



INSIDE | A8

USE OF POPULARITY

Dr. Anthony Fauci would like former President Trump to persuade his followers to get the COVID-19 vaccinations



SPORTS | B1

THE BIG DANCE

In the NCAA Tournament, OU will face Missouri on Saturday and OSU will face Liberty on Friday

THE OKLAHOMAN

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Sheila Seat, Integris ICU nurse, says she has had to make fewer calls to patients' families lately to share grim news about their loved one. [DOUG HOKE/THE OKLAHOMAN]

OKC health care workers feel optimistic

By Dana Branham
The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

Sheila Seat remembers the relentless pace in the intensive care unit. When the pandemic was at its worst, it seemed like “every patient wasn’t making it,” she said. Now, about a year since the coronavirus was first detected in Oklahoma, health care workers are feeling a small reprieve as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have waned in recent weeks. This week, hospitalizations across Oklahoma were at some of their lowest levels since the summer, down from a peak in January.

Seat, who began working at Integris Southwest Medical Center shortly after she graduated from OSU-OKC at the end of 2019, can feel the difference using her own somber metric. She’s had to make fewer calls to patients’ families lately to share grim news about their loved one, to let them know that day might be their last. In interviews, six health care workers who’ve been on the front lines of treating COVID-19 patients in Oklahoma City described cautious optimism: the lessened burden on their hospitals is palpable, but they

See OPTIMISTIC, A2



Jim Hull, left, with his twin brother Stephen Hull, are both respiratory therapists at Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City. Jim Hull described a tangible easing as coronavirus hospitalizations have declined in recent weeks. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

Alva high school student seeks city council seat

By Jordan Green
Special to The Oklahoman
USA TODAY NETWORK

ALVA – Joe Parsons has taken a liking to small-town politics. He’s never run for a publicly elected office before and he’s learning that campaigning for one takes time. Almost every day, he’s handing out yard signs, planning meet-and-greet events and politicking his neighbors

— after his classes at Alva High School are done for the day, that is. Parsons, an 18-year-old high school senior, is running for a seat on the city council in this rural north-west Oklahoma town. And even though he’s young, the political newcomer said he believes he can make a positive difference in the community.

See CANDIDATE, A4



Joe Parsons, 18, a high school student, is running for a seat on the Alva City Council. [JORDAN GREEN FOR THE OKLAHOMAN]

Documents show Stitt was urged to impose lockdowns

By Sean Murphy
Associated Press

As the coronavirus swept across Oklahoma and the nation last spring, Gov. Kevin Stitt’s office was inundated with correspondence from frightened residents seeking stricter lockdowns to control the spread of the virus. “We can bring back lost jobs. We can re-strengthen the economy. We cannot, however, regain the lives of those we have already lost and will continue to lose if we fail to get this right,” Tulsa resident Nate Morris wrote in an April 2020 letter to Stitt signed by 1,200 people. At the same time, the governor was also weighing requests from dozens of business leaders asking him to make sure their businesses stayed open. The Associated Press reviewed nearly 9,000 documents released by the governor’s office in response to an open records request that show the delicate balance Stitt and his team tried to walk during the early stages of the pandemic.

Real estate agents, banks, manufacturers and firearms distributors were among those who asked the governor to make sure their businesses stayed open. Even a filmmaker seeking to shoot a movie in Oklahoma reached out to the governor to make sure the state’s COVID restrictions wouldn’t disrupt the production. “We look forward to shooting the Reagan film in your state,” producer Mark Joseph wrote in a March 8 letter to Stitt. “Our start date is May 11 but I’d like to talk to you about what measures can be taken to assure that we don’t experience any delays because of the coronavirus.” Production of the film ultimately was halted temporarily after multiple people on the set tested positive for COVID-19. The AP specifically sought communications between the governor’s office, state health officials, cities, counties,

See SUNSHINE, A2

CORONAVIRUS IN OKLAHOMA

The number of positive COVID-19 tests reported Sunday by the Oklahoma State Department of Health increased by 492 to 432,483. The state, via the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s provisional death count, did not report any additional COVID-related deaths in its Saturday report. Here is a look at the latest numbers in Oklahoma and across the nation:

| OKLAHOMA | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|------------|--|
| Positive: | (+492) | 432,483 | |
| Active: | (+140) | 11,930 | |
| Deaths: | (no change) | 7,486 | |
| Recovered: | (+352) | 415,852 | |
| Vaccines given: | (+37,186) | 1,435,464 | |
| UNITED STATES | | | |
| Cases: | | 29,400,553 | |
| Deaths: | | 534,315 | |



Alva City Council candidate Joe Parsons, 18, is also a student at Alva High School. [JORDAN GREEN FOR THE OKLAHOMAN]

CANDIDATE

From Page A1

“People can say I’m too young to be on the city council,” he said. “I understand it might be concerning. There’s a lot of 18-year-olds who would not be great on city council. But I think anyone who sits down and has a conversation with me, their mind would probably be changed.”

