

CAIR 2018-2019
OKLAHOMA

Government Affairs Report





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MESSAGE FROM CAIR-OK GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DIRECTOR



Assalamu Alaikum and Greetings of Peace,

2019 was an eventful year for the state legislature. With a large portion of the elected population being made up by freshmen, this year's session held many unknowns. We saw highs and lows regarding criminal justice reform and teacher pay, both heavy-hitting issues carried over from the 2018 session. We saw new gun laws and the designation of an Oklahoma Native American Day.

But the biggest success the CAIR Oklahoma (CAIR-OK) Government Affairs Department saw was the new relationships forged across party lines. Last year was an election year, which provided a great opportunity for CAIR-OK to engage on the ground floor, working in the community on educating and building relationships with newly elected leaders.

2019 was a year for making history. For the first time in the history of our organization, CAIR-OK had a sitting member of Congress attend and keynote an event. For the first time, we had recognition of Muslim Day at the Capitol by the Governor of Oklahoma. For the first time ever, the Mayor of Oklahoma City came to our Annual Ramadan Iftar and gave opening remarks. And for the first time ever, a sitting Mayor (of Edmond), came and gave welcoming remarks at our banquet. We saw an openness from the new freshman class the Oklahoma Muslim community had yet to experience. For the first time, elected leaders from both sides of the isle came to our meet and greets at mosques across the state and attended our events.

We saw hundreds of pieces of legislation vying for a place on the Governor's desk, and we worked to keep you up to date on the issues, bills, and committee meetings that are important to the Oklahoma Muslim community.

We will continue to build on this foundation and keep you up to date on important issues facing our state. We will persist in our pursuit of opening more channels of communication between our legislative body and our small but powerful community. We will strive to be the voice of the Muslim community on all levels with elected leaders from all parties. Likewise, we will work to strengthen the Oklahoma Muslim community, finding our individual and collective voices in order to advocate for positive change.

Thank you for allowing me the honor of being your Government Affairs Director. Here's to a year of continued growth in voice, in recognition, and in meaningful relationships that bring power and peace to our state for years to come.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lani Habrock". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Lani Habrock
Government Affairs Director

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 the CAIR Oklahoma (CAIR-OK) Government Affairs Department embarked on a journey with the goal of deepening our connection with law makers on both sides of the aisle and strengthening the voice of the Oklahoma Muslim community. We went about this with a multilevel approach.

The first step we took was to grow our **grassroots**. Throughout the year, CAIR-OK held events bringing Okie Muslims and our interfaith allies together to share ideas and inspirations and to work together for the good of our state. The more close-knit our community, the stronger our efforts in policy making will become.

The next level of our efforts was to open **direct dialogue** between ourselves and our elected leaders. We did this through setting up private meetings with newly elected leadership and some of their most active and engaged Muslim constituents for some one-on-one face time, in order that our community might get to know their State Representatives and Senators on the ground level before the proceedings of the legislative session overwhelmed them. We wanted to make sure they knew they had Muslim constituents and that we are here to partner with them in friendship and work toward the good of our respective communities.

The most important step we took was in **building bridges** between the Muslim community at large and our elected leaders. We did this through highly publicized and well attended events, like Muslim Day at the Capitol and the Ramadan Iftar with Elected Leaders. We also strengthened friendships through hosting more intimate events such as Congressional Office Visits and Meet & Greets at mosques across the state, bringing elected officials into the heart of our Muslim community.

As we continue to grow our Government Affairs Department, we can look forward to more strength and focus on ground level trainings in how to get involved in the political process as well as workshops on what it's like actually taking the leap and running for office. After all, who can represent and advocate for us better than ourselves?

Last year was groundbreaking, but this year will be even more exciting as we continue to build momentum around the successes we've already had. We are looking forward to 2020 and beyond!



CAIR-OK'S 2019 POLICY PRIORITIES

Each year, CAIR-OK develops policy priorities to advance key issues and promote civic engagement among Oklahoma Muslims. The priorities are informed by research, community interest, and CAIR-OK's mission, and is approved by our Board of Directors.

If you have any feedback regarding our policy priorities or would like to get more involved in CAIR-OK's government affairs advocacy, please contact Lani Habrock at lahabrock@cair.com.

