

# PERSPECTIVE

February 12, 2021

## Legislative update: Ad valorem bill sees early movement

**A**s legislators convened at the state Capitol to begin work on more than 3,000 pieces of legislation, Oklahoma Farm Bureau leaders and staff hit the ground running on a number of issues of importance to its grassroots farm and ranch members.

For several years, Farm Bureau members have been involved in discussions at the state Capitol concerning new ad valorem taxes and the 2021 session will be no different. Only four days into the first week of committee work, a bill advanced that would allow voters within a municipality to vote on a resolution to create a Public Safety Protection District funded by ad valorem taxes. If approved by local voters, the municipality would assess an ad valorem tax of up to 5 mills on qualified property within the district to fund equipment, salaries and other related costs for law enforcement and fire departments which are currently funded through sales tax.

While Farm Bureau members are avid supporters of public safety officers, OKFB policy for years has opposed new ad valorem taxes because farming and ranching are capital-intensive industries susceptible to uncertain weather and

volatile markets – especially during a global pandemic. Ad valorem taxes remain the same regardless of whether or not the producer turns a profit and can make the difference between keeping the family farm or having to sell. As conversations on ad valorem taxes continue at the state Capitol, OKFB will continue to be at the table to voice the needs of Oklahoma’s farmers and ranchers.

With Farm Bureau members advocating for improved high-speed internet access for years, OKFB is encouraged to see 11 bills introduced this year seeking to expand broadband access across the state. The explosion of virtual schooling and teleworking during 2020 helped put the need for access to quality, high-speed internet at the forefront of the minds of both urban

and rural Oklahomans. Throughout the legislative session, OKFB will work with legislators to find a plan to improve and expand broadband access statewide.

As always, the involvement of Farm Bureau members is critical to the organization’s success this year at the state Capitol. Though COVID-19 protocols may impact the traditional efforts of county Farm Bureaus, OKFB staff has worked diligently to provide members with opportunities to stay informed and engaged in the legislative process. Members can watch OKFB’s weekly Lincoln to Local videos on social media, join public policy staff for member-only calls every Friday at 12 p.m. and sign up for legislative action alerts. Check out OKFB’s 2021 Advocacy Guide at [okfarmbureau.org/advocate21](http://okfarmbureau.org/advocate21) to learn how to stay involved.

**REMINDER: Celebrate  
Farm Bureau Week Feb.  
15-19**

Each year, Farm Bureau week serves as the perfect way to celebrate and promote the grassroots organization throughout your local community.

Keep an eye out on Oklahoma Farm Bureau’s Facebook page for your chance to win one of three exciting giveaways.



# OKFB discusses ad valorem tax, urban-rural connection with Mayors Holt and Bynum

Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel discussed the impacts of potential changes to Oklahoma's ad valorem tax structure with both Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt and Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum during OKFB's Leadership Week.

Though the divisions between urban and rural communities often receive the most attention, the conversation gave Moesel and the mayors an opportunity to highlight the ways both communities rely on one another.

Over the past several years, municipalities have pushed the state legislature to levy ad valorem taxes to fund public safety districts for police and fire services.

While Farm Bureau members are avid supporters of public safety, Moesel explained the organization is against increases in ad valorem taxes because farming and ranching is a capital-intensive industry that requires vast amounts of land and equipment.

Farmers and ranchers face uncertainty year after year from weather and commodity prices. Yet ad valorem taxes bills are due each year, regardless if producers make a profit or lose money.

While acknowledging the concerns of farmers and ranchers, the mayors each shared the difficulties Oklahoma City and Tulsa face because they are reliant upon sales tax revenue.

"When you are in a downward cycle in the economy, people tend to spend less, and you generate less sales tax revenue," Bynum said. "Almost invariably crime starts to go up, and community after community is faced with the challenge to

cut back on public safety funding."

Public safety accounts for more than 50% of operating costs for most municipalities. Under current law, funding for public safety cannot come from property taxes.

The mayors argued allowing cities to use ad valorem taxes would help diversify and stabilize their revenue.

If passed, the mayors said the proposed legislation would exempt agricultural land and would still require approval by local voters.

"I understand how valuable the agricultural economy is to Tulsa and Oklahoma," Bynum said. "I would not want to do anything to hurt that. If anything, I want to find ways to help it."

Bynum acknowledged the Port of Catoosa is a major economic driver allowing agricultural commodities, building materials and much more to be shipped anywhere in the United States.

The Oklahoma National Stockyards located in Oklahoma City is the largest cattle market in the world bringing people to the city from across the state and world, Moesel mentioned.

"As much as I want people in Oklahoma City to understand our economic interdependence on rural Oklahoma, I also want them and rural Oklahomans to understand our basic human interdependence," Holt added.

The mayors were both eager to work toward closing the gap between rural and urban Oklahomans.

"There is a great synergy between rural Oklahoma and our cities, like Tulsa or Oklahoma City, that fuels our abilities to thrive," Bynum said. "It is really important to me as mayor that we have a good working relationship between the two of us."

The mayors each said they look forward to creating a better working relationship with Farm Bureau and rural and urban residents.

"All too often in Oklahoma, we find ourselves talking about what the disagreements are between urban and rural," Bynum said. "There are a whole lot of things that we should be talking about that we can get together and work together on ... I would love to work together with you all moving forward."



Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum



Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt

To view the full-length interview, visit [okfarmbureau.org/leadershipweek2021](https://okfarmbureau.org/leadershipweek2021).



Because most Farm Bureaus members are busy on their farms and ranches each day, they do not have time to visit with legislators about every agriculture or rural issue the Legislature considers. Members instead rely on Farm Bureau leaders and staff to carry out their message for them. But sometimes, state representatives and senators need to hear directly from farmers and ranchers.

