

## POLICY MATTERS

## HB 1775 would whitewash our history

Our national and state history is littered with dark stains stemming from racial inequities ingrained in our economic, political and legal systems. House Bill 1775, which now sits on Gov. Kevin Stitt's desk for signature, would direct Oklahoma educators to turn a blind eye to the historical events that

led us to this place and keep us from fully exploring the paths that move us away from these inequities.

If signed into law, HB 1775 would prevent public schools and universities from fully teaching about the inequality and

racism threaded throughout our history and public systems. It would have a chilling effect on teachers wanting to examine atrocities like the Trail of Tears and the Tulsa Race Massacre, events that influence the daily lives of Oklahomans. It also would ban mandatory gender or sexual diversity training or counseling.

We don't have to dig too deeply to see that Oklahomans still need schooling on these subjects. In just the first four months of this year, we have made national news for: a lawmaker referring to "colored babies" in a floor debate, a lawmaker saying transgender people suffer from "mental illness," another lawmaker comparing efforts to end abortion to the fight against slavery, one elected official comparing Black Lives Matter to the KKK, a state senator making a lewd oral sex reference about the nation's first Black female vice president during a television interview, a school teacher telling his middle school class that we need a "white history month" after seeing one of his students wearing a t-shirt expressing Black pride and sports announcers caught on a hot mic referring to high school basketball players as "f----- n-----."

These only represent stories that made the news, and they fail to fully capture how punishingly difficult it is for our fellow Oklahomans whose life experiences fall outside the categories of white, male, Christian, cisgender and heterosexual. These hateful comments underscore the need for Oklahomans to have access to information and resources that help us better understand each other.

HB 1775 does not do that. In fact, this legislation seeks to whitewash our history and moves Oklahoma further away from being a more inclusive state. It also sends a clear message that our state is an inhospitable environment for many who currently live here or may be considering moving themselves or their business to the state. HB 1775 is bad for Oklahoma, and Gov. Stitt would be well served to veto it and move this legislation to the scrap bin of history.

Ahniwake Rose is executive director of the Oklahoma Policy Institute.



AHNIWAKE ROSE

## GUEST COLUMN

## Diversion Hub helps those seeking hope

For most, being arrested and jailed is a low point in life, but an Oklahoma City nonprofit established two years ago is changing that narrative for thousands.

Now being locked up in the Oklahoma County Jail can open up a path to a better life. The Diversion Hub was set up as a free service to help people weave their way through the complicated court system.



NANCY ANTHONY

However, in the past two years, the agency has become much more than that.

The agency is a clearing house of opportunity, serving so many in our community who are desperate to find a foothold. Nearly all the Diversion Hub's clients are low-income and some are indigenous. Alcohol and drug addiction are common. Some are homeless and, for many, hunger is a way of life, so imagine how difficult it might be for them to pay a fine, find transportation to a court date or

comply with probation requirements.

For those who are struggling, the world must seem filled with trap doors. That is why the Oklahoma City Community Foundation has joined with the Arnall Family Foundation, the Kirkpatrick Family Fund and the City of Oklahoma City to help break the cycle of incarceration and open doors to recovery and stability.

Through the leadership of Executive Director Damon Britton, Diversion Hub has been expanding and growing since its early days as a pilot project supported by the Oklahoma County Public Defender's office.

Beyond helping people manage their affairs at the county courthouse, Britton's agency is collaborating with multiple public and private agencies to help people address issues that may have led to incarceration in the first place.

Within Diversion Hub's offices in Oklahoma City's Midtown District, there are representatives from nonprofits, such as the Homeless Alliance, City Care, Catalyst Behavioral Services and The Education and Employment Ministry. The Hub also

is partnering with public agencies and services to provide easier access to healthcare, child care, nutritional assistance and other social services.

The nonprofit has never turned anyone away, despite growing demand and stretched resources. For those who need help, the agency is easy to find. A bus runs a regular route, offering free transportation from the jail's doorstep to the Hub's front door.

Part of the Oklahoma City Community Foundation's mission is to step in when there are opportunities to fulfill unmet needs in Central Oklahoma. The Diversion Hub was one of those opportunities. It has earned strong support from across the community, including judges, prosecutors, public defenders and even Oklahoma City voters, who approved construction of a new \$17 million Diversion Hub facility that was proposed under MAPS 4 in 2019.

We all understand there is a problem in Oklahoma's criminal justice system. Perhaps the Diversion Hub is part of the solution.

Nancy Anthony is president of the Oklahoma City Community Foundation. [www.OCCF.org](http://www.OCCF.org).

## RIGHT THINKING

## Right's corporate support eroding

It's easy these days for Republicans to feel beleaguered. Aside from losing the presidency and Congress, it feels like all of the power centers of society are arrayed against them.



ANDREW SPIROPOULOS

They already knew the press, Hollywood, most lawyers and Wall Street investment bankers, Silicon Valley and the universities are against them and have been for years. Their only solace was that their party, with few exceptions, was backed by the money and power of big corporations in legacy industries like energy, transportation, manufacturing and consumer goods.

But now, it appears, the GOP has lost the support of even these corporate titans. After some Republicans in Congress hesitated to affirm President Joe Biden's election victory, and party leaders in an increasing number of states decided to revise the voting laws in order, in their minds, to address potential abuses that threatened the integrity of the process, these corporate leaders turned on them and threatened to withdraw both campaign contributions from them personally and business from their states.

While once big business only wielded its political capital in defense of its particular interests

and assiduously kept clear of messy cultural conflicts, the managers of many of our largest corporations now think nothing of taking sides—always on the left—in our society's most divisive conflicts, especially those involving race, sexuality and religious freedom. Some of these companies have gone so far as to threaten economic retaliation against those state governments that dare to offend the pieties of "woke-ism."

Many conservatives are shocked by these developments, but they shouldn't be. Ever since the rot of political correctness hollowed out the humanities and social sciences departments of our most prominent universities, it was inevitable that the products of this intellectual sewer would bring their tendentious notions to their professions. You can never forget that most of the people who run these big corporate outfits are not entrepreneurs who made good, but university-educated managerial elites who were trained to implement the progressive dogmas they imbibed at school.

The good news is, while these people may be wealthy and culturally chic, they don't represent a lot of votes. Most middle and working-class Americans—as demonstrated by Republican near-parity in Congress and majority control in state legislatures—think America, despite our undeniable sins, has been predominantly a force for good and that, while we should purge those who abuse

their authority, most police officers nobly serve and protect our community. I don't know about you, but if I have to choose between joining a party dominated by patronizing progressive elites or one made up of small business people, blue-collar workers and religious families, I'm picking Door #2. And I'm not alone. Before this year, one poll showed 57% of Republicans were satisfied with big business. That number is now down to 31%.

Republican leaders worry about losing the corporate campaign cash they are used to relying upon, but it is evident that they can raise just as much or more money from individuals. In the past quarter, for example, Republican U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy raised a record \$27 million from 50,000 unique donors, as opposed to the previous year's \$22 million from 6,000 donors. It won't be much time before the institutional shareholders who really own these companies inform their hired hands that their companies need the politicians more than they need them.

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