

WEST OK WEEKLY



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City of Cordell to Host Fourth of July Hometown Celebration

Cordell's Chamber of Commerce and the Cordell Fire Department is hard at work and excited to present Cordell's 4th of July Hometown Celebration, taking place on July 2nd. Beginning at 3 pm, swing out to Lee Park for food trucks, vendors, jump houses, and contests! At dark, head over for the "Red, White and BOOM" Fireworks show at Gregory Ball Park put on by the Fire Department.

The day kicks off at 3 pm with the All American Boy and Girl Contest under the pavilion. The contest, sponsored by Hillbilly Fireworks of Cordell, will award 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners with a trophy in both the Boy and Girl competitions, and the 1st place girl and 1st place boy will receive a crown!

Then, the jump houses will open at 4 pm with unlimited jumping wristbands (wristbands for

the jump houses are \$10)! At 5pm, the Backyard Cornhole Tournament begins where teams of 2 will compete for ultimate bragging rights! Registration for the cornhole tournament is closed, but there is still opportunity to come out and cheer on competitors!

The City of Cordell and the Cordell City Council is proud to sponsor a fun Independence celebration.

Heartland of America Museum Dedicating Veteran's Memorial July 2nd

Take time to visit the Heartland of America Museum this Independence Day weekend as the museum hosts a Veteran's Memorial Dedication with a Salute to Veterans and ceremony for the recent restoration of a Bell UH-1 Iroquois helicopter, nicknamed "Huey." The UH-1 Iroquois utility military helicopter was the first member of the iconic Huey Family and was designed to assist in medical evacuation and utility. The UH-1 became the first turbine-powered helicopter for U.S. military and first flew in 1956.

The celebration begins on Saturday, July 2nd, from 12pm - 6 pm. The Veteran's Memorial Dedication will take place at 5pm. During the dedication, more than 25 Vietnam veterans who flew in this helicopter are expected to attend. Admission is \$5, SWOSU's Code Blue will provide music, and a meal will be provided by the Bar B Que Shed. This specific Huey belonged to the Oklahoma Army National Guard and

flew in missions in Vietnam.

Developed by Bell Helicopter Textron, Inc. and according to a pocket military guide published in 2006 that covered the history, operation, and impact of the UH-1 series of helicopters, "the UH-1 family of helicopters are the most successful military helicopters every produced." Commissioned by the U.S. Department of Defense and developed for the Marine Corps, the Huey helicopters were state-of-the-art, leaders in aero-superiority, and are still in service in nations around the world. Its success came after identifying that the current helicopters were too sluggish, large, and dangerous to operate in highly active zones. With the intent to fix those shortcomings, the Model 204 was born. Its bleeding edge avionics, turbine-powered engine, and suite of electronics were unmatched, and after rigorous test flights, a contract for 100 more aircraft was signed.

At the time, the Model 204 was designated

"HU-1A" and nicknamed Iroquois after the Native American nations. Due to its HU-1A designation and pronunciation, "Huey" quickly became the most popular reference name. As production units and new variants were in development, the manufacturer Bell even began casting the name into the helicopter pedals. In September of 1962, all models were officially designated with UH-1, but the "Huey" nickname stuck.

As it began its debut in various operations and Vietnam in particular, the UH-1 family went through several upgrades and specialized models. It spawned an impressive list of variants used for troop and cargo transport, med evac, and aerial attacks, and over 16,000 units were produced between 1955 and 1976, with 7,000 used in Vietnam. The Hueys became an iconic image during the Vietnam War after press released photos of U.S. troops, disembarking

(See Heartland, page 2)

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Store Drawings/Giveaways
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Corene Cabaniss

Corene Cabaniss, 79, of Clinton went to be with her Heavenly Father Wednesday, June 22, 2022 in St. Anthony Hospital, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



Corene was born April 6, 1943, to Jim and Lois Dix in Pittsburg, Oklahoma.

She was the youngest of three children; Jimmy and Hazel. She grew up in and attended school in Pittsburg, Oklahoma. She and her family moved to Clinton where she attended Clinton Public School in the Class of 1960.

