

Why I am running as a Democrat in a Republican District?

During the past 6 years, Republicans have controlled the state legislature and the governor's office, starting with large majorities in the legislature in 2011 to supermajorities today. Oklahoma has suffered self-inflicted revenue failures the past two years, \$1.2 billion in 2016 and \$900 million in 2017. Teachers leaving our state. School districts resorting to four-day weeks. College becoming even more out of reach for middle class students. State Troopers parking their patrol cars because there are no funds available for fuel. Republicans have had ample opportunity to solve these problems, but instead have failed. Rather, they secretly paid \$44,500 in state funds to settle a sexual harassment complaint by a legislative assistant against a Tulsa Republican legislator, questioned the competency of the people over the SQ780 referendum, look for public property to erect a Ten Commandments monument (which makes sinners of those who mow their lawn on Saturday or carry coins in their pocket) as opposed to legislating with the Golden Rule or Beatitudes in mind (and who would object to posting these in school classrooms?). Moreover, multiple Republican resignations from sex scandals to moving to greener pastures have wasted Oklahoma taxpayer money for unnecessary special elections. And most unfortunately, it seems too many are intent on making Oklahoma a national and international laughingstock with incessant hate mongering over gays, Muslims, and Hispanic school children. Republican supermajorities have created a complacent, careless party in a state that needs an effective Republican Party as much as an effective Democratic Party. Tendencies triggered by one party rule are not in the best interests of Oklahoma any more than they are in other countries.

A word about ideology

When I was in seminary, too much discussion centered on whether one is identified as a fundamentalist, a conservative, an evangelical, a moderate conservative evangelical, and the like. As in religion, so also in politics, these labels, while not useless, are not very helpful either. Hiding behind a label is a convenient way to avoid stating exactly how to solve the problems facing our state. Labels, such as conservative or progressive, and even Republican or Democrat, are vague and leave too much room in which to deceive voters or wiggle out of voting for what is best for Oklahoma. Labels also prevent politicians from admitting when a policy has failed (despite the mounting evidence) because when so much emphasis is placed on labels, politicians have to maintain ideological purity in order to win the next election. Did passing Right to Work deliver the high paying, quality jobs promised? Did the lottery solve our education funding problem? Is refusing the federal dollars attached to Medicaid expansion in the best interests of Oklahomans? How does identifying oneself as a conservative on a campaign sign or website going to lead to the creation of quality jobs, increase the quality of education and prevent teachers from leaving our state, make college more affordable, and enable our neighbors to receive the healthcare we desire for ourselves? Those in government must believe government has the power to do good. After all, defeating fascism in WWII and then rebuilding war-ravished countries, including West Germany, with the Marshall Plan was something our government did. The moonshot and the internet were accomplished by the government as well. Yet, government can do much harm, as, for example, in Watergate, Iran-Contra, and invading Iraq over weapons of mass destruction. The same is true at the state and local level. Almost all of us were educated in public schools and are protected by our local police and fire departments. And just as government cannot force us to do our homework, lock our doors at night, or replace the batteries in our smoke

detectors, government still has a role making Oklahoma the best and most educated population in the U.S., Oklahomans the happiest people, our state the most beautiful, our infrastructure the most safe and efficient, our state the envy of our neighbors. Only then will companies here in Oklahoma flourish and out-of-state companies desire to move or expand here, bringing us the prosperity that will not only keep our best teachers in the state, but our highly educated and skilled children as well.

Public Education

Over the past 10 years, Oklahoma has cut education spending by 27% while the student population has increased by over 51,000. Oklahoma is 48th in the country in per pupil spending, and about 47th on teacher salaries. Teachers are leaving the state in record numbers. Not only must this trend stop, it must be reversed. Oklahoma teachers should earn the same salary as teachers in Texas. Yet, not all salaries or costs in common education should rise. Oklahoma public school principals should not earn twice the salary of their teachers. Compared with other states, Oklahoma spends a high percentage of its budget on district administration and a low percentage on instruction. It spends just above the national average on school administration. Likewise, administrative costs at our colleges and universities should not be significantly higher than the national average either.