Hometown candidate

Parsons has spent his life in this small town where his parents own a diner and a motel. He has grown up helping run the family businesses, and he’s started his own, too.

When he was 14, he opened a snow cone stand, which he continued to take to events in the area until the coronavirus pandemic began. He’s a certified auctioneer and a licensed drone pilot, and he’s training to become a real estate agent.

He’s a concurrent student at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, and he’ll be attending Northwestern after graduating from high school to obtain a bachelor’s degree in business, he said.

He plans to start a real estate business in Alva — a town he hopes to improve by listening to the concerns of the citizens, he said.

“That’s really a big reason I’m running,” he said. “As a city council member, it’s your job to represent your constituents. If someone comes to me, it’d be a priority to bring it to the council.”

If elected, Parsons said, he hopes the city can repave roads, improve municipal water lines and fix the town’s swimming pool, which has been closed for more than two years because of safety concerns.

Parsons said he believes the city “needs a pool, but we need to find a way to have a pool without adding to our citizens’ financial burden,” he wrote in one of his campaign flyers.

“I care about how tax dollars are managed and am against tax increases without community support,” he wrote.

A future in Alva

When Parsons’ senior year began in the fall, he knew he had to make a

choice.

“I’ve always known I love Alva, and I wanted to live here in the future,” he said. “But there for a while ... I considered going somewhere to just see what was out there.”

In September, Parsons created the Beautify Alva project, bringing locals together to pick up trash around town. On Sept. 18, Parsons and his crew were cleaning up debris scattered on the side of a roadway when a man asked Parsons why he was picking up trash. Parsons told the man he was doing it because he wanted to.

The man was surprised, Parsons said.

“He said, ‘You know what? That’s the best thing I’ve seen happen in Alva in over 10 years,’” Parsons said.

In that moment, Parsons said he knew what he had to do.

“I asked, ‘What else can I do for my community?’” he said. “And that’s another reason I decided to run for city council.”

Parsons announced his candidacy for the Ward 4, Seat 1 office on the council on Jan. 26. He’s running against two other Alva residents, Blake Jordan and Greg Bowman. The election is April 6.

Bowman, like Parsons, said he hopes the city can repair its pool and update its infrastructure.

Bowman said he’s intrigued by the young man’s candidacy.

“I think it’s pretty cool,” he said.

Bowman, 62, said he hopes Parsons keeps his mind open if elected.

“I have thought about this: How did I look at life when I was 18 years old? How do I look at life when I’m 62?” he said. “I can tell you for sure I thought a whole lot different when I was 18 years old than I do today.”

Blake Jordan declined to be interviewed for this story.

First time for everything

The April 6 election won’t just be Parsons’s first run for political office. It will be the first election he’s been able to vote in.

And he’s not alone.

Fellow Alva High student Emily Barton turned 18 on March 3, a little over one week before the March 12 voter registration deadline. She’s excited to vote for Parsons, she said.

“He has always been so excited about politics and bettering our community

— I mean, really, for a long time,” she said. “Whenever he was like, ‘I’m going to run for City Council,’ we were all super happy for him, and we just know that that’s in his personality.”

Barton has known Parsons since the two were in the first grade, she said. Since then, she’s seen him lead her school by serving on its student council.

She said Parsons is making her classmates more interested in learning about — and getting involved in — local government.

“I think that he is going to do a really good job,” she said. “I’ll be registering, and I’ll be voting for him because I know how much work he’s put into it, and I know how much he cares. And I think it would be really great to have that young insight on our city council.”

Alva High School English teacher Halah Simon said she shares that sentiment.

“I feel like Joe has put a lot of time into really thinking about his platform and the things in the community that are important to him,” Simon said. “I also think that he will listen to his constituents and really try to take their opinions and their feelings into account while making decisions.”

Simon said she thinks Parsons is a “very studious, very determined, very task-oriented multi-tasker — just an all-around great young man.”

“I think that once there’s an issue isolated that maybe needs to be worked on, Joe doesn’t stop until he finds a resolution,” she said. “He works very hard to try to bring things to a close and then solve things in a very positive manner.”

Proving the point

Parsons said he knows that some folks might be apprehensive about young people taking office. He thinks he can persuade them, he said.

“If they sit down and want to have a conversation, I’d love to have a conversation with them,” he said. “If they look at my resume without knowing my age, they’re going to think, ‘Wow, this guy would be amazing on city council.’ I ask them to just look past my age. Look at my experience and what my qualifications are.

“I’m not the average high school senior.”

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LOTTERY

Pick 3, March 13: 7-7-1
Cash 5, March 13: 5-12-20-22-29
Lucky for Life, March 11: 15-19-28-30-48, Lucky Ball: 5
Mega Millions, March 12:

2-24-25-31-65, Mega Ball: 18, Megaplier: x4
Powerball, March 13: 5-11-51-56-61, Powerball: 2, Power Play: x2
Lotto America, March 13:

7-30-40-49-50, Star Ball: 10, All-Star Bonus: x5

For the latest lottery numbers, go to www.lottery.ok.gov.