She met Jon Cabaniss, a best friend of her brother & cousin. Corene and Jon were united in marriage June 6, 1966, in Lawton, Oklahoma. Jon became

self employed as a telecommunications contractor and worked all over the United States, and they traveled extensively. She was content as a housewife and mother. She was a wonderful cook, canning vegetables and the best wild plum jelly. She enjoyed gardening and spending time with friends and family. She loved reading and studying her bible and made sure her kids knew the Lord. She was baptized April 26, 1975, along with her son Steve and daughter Cathy at the First Christian Church in Clinton. She was a wonderful mother to Steve, Cathy, Cindy, and Jason.

Her family will never forget her love and how she made each one of us feel special.

She was preceded in death by her husband Jon B. Cabaniss. Her parents Jim and Lois Dix. Brother Jimmy Dix, and mother-in-law Zella Mae Cabaniss.

Those left to live her legacy are Jason Cabaniss of Clinton, Steve Cabaniss of Clinton, Cindy and Jody Savoie of Clinton, Cathy and Rick Woodard

of Leedey, Oklahoma, Jeff and Susan Cabaniss of Marston, Missouri, sister Hazel McGregor of Pauls Valley, OK, sister-in-law Avis Dix of Edmond, OK, brothers and sisters-in-law Wesley and Kay Cabaniss of Clinton, Linda and Ed Berrong of Weatherford, OK

Grand Children, Christopher and Tabatha Cabaniss of Pocasset, Oklahoma, Jennifer, and Jeff Mayjoffo, of Altus, Oklahoma, Ryanne Woodard of Sweetwater, Oklahoma, Randi and Chris Reyes, of Elgin, Oklahoma, Jaylynn and Doug Strubel, of Marston, Missouri, and grandsons T. J. Savoie, Caleb Savoie, and Nathan Savoie of Clinton.

Great Grand Children, Damion Cabaniss, Dominic Cabaniss, Abbie Cabaniss, all of Pocasset, Oklahoma, Kaden, and Kennedi Mayjoffo both of Altus, Oklahoma. Rozzi Strubel, of Marston, Missouri. One very special Cousin Rev. Johnny and Billie Cooper, of Sulphur Springs, Texas, many nieces, nephews, and friends.

Heartland

Continued from Page 1 from one. "Hueys have served with all branches of the U.S. military, as well as multiple U.S. government agencies and at least 48 foreign countries." (Museum of Flight). They've also been used in civilian applications and have fulfilled roles in firefighting, humanitarian aid, research operations, and search-and-rescue. NASA even utilized a model that supported Space Shuttle operations at Kennedy Space Center.

The Heartland of America Museum's complete restoration will include a kiosk of information near the base of the Huey that details its history and Vietnam service.



Provided Troops jump from a "Slick," term used for early unarmed Hueys, much like the Huey recently installed at the Heartland Museum in Weatherford, OK. The next variants would include gunships that could cover troops and defend during evacuations.

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SCAN ME

OSDE Investigation of Epic Reveals Millions in Misallotted Public Funds



An extensive investigation into Epic Charter Schools by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) has uncovered significant problems, including dubious attendance data that may have resulted in \$780,000 in improperly obtained state funds and the improper disbursement of more than \$8.5 million in bonuses to school administrators. The investigation was prompted by a complaint made against Epic in December 2021 by a former member of Epic's governing board, Community Strategies Inc. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister said she will recommend in the coming weeks that the State Board of Education place the virtual charter on probation and require it to undergo comprehensive corrective action. Findings in the OSDE report will also be shared with law enforcement to determine if further action is warranted.

While the OSDE could not substantiate some complaints made by the former Community Strategies board member, the investigation revealed serious problems in governance, enrollment and attendance reporting, and improper, unapproved and excessive payments to administrative staff.