BULLYING, PUBLIC SHAMING & DISCRIMINATION



- Expand the definition of bullying to include single incidents of harassment.
- Include the targeting of persons for sexual orientation and gender identity in criminal penalties for malicious intimidation and harassment.

CIVIL RIGHTS



- Protect citizens rights to strike, assemble at the state capitol, and exercise free speech.
- Prevent state funds from supporting agencies that discriminate.
- Ensure the rights of citizens to fair, open, and transparent government processes.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE



- Make current laws regarding low-level and nonviolent offenses retroactive.
- Reduce pre-trial detainment time.
- Amend pre-trial practices to protect the rights of the accused and decrease the number of people jailed for financial reasons.
- Reform sentencing procedures to protect the rights of defendants.

FIREARMS



- Prevent firearms from being carried in schools, playgrounds, or government buildings.
- Prevent the erosion of commonsense restrictions on irresponsible gun ownership and carry.

VOTING



- Make voting more accessible to working individuals.
- Reinstate voting rights to felony offenders once released from custody.
- Encourage responsible voting by emphasizing candidates' policy positions over party affiliation.

EDUCATION



- Increase funding for education.
- Encourage schools and educators to ensure up-to-date curricula, supplies, procedures, and facilities.
- Fairly compensate educators in terms of salaries and classroom expenses.

2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW

¹ Bill Information for SB 96. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB96>

² Bill Information for SB 111. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB111>

³ Bill Information for SB 361. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB361>

⁴ Bill Information for HB 2214. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo>.

⁵ Bill Information for SB 201. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB201>

⁶ Bill Information for HB 1269. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%201269>

⁷ Bill Information for SB 252. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB252&Session=1900>

⁸ Bill Information For HB 2273. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%202273>

CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil rights is the heart of our work at CAIR-OK. Ensuring not only the rights of the Muslim community, but the rights of all people and classes in Oklahoma are protected.

SB 96:¹ Authored by Sen. Weaver. It sought to classify law enforcement officers as a protected class by making premeditated violence against a law enforcement officer or correctional personnel a hate crime and a felony, punishable by death or life imprisonment without parole. This bill did not make it to the floor. Although CAIR-OK does seek to strengthen hate crime law, we viewed this particular piece of legislation as detrimental to public health and safety as well as prone to opening the door to egregious abuse and injustices .

SB 111:² This bill designates Oklahoma Native American Day as the second Monday in October, a date formerly designated as Columbus Day. This bill was authored by Sen. Bergstrom and Rep. Walke and was signed into effect by the Governor .

SB 361:³ This bill prohibits public universities from exercising strict control over expression and speech on their campuses except under clear, published, content and viewpoint neutral criteria. This bill was authored by Sen. Daniels and Rep. Lepak. It passed and was signed by Governor.

HB 2214:⁴ Authored by Rep. Todd, this bill sought to withhold teachers' pay and permanently revoke their state certification if they participated in a strike or walkout. CAIR-OK, as well as many in the legislature, saw this as a flagrant assault on the individuals' constitutional right to free speech. This bill did not make it through committee and thus died early on in the 2019 legislative session .

BULLYING & PUBLIC SHAMING

SB 201:⁵ This bill adds the taking and sharing of pictures intended to shame or otherwise harm a vulnerable adult to the definition of "abuse" under the Protective Services of Vulnerable Adults Act. This bill was passed and signed into law by the Governor. Authors of this bill were Sen. Thompson and Rep McEntire .

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Criminal Justice Reform was the hot topic of this years' legislative session. It was an issue that had bipartisan support. Although a few bills passed which will have positive long-term effects on Oklahoma's swelling over-incarceration crisis, there was much that remained undone. Some bills which did not pass this year can be reconsidered next year, as it is the second year of the 57th legislature.

HB 1269:⁶ The most successful and meaningful bill passed in the 2019 legislative session. It retroactively reclassified low-level drug and property offenses from a felony to a misdemeanor. This bill was bi-partisan, authored by Democrat Rep. Dunnington and Republican Sen. Bice .

SB 252:⁷ The most disappointing failed bill of the session for criminal justice reform advocates. It failed in the House at a vote of 45-49. This contentious reform bill would have required courts to give affordable bail terms to most defendants charged with misdemeanors and/or low-level, non-violent offenses. The goal was to prevent people who were not threats to society from sitting in jail for weeks or months waiting for trial. Many non-violent offenders end up losing their jobs, assets, and sometimes their children simply because they can't afford bail. Furthermore, they continue to accrue more fines and fees for simply being in jail. This bill was authored by Sen. Thompson and Rep. Kannaday .

