

ACCO COUNTY

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Editor: CJ Cook

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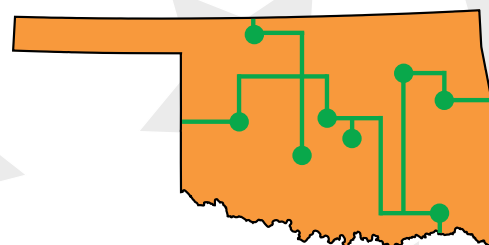
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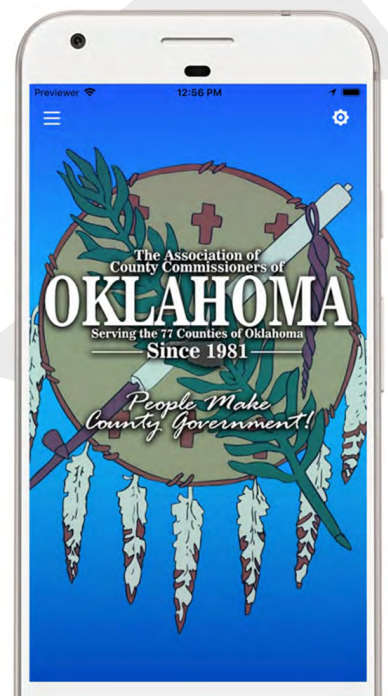
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Executive Director's Message

Author: Chris Schroder, ACCO Executive Director

As 2021 nears an end, I look back at the challenges counties have faced. When running for an elected office, such as a county commissioner, there is no job description that outlines the obstacles you will face. To your constituents, the job is to fill the potholes. As an elected official, you know and realize there is so much more and 2021 was proof of that.

First, the pandemic highlighted just how important counties are. County commissioners were making decisions and facing problems that had never been seen before. Shutting down was not an option as counties are essential to their communities and the people they serve. The court systems needed to continue, the county road system still needed maintained, the courthouse services still needed to be provided, the sheriff's office still needed to protect the public, and the county health departments became the backbone of many communities.

Then, in February, we transitioned to one of the coldest months on record with the lowest temperature registering at minus 22 degrees. Governor Stitt declared a state of emergency and the President declared all 77 counties as federal disaster areas. These temperatures put a tremendous stress on the electricity supply, gas service, and water systems across the state. Again, county commissioners were faced with the obstacle of maintaining power and water at county courthouses and county jails as well as keeping the roads open. The weather also takes a tremendous toll on the road system. Most people don't realize how these temperatures destroy the base of a road from the bottom up and the majority of this damage will not be seen for months after the disaster.

Shortly following the record cold temperatures, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Again, county commissioners were in untreaded water dealing with federal funding to support a pandemic response and bring back jobs. As a result of this Act, ACCO formed a committee in April to address the ever-changing guidelines from the US Treasury and to serve as a voice for commissioners to interpret the guidelines and provide options for counties to spend these funds through collaboration with other entities. This has grown to be one of the most productive committees ACCO has ever formed.

Although the challenges have been many, I am proud of the work of our elected officials this past year. They have stood in the gap for our communities and have continued to provide essential services. More than ever, local citizens need support for basic services and for many, that responsibility falls back to their local elected officials. As county commissioners, your jobs have become exceedingly difficult as you have faced challenges never seen before. But you have stepped up and reinforced how important county government is to this state and its local communities.



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Thank You: President's Message Nov 2021

One Last Message From the Desk of Jimmy Westbrook

A person that I greatly respect once told me, "That in order for evil to exist, the righteous must remain silent." I am humbled by the effort and support you have shown for me as your president and my family. I was reluctant to serve, as I live and represent a southeastern county in our state, but with acknowledging the advice given to me by my friend, I committed myself to do my part for local government. I share the same goals and dreams that you do for our country. I was raised on hard work and like all life's experience, if you want more out of something you must commit to doing more on your part.

I urge each one of you to become and stay engaged to make county government stronger for the future. The magic of local elected officials being selected by their neighbors keeps our communities and counties strong; self-governance was and is the nature of republic democracy.

I want to thank the committed staff at ACCO for their unrelenting effort of providing education and advice that make our jobs much easier. I can assure you, as sure as night follows day, you will have new and greater challenges in your future.

Our vendors who show their loyalty with friendship and support are essential in the giving of advice and new products, and I will miss the friendship I have made as commissioner and your president. I have the utmost confidence in your new leadership team; they are righteous men who represent your membership and not just the counties they serve.

Although I leave county government, I stand in respect and awe of the hard work and effort you exert. As an old cowboy preacher told me, please remember 1 Chronicles 29:28, "I pray each of you enjoy a long-filled life, with the wealth of family, friends, and honor." I am blessed beyond my expectations with my family, friends and the honor of being your president. And with that said, it's time this old cowboy rides away!



Jimmy Westbrook

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Public Pressure and Our Opportunities

Author: Gene Wallace, ACCO Chief Executive Officer

We find ourselves as public leaders facing an era of dynamic change and challenges. We knew when we were honored by the voters, that we could make a difference, and we have. The pressure and demands from a historic pandemic and a stormy political discourse. Our opportunity lies within our ability to restore public confidence in public service. Our legacy and story are one of consistency and performance at the lowest cost to the taxpayer. Our reputation of doing more with less is a story we must tell.

