. Without the Top Two open primary system, we risk silencing the voices of countless voters in Oklahoma eager to do their civic duty. All voters should be able to vote.

TOP TWO

Myths and Facts

Myth #1:

The primary election is not important. Women, minorities, young people tend not to vote in them – it is typically older voters who do. Opening the primaries will not do anything positive and might open the door to mischief.

Fact:

Closed primaries are the biggest form of voter suppression in the country. In 75% of elections, the outcome is determined in the first round of voting—the primary. In the majority of races, once a candidate wins the primary, which under a closed primary system is limited to members of their own party, they do not face a real challenge in the November election. 75% of elected officials in this country are winning office without having to communicate with voters outside their own party.

Voters are disinterested in partisan primaries. When you go to a nonpartisan “Top Two” primary system, you get rid of partisan primaries. You end the “inside baseball” aspect of elections that turn so many voters off. You have a public primary open to all and a November election between the two finalists.

Myth #2:

Third parties are locked out of a nonpartisan “Top Two” primary system.

Fact:

Unlike the traditional partisan system, a nonpartisan “Top Two” primary system allows third parties to participate in the first round and creates a level playing field for all voters and all candidates. Candidates, regardless of party affiliation, are on the same ballot in the first round. You could have a primary ballot with multiple Democrats, Republicans, Independents, Libertarians, etc. in any given race. Independent and third party candidates and voters are no longer barred from the crucial first round. Moreover, because candidates must now compete for all voters (instead of just their party base) in order to win, this gives groups of like-minded voters a lot of leverage to win powerful policy concessions. It’s this leverage that will catapult the third parties into political relevancy and growth.

Myth #3:

“Top Two” primaries minimize competition by allowing for same-party races and more centralized party control of candidate recruitment.

Fact:

The majority of election districts are dominated by one party or the other. Under a traditional partisan system, independents and minority party voters in these districts have no say in who represents them because they are barred from participating in the only election that matters, the primary of the dominant party. In a nonpartisan system, every voter is empowered, and November elections are competitive rather than pre-determined affairs.

Myth #4:

If we went to a “Top Two” primary system, elected officials are going to have to work harder to keep their seats “safe” and work extra hard to gain new seats in competitive districts.

Fact:

Absolutely correct. All politicians have to work much harder to stay in office under a nonpartisan system.

(OpenPrimaries.org)

Public Policy Priorities



Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). ACEs can have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential. Importantly however, ACEs can be prevented.

There are five overarching strategies and approaches that research has identified as effective in preventing ACEs. While all strategies are important, strengthening economic supports for families is the most effective strategy for preventing ACEs. Poverty and financial insecurity are the primary contributors to the prevalence of ACEs in Oklahoma. Strengthening the process of securing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are a must for Oklahoma families. The Oklahoma Academy supports family friendly policies and the programs of employers to better inform and educate the private sector about their role in preventing and mitigating ACEs (e.g., utilization of Employee Assistance Programs).

Research shows that ensuring a strong start for children is one of the best ways to address early prevention and decrease the number of childhood adversities. If emphasized and funded, ensuring a strong start for children will eventually decrease the expense of all other mental health services. Community-based involvement and action are key to preventing ACEs and are essential for life-long health, and life-long health is essential for a prosperous Oklahoma.

QUICK FACTS

- **ACEs are common. About 61% of adults surveyed across 25 states reported that they had experienced at least one type of ACE, and nearly 1 in 6 reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs.**
- **Preventing ACEs could potentially reduce a large number of health conditions. For example, up to 1.9 million cases of heart disease and 21 million cases of depression could have been potentially avoided by preventing ACEs.**
- **Some children are at greater risk than others. Women and several racial/ethnic minority groups were at greater risk for having experienced 4 or more types of ACEs.**
- **ACEs are costly. The economic and social costs to families, communities, and society totals hundreds of billions of dollars each year.**

(Content source: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention)

www.okacademy.org

Public Policy Priorities



Legalization of Sports Betting

It's been more than three years since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA). The PASPA had effectively made sports betting illegal except in Nevada and a few other states. Following the repeal of the 1992 law, states have been allowed to legalize sports betting and launch their own programs. According to Forbes, the market has grown from 19 states to 32 and Washington, D.C. in the last 12 months.