Concerns raised in this probe are in addition to those highlighted by State Auditor and Inspector Cindy Byrd in a 2020 audit of Epic. That state audit, requested by Gov. Stitt and Superintendent Hofmeister, found widespread evidence of fraud and mismanagement that resulted in the State Board of Education recouping more than \$9 million and the OSDE assessing more than \$10 million in fines to Epic.

Moreover, the historic lack of oversight, deceptive practices and mismanagement of taxpayer funds led to the OSDE recommending that Epic's accreditation status be adjusted to "Accredited with Probation." Although the State Board ultimately rejected Hofmeister's recommendation to put Epic on probation at that time, the OSDE demanded in late 2020 that Community Strategies take corrective

action across more than 15 areas of noncompliance. In response, Community Strategies proceeded with extensive reforms that included cutting ties with Epic's founders and assurance that the virtual charter's governing board would provide strong oversight.

But Hofmeister said the OSDE investigation found that major problems persist.

"It is clear that serious challenges remain. For the sake of the thousands of Oklahoma families and students who depend on Epic, it is critical that things be made right," she said. "The OSDE investigative report starkly illustrates that Community Strategies and Epic must focus on developing and improving processes and procedures that are efficient, transparent and follow the letter of the law. The students of Epic deserve an excellent education and the taxpayers of Oklahoma need Epic to fully comply with the law."

Among the most alarming issues are those involving enrollment and attendance procedures. Accurate attendance reporting is not a new problem for Epic. Prior to 2018, the virtual charter reported 100 percent attendance for all its students. In response, the state Legislature passed a law in 2018 requiring statewide virtual charter schools to adopt attendance policies under legislatively established guidelines. That was followed by a law in 2020 mandating that a virtual charter student who does not complete an instructional activity in a 15-consecutive-day period must be withdrawn from the school. Once a student is dropped from the rolls, the district no longer receives funding for that student.

The OSDE's examination of Epic's student attendance data revealed troubling patterns of students being absent 14 consecutive days, "present" for the 15th day and then absent for another 14 consecutive days. In the 2020-21 school year, there were 6,720 instances of this 14-1-14 pattern among 4,819 unique students. By contrast, there were no instances of this 14-1-14 phenomenon in the two prior school years.

According to Epic, an algorithm was created as a result of the change in law, so that student instructional activities are allocated across a period of time even though the student may not have completed any instructional activity on the day marked present. "With the vast number of students with the 14-1-14 pattern, it appears Epic may have intentionally designed the algorithm in such a way that a large number of students were never absent on the 15th day, were not dropped from enrollment and Epic continued to receive funds for these students," stated the OSDE report.

OSDE investigators requested the coding of the

algorithm used in Epic's student information system to record student attendance, but Epic could offer only limited information, claiming the full code and algorithm are the product of a third-party vendor.

"No one at the district could explain how a specific student's record of completed instructional activities would be converted into the student's attendance records after being run through the algorithm – it is a 'black box,'" wrote OSDE investigators.

Consequently, the OSDE does not have sufficient information to verify whether the bizarre attendance patterns are an intentional skirting of the law, a coincidence or inconsistency. While Epic officials could not explain the algorithm and coding attributed to a third-party vendor, the OSDE lacks the authority to issue subpoenas for that material. For this reason, the OSDE intends to provide the information it has gleaned to law enforcement agencies able to conduct a more thorough review.

In addition to the aforementioned 2020 law, regulations prohibit a school from counting a student on its enrollment records until the student is physically present at school or, in the case of a virtual charter, when the student completes an instructional activity. Statute defines what may count as an instructional activity. As is the case with the truancy process, the OSDE discovered similar inconsistencies in Epic's enrollment data.

The OSDE identified 4,569 Epic students in the 2020-21 school year who were marked absent (no instructional activity completed) on their first date enrolled. For these students, there were on average 8.5

(See Investigation, page 7)

"The Coin Guy" Canadian platinum coin sells for \$1.2 million



The Royal Canadian (RCM) mint has produced a proof platinum coin weighing more than one kilo (2.2 lbs). It is encrusted with 462 pink diamonds which are placed on it by hand. Its name is "The Ultimate" and has a face value of \$2,500 Canadian dollars (\$1,923.80 US).