Our history was started in 1607, when this nation's first settlers created shires or county government. We are the nation's oldest form of government. To be able to serve is an honorable experience, but to guarantee future generations to live under local rule is a tremendous obligation. Our opportunity to perform is the ability to learn more to do more, in our state being a professional is mandatory. State and city elected officials serve, as a rule, very short terms of office, while our county officials serve, in most cases, are the most consistent leaders in local government.

Today's local elected official must be astute at solving problems never encountered by previous commissioners. We must remain steadfast in continually educating ourselves on the complex

issues of today, our staff at ACCO and our partners at OSU are dedicated to providing advice, guidance and educational opportunities to increase our professionalism.

The ACCO newsletters are dedicated to you as county commissioners and its messages are created to spotlight current events and to thank our vendors for their faithful support. Their new products and technical advice, and loyalty provides ACCO's ability to improve our conferences throughout the year.

We must continue to maintain enthusiasm, for our residents, staff and family for as President James Madison wrote in the federalist papers from which our nation's constitution was created 'if all men were angels, there would be no need for government, if angels ran government, there would be no need for laws, with this realization local governance is the bedrock of a republic democracy.



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A Message from our Next President

From the Desk of Russell Earls

My path forward continues to be one of thanks. I thank God, my family, the members of the association (ACCO) and our veterans, as I write to you on the morning of November the 9th. I am forever thankful for the freedoms we enjoy, and we owe that to our veterans.

County government plays a role in policymaking at the capital simply by building relationships with our legislative leaders. Call them, email them, take them to lunch; I assure you they want to hear from you, they need your input, and when there are bills introduced that will help our veterans or county government we should be front and center supporting that legislation.

We have a voice at the Capitol and we should use that voice to support legislation that helps county government so we can help our citizens that we represent in our counties. I urge the ACCO members to build relationships with all elected officials in our county courthouses, continue to invite them to our conferences. By doing this you will build the relationships that are vital in keeping our voice strong at the Capitol.

As county commissioners, we are blessed to have a newly elected Executive Director, Chris Schroder. Chris brings a level of professionalism and enthusiasm that has been built on the

shoulders of giants. Chris is blessed to work with a staff that is second to none in this great state. I urge all members to reach out to Chris, get to know him, support him, and work with him to further our cause.

In closing, I want to extend a special thanks to the men and women that serve on all the boards and committees here at ACCO. It takes a great deal of time and commitment. Each one of you make a difference as we make decisions back home based on your leadership and the information you provide us. Also, the newly formed ARPA committee members, Darryl Stacy, Bryce Bohot, David Poindexter, Heath Dobrovolsky and Jason Kienholz, your work is invaluable as we navigate these new funding streams, thank you.



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Eliminating Deficient County Bridges by the Year 2035

Author: Randy Robinson, OCCEDB Executive Director

This interim study, H IS21-119, was requested by Representative Kyle Hilbert from Creek and Tulsa counties. It was held on October 21, 2021 at the State Capitol. The Representative wanted to get an understanding of the situation and how to improve it. A bridge structure is defined by the Federal Code of Regulations, 23 CFR § 650.403, as a structure being 20 feet or longer. Field inspections results determine whether a bridge is structurally deficient (SD). This is characterized by having the ratings of the deck, superstructure, substructure, culvert, or waterway adequacy falling below a certain threshold.

Presentations were made by several individuals. The speakers were Bradley Ward, Program Evaluator from the Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency (LOFT), Steven Hague, Engineer from consulting firm HNTB, Mark Liotta, past House Representative who authored the original County Improvements for Roads and Bridges (CIRB) legislation, Tim Gatz, Secretary of Transportation, and Randy Robinson, Executive Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Circuit Engineering Districts Board. The documents and audio from this study can be found here:

<https://okhouse.gov/Committees/ShowInterimStudies.aspx>

I have worked with counties in my 38-year career with the past 20 years being a Program Manager for Safety Bridge Inspections in 32 counties covering over 6,500 bridges. As a Program Manager, I reviewed field inspections, made repair recommendations, and performed bridge load ratings. This has given me some insight to the conditions that exist out on the County Highway System.

When asked why counties aren't maintaining their bridges, one needs to understand the counties are also responsible for almost 83,000 miles of road. We have no comprehensive information on county road conditions or conditions of structures that are under 20' in length. The calls that County Commissioners, Legislators, and the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma (ACCO) receive, are not calls complaining about poor bridge conditions, but of poor road conditions. Conditions such as the road is "too dusty", "too wet", "too many potholes" and "too rough". We could as well have an interim study on deficient roads, if we had the data on road conditions. The public will drive across a load posted bridge and never complain as long as the bridge is not closed. Poor bridge conditions are a statewide safety concern.

High deficient bridge numbers didn't happen overnight, and this doesn't mean a county was not deliberate in making deficient bridge replacement and

repair a priority. It comes down to simply the lack of funding. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) situation on state highway bridges is a good example of funding support. Currently, the state highway system has 1%, 67, bridges that are structurally deficient compared to the counties' 15%, 2,038, bridges. In 2004 the state system had as many as 1,168 structurally deficient bridges. With the Legislature's passage in 2005 of the Rebuilding Oklahoma Access and Driver Safety (ROADS) Fund, and an additional yearly 15-million-dollar apportionment passed this year, the fund has grown to a total of \$590,000,000 per year. The ROADS fund has been transformative for reducing the number of deficient state highway system bridges.