HB 2273 and HB 2218:^{8&9} Both of the bills meant to reduce the likelihood of offenders returning to prison for technical violations such as the inability to secure a job, housing, or missing a court-ordered fine or fee payment. Authors of HB 2273 were Rep. West and Sen. Jech, HB 2218 were Rep. May and Sen. Jech. The bill did not pass.

HB 2009:¹⁰ This bill provided sentence enhancement reform in an attempt to stop the over-sentencing of non-violent felonies. Authored by Rep. Mize and Sen. Coleman. It did not pass.

FIREARMS

Legislation regarding firearms and who could carry them was a key issue early on in this year's session. Governor Stitt made constitutional carry a key platform of his campaign and in his State of the State address. Further, a law allowing permit-less carry was the first piece of legislation he signed into effect.

HB 2597:¹¹ This the first bill of the 57th legislature signed into law. This law allows the carrying of a firearm openly or concealed without training or a licensing. It was authored by Rep. Echols and Sen. David .

SB 38:¹² This bill was proposed by Sen. Bullard and Rep. Humphrey. It would have permitted the concealed carry of firearms within the State Capitol without requiring it to be inspected by Capitol security, unless given probable cause. Fortunately, this bill did not get too far in the legislative process .

HB 1197:¹³ Authored by Rep. Gann, it would have prohibited the carrying of open/concealed firearms in any park open to the public such as The Gathering Place, a new park and community center located in Tulsa. The potential outcomes of this bill going into effect created the biggest contention over this piece of legislation. The measure was not heard in committee .

VOTING

It is predicted that voting will be a key point in 2020 presidential election debates. We saw rumblings of this discussion in this year's legislative session on the state level.

SB 282:¹⁴ The bill would have allowed convicted felons to become eligible to vote upon their release from incarceration, rather than when they complete post-prison supervision (probation and parole). The measure died in committee. It was authored by Sen. Matthews .

SB 51:¹⁵ Authored by Sen. Dossett, this bill would have eliminated straight-party voting. The measure died in committee.

HB 1072:¹⁶ This bill would have moved general elections to Saturday, instead of being held Tuesdays, in order to give more working people with traditional Monday - Friday jobs the opportunity to vote. The measure died in committee. It was authored by Rep. Pae.

HB 1153:¹⁷ The bill would have allowed county and district attorney elections to be non-partisan, however, it was not heard in committee. This bill was authored by Rep. Grego .

EDUCATION

After the teacher walk-out in 2018, the 2019 legislative session promised to bring positive change for Oklahoma's education system. This was reflected in the budget. Overall, common education saw an increased budget of \$157.7 million. \$74.3 million of the increase went to districts for hiring teachers, counselors, and social workers, or to be used for other needs.

HB 1780:¹⁸ Authored by House Speaker McCall, it provides a \$1,200 across-the-board pay raise for public school teachers. This bill passed unanimously in the House by a vote of 94-0 .

HB 1359:¹⁹ This bill which would have allowed teachers to claim up to \$500 tax credit for classroom expenses they paid, was unfortunately not heard in committee. It was authored by Rep. Hasenbeck.

⁹ Bill Information for HB 2218. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%202218>

¹⁰ Bill Information for HB 2009. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%202009>

¹¹ Bill Information for HB 2597. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%202597>

¹² Bill Information for SB 38. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB38>

¹³ Bill Information for HB 1197. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%201197>

¹⁴ Bill Information for SB 282. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB282>

¹⁵ Bill Information for SB 51. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=SB51>

¹⁶ Bill Information for HB 1072. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%201072>

¹⁷ Bill Information for HB 1153. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%201153>

¹⁸ Bill Information for HB 1780. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%201780>

¹⁹ Bill Information for HB 1359. (2019). Retrieved from Oklahoma State Legislature: <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=hb%201359>



MUSLIM DAY AT THE CAPITOL (MDAC)

Muslim Day at the Capitol (MDAC) is one of the most meaningful and important events CAIR Oklahoma hosts. Each year, it continues to grow and exceed our expectations in impact.