Do you want to share your voice this session from the comfort of your home or from the cab of your tractor? Have you been wanting to speak with your legislator about upcoming legislation and how it could affect you?

Visit [okfb.news/contactOKLeg](https://okfb.news/contactOKLeg) to learn how to sign up for action alerts today and a few tips for calling state legislators after receiving an action alert.



## Five takeaways from OKFB's conversation with legislative leaders

Oklahoma Farm Bureau President Rodd Moesel discussed the top issues expected to be addressed by the state Legislature this year with Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat and Speaker of the House Charles McCall during OKFB's Leadership Week.

Below read Farm Bureau's five takeaways from the conversation with the state Legislature's top leaders.

### Progress on rural broadband expected

With an estimated 30% of Oklahomans considered underserved in broadband services, both legislative leaders said they expect to see progress this year on bringing high-speed internet to all Oklahomans.

Under the Rural Broadband Expansion Council created by the state Legislature last year, McCall and Treat said they are working with private sector stakeholders to create a plan to deliver broadband to underserved areas of the state.

### Ad valorem taxes still a threat for farmers and ranchers

The state Legislature this year will consider a number of bills that would allow municipalities and counties to levy new ad valorem taxes upon approval by voters in the community. Treat and McCall each said they hope to find a solution that will work for all stakeholders.

Though empathetic to the ebb and flow of sales tax revenue in cities, Treat said he is unsure if Oklahomans are ready for increased ad valorem taxes.

### A balanced budget will not include new taxes

Despite facing a down budget year from impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the added expense of Medicaid expansion, Speaker McCall does not plan to raise taxes on Oklahomans.

McCall said the state Legislature will aim to fund Medicaid expansion and the state budget by adjusting overall state funding and utilizing state savings accounts.

### Redistricting process could see delays

One of the state Legislature's most consequential tasks this year is drawing new congressional and legislative districts using results from the 2020 Census. But Treat said the process could become more complicated this year due to U.S. Census Bureau data delays.

The constitution requires legislators to complete the redistricting process during the same legislative session in which census data is received – even if the data comes toward the end of the session.

### Getting in touch with legislators

The legislative leaders both encouraged Farm Bureau members to stay engaged in the legislative process by reaching out to their legislators through a phone call, an email or even a town hall.

To find contact information for your state legislators, use the Find Your Legislator tool on the OKFB website at [okfarmbureau.org/advocacy/resources](https://okfarmbureau.org/advocacy/resources).

To view the full-length interview, visit [okfarmbureau.org/leadershipweek2021](https://okfarmbureau.org/leadershipweek2021).



Speaker of the House Charles McCall



Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat

## OKFB examines ag, rural issues in Stitt's State of the State of the State

Gov. Kevin Stitt highlighted a number of key issues for Oklahoma Farm Bureau members in his State of the State address on Monday, Feb. 1.

"The state of our state is strong because we are resilient and well-positioned for a bright future," Stitt said, as he began his address to state lawmakers.

Most notably for farmers and ranchers, Stitt committed to protecting Oklahoma agriculture producers as he announced the tenets of his legislative agenda, dubbed "The People's Agenda."

"We'll fight for our farmers and ranchers and the Oklahoma way of life," Stitt said.

The governor's agenda also includes keeping taxpayer burdens low, supporting the oil and gas industry, and enacting business friendly policies.

Six issues of note for Oklahoma Farm Bureau member from the governor's address include:

- Keeping taxes low
- Cutting regulations and red tape
- Improving state infrastructure
- Finding solutions after McGirt ruling
- Reimagining health care delivery
- Keeping the state budget flat

As the legislative session begins, OKFB is committed to working with state leaders and lawmakers to create policies that will protect and preserve agriculture and the rural way of life.

To read a more in depth analysis of Gov. Stitt's State of the State address, visit [okfb.news/SOTS21](https://okfb.news/SOTS21).

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## Oklahoma County Farm Bureau donates to Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma

Oklahoma County Farm Bureau donated \$4,000 to the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma Feb. 3 in an effort to help combat food insecurity.

“It’s really touching this time around because there are so many people who lost their job through no fault of their own,” said Bob Bierschenk, Oklahoma County Farm Bureau president. “I think it’s really great that we can have a small part in helping them.”

The money donated by Oklahoma County Farm Bureau will go on to provide roughly 16,000 meals to hungry Oklahomans.

## OKFB announces community food assistance matching program

Oklahoma Farm Bureau is launching a new OKFB Community Food Assistance Matching Program to connect county Farm Bureaus with their community.

This program encourages county organizations to donate to a local food assistance program, and OKFB will match the donation up to \$100.

County Farm Bureaus may donate to their local food bank, food pantry, meals on wheels or other food assistance program to have their donation matched. Whether it is going to the local grocery store to purchase food, hosting a food drive or presenting a monetary donation, OKFB knows community food organizations need help most during these unprecedented times.

Farmers and ranchers across Oklahoma create food, fiber and fuel for people in their communities, and Oklahoma Farm Bureau members understand the importance of giving back to their communities.

County Farm Bureaus can reach out to their local food assistance program to see what items are needed of most to make the county’s donation impact even greater.

When a county Farm Bureau makes a donation, OKFB will match the donation up to \$100 and donate to the food assistance program of choice. OKFB will send a separate check to the chosen program.

Counties are asked to inform their field representative before presenting the food or money. Donations must be made by March 31 and submit the form no later than April 9 to receive OKFB’s match.

The Community Food Assistance Matching Program reimbursement form can be found at [okfarmbureau.org/applications](http://okfarmbureau.org/applications).

For more information or questions, contact Melisa Neal at (405) 523-2475.

If your county Farm Bureau is looking for a special way to serve your community this Farm Bureau Week, consider participating in the food assistance matching program.