The LOFT report on the County Improvements for Roads and Bridges (CIRB) fund stated that the then 120-million-dollar level of funding, counties were only receiving 15 cents on the dollar of the necessary funding to address their deficient bridge needs. We know not every deficient bridge requires replacement. Repairs may bring the bridge up to an adequate status. The current estimates in the 2021 ODOT Bridge Summary Report states a 652-million-dollar replacement cost. These costs are significantly underestimated at today's replacement dollars.

ACCO's top legislative goal for 2022 is to have the CIRB cap raised or removed. In doing so, it will increase both the County Highway Fund, used for maintenance, and CIRB new construction dollars.

If we want to become a "TOP TEN" state across all governmental infrastructure ownership, then we will need to provide the funding support to make that happen.



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Infrastructure Bill - Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA)

Author: Randy Robinson, OCCEDB Executive Director

At this time, the U.S. House and Senate have passed the infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act and is waiting on President Biden's signature. During a Zoom conference held on Monday, November 9th, Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, and White House staff described the Act's overall funding breakdown:

- 110 billion dollars for roads and bridges
- 66 billion dollars for railroads
- 39 billion dollars for public transit
- 42 billion dollars for airports and ports
- 11 billion dollars for safety
- 7.5 billion dollars for Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations
- 55 billion dollars for clean water
- 50 billion dollars for resiliency - fighting hazards such as wildfires and floods
- 65 billion dollars for clean energy & power
- 21 billion dollars for environmental remediation – superfund sites, etc.
- 48 billion dollars for broadband development
- 14 billion dollars for internet affordability
- 2.7 billion dollars for digital equity and inclusion

The implementation phase will begin once the bill is signed by the President. There will be additional lengthy engagements with partners, agencies, governments and tribes. Two excellent resources that go into the details of the bill are from the National Association of Counties (NACO), <https://www.naco.org/resources/legislative-analysis-counties-infrastructure-investment-jobs-act> and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), <https://policy.transportation.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2021/09/2021-09-15-AASHTO-Comprehensive-Analysis-of-IIJA-FINAL-v2.pdf>. NACO will continue to be our major resource for future information on this Act.

Currently, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) provides 28 million dollars per Federal Fiscal year (October 1st – September 30th) for the County Highway System. This funding pays for a portion of the Safety Bridge Inspection and construction costs of county roads and bridges let through ODOT. Since the formula funding comes through ODOT, we do not currently know the impact on counties' current or future federal funding levels.



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Review your Counties Personnel and Drug Testing Policies

Author: Dusty Birdsong

It is important that counties who participate in the ACCO-SIG self-insured program keep their personnel and drug testing policies up to date. Your county should also have a periodic review process in place to ensure that both policies are current and up to date.

The ACCO model policies that are made available to counties through our website are reviewed every two years by outside legal counsel for the purpose of staying current with both state and federal law changes that could affect how each policy could apply to your employees. Your county should also have a process in place to review your adopted personnel and drug testing policies every two years for the same reasons.

This can be done by taking the ACCO model policies and reviewing alongside your adopted policies. Proceed with your review by making notations on where your county's adopted policies are different from the model policies and discuss those differences with your fellow elected officials and, if necessary, implement those policy changes through board action.

It is also imperative that all your employees throughout your respective counties sign, read, and acknowledge they have read and understand each policy. Also, if any revisions are made to either policy, those revisions will not go into effect until 30 days from the date those

revisions are made to your in-place policy. If this process is not followed, the employee can take the position the policy and/or any revisions that are made to the policy are not in force or applicable to the revised policy.

The ACCO model personnel and drug testing policies are currently made available on ACCO's website at www.okacco.com. These policies can be found by clicking on the ACCO-SIG/SIF link which is located at the top of the opening page and then click on policies and procedures located below ACCO SIG-SIF Resources which will open a link to both policies along with other model policies, documents that are provided by ACCO.

These policies can then be downloaded and modified to identify your county by name. If your county should have any questions or need assistance with implementation of personnel or drug testing policies, please contact myself or Dale Frech here at ACCO.



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Election Year

Author: Randy Robinson, OCCEDB Executive Director

Election years are always challenging but also affects the way you do business. Every situation will be different in every county. Please discuss your situation with your DA now and have them give their legal opinion on how you should operate. Below are our opinions.

ITEM 1: Surplus of county equipment

Board of County Commissioners must surplus equipment before March 14, 2022 (30 days before beginning of filing period, April 13-15, 2022) when any two or more County Commissioners' offices are up for election or reelection. The Board may surplus still if the following situation(s) occur below.

- **No opponent(s) for two or more County Commissioners' offices.**
- **Wins reelection, can succeed himself/herself at primary or general for two or more County Commissioners' offices.**

If you are in an election year that only one County Commissioner's office is running, then the Board may still take action on surplus all county property. Note that under Title 19 § 333, one County Commissioner may not dispose of equipment if the office is open for election, and it is up to the Board of County Commissioners to enforce this. See further discussion under "ITEM 2" below.