Not surprisingly, 21st century jobs require more education than jobs of the past. At one time in the U.S. a high school diploma, the result of a public education system freely provided to students, was sufficient to enter the middle class. Today, a high school education is not sufficient. Today's employees need knowledge and skill beyond what is acquired in high school. And just as Oklahoma once provided enough free

education to enter the middle class, by the same token, today, that free education must include technological, college, or university training. As it stands, Oklahoma is last among all states in the amount of public funding to higher education. A happier, more prosperous Oklahoma awaits if we were to provide free of charge to our students the education needed for the jobs of today.

Civil Liberties

Tobacco and alcohol are responsible for over 500,000 deaths in the U.S. each year, yet marijuana, which has no known case of a deadly overdose, is illegal in Oklahoma. Even caffeine, which is added to many products and is sold over the counter, is associated with fatal overdoses. Moreover, about 20,000 Americans die each year from accidental overdoses of prescription medications, which treat some conditions that marijuana could much more safely treat. Like most Oklahomans, I do not want my kids to smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, and I also do not want them to smoke marijuana. But for some medical conditions, marijuana is an effective treatment and one that can be produced cheaply at home. So while marijuana use/abuse may not be harmless, it should be treated either as a public health problem or issue, not a criminal issue. Let's take some of the money we spend on enforcement and redirect it into education and treatment.

Our current marijuana drug law is wrongheaded for a host of reasons. First, the core principle of the Bill of Rights is the right of the people to be left alone by the government. Marijuana laws permit the government to harass, detain, search, arrest, and imprison otherwise law-abiding Oklahomans. Second, marijuana law enforcement is expensive. A recent study found that enforcement costs American taxpayers \$7.6 billion annually. Three, enforcement is racially biased. African Americans are 3.77 times more likely to be arrested for possession even

though studies show that blacks and whites use marijuana in roughly equal percentages. Fourth, a misdemeanor, much less a felony, marijuana possession will make gainful employment less likely. According to Nazgol Ghandnoosh, a research analyst at the Sentencing Project, a marijuana conviction “sends people down a route that limits their life chances and sets up conditions that can lead them to commit additional crime. It makes it hard for people to have stability in their life. It’s not good crime policy and it doesn’t help to promote public safety.”

Fifth, allow me to illustrate a situation from my experience as a Tulsa County juror. Several years back, I spent three days on a jury hearing a case where the defendant was indicted for drug possession and intent to distribute. Once we, the jury, began deliberations, we quickly found the intent to distribute charge unfounded and a troubling abuse of prosecutorial discretion. But we did find the defendant guilty of possession, since he had about $\frac{1}{3}$ of a thimble full of marijuana (yes, $\frac{1}{3}$ of a thimble!). Because this was the defendant’s second marijuana possession conviction, the state sentencing guidelines the judge gave to the jury were 2-10 years. We deliberated the sentence from 6pm to midnight, finally compromising with a four year prison sentence. The problem that haunts me to this day is that the defendant was the sole parent of two elementary age children. So, sending this man to prison essentially meant taking a father away from two young children. Since then, I have wondered the true social cost of a policy that separates a father from his two young children. I wondered who was caring for these kids, how they were doing in school without a father or mother around to provide guidance, help with homework, motivation to study, or advice for dealing with problems at school or in the neighborhood. How does one calculate the true cost to society when two children grow up without a parent? Once SQ780 is implemented, Oklahoma will reap several million dollars in savings each year. If Oklahoma legalizes marijuana, Oklahoma taxpayers would be spared even more from enforcement and prosecution costs.

Civil asset forfeiture is a clear violation of the 4th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and will one day be regarded as such by the U.S. Supreme Court. Civil asset forfeiture is wrong and Oklahoma should get on the right side of the Constitution and of history by abolishing civil asset forfeiture before the U.S. government forces Oklahoma to do so.

Rebuild Crumbling Infrastructure

Oklahoma's infrastructure was given a C- in the latest report card: <https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/state-item/oklahoma/>. We can do better. We can pay for the damage caused to our vehicles and property or we can pay to repair our roads and bridges, but either way, we are going to pay. A modest increase in the motor fuel tax would pay this cost, and would also provide for good paying jobs for Oklahomans, a necessity since our unemployment rate is above the national average.

