



OKLAHOMA RIVER

NOT-SO-DRY RUN

Kayakers and rafters tested the waters Thursday during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the \$45.2 million Riversport Rapids park on the Oklahoma River. The park officially opens next week with U.S. Olympic canoe and kayak trials.



[PHOTOS BY STEVE GOOCH, THE OKLAHOMAN]

METRO | STATE

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Some state budget bills may finally surface amid record funding shortfall

The first budget bills may get a vote in the House in about a week as lawmakers finally begin to deal with what has been the elephant in the room all legislative session — a record \$1.3 billion revenue hole.

House Appropriations and Budget Committee Chairman Earl Sears said the governor's office along with Republican leadership in both chambers agree on some legislative approaches that will take the form of bills likely to be heard the



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CAPITOL BUREAU

AT THE
CAPITOL

second week in May.

The session is required to end by May 27, but leaders have dis-

cussed concluding a week early.

There is an effort to minimize cuts to priorities like education and health care in the new spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

"A number of approaches will develop funds to help us address the shortfall," Sears said. "We're close."

Health officials have warned they can't sustain major cuts without destabilizing the Medicaid system. Education leaders say reductions will cause pro-

gramming cuts, teacher layoffs and four-day school weeks.

Revenue options

Some of a long list of options for boosting revenue include increasing the cigarette tax, broadening the sales tax to take in more goods and services, limiting tax credits, taking money from the Rainy Day Fund and reducing apportionment spending.

Other possibilities include bonding road funding, revers-

ing a slight income tax decrease, increasing the gas tax and tapping agency savings known as revolving funds.

Options abound, but many of the choices are hard to swallow for conservative leaders who have said for years the state does not have a revenue problem but does have a spending problem. They've also said cutting taxes is the best way to increase revenue.

The \$1.3 billion shortfall comes

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'AN EXPERIMENT IN IDEAS'

WORKS BY PIONEER SCULPTOR TO BE FEATURED IN OKC SOLO EXHIBIT



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STAFF WRITER

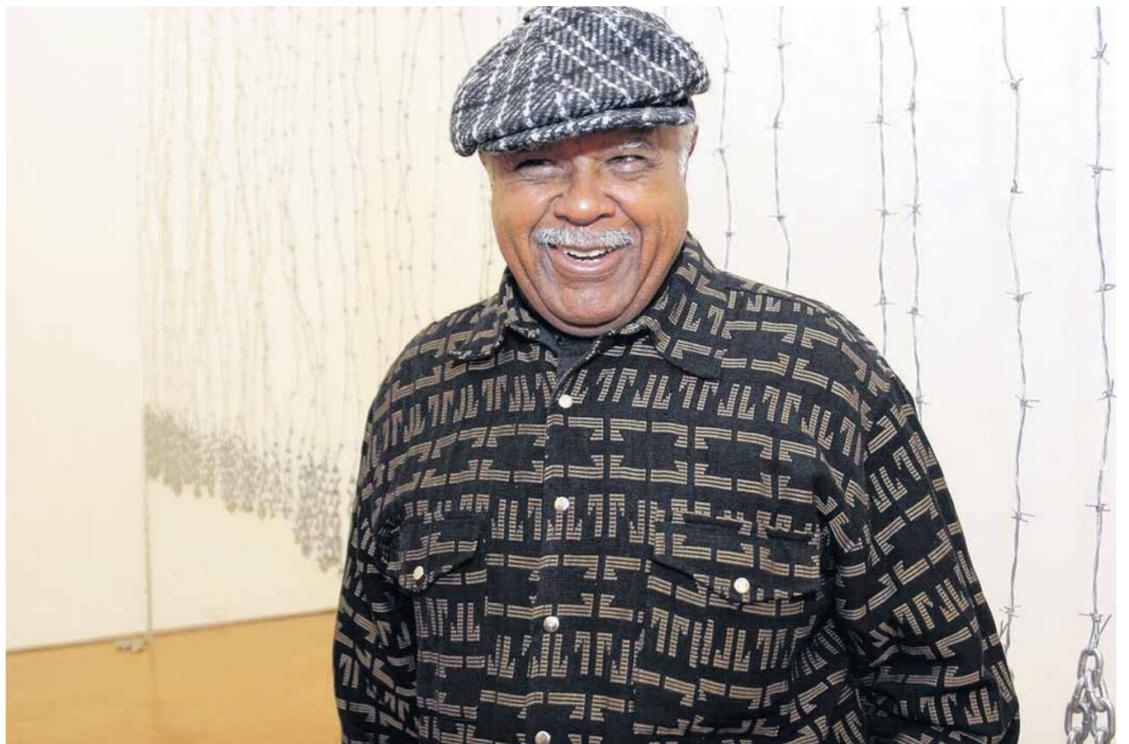
A sculptor who is considered a pioneer in the history of contemporary black art and sculpture will bring his art to the Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center in a solo exhibit set for Oct. 27 to Dec. 27.