It is time for the state of Oklahoma to accept sports betting as a covered game under the Oklahoma state-tribal gaming compact. Sports wagering should be implemented, as it is being adopted by competitive gaming jurisdictions. The approval of sports betting will grow both Oklahoma and tribal economies.

It is widely accepted that people are wagering on sports in every state, many illegally through unlicensed offshore sportsbooks. Capturing that revenue through a regulated market that has sensible rules and regulations can ensure honest, secure and safe transactions for our people.

QUICK FACTS

- **Since Oklahoma has not legalized state-based betting operations, local sportsbooks are unauthorized.**
- **The Oxford Economics Group estimates that legal sports betting would generate \$240 million in revenue for Oklahoma and create over 3,000 direct and indirect jobs.**
- **Currently sports betting is legal in Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, and New Mexico (not prohibited in the gaming compacts shared between tribes and New Mexico).**
- **Sports betting legislation is currently proposed in Kansas, Texas, and Missouri.**
- **House Bill 3008, a bill that would add in-person sports betting to the Oklahoma state-tribal gaming compact, has been filed this session.**
- **The legalization of sports betting was a 2018 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall recommendation.**
- **The Oklahoma Academy supports House Bill 3008**

www.okacademy.org

Public Policy Priorities



Statewide Broadband Network

Broadband is increasingly intertwined with the daily functions of modern life. High speed internet breaks down the barriers of distance and time, allowing all residents of Oklahoma to participate in economic and civic life far beyond our geographic region. Oklahoma needs to embrace advances in telecommunication to empower our state to have an advanced statewide broadband network.

An advanced statewide broadband network would empower students to have virtual classrooms, effective distance learning, and global interaction with classrooms in various cultures and countries. Statewide broadband would allow students to use the best technology available to maximize resources and prepare students for professional development, moving beyond hard-cover textbooks and oversized classrooms.

On the economic front, development of an advanced broadband network and universal connectivity availability for the entire state is critically important. Businesses with services to offer can promote their brand online and put the internet to work for them. With a broadband connection, businesses can connect to millions of consumers in just a few clicks. Broadband services are a necessity in an economy where the ability to complete a transaction electronically has become indispensable. The economic impact would be greater if broadband was more widespread and as available in rural areas as it is in urban areas.

The health and mental health well-being of our people would also benefit from an advanced statewide broadband network with the use of telehealth. The limited broadband availability in many areas of Oklahoma has created barriers for the people of our great state to take advantage of a visit with a physician from the comfort of their home. With rural area hospitals closing and a shortage of medical professionals in all areas of the state, a statewide broadband network would ease the burden of finding adequate health and mental health care.

Fewer than half of Oklahoma's rural residents have access to high-speed internet – one of the lowest percentages of any state, according to a Federal Communications Commission report. The need for high-speed internet access for all Oklahomans has never been more important.

QUICK FACTS

- **57.8% of Oklahoma's population has access to broadband coverage.**
- **52.5% have access to a wired internet plan at an affordable rate of \$60 or less per month.**
- **27.4% of Oklahomans have access to fiber-optic service.**
- **Oklahoma ranks 26th in broadband access.**