Example: Longest scenario from being able to surplus, two existing County Commissioners' offices are running, then from March 14, 2022 to January 3, 2022, the Board of County Commissioners cannot surplus any item from any office at the courthouse.

Title 19. Counties and County Officers

Sale, Trade, or Disposition of County Equipment Section 421.2 - Transfer of Surplus Machinery, Equipment, or Vehicles

A. A unanimous vote of the board of county commissioners may transfer any machinery, equipment or vehicle belonging to the county, which is deemed by the board to be surplus, to a political subdivision of the state which is in need of such machinery, equipment or vehicle. Upon such transfer, the subject property shall be removed from the inventory of the county.

B. Except as otherwise provided in this section, the board of county commissioners shall not deem any property to be surplus during the period when the elections of any two county commissioners occur at the same time. The prohibition of declaring county property or material surplus shall:

1. Begin thirty (30) days before the filing period for the elections of any two or more county commissioners in a county; and
2. End the day after two or more county commissioners are sworn in as such.

C. If two or more incumbents draw no opponents or if two or more incumbent county commissioners both win reelection, either at the primary, special, or general election, the prohibition of declaring county property or material surplus until the swearing in of county officials shall be removed and the county may dispose of surplus property as provided in subsection A of this section.

D. When the political subdivision receiving such property declares same to be surplus, the governing body shall give written notice to the county of its intent to transfer such property back to the county. The board of county commissioners shall have up to fifteen (15) days from the date of receipt of such notice to either accept or reject the property. The political subdivision shall transfer such property back to the county only if the board of county commissioners agrees to accept the property or the board fails to respond within the fifteen-day time period.

ITEM 2: A County Commissioner cannot buy or dispose of equipment.

- **Not filing - Starts at end of filing period – April 15, 2022**
- **Defeated at Primary Election – June 28, 2022**
- **Defeated at Runoff Primary Elections – August 23, 2022**
- **Defeated at General Election – November 8, 2022**

This occurs when a County Commissioner does not file or is defeated. That County Commissioner cannot acquire, contract, or dispose of equipment. The other County Commissioner(s) can conduct normal business, but should

enforce not disposing or purchasing equipment for that County Commissioner's office that is up for election.

Example: Longest scenario from being able to dispose or buy equipment, existing County Commissioner is retiring, then from April 15, 2022 to January 3, 2023, the retiring commissioner cannot dispose or buy equipment.

Title 19. Counties and County Officers Section 333 - Record of Orders and Decisions - Commissioner not Succeeding Himself - Duties

A. The board of county commissioners shall keep a book in which all orders and decisions made by them shall be recorded, except those relating solely to roads and bridges as required by Section 334 of this title. All orders for the allowance of money from the county treasury shall state on what account and to whom the allowance is made, dating the same and numbering them consecutively from the first day of January to the thirty-first day of December, inclusive, in each year.

B. Any county commissioner who fails to file for reelection or is defeated in any primary or general election or by any other manner it is impossible for the commissioner to serve another term in office, shall not acquire, purchase, contract for or dispose of any machinery or equipment, or expend or approve for expenditure any monies for any purpose other than normal or routine operating expenditures except as provided in this section. It shall be the mandatory duty of the commissioner to execute payment and to pay all outstanding obligations of the county incurred by the commissioner, or on behalf of the commissioner by the board of county commissioners, prior to the expiration of the term of office of the commissioner. However, in the case of lease-purchase contracts, rental, lease or other payments extending beyond the term of office of the commissioner it shall be the mandatory duty of the commissioner to execute and to make such payments current as of the date of expiration of the term of office of the commissioner. The commissioner shall be liable both personally and on the official bond of the commissioner for any violation of the mandatory duties herein imposed.

ITEM 3: Spending funds, Board of County Commissioners statutory duty

Beginning July 1st of an election year, a county officer running for office cannot spend more than ½ of balance on hand by December 31st without written approval from the County Excise Board.

• Only is in effect if the County Officer loses their election. If there is a runoff election or general election, both being after July 1st, the officer must be prepared to leave ½ of their balances in their accounts. The reason is they will not know if they will win.

Example: County officer has a July 1st balance in their account of \$500,000. On December 31st, the officer must have a minimum balance of \$250,000.

Excerpt from:

Title 19. Counties and County Officers Section 347 - Limit of Annual Expenditure or Indebtedness - Warrants

C. Whenever a county officer holding an elective office will not immediately serve a succeeding term in the same office, it shall be unlawful for the board of county commissioners, during the first six (6) months of the fiscal year in which said term of office expires, to approve claims for the operation of said office totaling in excess of one-half (1/2) the amount allocated for the operation of said office during said fiscal year, unless approval in writing is obtained from the county excise board, and any claim in excess thereof and any warrant issued pursuant thereto shall be null and void.

NOTE on spending funds from Cheryl Wilson, State Auditors' Office

If the commissioner has expenditure authority over any of the budgeted funds (ad valorem revenue) then he or she would be limited to 50% of the appropriations approved by the Excise Board/Budget Board for that six-month period July to December. Many counties only have commissioner's salary as part of the general fund budget – in that case the 50% should not be an issue since they will only have 6 months of paychecks in that period. But a small number of counties have an (optional) appropriation for "Highway Levy" within the general fund. So those counties would need to be mindful of this.