The RCM is offering this coin as part of its series known as 'Opulence' (great wealth or luxuriousness) as a new collection of elite high-value pieces which started in 2022.

Queen Elizabeth II adorns the obverse with a pattern of cherry blossoms while the edge is serrated. It had a pre-auction estimate of \$700,000 to \$900,000 Canadian dollars (\$538,762.00 to \$692,694.00). It sold for \$1,261,250 Canadian (\$970,935.48 US) on May 31.

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Vlasic Relish Sweet or Dill 10oz.....	\$1.29	Jimmy Dean Sausage Biscuits 20 ct.....	\$9.99
Vlasic Hamburger Dill Chips 32oz.....	2 for \$5.00	Food Club Crinkle Cut 80oz.....	\$5.99
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Griffin Mustard 20oz.....	\$0.99	Oscar Mayer Hot Dogs.....	2 for \$6.00
Food Club Ketchup 38oz.....	2 for \$3.00	Eckrich Smoked Sausage All Varieties 13-16oz.....	\$3.99
Leals Tortilla Chips All Varieties.....	\$2.99	Boneless Skinless Chicken Breast.....	\$3.19 lb.
Gatorade 28oz All Varieties.....	2 for \$3.00	Boneless Ribeye Steak.....	\$14.99 lb.
Food Club Tomatoes and Green Chilis 10oz All Varieties....	\$0.79	Trimmed Brisket.....	\$4.99 lb.
Food Club Potato Chips All Varieties.....	\$1.88	J.C. Potter Sausage 16oz pkg.....	\$3.99
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The Clinton Chamber of Commerce hosted a legislative forum last week at the Frisco Community Center. Julie Strong moderated the event, which included candidates for District 1 Custer County Commissioner (Wade Anders, Jeremiah Trent, and David Fawver), District 26 State Senator (Darcy Jech, Brady Butler, and J.J. Stitt), and District 57 State Representative (Anthony Moore and Kristen Kelley Poisson).

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The Connections Food & Resource Center have named their four "Volunteers of the Month." Pictured, from left: Shirley Davison, Nathaniel Davison, Kathy Stalion, & Edward Moreno

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OCPA/DISMISSAL SOUGHT – Four employees of the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs have asked for the immediate dismissal of protective-order petitions, filed against them by the spouse of State Representative Anthony Moore of Clinton, saying the petitions fail to meet the requirements needed for a valid protective order. Spokesman Trent England says none of the OCPA staff have ever had any contact with representative Moore's spouse by text or in any other way. Following an internal investigation, OCPA determined that one staff member, a former long-time resident of Western Oklahoma, did send representative Moore two text messages in her personal capacity. Those messages are said to not have been in a threatening nature and related to concerns about representative Moore's behavior as a legislator.

BURNS FLAT/NEW CHIEF – The town of Burns Flat has a new Chief of Police. Administrator Joel Newberry says Keith Smith started last week. Chief Smith began his career in law enforcement in 2002. He has been with the Beckham county sheriff's office and was chief of the Hammon Police Department. Smith succeeds Doug Yates who went to work for the Beckham County Sheriff's Office.

BUTLER/WATER RESCUE – First respondents worked to rescue a man from a capsized boat on Panther Creek. Butler Fire Chief Jay Baker says volunteers were able to use a boat to reach the area where they last saw the man flashing a light at them. They were able to find the man when they heard his voice and were able to get him back on land safely.

CLINTON SCHOOLS/HS PROJECT – Clinton Schools Superintendent Tyler Bridges says the high school will be back to normal operation when school starts back up this Fall after work has been completed to repair water damage from a busted fire suppression line. Bridges says the water damage affected, among other things, 14 classrooms and the high school library. The district had to get portable classrooms to finish out the school year, following spring break.

CLINTON SCHOOLS/FUEL – As the price of fuel continues to increase, Clinton Schools Superintendent Tyler Bridges says he expects the rising cost of fuel to financially impact the district this coming school year. Bridges says the district has 18 buses that service the school district. He says despite not knowing how high fuel prices may go, he does not anticipate the cost of fuel to impact student activities.