In 2019, for the first time in the history of MDAC, the Governor of Oklahoma came in to acknowledge our community. During a keynote session, Governor Stitt unexpectedly came in the Senate Chamber to greet the Oklahoma Muslim community and welcome us to the house of the people.

Other highlights from 2019 MDAC include a panel of experts discussing a variety of issues facing Oklahoma's many diverse communities, including poverty, firearm safety, racism, and incarceration, reminding us that though the issues and struggles of each community may differ, we are all connected and one issue always feeds into others.

Our many Muslim youth in attendance were not forgotten. Youth enjoyed an interactive workshop that included a dynamic panel of young leaders who led them in an exercise of redrawing district lines in the metro in order to create a more equitable and fairly represented Oklahoma City.

A citation was awarded jointly by Senator George Young to the Interfaith Alliance and the Oklahoma Conference of Churches as a token of appreciation for the tireless interfaith work they do.

INTERFAITH JUMMAH PRAYER AT THE CAPITOL

People of many different faiths and backgrounds, some clergy, some non-religious, all came to the Oklahoma State Capitol to hear prayers led by Rev. Shannon Fleck of the Oklahoma Conference of Churches; Sarah Adams-Cornell, who provided the Native American spiritual perspective; Rabbi Vered Harris of Temple B'nai Israel; and Rev. Sheri Amore Dickerson of Black Lives Matter.

This was followed by a khutbah and prayer lead by Imam Imad Enchassi. In his message, Imam Enchassi addressed last years' chaplaincy dispute in which all minority religions, and many minority Christian denominations, were excluded from leading the opening prayer in the House chamber during session. Imam Enchassi explained that rather than suing the state for this encroachment on the First Amendment, he was extending a hand of friendship to the Governor. This gesture was not one of weakness, but one in the pursuit of kindness and in an effort to build bridges rather than walls.

Several Representatives and Senators came out of their offices to experience prayer with us and meet the interfaith community. Representative Branham presented a citation to the civic group Oklahoma Muslim Women for Humanity in appreciation of the work they do within the community, including feeding the homeless and adopting city streets.





RAMADAN IFTAR WITH ELECTED LEADERS:

2019 introduced the fifth annual Ramadan Iftar with our Elected Leaders. This event was historic in that it was the first time a sitting member of Congress attended one of our events. Congresswoman Kendra Horn was gracious enough to agree to keynote the event and break the fast with us.

This was also the first time that an acting Mayor of Oklahoma City attended one of our events. Mayor David Holt came early, welcomed us to the city, and gave a few opening remarks. Videos of both these speeches can be found on CAIR Oklahoma's YouTube channel.

This Iftar was also special because of the number of elected leaders who came out to meet their Muslim constituents. Almost every table had at least one elected official seated so that everyone had an opportunity to build relationships with those who represent them. Elected leaders from every level of government joined us for this event. From a County Commissioner to City Council members to State Representatives and Senators, no stone of public service was left unturned.

This year's Courage and Leadership award went to Commissioner Carrie Blumert for her continued support of the Oklahoma Muslim community as well as her work for Criminal Justice Reform, Mental Health and starting the conversation regarding the safety of the Oklahoma County Jail.



YOUNG PROFESSIONAL IFTAR WITH BASHEER JONES

Basheer Jones is the first Muslim City Council member ever elected to the city of Cleveland, Ohio. He is passionate about public service and working to grow healthy communities of color. He is an inspiring and motivational speaker who impressed upon the youth in attendance the need to be present in our communities and fearless in our faith

Our children are the future and CAIR-OK is making it a priority to ensure they get the resources needed to be engaged and educated young adults. CAIR-OK is focusing on bringing speakers that will inspire our young people to take action and hosting workshops at events such as Muslim Day at the Capitol that will motivate long-term involvement in the political process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



MEET & GREETs

One of the most meaningful things we can do as a civil rights organization and as a government affairs department is build bridges of understanding and friendship between our Okie Muslim community and those who represent our voice. To do this, CAIR Oklahoma organized several meet and greets throughout the state that gave elected officials the opportunity to engage with their Muslim constituents. In a Meet & Greet held at the Islamic Society of Stillwater, all four elected officials serving the district at the state level attended to meet their constituents and tour the mosque.