Melvin Edwards, a Houston native, has had his work displayed in Oklahoma once before, but it has been at least 25 years since that showing, art center representatives said recently.

Jennifer Scanlan, curatorial and exhibitions director at the center, 3000 General Pershing Blvd., said Edwards' exhibit will feature some of the sculptures from his catalog of works, as well as new individual pieces, including some that use objects found at Oklahoma scrap yards.

Since he burst onto the art scene in Los Angeles in the 1960s, Edwards has created sculptures all over the world, with large-scale pieces in Senegal, where he has a home, as well as Nigeria and Cuba.

SEE SCULPTOR, PAGE 21A



A solo art exhibit featuring works by sculptor Melvin Edwards will be on display Oct. 27 through Dec. 27 at the Oklahoma Contemporary Art Center in Oklahoma City. [PHOTOS PROVIDED]

Left and right: Two of sculptor Melvin Edwards' welded art sculptures are shown.



Proposed Medicaid reform has its supporters and lingering questions

DURANT — Nico Gomez stood before a small group of 25 concerned residents.

How will we save Oklahoma's Medicaid program?

That's the question at hand.

Gomez, Oklahoma Health Care Authority CEO, has his answer: the Medicaid Rebalancing Act of 2020.

Under Gomez's proposal, 354,000 Oklahoma men, women and children would receive private health insurance over a four-year period.

"There's a lot of moving parts, it's complex, and that's why I'm



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coming to every community that will have me and talk through this," Gomez told the crowd at the April 22 meeting. "Because the other thing is, we can always make it better, there's always an opportunity to make it better."

So far, the proposed Medicaid

Rebalancing Act has found a lot of support.

Republican leadership at the Capitol has voiced their support.

Hospital executives like the plan.

Addiction treatment leaders approve.

The Oklahoma Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics says the plan will help make Medicaid into a sustainable system.

The state medical association called it the "best proposal that

SEE MEDICAID, PAGE 20A



Nico Gomez, Oklahoma Health Care Authority CEO, discusses the Medicaid Rebalancing Act of 2020 at a forum in Durant on April 22. Gomez proposed the plan as a way to help ensure the Medicaid program in Oklahoma is sustainable well into the future. [PHOTO BY JACLYN COSGROVE, THE OKLAHOMAN]



Sculptor Melvin Edwards' art piece entitled "Curtain for William and Peter" is shown in this photograph. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

Sculptor: Artist says family roots may be reason welding is key in his work

FROM PAGE 19A

In 1970, he became the first black sculptor to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and his work is in the permanent collection of several major institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Chicago Art Institute and the Dallas Museum of Art.

He has become known for many of his works, most notably his Lynch Fragments series, which he began in 1963 and continues today. In the series, Edwards welds objects such as steel scraps, chains and tools into thought-provoking forms.

Edwards recently was the subject of a 50-year retrospective at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, which toured nationally.

In a recent interview, the artist said his family was a typical poor family, and his parents made read-

IF YOU GO

SOLO EXHIBITION

- Who: Melvin Edwards
- When: Oct. 27 to Dec. 27.
- Where: Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center, 3000 General Pershing Blvd.
- Information: 951-0000; www.oklahomacontemporary.org.

ing and education a top priority. He said he always was interested in art, although football also grabbed his interest — he remembers playing a game against Douglass High School in 1953; his team lost.

He said as a painting major in college, he spent much of his time painting, but he also was required to take some sculpting classes. In his last years in school, he learned how to weld.

Edwards said years later, he found out that one of his ancestors was an

African man trained to work as a steel welder. The artist said his relative was brought to New York and sold as a slave to an Alabama family.

The connection with his family roots may be one reason welding has played such a large role in his work, Edward said.

"I don't know that I got a call, but I tend to be pretty mechanical in my thinking," he said, smiling.

Edwards said many people have described some of his works as "social protest," but he calls it "social expression."

"Almost every work is an experiment in ideas," he said.

Making connections

Scanlan said the art center plans to host several community events in conjunction with Edwards' exhibition.

She said the sculptor has a connection to jazz music, so there are plans underway to have an event featuring jazz musicians and spoken word artists and poets.

Century-old state tribal map is flashpoint in digital debate

BY TODD SHIELDS
Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — Pioneer George Rainey bounced into Oklahoma aboard a Santa Fe train in 1889 seeking his fortune. He landed a job as a county clerk and published a map of the state, including the vast tracts that once belonged to the Comanche, Cherokee and other tribes.