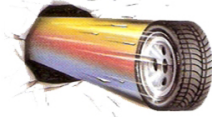
Cash funds are only limited to 50% of the cash balance they bring over from last fiscal year.



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The ACCO Fall Conference 2021 focused on celebrating ACCO's 40-year history supporting the 77 counties of Oklahoma. Our guests turned out in droves to celebrate with us, and it was fantastic to see all of them.



Photo by CJ Cook on the behalf of ACCO

We kicked off the conference with a fantastic ACCO Forum between Senator Roger Thompson from the Oklahoma State Senate and H.E. "Gene" Rainbolt, founder of Bancfirst in Oklahoma. The ACCO Forum was moderated by our own Gene Wallace, ACCO Chief Executive Officer.

After the ACCO Forum we invited everyone to attend the ACCO General Session which had a star-studded list of presenters featuring Representative Boles, State Auditor Cindy Byrd, Jessica L. Jennings, Associate Legislative Director, Transportation & Infrastructure Liaison to the Rural Action Caucus

National Association of Counties, and Steven C. Agee, Ph.D. Dean Emeritus and Professor of Economics Meinders School of Business Oklahoma City. The ACCO General Session was started with a video message directly addressing the conference attendees. Followed shortly after by Representative Brad Boles who received ACCO's second ever and highly sought-after Rock Star Award. After Representative Boles spoke, Jessica Jennings with NACo spoke at length about the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Next up, we had Steven C. Agee, Ph.D., who spoke about the effects the COVID-19 Pandemic had on the economy and how that might affect the future going forward.



Photo by CJ Cook on the behalf of ACCO

We then had a presentation from Bill Case (ACCO's Legislative Liaison), who gave us a legislative update.



Photo by CJ Cook on the behalf of ACCO

Following Bill Case, ACCO President Jimmy Westbrook presented ACCO Chief Executive Officer Gene Wallace with the ACCO Impact Award. We then held voting for the Secretary/Treasurer seat on the ACCO Executive Committee. The candidates for this seat were Jim Rogers from Sequoyah County and Zach Cavett from Payne County.

While the votes were being counted, State Auditor Cindy Byrd spoke about the American Rescue Plan Act and how the State Auditor's Office is working with counties on answering some of their questions regarding ARPA. Next, Notie Lansford (OSU CTP) introduced Damona Doye (Associate Vice President, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, OSU) who spoke on their role in the county regarding education. Notie Lansford then rewarded certificates to six individuals.

With the votes counted, Jim Rogers won the vote for the Secretary/Treasurer seat, Russell Earls from Ottawa County will be the President, and Jack Strain will be the Vice President. ACCO's Executive Director, Chris Schroder, then wrapped up the General Session with a message to the attendees thanking them for allowing him to become the new ACCO Executive Director. "This is where I want to be".



Photo by CJ Cook on the behalf of ACCO

On day two, we started with an ACCO Educational workshop, the workshop was led by State Auditor Cindy Byrd and discussed the American Rescue Plan. State Auditor Cindy Byrd was joined by Cheryl Wilson from the State Auditor's Office, Lori Johnson with the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Executive Director Chris Schroder, County Commissioner Darryl Stacy from

Cleveland County, and County Commissioner Bryce Bohot from Jefferson County. There was a Q&A Session after the main presentation where many good questions were asked and answered.

Our next session was another ACCO Educational workshop, this time with two distinct sessions. The first session of the workshop focused on the Oklahoma State Health Department's Role in the Counties; this session was led by Mendy Spohn, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Oklahoma State Health Department, and Brandie Combs Regional Administrative Director for the County Health Departments in Southwest Oklahoma. The second part of the workshop was led by John DeFalco, CEO, and Ian Osteyee, COO, from 4Sight Labs. Their presentation focused on revolutionary technology for county jails, such as mobile vital trackers. Both sessions were incredibly informational.

The final event of the ACCO Fall Conference 2021 took place as dinner was getting started. ACCO hosted a very fun game of Boo Money Bingo while our guests enjoyed an all you care to eat Taco Bar. The room was decorated to look spooky with cobwebs and tombstones adorning the prize table. There were many laughs had as Dee Jett, a relative newcomer to ACCO, called Bingo.

With the ACCO Fall Conference 2021 done and in the bag, it was a pleasure seeing each of you at the conference. I loved getting to chat with everyone as I passed them in the packed hallways. I want you all to know that you were the highlight of the conference for me.



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Circuit Engineering Districts' (CED) County Equipment Auction

Author: Randy Robinson, OCCEDB Executive Director

This CED 6 sponsored auction was promoted as an online bidding only event beginning November 11th - November 13th. The main yard was in Marlow, but some items sold offsite at multiple locations. The equipment was consigned from counties, companies, banks and private individuals.

The next CED auction, sponsored by CED 7, is scheduled for Friday, March 11th and Saturday, March 12th at the Convention Center in Elk City. More information will follow.

See <https://www.mgrahamauctioneers.com/> for details.