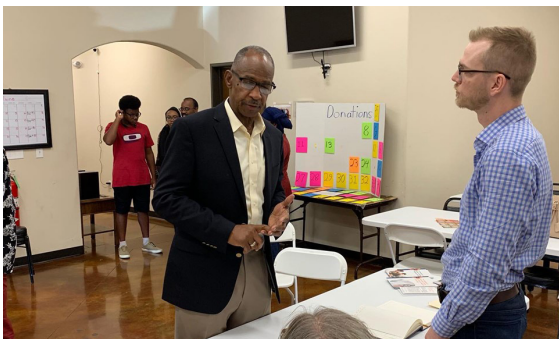
Two of the three State Representatives, Rep. Talley and Rep. Burns, are Republican, while Rep. Ranson is a Democrat. This event was also attended by the Republican State Senator Dugger, whose district covers Stillwater and the greater surrounding area. The Mayor of Stillwater, Mayor Joyce, was in attendance as well.

Meet & Greets have been held in Ardmore, Tulsa, Edmond, Norman, and Oklahoma City at both Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City and Masjid Mu'min.



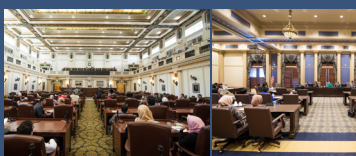
CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE VISITS

As much as they try, our elected leaders cannot be in more than one place at a time. Because of this, CAIR Oklahoma joined forces with Congresswoman Horn's staff to organize Office Visits at a couple of the mosques in her congressional district. Masjid Mu'min and the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City had the opportunity of meeting some of Horn's local team after Friday prayers. This gave the Muslim constituents the opportunity to interact face-to-face with her office to build relationship, ask questions, and express their concerns.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Societal change can only be achieved through relationships. If we are to put an end to the spread of Islamophobia, we cannot do this through policy alone. Contrary to popular belief, policy does not come out of the Capitol. Policy flows out from the hearts of our elected leaders and their



2018 Oklahoma Voter's Guide



VOTER GUIDES

The 2018 Candidate Guides were created with the Oklahoma Muslim community in mind, in order that you may have the tools and resources available to be an informed and confident voter in the November election.

In 2018 a record number of citizens filed to run for office. We narrowed it down, reaching out only to candidates running in districts identified as having a higher concentration of Muslim voters. We asked their stances on issues of immigration, budget, bullying, hate crimes, and education.

The CAIR-OK Government Affairs Department is already starting on a 2020 guide for state and presidential elections. We look forward to continuing to be a premier resource for the Muslim community and Oklahomans at large.



constituents. If we are to have a voice in the decision making of the laws and policies that impact ourselves, our children, and our neighbors, we must have relationships with those decision makers.

It is important for our elected officials to understand that Islam is not monolithic. Islam is made up of people of many countries with many different cultures. Muslims can be Republicans, Democrats, Independents; we can be conservative or liberal; we can be wealthy or poor- we are just like everyone else. This may seem obvious to us, but to many people who have never met a Muslim, this can be news to them.

Every day CAIR Oklahoma works to reach out to communities to inform and demystify their understanding of Islam. We do this through our creation of educational resources and we do it through showing up in our communities. The Ramadan Day of Service at the Regional Food Bank is a great illustration of setting an example of who we are as Muslims in our state. The best way to deflate fear is to shine a light on the truth of who we are and what we believe. The more we get to know people, the more difficult it will be for bigoted rhetoric to deceive them.

Not only do we want to have relationships with our elected leaders, we need to become the elected leaders. Who understands our community better than the members of it? Through this year and into the next, CAIR Oklahoma will be hosting training days on how to run for office and how to get more involved in the political process. If you are interested in more information on what we do in the Government Affairs department and/or how to get involved, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Islamophobia: is the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam. For more information visit islamophobia.org

CITATIONS

CAIR-OK received welcoming remarks and a citation from the Mayor of Edmond, Elizabeth Waner, during the 2019 Annual Awards Banquet. This was the first time CAIR-OK has received a city citation recognizing the work of CAIR-OK and the Muslim community's contribution in business, culture, and city growth.

A citation was presented to the Interfaith Alliance and the Oklahoma Conference of Churches by Senator George Young at the 2019 Muslim Day at the Capitol. This citation recognized the continued work of both organizations to build bridges of understanding and acceptance.