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Happy Birthday Wishes for June 29th – Al Chapa, Chrystie George, Chris Ladd, Gena McCullough, Michelle Russell, Jim Scruggs, Taylor Smith, Tyrone Turner; **June 30th** – Verla Brice, Glynn Cobb, Tatum Duncan, Lindsey Edwards, Dwayne Graybill, Joe McPhearson, Michaela Roulet, Brian Settles, Stephanie Strong, Cole Thomason; **July 1st** – Chelsie Austin, Billy Cling, JoJo Hardage, Jackie Helt, Debbie Kaufman, Katie Kennemer, Max McKinsey, Stephanie Peck, Bev Swaney, Dr. Paul Tisdale; **July 2nd** – Leticia Contreras, Jaqueatta Cummings, Taylor Exinia, Lois Griffin, Lois Heinrichs, Rachel Lundstrom, Mary Beth Mendez, Michael Perez, Myron Webb; **July 3rd** – Ellen Arnold, Taylor Carder, Cameron Hines, Ryan Merrill; **July 4th** – Alicia Allen, Cheryl Bell, Riley Bryson, D'Arshi Christensen, DeWayne Crawley, Anita Fransen, Mary Lou Kaiser, Jenna Maddox, Haley Merrill, Kristine Moreno, Danny Rhodes; **July 5th** – Alecia DePasa, Renae McGregor, Milburn Outhier, Dana VanHuss

SPORTS *Presented by:*

SWOSU Volleyball Adds Three Transfers & Prep Standout

Jon Chidester
SWOSU Assistant AD/Media Relations

SWOSU Volleyball Coach Josh Collins has announced the addition of four players to the Bulldogs roster for the 2022 season, all of whom come to Weatherford with a substantial amount of high-level volleyball playing experience.

Included in the new signings are one junior college transfer, two NCAA Division I transfers and an Oklahoma High School standout.

“After graduating five key players in 2021, we knew we had big shoes to fill,” Collins said. “These four have all competed and produced in premier volleyball programs. We have no doubts that they will do the same here at SWOSU.”

Joining the Bulldogs are NCAA Division I transfers, Carmen Kinsey and Taylor Henderson. Kinsey spent the past four years playing the outside and right-side hitter positions at Tarleton State University. Henderson, a 6-foot middle hitter, transfers to SWOSU from the University of Incarnate Word after a two-year career at Blinn Junior College. Both, Kinsey and Henderson have one season of eligibility remaining. Rounding out the incoming transfers is Cowley College defensive specialist, Erin Thompson. Thompson led the Tigers to a 2021 NJCAA National Runner-Up finish from the libero position. The lone freshman joining the Bulldog roster in 2022 is Cameron Turner. Cameron had a stellar career at Deer Creek High School in Edmond, and with one of the premier club programs in the country, Oklahoma Peak Performance.

“With this class, we feel like we have recruited athleticism and skill that will better our team in all aspects of the game,” Collins said. “We also add valuable, high-level on-court experience that is sure to bring out the best in our returning players. Each of these young ladies bring a great deal of character and leadership qualities to our program. We hold our players to a high standard, and we are confident that these four will see that bar and raise it. We couldn’t be more proud to welcome them to the Bulldog Family!”

Collins enters his eleventh season as the head coach of SWOSU Volleyball in 2022 and he welcomes back a veteran squad with 10 players returning from last season.



#1 Cameron Turner – 5’ 10” Freshman Setter
“Cameron may be the lone freshman on this year’s squad, but she is anything but unexperienced. She has received some of the best coaching the state has to offer and has played the highest of level of club-ball for her entire career. Her volleyball IQ is special. She knows exactly who needs the ball and when they need it. She also adds size to the setter position giving her the ability to be a dominating block. As impressive as Cameron is on the court, she is just as impressive in the classroom and in the community. She brings a plethora of accolades with her from high school, including being the Deer Creek Valedictorian. We can’t wait to see her succeed on the Hilltop!”