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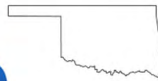
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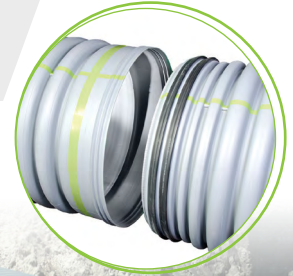
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County Government is Vital

By Representative Brad Boles, Oklahoma House of Representatives

This past week, I had the opportunity to speak at the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma (ACCO) fall conference. I've had the great opportunity to work with outstanding county elected officials from all 77 counties over the past few years while I served as chair of the County & Municipal Government Committee in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

I was very surprised and honored when ACCO Executive Director Chris Schroder presented me with the "ACCO Rock Star Award" at their general session while introducing me as their guest speaker. In his remarks, Chris said I was the third legislator to receive this award in the past nine years, and he mentioned that I had served as the House author for nine county government bills that have been signed into law in the last three years.

I've learned so much from many of these county government leaders over the past few years. Many of the bills we wrote were inspired by the solutions they brought to me from their valuable experiences in county government, and their insights are always very much appreciated.

Additionally, without the support of the majority of my colleagues in the House and Senate, these bills wouldn't have made it through the legislative process and onto the Governor's desk. I want to thank my colleagues and the Governor for supporting these county government reform bills.

While there is always more work to be done, I do feel that we have moved the needle in a positive direction that will benefit Oklahomans across the state.

In order for us to be a strong state, we must have 77 efficient and effective county governments throughout our state. To be successful, our state needs leaders in all levels of government—local, city, county, state and federal—to work together for the betterment of our constituents. I've enjoyed working with my local county elected officials in Stephens, Grady and McClain Counties and they know that they can call me anytime if there is anything I can do to help them at the state level, which in return helps our constituents we mutually serve.

Our counties and our county leaders should be empowered by our state governments. Our Oklahoma state statutes specifically outline the duties of county governments, so the Legislature works hand-in-hand with ACCO and county officials to ensure Oklahomans' needs are met.

Many of the nine county government bills I've recently passed into law

have focused on modernizing the county elected officials' salary formula and cap, which were outdated. The bills also set clear guidelines and definitions for counties to follow with more checks and balances in place that better protect taxpayers and the county elected officials.

We also passed HB3271 to modernize the county government bidding laws and allow counties to use online bidding procedures similar to what some state agencies use. Those online bidding procedures have been proven to increase competition and lower the cost of bids awarded and the cost to manage the bidding process compared to traditional bidding programs.

We also passed laws increasing audit requirements for county circuit engineering districts, as well as streamlining the county purchasing process in Title 19 to be much more efficient.

This year, my role has changed in the House as I've transitioned from the chair of the County & Municipal Government Committee to now chair of the Energy & Natural Resources Committee, which means I will be focusing more on energy-related policies. However, I am thankful to still serve on the County & Municipal Government Committee and will be engaged in these issues as I feel they are very important to our state and all Oklahomans.

It truly is an honor and privilege to represent House District 51. As always, I hope you continue to contact me about any questions or concerns that you may have at the state level. My office phone is (405) 557-7405 and my email is brad.boles@okhouse.gov. God bless!

Rep. Brad Boles represents District 51 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives, which includes Grady, McClain and Stephens Counties.



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"IT'S MILLIN' TIME"

Welcome Melinda to the Family

Melinda Anoatubby was hired as the Transportation Programs Administrator taking over Chris Schroder's previous role under Randy Robinson, OCCEDB.

Melinda grew up in Wilburton, OK living on a farm. After high school she attended Eastern Oklahoma State College and earned her associates degree. After EOSC, she moved to Ada, OK to attend school at East Central University, earning a Bachelor's degree in Legal Studies (pre-law) and a Master of Science in Human Resources with a concentration of Administration. She also attended Oklahoma City University, Business School of Meinders-earning a certification in Native American Management Enterprise. She has her Lean Six Sigma, White Belt. She has also completed multiple leadership certifications through the Chickasaw Nations leadership series that include: OSU's Spear's School of Business- Communication Series, Chickasaw Leadership Series - Bronze, Silver, and Gold.

She worked for the Chickasaw Nation for 17 years with an extensive background in tribal government, human resources, marketing and law. Under the executive leadership of the legal department, she was tasked with legal research, writing contract law, and commerce related business. She had the opportunity to take a position in the Nation's commerce's marketing department where she maintained and negotiated entertainment contracts for the businesses (i.e., ZZ Top, Mel Gibson, Randy Travis, Dallas Cowboy sponsorships, PBR, and etc.). While working in marketing, she was exposed to the business industry, promotional marketing, statistical marketing, and strategy where she and her team were successful by creating multi-million-dollar promotions, grand-openings, and large events to generate revenue for the tribe.

Melinda left the tribe in 2009, to open her own retail business. She returned to the tribe 2 years later, taking a position in Human Resources. While working in HR, she was promoted quickly to a management roll supporting the nation's 15,000 (+) employees from recruitment, employee relations, acting generalist role, acting HR management, project manager and then to a program manager. She was asked to step into a large role and take on the full lifecycle of HR management by implementing change management, culture and innovation with the largest casino in Oklahoma.