Oklahoma Muslim Women for Humanity received a citation during Jummah at the Capitol, an interfaith prayer held annually at the Oklahoma State Capitol. This citation was presented by Representative Chelsea Branham acknowledging the many acts of public service performed by the Oklahoma Muslim Women for Humanity.

CHALLENGING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Throughout our history, one of the core missions of CAIR-OK has been to challenge Islamophobia. Be it hate speech spoken from an elected official, hate crimes committed against our community, graffiti sprayed on concrete, or policies singling out the Muslim community and minorities, CAIR-OK continues to address injustice daily.

Much of this work began with former State Representative John Bennett, a Republican from Sallisaw Oklahoma, whose career was marked by constant Islamophobic rhetoric and discrimination against Oklahoma Muslims. In 2014, a tragic incident in which a woman was beheaded in Moore Oklahoma gave Bennett an opportunity to continue bashing the

Muslim community. Prior to the incident, Bennett had formed the Oklahoma Counterterrorism Caucus which used their position to question FBI results and continue with their own bias and discriminatory narrative. Even when CAIR-OK denounced Nolen's actions, Bennett claimed the organization was lying in order to "promote its pro-Muslim agenda."

In a September meeting with his constituents, the Sallisaw Representative claimed that "[Islam] is a cancer in our nation that needs to be cut out." Bennett faced criticism after his comments, but refused to apologize. In an interview with Huffington Post, Bennett went further and claimed that "Islam is not even a religion. It's a social political system that uses a deity to advance its agenda of global conquest." As a direct result of these comments, CAIR-OK Director, Adam Soltani, received death threats after Bennett's claims, saying, "I received a phone call from an individual who asked if I was the director of CAIR and I said yes. He said he thinks I should be beheaded and so should every other Muslim in America."

In 2016, Bennett heightened his attacks against Muslims. After receiving permission from House Speaker Jeff Hickman, Bennett created an interim study named "Radical Islam, Sharia Law, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Radicalization Process." (Interim Study H16-O29) It was meant to be a study on possible terrorism in Oklahoma, but in reality it was little more than a bashing session against Muslims. On October 25, Bennett convened his study at the Capitol to further his Islamophobic agenda. He put on full theatrics, being escorted by the Oklahoma Highway Patrol into the chamber along with the panel of experts he had prepared to testify. Among these so-called experts were "Frank Gaffney, the president and founder of the Center for Security Policy, John Guandolo, founder of UnderstandingtheThreat.com an extreme anti-Muslim conspiracy theory website, and retired Lt. Gen. William G. "Jerry" Boykin, former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence and current executive Vice President of the rabidly anti-LGBTQ organization Family Research Council. Bennett also brought in a 'confidential informant' who spoke over speaker-phone, as well as a man who claimed to be a former member of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Living up to his past deeds, Bennett attacked American Muslim organizations and labeled them as the enemy, saying,

"If you love America and love freedom and our way of life, you have an obligation to stand and fight against Hamas, CAIR (the Council on American Islamic Relations), NAIT (the North Atlantic Islamic Trust) and ISNA (the Islamic Society of North America) and all these other groups that are here to destroy us."

The Sallisaw Representative went on to call CAIR-OK Director Adam Soltani and Imam Imad Enchassi "terrorists" and after Imam Enchassi hugged another audience member, Bennett demanded that he be admonished for hugging. The event served as a platform for Bennett and his guests to push anti-Muslim sentiment, promote anti-Muslim conspiracy theories, and garner attention from anti-Muslim groups. As a result of his constant Islamophobic remarks and most likely the interim study, a few weeks later Bennett received the National Defender of Freedom award from the Center for Security Policy, which is classified as an extremist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) Even though Bennett was criticized for making these discriminatory statements against minority Oklahomans, he was elected for another term just a month after his inflammatory conference.

In March 2017, during the Muslim Day at the Capitol, which CAIR-OK sponsors, three Muslim students tried to meet with Representative Bennet, but upon entering his office, they were handed a questionnaire on Islam. This questionnaire was written by ACT! For America, an anti-Muslim group, as classified by SPLC. It included loaded questions such as, "Sharia law says that it must rule over the kafirs, the non-Muslims. Do you agree with this?" and "The Koran, the Sunna of Mohammed and Sharia Law of all schools say that the husband can beat his wife. Do you beat your wife?" Bennett later released a statement saying he "didn't refuse to meet with any of them. [He] was already gone when they stopped by [his] office.", but he went on to call CAIR a terrorist organization and Islam a violent religion.