Today, Rainey's "Historical Map of Oklahoma 1870-1890" is central to a most modern debate: how much the federal government should spend to help people stay connected as the Internet emerges as the central communications service of the 21st century.

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission has adopted Rainey's 1917 map as the reference for determining how big a subsidy poor residents get for telephone and Internet service. It includes wide areas that were once Indian reservations, where residents get \$34.25 a month — compared with \$9.25 elsewhere.

The subsidies are part of a nationwide system. But relying upon the long-dead cartographer's handiwork in Oklahoma is being cited by critics as evidence of what they say is the program's mismanagement and waste. It has become a rallying cry for Republicans in Congress who want to contain spending for what they derisively call the Obamaphone.

"There are problems plaguing this system," Rep. Greg Walden, an Oregon Republican, said last week as lawmakers debated a Republican bill to limit spending on the program. "There's been cases of waste, fraud — a lot of fraud."

The program

The Lifeline program has been around in some form since 1985, during the administration of Republican President Ronald Reagan. Last year it spent about \$1.5 billion to help people pay for service over mobile phones and landlines. In March, the FCC expanded it by making broadband Internet eligible for subsidies.

That could drive up demand and costs for the program, which is paid for through a telecommunications tax on telephone bills. The FCC says switching from a 1951 map now in use in Oklahoma — where about two-thirds of all enhanced tribal subsidies are paid — will save money

by cutting the capital, Oklahoma City, from areas regarded as former reservations. But it leaves much of the rest of the state still eligible, including Tulsa, the state's No. 2 city with about 400,000 people.

The enhanced subsidy is meant to provide an incentive for companies to provide service in neglected tribal areas.

The map grants standing for an expanded subsidy "even if you're not a tribal member, and if you're living in a major urban area," said Ajit Pai, a Republican FCC commissioner who has criticized Lifeline.

Democrats oppose a spending cap, saying it could arbitrarily bar poor people from a program that makes it possible for schoolchildren to complete homework, and grown-ups to reach jobs and doctors.

"This is truly the lifeline for people that live in poverty," Rep. Anna Eshoo, a California Democrat, said during debate April 19 before a House subcommittee that passed a cap, sending the bill on to full committee. "Why are we hurting these people?"

Oklahoma

In Oklahoma, the broad availability of a higher subsidy has attracted an unusual number of companies.

The state had 74 Lifeline providers at the end of last year, compared with 40 providers in Oregon, a state with about the same population, according to Universal Service Administrative Co. reports to the FCC. The two states had roughly the same poverty rate in 2014, approaching 17 percent.

Lifeline spending last year in Oregon was \$7.3 million; in Oklahoma it was \$108.2 million, of which all but \$88,000 was billed at the higher tribal rate, according to the USAC reports to the FCC.

By cutting Oklahoma City (population about 620,000 people) from the regions regarded as former tribal areas, the program expects to save \$30 million to \$40 million annually, said Mark Wigfield, an FCC spokesman.

Wireless companies went to court to block the new map, and settled after the FCC delayed implementation for four months, to June 8, to give more time to notify customers.

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Budget: Legislators seek new revenue

FROM PAGE 19A

after an oil industry slump on the heels of a decade of tax reductions, tax credit increases and growing off-the-top spending outside the normal appropriations process.

Now, lawmakers are trying their best to find new revenue and avoid major spending decreases.

They've not been discussing further tax cuts.

State spending

While the Education Department and the Health Care Authority have been getting the most attention in the budget process, they have actually seen allocation increases of 3.35 percent and 29.24 percent respectively since 2007 as their costs have increased.

agencies have seen their state appropriations decline markedly since 2007, including:

- Career and technology education, down 15.20 percent.
- Emergency management, down 29.95 percent.
- Veterans Affairs, down 16.83 percent.
- Agriculture, down 18.47 percent.
- Corporation Commission, down 27.70 percent.
- Environmental quality, down 28.85 percent.

Cigarette tax

Gov. Mary Fallin's call for a \$1.50-per-pack increase in the cigarette tax has been one of the most contentious issues on the

revenue front.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Clark Jolley supports the increase, but said it would be difficult to pass because such tax hikes require a three-fourths vote of the Legislature.

"The reason to pass the cigarette tax is to price people out of smoking," said Jolley, R-Edmond.

He said smoking leads to major state health care costs.

Sen. Mike Schulz, R-Altus, the designee for Senate president pro tem, is against the cigarette tax proposal, saying it would not be fair to non-tribal retailers, since part of the tax on tribal ciga-

rette sales is refunded to the tribes.

"Also being a member that represents a border district I think you will have a lot of folks that will go to Texas and buy them, go to Kansas and buy them, again hurting our retailers in Oklahoma," Schulz said.

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