During that time, she was recognized for implementing and leading some of the most successful HR projects, processes, SOP's, trainings, and the execution of the departments largest cost savings to date. She created a compensation structure that saved the tribe 1.5 million dollars the first year, 3.6 million the second year, and 6.7 million the third year. She was also successful by developing a HR recruitment plan to save over 4.2 million the first year by using the employee database to show demographics, target market, and resident radius of the employee population. She was also successful at reducing turnover and maintained high retention rates.

Pre-COVID – Melinda was promoted into a tribal government role, under the Lt. Governor's office to help strategically develop initiatives for the Department of Administration to cascade down for the entire Chickasaw Nation to unify processes and procedures throughout the Nation. She and her team created DOA's, processes, automated and streamlined the DOA process. Developed a six-sigma approach to the DOA process and partnered with other departments throughout the nation to develop best practices. She helped developed a Quality Assurance Division to adhere to processes and procedures. Melinda is a member of several national organizations: SHRM – since 2011, PMI (Project Management Institute) since 2014, member of the Oklahoma City Chapter, and is eligible to for her PMP certification (450+ documented hours) and the NIH (National Institutes of Health) since 2011.



Melinda has worked at East Central University, graduate school of Human Resources as an adjunct professor. She has volunteered for American Red Cross, American Heart Association, and volunteered as a divemaster (DM) throughout the summers with a local dive shop and just recently in California off the coast, on Catalina Island and Coronado Islands, Mexico.

Melinda enjoys spending time with her two daughters - Chloe and Preslea. She also enjoys traveling, scuba diving, running, working out in the gym, hiking, fishing, hunting, and shopping.

Some fun facts on her personality based off the CORE CLARITY Assessment



Top 5

1. Analytical – loves data; detailed oriented
2. Deliberative – careful, vigilant, practical; plans ahead.
3. Self-Assurance – Aura of certainty
4. Strategic – sorts through clutter to find best route, sees patterns where others see complexity, sees potential obstacles.
5. Maximizer - excellence, not average, is my only standard of measure; strives to get the most out of everything.



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The Well – Cleveland County

Author: Melinda Anoatubby, OCCEDB Transportation Programs Administrator



Cleveland County and the Cleveland County Health Department cut the ceremonial ribbon, marking the official opening of The Well, on Friday November 12, 2021. The facility is located at 210 S. James Garner Ave., Norman OK 73069. The area features green, walkable space for outdoor events and a new, 2-story community building with 14,000 square feet of classroom and meeting space. This unique platform, never seen in Oklahoma Counties, will bring physical, virtual health and wellness resources to residents and



visitors in Cleveland County. This beautiful facility will be the hub for activities and services, including online and in-person fitness classes, cooking demonstrations, Norman Regional Health System clinic and other wellness resources and events. The Well will also be the new home of the Norman Farm Market beginning 2022.



When asked how this conception came to life, Commissioner Darryl Stacy responded “The Well is the culmination of a vision started several years ago as we recognized the needs in our community. Cleveland County has been committed to employee wellness for many years now and in some ways the Cleveland County Wellness Square — The Well — is an outgrowth of that initiative expanded to include our county residents. The Board of County Commissioners adopted the County Master Plan

which included the wellness square in November 2017. That plan presented a vision which included relocating the farmers market from the existing fairgrounds space and combining that with an indoor/outdoor multipurpose programming space to house and encourage healthy living. To do this effectively, we partnered with county and state health departments and that primary partnership evolved into joining with multiple other community stakeholders to provide programs to benefit the community.”



The ceremonial day was festive and gave a good diverse idea of what the facility will offer. The day consisted of the ribbon cutting followed by yoga, financial wellness classes, Tai Chi, meet and greet with the staff, children’s story time, second Friday Artwalk programming, Pioneer Library Maker Mobile and children’s activities, pumpkin painting, live music, Appetizers & Art Class, and Chef’s Table cooking.

When asked how this will impact your community, Commissioner Stacy responded, “The Well was designed with flexibility in mind, and a wide range of uses for program space. Free or very low-cost classes at The Well will provide exercise opportunities and continuing education such as cooking or financial planning. A clinic located at The Well offers functional medicine and chiropractic and will also offer free services from time to time such as free flu shots. The Well will be a one-stop physical and digital destination, assisting all Cleveland County residents and visitors regardless of income, background or geography.”

Congratulations to Cleveland County Commissioners and their local constituents on their visionary thinking and accomplished goals for the community!

To sign up, follow, and visit -The Well <https://www.thewellok.org>.



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Farming and ranching can be a stressful occupation. OSU Extension is partnering on a new Heal the Harvester program to support rural residents experiencing mental health crises. (Photo by Todd Johnson, OSU Agricultural Communications Services)

Heal the Harvester: Extension partners to address mental health challenges for farmers and ranchers

Media Contact: Gail Ellis | Communications Specialist, Copywriter | 620-515-2498 | gail.ellis@okstate.edu

In a profession that involves backbreaking labor, life-altering financial decisions and the favor of Mother Nature, farmers and ranchers are especially vulnerable to mental health issues.

The number of Oklahomans who struggle with a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression jumped 25% during the pandemic, according to the Oklahoma-based, nonpartisan Healthy Minds Policy Initiative. The initiative also reports the state's rural suicide rate has increased 27% since 2017, compared with a 3% rise in urban areas. That's why the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry requested help from the Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences and OSU Extension to develop Heal the Harvester, a Project ECHO line of assistance for rural Oklahomans. Hundreds of Project ECHO programs worldwide connect community

providers with support specialists through virtual sessions on learning and mentorship. OSU's Project ECHO offers several training courses on topics, such as addiction medicine and pediatric psychiatry.