Taxes

Taxing groceries is unethical since food is necessary for survival. Our Founding Fathers, who so vociferously objected to taxes on tea that they destroyed \$1 million in private property, would find taxes on groceries far more objectionable. Sales taxes are by nature regressive and unduly burden poorer Oklahomans. For this reason, I propose cutting the state portion of the sales tax by 33%, revenue that would have to be made up

by increasing taxes in other areas. Motor fuel taxes are similar to sales taxes, but I propose increasing them incrementally over time. Lower and higher income Oklahomans can choose vehicles based on their gas mileage performance, and therefore can choose whether they want to pay more or less in motor fuel taxes. Motor fuel taxes, much like cigarette taxes, are used to incentivize behavior that benefits all Oklahomans. Just as decreasing tobacco use benefits all Oklahomans, so also will decreasing fuel consumption. Otherwise, income taxes should return to 2007 rates, back when Oklahoma's unemployment rate was less than the national average. Gross production tax rates should return to 2007 levels as well, and rate incentives for horizontal drilling should be ended. Over the past two years, oil and gas companies, along with their trade groups, have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign donations to state lawmakers, effectively buying higher profits at the expense of all Oklahomans. Common sense, not campaign cash, should determine what policy is in the best interests of all Oklahomans.

Tax incentives to profitable businesses, such as Goodyear and Michelin at tens of millions per year, should be ended. Every tax incentive program should be scrutinized to determine whether it benefits all Oklahomans. For example, the tax incentive program for aerospace engineers costs Oklahoma \$4 million per year.

Family Values

Oklahoma families will benefit if the state would accept the federal dollars attached to the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. As it is, federal money that lower-income Oklahomans could use for health care is going to other states. In other words, money that

Oklahomans are paying in federal income taxes is being sent to other states because our state government is refusing to accept Medicaid expansion. Healthcare should be considered a right, not a privilege. Though imperfect, the ACA moves the country in this direction. The United States, as the wealthiest country in the world, should provide for its citizens the necessary health care that all other Western democracies recognize as a proper function of government. At the very least, we Oklahomans should provide healthcare for every child in the state--despite the success of SCHIP, about 80,000 Oklahoma children do not have health insurance. As children, we cannot choose our parents (and the wealth, income, and love that goes with parenting), and so it our fundamental moral obligation to ensure that every Oklahoma child receives the health care he or she needs regardless of that child's parents' ability to pay for it.

On the issue of benefits, such as paid family and maternity leave, we all recognize the necessity of occasionally taking off work to care for a sick family member or a newborn infant. It is in the interests of a well-functioning and happy society that family members take care of each other. However, not every Oklahoman has the leverage or collective bargaining apparatus to negotiate these employee benefits. And not every Oklahoman can afford to take time off work without pay to provide such care. As a teacher, I am entitled to eight paid days off work to care for a sick member member or to care for myself. Teachers are normally given six weeks paid maternity leave. These benefits are what civilized and caring societies provide. These benefits make life, which is exceeding difficult at times, bearable. These are benefits that I expect from my employer, but I expect them not because I am important or especially valuable, but because I am a human being.

Reducing Big Government

First, Oklahoma's bicameral legislature--having two houses of Congress instead of one house--costs Oklahomans \$15 million each year. I find no justification for having two houses of Congress do what one house could do just as well and more efficiently. State congresses should not be based on the model of the national legislature because the national government is federal, while the state governments are unitary. What that means is that the U.S. Constitution sets up Congress to represent the people of the states in the House and the state governments in the Senate. State congresses have no need to represent the people in one house and then, say, the county or city governments in another, which Oklahoma doesn't even attempt to do anyway.

Second, the Lieutenant Governor is the president of the Oklahoma Senate. Without a senate, there is no need for the Lieutenant Government. Eliminating this office will save Oklahomans \$400,000 per year. The Speaker of the House can be next in line to the governor in case that office is vacated.

