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Biden picks Harris to be running mate

By Rebecca Morin
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has announced California Sen. Kamala Harris as his running mate for the 2020 election, making her the first Black woman and first Asian American person on a major party's presidential ticket.

Harris, who early on was a Biden opponent for the nomination, brings the

political prowess of winning statewide election in the largest state while also personifying the diversity that key Democratic activists have said is crucial to building grassroots enthusiasm for the ticket.

"I have the great honor to announce that I've picked @KamalaHarris — a fearless fighter for the little guy, and one of the country's finest public servants — as my running mate," Biden tweeted.

See HARRIS, A2



Former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Kamala Harris greet each other July 31, 2019, ahead of the second Democratic primary debate at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. [JIM WATSON, AFP/GETTY IMAGES]

State Democratic Party chair thrilled with Biden's choice for VP

By Chris Casteel
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Oklahoma Democratic Party Chair Alicia Andrews said Tuesday she was thrilled that presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden tapped U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris as his running mate, saying she could be a voice for racial and social justice.

"I'm thrilled," Andrews said in an interview.

"And I'm thrilled for more reasons than just the obvious that she's an



Andrews

African American woman. I'm thrilled that the selection of Kamala Harris makes the Democratic Party live up to the ideal that I believe it to be and that it is more inclusive. So not only is she the first African American woman to be considered for this position, but she's also the first Indian American woman to be considered for this role."

Andrews, the first African American chair of the Oklahoma Democratic Party, said she had been rooting for Harris during the primaries last year. Harris dropped out in December.

U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn,

See CHAIR, A2

CORONAVIRUS IN OKLAHOMA

The number of positive COVID-19 tests reported by the Oklahoma State Department of Health increased by 765 to 44,728 on Tuesday.

The number of deaths rose by 13 and the state's cumulative death toll moved to 618.

Here is a look at the latest numbers in Oklahoma and

across the nation:	
OKLAHOMA	
Positive	(+765) 44,728
Active	(-63) 6,917
Deaths	(+13) 618
Total recovered	(+815) 37,193
UNITED STATES	
Total	5,094,400
Deaths	163,463
Total recovered	1,670,755



BNSF Railway locomotives are parked in a rail yard near Interstate 235 just north of NW 23 in Oklahoma City. [PHOTOS BY BRYAN TERRY/THE OKLAHOMAN]

Off the rails

Oklahoma railroad traffic slows with economy

By Jordan Green
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Like cars in a parking lot, dozens of idled locomotives are sitting in a railroad yard along Interstate 235 in Oklahoma City, waiting for the day when they'll once again haul loads of freight from coast to coast.

Those locomotives, which belong to the BNSF Railway Co., are being stored until rail traffic volumes in the United States return to pre-pandemic levels.

Rail traffic volumes across the U.S. have dropped dramatically since the coronavirus pandemic began. The



Parked nose-to-nose, these BNSF Railway locomotives are awaiting conditions to improve so they can be brought into use again.

See RAILS, A5

Keep focus, Holt advises policing task force

By William Crum
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Mayor David Holt on Tuesday urged members of his law enforcement task force to concentrate on the experiences, values and desires that bind them together.

"Some of you probably think we are on different sides," Holt said. "I don't see it that way. I see the basic humanity of every person in this room."

About 40 of the task force's 45 members gathered for their first meeting in a socially distanced and mask-mandatory Cox Center ballroom.

Holt purposely named a

diverse and inclusive array of community leaders to the task force, ranging from northeast-side pastors to city council members, Black Lives Matter activists to police union leaders.

Facilitating the task force's work is M.T. Berry, who began with the city as a police officer in 1970 and retired last year after serving as Oklahoma City's first African American police chief and, since 2003, as an assistant city manager.

Holt has charged the task force with making recommendations for improving the police department's de-escalation policy, intended

to prevent encounters with citizens from turning violent, and its accountability back to the residents, a function currently performed by a Citizens Advisory Board.

Holt noted the task force's origins in this summer's wave of protests following the death of a Black man, George Floyd, at the hands of Minneapolis police.

Peaceful protests organized by Black Lives Matter OKC and others that drew thousands of residents of all ages and races were "unlike anything Oklahoma City had seen in a long time," Holt said.