(BroadbandNow)

www.okacademy.org

2022 Public Policy Priorities

ECONOMY

- State leaders must be tasked with prioritizing early interventions, preventive measures, and more cost-effective treatment for mental health issues in Oklahoma. There must be greater involvement on the part of the business community (e.g., chambers of commerce) to play a larger role in the support of mental health services, since employee productivity is so closely tied to those services. It is imperative we expand Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) in the state, either through individual businesses or state government (Oklahoma offers an EAP through the ODMHSAS).
- To attract entrepreneurs, CareerTechs and regional colleges should collaborate on business incubators and innovation centers to focus resources on business development programs. When possible, collaboration should include immigrant students and foreign partners, the latter of which might be able to help with limitations related to the current visa requirements.
- Oklahoma must achieve “economic agility” with policies and actions that optimize all our resources: natural, human, physical, and entrepreneurial. The best strategies for mitigating the negative effects of the state’s high concentration of energy are to broaden our tax base, diversify our economy, grow and attract higher waged jobs, and continue smart, forward-thinking governmental reforms. Three energy-supporting strategies must be implemented: (1) expansion of connectivity/broadband, with specific references to rural Oklahoma and rural health, (2) a greater focus on technology jobs and investment, with multiple references to organizations like OCAST, i2e, and the recruitment of information- and STEM-based businesses, and (3) improving educational opportunities.
- Oklahoma should tax services with a judicious approach. A tax on services should be applied across the board, rather than to a list of specified industries. Stacking of taxes must be avoided, and, in areas where consumers may be paying taxes on services, special care must be applied so as to ensure those services would not become too expensive for the vast majority of Oklahomans. Doing so is necessary because of the ever-increasing trend towards becoming a service-based economy in order to capture a broader revenue source. Owing to the overall increase in services in our economy, it is specifically recommended that the tax rate on goods be reduced accordingly if the tax base is broadened to include services resulting in a collective increase in revenue. The impact upon municipalities and their available budgets must be considered prior to imposing sales tax expansions to services.
- Implement a Career Pathways methodology that integrates PreK-12, Career Technology and Training, and Higher Education (both public and private) while horizontally meeting the needs of business and industry to provide Oklahoma with a home grown workforce that is competitive in the global economy of the future.
- Native American Tribal governments remain significant to the economy and intergovernmental fabric that makes up our Oklahoma community. Tribal governments must be consulted by state policymakers and be considered as a positive community partner as a matter of respecting their sovereignty and increasingly crucial roles in building a robust energy economy in Oklahoma. It must be recognized that each tribal government is unique, possessing cultural, structural, historical, geographical, financial and logistical resources differing from Tribal Nation to Tribal Nation. Therefore, potential partnerships between the Oklahoma and each Tribe must be approached on a case-by-case manner, affording due respect and consultation on each government’s accords.
- Instrumental to maintaining and expanding Oklahoma’s export industry is the infrastructure for transporting these products. Oklahoma must dedicate ample funding for the maintenance and construction of Oklahoma’s roadways, bridges, railways, airports and navigable rivers to ensure continued growth in export and international trade, regardless of barriers for funding at the federal level.