Third, members of Congress work only about three months per year, yet earn \$6,000 per year more than a first-year teacher. The salary ratio of legislators to teachers should reflect the amount of work each one does and the relative contribution to making a better future for Oklahomans.

Fourth, Claremore has two state supported museums, the Will Rogers Museum and the J.M. Davis Memorial Museum. Nothing against these museums or the City of Claremore, but Broken Arrow does not have any state supported museums. If the public finds these museums beneficial, then Claremore, not Broken Arrow and the rest of the state, should fund them. Eliminating this state funding will save Oklahomans \$855,000 per year.

Fifth, the state militia costs Oklahomans \$10 million per year, though it is mostly funded by federal dollars. State militias, as they existed in the 18th century and as allowed by the U.S. Constitution, are anachronistic today. Once upon a time, Americans were much more prone to use violence to achieve political ends (for example, Bacon's Rebellion, Shays's Rebellion, Paxton Boys, North Carolina Regulators, Boston Tea Party, and the hundreds or thousands of cases of assault against intransigent Loyalists in the Revolutionary War period). Considering that local law enforcement was virtually non-existent, governors relied on militias to control violent uprisings of the people--a primary reason why the Americans abolished the Articles of Confederation in favor of the U.S. Constitution in 1788, which created a much more powerful government. Governors also used militias to put down slave rebellions, another, though much less palatable, justification for allowing state militias. Today, local and state law enforcement has enough officers to handle an occasional and minor uprising of the people, and the governor still has the option to call the president for assistance. Sometimes, though rarely, the militia is called out to help state and local government in response to a natural disaster. Flying fighter jets and aiming artillery have nothing to do with disaster relief, and so I would prefer funding disaster relief teams in place of a militia at significantly less cost to Oklahoma taxpayers. Transferring some or all of this money to Veterans Affairs could be used to address the wait time veterans suffer to receive health care. The very least we can do for our veterans is to keep our promises to them and provide them with quality and timely health care.

The Oklahoma Incentive Evaluation Commission provides a \$5 million subsidy for Hollywood to produce films in our state. This subsidy should be ended before its sunset date in 2024. This subsidy does not seem to produce any significant economic impact beyond what would normally occur without it.

Animal Welfare

Using steel leg-hold traps as a means to capture fur-bearing animals is a most cruel and inhumane practice, akin to medieval torture used during the Inquisition. No Oklahoman would use a steel leg-hold trap on their cat or dog simply because no person in their right mind would intentionally inflict pain and suffering on beloved pets. Wild animals are no less immune from such pain and suffering and should be given the same compassion we all recognize as rightly due to our pets. Some Oklahomans do not want to fund with their tax dollars practices that they find morally repugnant, and so, specifically, some Oklahoma taxpayers object to their taxes being used to fund the killing of coyotes and other predator species. Such a practice should not be funded with taxpayer money.

Hunting is an Oklahoma tradition, but sport shooting of inedible animals, such as crows, bobcats, and coyotes, is not or should not be a part of that tradition, and thus, should be ended.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that the living sometimes depend on the exploitation and death of other creatures to sustain their own life. Given that humans consume animal products, a compassionate and civilized society should ensure that animal exploitation and death should be as humane as possible. To that end, Oklahoma should ban the use of battery cages in chicken farm operations and of gestation crates on pig farms. Google these, view the pictures and watch the videos, and I think you will agree

Guns

Common sense dictates that a criminal background check should be performed on every person who wants to buy a gun as a condition of that sale. Reasonable people should agree that violent criminals should not own a gun, a device that makes killing extremely easy and efficient--this is why the military and law enforcement use them. A criminal background check does not violate the Constitution and is not a step in the direction of a government confiscation of guns.

Moreover, possession of high-capacity magazines should be banned, just as automatic weapons, silencers, and explosives are banned. Citizens do not need 100 round canisters to hunt deer or to protect their families from harm. However, 100 round canisters and other high capacity magazines make mass killings, such as we have seen in Columbine, Aurora, Newtown, and Orlando all too easy. Banning such devices is a reasonable protection a society should take to protect its citizens.

Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering is a technique used by the state congress to help get members re-elected. Essentially, gerrymandering enables legislators to pick who votes for them rather than allowing the voters to pick their legislators. Gerrymandering is fundamentally unfair and therefore should be abolished. District boundary lines should be decided by an independent commission, composed by people such as judges. If partisanship cannot be eliminated, then multi-member districts should be

contemplated as a solution (essentially combining two districts and sending to congress the top two voter-getters).

Personal Responsibility

Drunk drivers kill innocent people. First time offenders should be strongly punished. Second time drunk driving offenders should forfeit ownership of their car to the state, which could provide a source of money for victim's compensation.

One in every four Oklahoma drivers do not have the required automobile insurance, and is a primary reason why Oklahoma insurance rates are high. Moreover, uninsured motorist coverage does not cover damage to property in case of an accident, so besides increasing penalties for those who behave irresponsibly, we need to change the law to allow coverage for property damage.

Sustainable and Thriving Environment

Our best scientists (who we already employ at OU and OSU), not politicians, should guide state policy determining how best to protect our natural environment for our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and all future residents of Oklahoma. Previous generations of Oklahomans left us with the environmental disaster in Pitcher/Cardin, over 15,000 abandoned oil wells, and very little left of the short and tall

grass prairie. Let us leave the environment to the next generation in better condition than we received it.

Investing in renewable energy is one obvious way to protect our environment and our health. Just as government aided the automotive and oil and gas industries 100 years ago by building paved roads for smooth travel and 60 years ago by building the Interstate Highway System, so also government can assist with the purchase of solar panels (preferably from an Oklahoma manufacturer) for our roof tops and electric vehicles for our commutes to work, at least until such time market forces bring down the cost of solar panels and electric cars to where they are affordable to the broad middle class. And with Oklahoma seemingly floating on natural gas, it makes sense to convert the remaining coal-fired electricity generating plants to natural gas. The Wyoming coal that we import is especially dirty, so cleaner burning natural gas is a better option in Oklahoma. But as we transition away from carbon-based fuel sources over the long term, Oklahoma should continue to encourage electricity generation from wind.

Minimum Wage

No one who works full time should live in poverty, and thus the state should increase the minimum wage to \$10.75 per hour, or to what an expert commission would agree is a liveable wage in Oklahoma given our cost of living. The Oklahoma minimum wage, as a percent of the average wage, is substantially less than it was 50 years ago. Moreover, wages have not kept up with increased productivity over the same period. Increasing the minimum wage to \$10.75 would place it at 41% of

the average wage, not quite the 54% high it reached 50 years ago, but higher than the 24% the minimum wage is today. With 11% of Oklahoma's workforce on SNAP ("food stamps"), Oklahoma taxpayers are effectively subsidizing companies that do not pay a living wage to their employees. Moreover, reducing poverty would have many and profound ripple effects in other areas of life, all to the benefit of Oklahoma taxpayers.

Annoyances

Commercial speech is not protected by the First Amendment. Just as we banned TV advertisements for tobacco products, so we should ban pharmaceutical ads. Why? Patients do not need to see advertisements on such products because one needs a physician's prescription to purchase that medication. In other words, physicians should determine what prescription medications patients need, not the patients. Eliminating the incessant pharmaceutical advertising competition on the most expensive medium will result in cheaper drugs for all of society. As it is, the U.S. spends twice as much on healthcare per person per year as do Europeans, though we have worse outcomes. The pharmaceutical industry spends an outsized cost comparatively speaking on advertisements and lobbying, and while lobbying is currently protected speech, advertisements are not. Decreasing the cost of healthcare (and thus health insurance) is in the interests of all of us, and this is a good step in that direction.

Another annoyance is tractor-trailers running side by side on a four lane highway, backing up traffic because these trucks cannot maintain the speed limit every time they try to muster up a slight incline. Tractor trailers should be limited to the right most lane only and should have a slower speed limit as well. It is annoying enough that we in Broken Arrow have to pay tolls just about every time we leave town, a law requiring tractor trailers to stay in the right most lane will make travelling much less frustrating.