Heal the Harvester launched in October to help increase awareness of needs and resources to support rural residents experiencing mental health crises. The training is funded through ODAFF and is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture. The \$500,000 NIFA grant provides one year of funding for Heal the Harvester programming.

"Life in agriculture is sometimes tough and isolating," said Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Blayne Arthur. "Producers

are certainly some of the most resilient people, but natural disasters, disease, retailer demands, market uncertainties and misconceptions, and a seemingly growing list of other issues, wear on everyone.”

While OSU’s Project ECHO provides the management and information technology infrastructure for Heal the Harvester, OSU’s Jason Beaman facilitates video sessions on mental health education and consultation for Extension educators. Beaman is chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at OSU’s Center for Health Sciences and the executive director of training and education for OSU’s National Center for Wellness and Recovery.

“Extension educators interacting with farmers and ranchers on the ground is paramount,” he said. “When someone comes into a county Extension office with schizophrenia, or a rancher is going to lose his ranch because of alcohol disease, educators can offer information and support. We want to equip educators with the skills to do their daily jobs even better.”

The education segment of each biweekly video session involves a 15- to-20-minute lecture followed by designated time for Extension educators to discuss real cases of farmers or ranchers in need of mental health assistance. Beaman answers questions and directs educators to therapists, physicians and other mental health professionals.

Damona Doye, associate vice president of OSU Extension, said helping health care providers reach people in rural areas

where access is limited is a blessing to many families. Educators naturally connect with farmers and ranchers, families and youth.

“Addressing mental health issues contributes to our mission of providing practical, research-informed knowledge for communities,” Doye said. “We’ve assisted in this educational area throughout my career, dating back to challenges experienced during the financial crisis. The pandemic has added to everyone’s stress, and we want to assist.”

Beaman has also conducted research that shows the opioid epidemic, often a factor in mental health struggles, has affected more residents and spread faster in rural counties than any other demographic.

“Farmers and ranchers have a strong work ethic that sometimes works against them,” Beaman said. “When they are injured and are instructed to take it easy, they take medication to work through the pain. Opioids block the pain the body uses to signal a need for rest.”

As Heal the Harvester progresses, Beaman plans to identify three county Extension offices that can offer telemedicine services. In addition to the program, Arthur said there are other resources available that also address the unique challenges of production agriculture.

“Reach out, check in, lighten a load, have a conversation with a friend,” Arthur said. “We are all in this together.”






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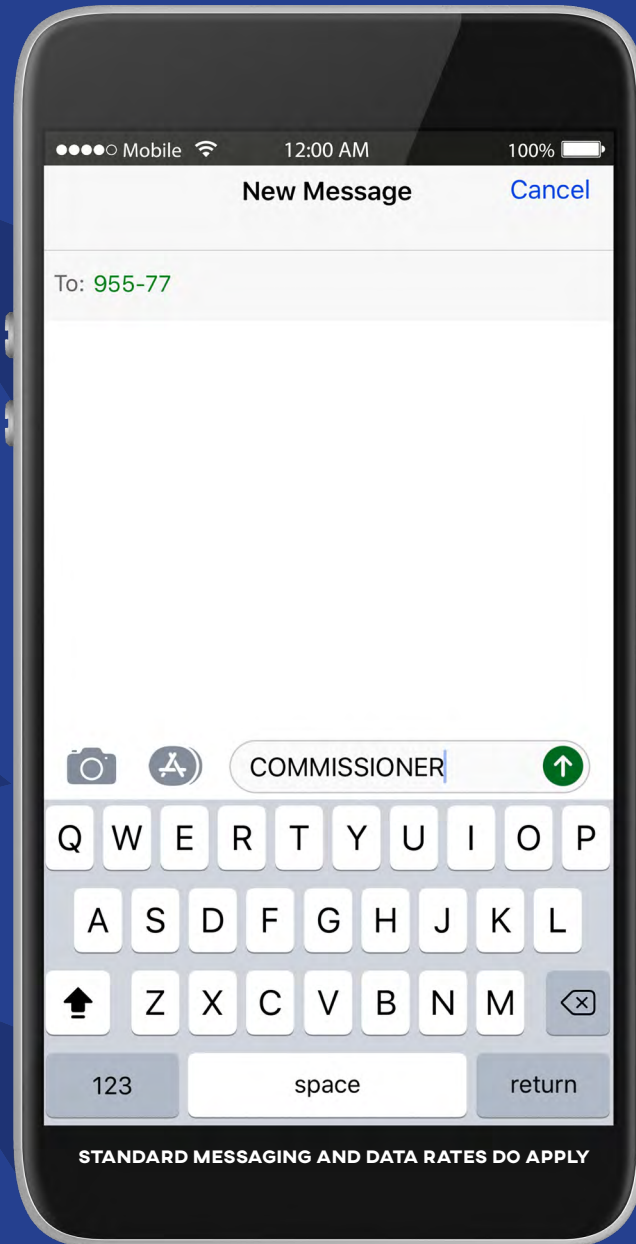


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