#2 Taylor Henderson – 6’ 0” Senior Middle Hitter
“We were lucky enough to have Taylor transfer at semester. So, we got a thorough glimpse of what she brings to the middle hitter position this spring. She is very athletic and explosive. She has a true knack for blocking and reads the game at a very fast pace. Her high-level experience at Incarnate Word and Blinn give her the ability to display a quiet confidence that is contagious on the court. She fits our program perfectly and it seems like she has been a DAWG for her entire career.”



#5 Erin Thompson – 5’ 4” Sophomore Libero
“Erin joins us from one of the top junior college programs in the country, Cowley College. She received excellent coaching there, but also excellent leadership training. Erin is a quick and relentless defender. Her understanding of the game puts her in all the right places to get digs. She is also a skilled serve-receiver. Perhaps what stands out most about Erin is her infectious positive energy. She truly loves playing the game and it shows. We are stoked to add her to Bulldog Nation.”



#12 Carmen Kinsey – 5’ 11” Graduate Senior Outside Hitter
“We are so excited to welcome Carmen back to the Sooner State for her final season of eligibility. She gained a great deal of experience playing in the WAC at Tarleton State. Carmen is a versatile hitter that has a ton of range. She knows when to get kills with power and when to rely on finesse. Carmen is also a gifted passer who will strengthen our serve receive. We are excited about the leadership she will bring to the program, and we know that she will make SWOSU proud on and off of the court.”



As the Summer Little League season continues, we at Wright Media would like to wish both the Baseball and Softball teams of Weatherford, OK luck in their remaining games. Pictured left are the Weatherford Eagles' 10U Softball team. Pictured right are the Weatherford Coach's Pitch team, the Bad News Bears.

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Investigation

Continued from Page 3

days between the first day of enrollment and the date when the student was first marked as completing an instructional activity. In total, Epic certified data that added 39,045 days of membership that – according to its own certified enrollment and attendance data – should not have been counted. This results in approximately \$780,000 of state funds being misallocated to Epic. It is worth noting that this amount merely reflects what the OSDE found investigating a single data-reporting pattern in a given school year; it is possible additional reporting problems exist in other school years.

Related issues found include:

From the 2019-20 school year to the 2020-21 school year, total absences increased from 18,275 to 647,624 (a 3,443.8 percent increase).

For the 2020-21 school year, nearly 9 percent of all students enrolled in Epic (6,436 students) were absent more than half of the time they were enrolled. Almost 5 percent (3,399) were absent more than 75 percent of the time they were enrolled.

OSDE investigators were able to confirm the concerns of a former Epic internal auditor who had discovered questionable treatment of public funds, specifically “extremely large and unapproved bonuses that exceeded employee contracts without board approval” and in “clear violation of board policy that expressly requires the proration of bonuses for partial-year employees.”

Perhaps the most glaring alleged illegality involves bonus payments that Epic made to administrators

on June 7, 2021. No evidence exists that more than \$8.5 million in bonuses were approved by Epic’s governing board, as required by state law. According to senior leaders at Epic, it was believed that the superintendent had the authority to approve and order the bonus payments. Subsequently, three members of Epic’s staff (including the superintendent) determined bonus amounts and directed they be paid. In addition to being a violation of state law, this act was directly contrary a resolution that Community Strategies had adopted less than a year earlier requiring the school to present and garner approval from the governing board for all financial transactions.

In addition to the payment of unauthorized bonuses, some employees received bonuses that exceeded amounts allowable in their contract, also a violation of state statute. These bonuses included \$67,500 that Epic Superintendent Bart Banfield approved for himself and \$34,167 for his wife, also an Epic employee. Another employee received a bonus that was 600 percent more than the amount of the employment contract; that employee had worked at Epic for only 35 percent of the school year for which the bonus was paid.

The OSDE investigated the Complainant’s allegations of violations of state law regarding competitive bidding of contracts and the Open Meeting Act, improper terminations of school staff and involvement of the board in day-to-day activities of the district, and Title IX.