See POLICE, A2

RAILS

From Page A1

demand for shipments of automobiles, food, electronics, and other commodities carried by railroads has waned as businesses close and consumers stay home. The need for locomotives has also decreased, as shown by the number of idled locomotives parked in Nowers Yard in Oklahoma City.

The American Association of Railroads, which tracks shipping data from railroads across the U.S., reports that railroads hauled roughly 481,000 carloads of freight and intermodal units for the week ending July 25, a drop of almost 10% compared to the same week in 2019.

Intermodal units are railroad cars that carry semi-truck trailers and storage containers, allowing products to be moved between various modes of transportation. Intermodal shipment volumes were down by 2.4% compared to the same week in 2019, while shipments of regular freight cars were down by almost 18%, the association reported.

Overall, total U.S. rail traffic for the first 30 weeks of 2020 was down by 12.7% compared to the first 30 weeks of 2019.

Ben Wilemon, a spokesman for BNSF, declined to tell The Oklahoman how many locomotives are in storage in the Oklahoma City yard. He also declined to say how many carloads of freight the company has hauled through the Sooner State since the pandemic began.

At least 30 locomotives are visible in the yard.

"The rail industry as a whole has felt the effects of COVID-19 much like the rest of the global economy," Wilemon said. "We strategically store



BNSF Railway locomotives are stored in a rail yard near Interstate 235 just north of NW 23, waiting for the economy to recover. [BRYAN TERRY/THE OKLAHOMAN]

equipment around our network to be ready to move freight when volumes return."

BNSF shipping data for the week ending July 25 shows that the company's total carloads were down by more than 20% compared to the same week last year. The company's second quarter financial results will be released to the public Aug. 8 on the company's website, <https://www.bnsf.com>.

Union Pacific Railway's second-quarter results, released July 23, also showed a downturn in freight volumes. The company had a second quarter profit of \$1.1 billion, a decrease of 24 percent from the second quarter of 2019.

In 2019, the top commodities Union Pacific shipped out of Oklahoma were construction materials and agricultural products. The top commodities the company shipped into the state were automobiles, coal, industrial chemicals, and construction materials, the company said. Union Pacific supported 2,988 jobs and had a payroll of roughly \$34 million in Oklahoma in 2019.

It's unclear exactly how many Oklahoma railroad employees have been laid off or have lost wages due to the pandemic's economic impact.

"The Second Quarter proved very challenging as we faced a volume decline of 20 percent due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic," Union Pacific President and CEO Lance Fritz said in a news release.

"Demonstrating the transformation our Company is experiencing through the implementation of Unified Plan 2020, we were able to largely mitigate the impact of that volume loss. Our dedicated employees are feeling a very real impact from this pandemic, making tangible sacrifices. Despite this adversity, they continue to make strides to improve the safety of our railroad, while providing our customers an uninterrupted, enhanced service product."

Raquel Espinoza, a spokesperson for the company, said Union Pacific is operating a smaller number of locomotives because of the downturn in freight traffic, but company officials remain hopeful that freight volumes will increase as the economy reopens.

Small railroads weather the storm

While freight volumes are down on larger U.S. railroads, smaller railroads have been affected differently from their nationwide counterparts.

between employees, and has required employees to wear masks when they can't practice social distancing.

No employees have been laid off, either. As a matter of fact, the railroad has never laid off any employees since the company formed in 1981, Petry said.

But company officials do hope to see growth in the energy and agricultural sectors in western Oklahoma — and soon. As a railroad serving the predominantly rural region of western Oklahoma, Farmrail ships commodities like grain from local elevators. The company also hauls frac sand for use in oil-field drilling operations.

"We like to say we're on a two-legged stool in western Oklahoma," Petry said. "One is agriculture, and the other is energy. Wheat harvest wasn't all it was cracked up to be, and the oil field is down, so those two things combined are kind of a 'one-two'

punch for us."

However, shipments of grain and sand aren't the company's only sources of revenue. Farmrail leases space along its rail lines for larger companies and railroads to store unused rail cars, providing a stable stream of revenue for the regional railroad. Petry said about 2,000 cars are in storage along the company's track.

Until higher freight volumes return, Petry said, the company will have to work through this economic downturn like it has done in the past: by being strong.

"In western Oklahoma, you need to be tough, and you need to be resilient," she said. "We've lived through these downturns before, and we will live through them again. You just have to be able to be agile, and take it on the chin and come back."

"And western Oklahoma will. We have to find our new 'normal' again."

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