In August 2017 a car was intentionally driven into a crowd during an anti-white supremacist protest in Charlottesville, Virginia, injuring 28 people and killing one woman. This ill-fated protest was in response to a previous white supremacist rally held in the same city which was demonstrating against the proposed removal of Confederate monuments.

In light of this, Bennett called for mosques to be removed on Facebook as a response to Confederate monuments that were being removed at the time. This particular post received reactions from Governor Mary Fallin, who said, "Racism, bigotry and hatred have no place in our society. At a time when our country is very divided politically, we must do our best to show respect for others, including their backgrounds and beliefs." and the OK GOP chairwoman Pam Pollard who said, who said

"the Oklahoma Republican Party stands against all racism and bigotry. We hope all Oklahomans and Americans see that the violence and hatred we have seen in the last week only divide us as a nation. The world is watching."

Bennett chose not to run for re-election in 2018, but his long tenure in the House of Representatives shows that there is much to be done to educate Oklahomans on what Islam really is and to reduce hate speech that negatively impacts the Oklahoman Muslim community.

12 Since then, CAIR-OK has addressed hate speech from other elected officials and organizations. Our work continues to make Oklahoma a more just, inclusive, and welcoming state for all people.

MEDIA

In 2019, the Oklahoma Gazette featured CAIR-OK's Government Affairs Department and the annual Muslim Day at the Capitol. This issue of the gazette highlighted this history of MDAC and the evolution of the programming through the years. As well as the growth in attendance by citizens and elected leaders.

The Oklahoman ran a piece on Islamophobia and recent anti-Muslim statements made by an elected official, authored by Government Affairs Director, Lani R. Habrock. The article was entitled, "Words Matter." <https://oklahoman.com/article/5627237/point-of-view-words-matter?access=9d87377Of392d7f9a2b520aa7Ofa6c10>

Tulsa World ran an op-ed column written by Government Affairs Director Lani Habrock regarding the Fort Sill protests entitled, Why "Go Back Home" Hurts. https://www.tulsaworld.com/opinion/columnists/lani-habrock-why-go-back-home-hurts/article_219111a8-4402-54a6-9e4c-766ce6837dda.html

CAIR-OK's Executive Director, Adam Soltani, published in the Oklahoman an op-ed piece regarding the Supreme Court's ruling on the Muslim Ban, titled "High Court Should Strike Down Muslim Ban." <https://oklahoman.com/article/5592579/adam-soltani-high-court-should-strike-down-muslim-ban>

INTERNSHIPS

Special thanks to the interns who helped grow our Government Affairs Department and who helped on the development of this 2019 Report. Without them CAIR-OK would not have the capacity to do nearly the amount of work we do!



Gabriela Ramirez-Perez is a Summer 2019 Government Affairs Intern. She graduated from Classen School of Advanced Studies in 2017 and is now a rising junior at the University of Oklahoma. She is majoring in International Studies with a minor in Arabic and German. In her free time she enjoys crocheting, reading, and watching movies.



Maleha Anwar will be a junior this fall at the University of Oklahoma. She is majoring in political science and is originally from Edmond. She is particularly passionate about immigration laws and hope to one day be able to help families that suffer due to these laws. She is excited to be interning with CAIR Oklahoma and hopes to play a role fostering a better environment for Muslims in society by promoting awareness about Islam's true meaning.



Saleem Dotani is a current senior at the Oklahoma State University, Stillwater campus who is studying Chemical Engineering and History. He hopes to continue with a Masters in Public Policy program and graduate to law school. Dotani's hope is to be a leader in the public forum, and help lead his community and nation to a better future for all. Being of Pakistani descent, he has seen what can happen from misinformation, fear, and passion. To counter this, he hopes to use his own experiences and passion to stand up and directly work with all sides of the community to better Oklahoma as a whole. Saleem currently is working in the Officer Program for the U.S. Marine Corps. With the lessons of conduct, discipline, and his 14 points of leadership traits he hopes to lead the charge against injustice to help those who cannot fight it themselves.



OKLAHOMA



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