2022 Public Policy Priorities

HEALTH

- A unified message and educational campaign must be developed to drive public health needs to the forefront in order to improve our public health. The goal of the Oklahoma campaign should be to raise awareness on the importance of good health and health literacy, and should be designed to help offset the widespread addictions in Oklahoma to fast food and sedentary lifestyles. The campaign must be supported by leadership at all levels of government, including Tribal government. The campaign must also involve the business, education, nonprofit, and faith based communities.
- We must employ a greater utilization of technology, as well as the support for greater and expanded use of Drug Courts, Mental Health Courts, and other diversionary programs, to end the negative consequences of untreated mental illness that are intertwined in the criminal and civil justice systems of Oklahoma. This should include support for statewide mobile crisis response teams to be a part of the 988 crisis response system that will begin July 1, 2022. Including these teams as part of the crisis response system would further separate mental illness response and the civil and criminal justice system to “triage systems with iPads everywhere,” and the concept of “therapeutic transport.”
- Starting at the youngest age of development and education, a disparity in health education and literacy exists. There is a real need to improve health literacy and education among parents and students to secure a more integrated approach to healthy lifestyle implementation. While classroom education regarding health awareness, dietary lifestyles/options, and exercise implementation is critical to improving youth health literacy, it is important that these concepts are implemented at home with the full support of caregivers, such as parents and grandparents.
- Expand the mental health and medical workforce. Oklahoma faces significant shortages in healthcare professionals. The professional position shortages that should receive immediate attention are: tele-psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, physician assistants, advanced practice nurses, and increased residencies for psychiatrists. Additionally, improve/strengthen state licensure laws and address the “scope of practice” issues of allowing all medical professionals to “practice at the top of their license.”
- The State of Oklahoma, in concert with professional organizations and foundations, must develop and fully fund a public relations strategy, raising awareness and better educating the general public on the importance of prevention, early detection, and treatment of mental health issues. The importance of eliminating the “stigma” of mental illness and educating the public in this area, the disease of the brain, is paramount. Mental illness deserves the same evaluative treatment as other diseases.
- Crisis Intervention Training for all police officers is necessary, and must be included as a mandatory part of the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training course, with local communities adding additional trainings. There is a need to overcome the distrust between law enforcement and the mental health community as a way of expanding fundamental training of law enforcement.
- More emphasis must be placed by the State Department of Education and the public school districts on the importance of physical fitness and health education/literacy in schools. Personal Health and Fitness Education and physical activity classes must be added as a part of the standard curriculum in Oklahoma’s K through 12 education systems. This curriculum addition should be funded through tobacco tax revenue or a re-allocation of tobacco tax funds. The school grading system should include health literacy and activity efforts.

2022 Public Policy Priorities

EDUCATION

- It is imperative Oklahoma implements a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) statewide as a way to prevent and/or reduce mental health issues in the K-12 system. To achieve this goal, school administrators at certain levels must receive training to attain the trauma-informed designation.
- House Bill 1886 must be passed this Legislative Session. This proposed piece of legislation focuses on mental health education for K-12 students, a minimum competency requirement related to mental health training for school staff. Adopting HB 1886 would ensure our school personnel, inclusive of administration and support staff, are better prepared for student interactions. A firm minimum competency requirement related to mental health training for teachers and administrators would ensure our teaching workforce are better prepared for classroom interactions.
- There is a need to develop wellness teams in school systems to facilitate referrals and partner with community groups outside of the school to access the expertise and resources of the community groups. These types of community partnerships can build resiliency through embedded programs to increase belonging and support
- Evaluate, envision, and build an Early Childhood, Pre-Kindergarten through 20 Educational System that provides consistent academic and career counseling throughout the educational process; and includes access to mentoring, internships, and training opportunities with potential employers and vocational education. Oklahoma must ensure students maintain maximum time in the classroom and that qualified school counselors are able to maintain a focus of academic and career guidance with students rather than handling non-counselor/guidance paperwork.
- Develop a unified Oklahoma higher education model that encourages collaboration among the state's higher education institutions, regional universities, and career technology centers. Include entities such as OCAST and i2E in the strategic development of a unified higher education model.
- Oklahoma must foster an environment that encourages students to pursue advanced degrees in areas related to technology, research, and development.
- 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.
- State Regents for Higher Education and the Oklahoma State Department of Education should convene college and university presidents and vice presidents of academic affairs to address the question of existing adequacy of the teacher education and preparation programs and curricula in these programs to meet Oklahomans' social, economic, and Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade teaching/ learning needs.
- Fully develop and implement a shared student identification system to track students through the educational process (Early Childhood Education through 20) to work. This will impact the ability to serve dropouts at all levels. The identification system will properly facilitate interventions to address dropouts and provide data to all levels of education, business, and industry.

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Creating Solutions for a Stronger Oklahoma

*530
members of The
Oklahoma
Academy*

*More than 77
pieces of legislation
passed since the
adoption of the Town
Hall process in 2001*

*8,235 participants in the 37
conferences held since 1986*

For more information about us, specific public policy topics, or to get involved with The Oklahoma Academy right away, call (405) 307-0986 or email President and CEO Julie Knutson at julie@okacademy.org