The OSDE found numerous instances in which Community Strategies board members have taken on an inappropriately outsized role in daily operations of

Epic. Interviews with district staff unveiled a culture of disharmony, uncertainty and fear in the workplace. Compounding matters is that board members appear to lack the training for understanding school finance, operations, ethics and legal compliance needed to effectively govern Epic.

Due to its collective inexperience and significant turnover over the past 18 months, Community Strategies has struggled to comply with state and federal laws and regulations. While the OSDE investigators concluded that the board’s policies largely comply with applicable laws and regulations, the board and district consistently have failed to follow their own policies. The OSDE found violations of Community Strategies’ own procurement policies, including executing compliant contracts and competitive bidding, as well as potential conflicts of interest with vendors.

The OSDE also believes violations of the Open Meeting Act have occurred, including the requirement to post timely agendas and provide legally sufficient language.

“It is unfortunate and disappointing that Epic, despite a number of positive changes made, remains an entity fraught with poor transparency and questionable practices,” Hofmeister said. “Meaningful engagement of students seems less important to Epic than ensuring high numbers of kids remain on the rolls to keep funds flowing. I am hopeful the State Board of Education will recognize the severity of these problems and that Epic’s leadership will act urgently on the recommendations laid out in the investigative report.”

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Defending the Faith



Jim Morrison

In the early days of Christianity, Rome allowed Christians to worship as they pleased as long as they paid their taxes and did nothing to defy the authority of Rome. However, when Nero came to power things changed dramatically. His fear of the rising numbers of Christ-followers brought him to the point of insane persecution. One example of his cruelty was his practice of rolling Christians in pitch, setting them afire while still alive, and using them as torches to light his gardens. It was in anticipation of suffering that was to come that Peter wrote his letter to Jewish and Gentile Christians scattered throughout the provinces.

In I Peter 3:15, 16, he writes, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be

prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against our good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

To say Christ is Lord instead of “Caesar is Lord” was tantamount to treason. Peter’s statement of faith was that they were to “set apart Christ as Lord.” It was more of a lifestyle rather than a statement. Does our lifestyle give evidence that Christ is “Lord?” Does our checkbook or bank account register Christ’s Lordship? In the culture of Peter’s day, to call someone “Lord” was to recognize him as master and you as his servant or more likely “slave.” That is too radical for today’s mindset of convenience, pleasure, and indulgence. Are we “compelled by his love....” as Paul wrote? Do we plan ahead and make decisions based on how this will enhance the kingdom?

Peter goes on to say that we are to have an answer for the hope that we have. But we are to express it with gentleness and respect. There is a polarization going on in society today. It is certainly true in politics, but also in spiritual matters. We have lost the art of disagreeing with civility and respect. Too often, we resort to name calling and demonizing

without listening carefully to opposing arguments for possible elements of truth that in our passion we may have overlooked. Peter wrote that our “good behavior” would make our enemies ashamed because they saw how respectful we were.

To back track a little, the matter of “having an answer” is of little concern for many church goers. It should cause us concern that those who know not the truth have in some cases searched more diligently than we who have taken our faith for granted, or worse “inherited it” from our parents.

I close with this paraphrase from Ephesians 3:16,17

“Lord, help (me) to realize how rich I am because I belong to you. Your resources are unlimited. And to think, they are on deposit in my name. Help me to draw on my account daily—to seek your love, your grace, your forgiving spirit, your compassion. As I live out my life today, give me inner strength to put Jesus on display through my words and actions. I pray that you will make yourself at home in my heart because my sin is confessed and removed by the cross. Give me a greater capacity to experience and understand how much you love me.”

To comment: jnm82@outlook.com or 580-302-1142

Lankford Slams TikTok CEO for Enabling Spread of Pro-War Propaganda to Russian Public

Senators James Lankford (R-OK) and Steve Daines (R-MT) led a group of their colleagues to demand answers from the CEO of TikTok on their disinformation practices in Russia. Specifically, Lankford and his colleagues want answers on why TikTok caved to the Kremlin and banned users from Russia from seeing any content other than Russian state-approved media, creating an information blackout.

“Recent reports indicate TikTok... has allowed Russian state media to flood the platform with dangerous pro-war propaganda. No company should find itself in the position of amplifying the Kremlin’s lies, which fuel public support for Russia’s war of choice in Ukraine,” the senators wrote.

“We are deeply concerned that... TikTok is enabling the spread of pro-war propaganda to the Russian public, which risks adding to an already devastating human toll for both Ukrainians and Russians,” they continued.

Lankford and Daines are joined by Senators John Cornyn (R-TX), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), Roger Wicker (R-MS), and John Barrasso (R-WY).

Dear Mr. Chew,

We write to request information about actions taken by TikTok to remove content or prohibit viewing of content relating to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Not only has TikTok banned users in Russia from livestreaming or posting new content, it has also blocked users in Russia

from seeing any content uploaded by non-Russian TikTok accounts, creating an information blackout that deprives the Russian people access to objective reporting about the atrocities being committed in Ukraine. Alarmingly, recent reports indicate TikTok’s non-enforcement of its own purported moderation policies has allowed Russian state media to flood the platform with dangerous pro-war propaganda. No company should find itself in the position of amplifying the Kremlin’s lies, which fuel public support for Russia’s war of choice in Ukraine.

On March 6, 2022, TikTok suspended livestreaming and new content on its video service in Russia to protect itself from a “fake news” law, which banned content critical of Russia’s actions in Ukraine. We are deeply concerned that, through its failure to equally enforce this policy, TikTok is enabling the spread of pro-war propaganda to the Russian public, which risks adding to an already devastating human toll for both Ukrainians and Russians.

According to reporting by The Washington Post, TikTok’s suspension of new video uploads and live streams from Russia has not been equally enforced. Research from Tracking Exposed shows that before TikTok’s March 6 suspension, new uploads in Russia related to the conflict were roughly balanced between pro-war and anti-war content, but between March 6 and March 25, more than 93 percent were pro-war. Alarmingly, a number of content producers evading

TikTok’s suspension are Russian state-controlled media such as RIA Novosti, effectively making TikTok a conduit of state propaganda. While The Washington Post reports that while it appears TikTok belatedly closed this loophole on March 25, the misleading, pro-regime content that flooded the service has not been taken down, creating an easily-accessible archive of pro-war propaganda.

Additionally, we remain concerned that TikTok’s broader disinformation and misinformation policies related to the Ukraine war are insufficient, fueling pro-war sentiment among TikTok users residing beyond Russia’s borders.

We request that TikTok provide answers to the following questions and requests for information:

Will TikTok remove Russian state-controlled media such as RIA Novosti from its platform?

What has TikTok done to remove pro-war content posted on its platform in Russia and Ukraine from March 6, 2022 to March 25, 2022?

What steps has TikTok taken to enforce the suspension of livestreaming and new content on its video service in Russia since March 6, 2022?

Information relating to TikTok’s pilot state-controlled media account policy, including:

the jurisdictions in which TikTok is piloting its state-controlled media account policy.

TikTok’s definition of “state-controlled media account”;

TikTok’s approach to designating state-controlled media accounts;

the accounts currently subject to labeling under TikTok’s pilot state-controlled media account policy; and

TikTok’s processes in place to consistently enforce its state-controlled media account policy.

Information regarding TikTok’s efforts to combat disinformation and misinformation about the Ukraine war on its platform, including:

the size and geographic location of TikTok’s “safety team focused on the Ukraine war”;

the identities of TikTok’s fact-checking corporate partners helping to assess videos related to the Ukraine war;

the process by which TikTok designates “coordinated efforts to influence public opinion”;

TikTok’s definition of “harmful behavior” and behavior that “incites violence”; and

TikTok’s approach to moderating content it finds to be false, misleading, or a coordinated effort to influence public opinion.

Has TikTok received any communication or indication from the Russian government related to their insistence to see anti-war content regarding the war in Ukraine removed, banned, or otherwise de-prioritized?



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