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# Enid News & Eagle

2 Sections 16 Pages \$1.50      Enid, Oklahoma      enidnews.com      March 6, 2024  
**WEDNESDAY**



Edna Mae Holden and John Rule stand with Harold Holden's last monument, "Pistol Pete," which was finished by friends Rule and Paul Moore.

**Suzie Byrd**  
 Enid News & Eagle

## Residents voice concerns about Skeleton Creek solar farm to commission

**By Tanner Holubar**  
 Enid News & Eagle

Thirteen residents voiced their disapproval of the proposed Skeleton Creek solar project during the public comment portion of the Enid City Commission meeting on Tuesday.

The project will consist of 5,000 acres of solar panels, as well lithium batteries for storage. The solar project's exact location in Garfield County still is being determined by NextEra Energy Resources, the company in charge of the project.

Leann Clinton asked commissioners if they had seen the letter drafted by City Manager Jerald Gilbert in November 2023 and said Gilbert had acted out of his authority.

"Did you receive the letter from Jerald Gilbert to NextEra regarding the solar complex dated Nov. 16, 2023? Because on that letter it states you were copied on it," Clinton said. "Did this council confer on the position the city would take on the solar complex that was denied at the MAPC meeting

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## 'A statue to finish'

### Harold Holden's last monument completed

**By Suzie Byrd**  
 Enid News & Eagle

On Thursday "Pistol Pete," the final monumental work of art by Harold Holden, "H" as he was known to many, will be moved from his studio to a foundry.

Then, the completed bronze statue of Frank "Pistol Pete" Eaton will be taken to the campus of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater.

After Thursday, Holden's studio will be quiet.

"Finishing this project has been very hard," said Edna Mae Holden, his wife. "I suppose I will pour myself a glass of wine, sit in the studio in the evening and reflect."

Holden died Dec. 6, 2023, in Integris Health Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City at age 83, leaving a leg-

acy of art in Garfield County and around the region. Holden overcame a terminal lung disease with a lung transplant in 2010.

In April 2023, he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and was undergoing treatment.

"He always came out of it, and I believed he would again," Edna Mae said. "He had a statue to finish."

Edna Mae made the decision to have two close artist friends, John Rule and Paul Moore, finish the project.

"I had a conversation with H once about finishing his sculpture, but we never thought it would happen," Rule said.

They both felt like it was an honor to be asked.

"I trusted them," Edna Mae said. "No one else had ever worked in his studio or touched his tools."

She said she cried at first, but after a few days she focused on the project being completed.

"I learned a lot finishing this work," Rule said. "Paul has a smooth stroke, mine is rougher and H's is real rough."

They left his hand print where they could. Holden had made all the parts out of clay and foam, then Rule said they had to make sure they would all fit together.

Moore and Rule used Holden's tools because they wanted to do it right like Holden would want it done. Rule said it was hard work and at times he had his son Marshall, his daughter-in-law Nicky and grandson Hunter come and help him lift different parts.

Of Holden's 24 other monuments, three are on the OSU campus — Heisman Trophy winner Barry Sanders, OSU

See LAST STATUE, Page A3

## Biden, Trump cruise to wins in county, state

**Staff and wire reports**

As expected, President Joe Biden and Republican challenger and former president Donald Trump were big winners locally and in the state Tuesday in the Super Tuesday presidential primary elections.

Biden polled 632 votes, or 72.06% of the 877 votes cast in the Democrat primary in Garfield County. He easily outpaced five other candidates, none of whom received more than 83 votes.

On the Republican side, Trump racked up 4,559 votes, or 81.79% of the 5,574 votes cast in the county. Nikki Haley, Trump's only serious challenger left, was far behind, with 890 votes, or 15.97%.

Libertarians also voted for two candidates, with Chase Oliver receiving six votes in Garfield County, compared to four votes for Jacob Homberger.

Statewide, the results were the same, with similar percentages to what was seen in Garfield County. Trump won all 77 counties, while Biden won 76 — losing Cimarron County 11-6 to Dean Phillips.

Biden and Trump had each won Texas, Alabama, Colorado, Maine, Oklahoma, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Minnesota and Massachusetts. Biden also won the Democratic primaries in Utah, Vermont and Iowa.

Haley's strongest performance was in Vermont, where she

See VOTE, Page A3

## Enid Day at Capitol: Social media limits, college funding, water rights

**By Jeff Funk**  
 Publisher/Editor

OKLAHOMA CITY — Children under age 16 need a law to protect them from the content and addictive qualities of social media, Rep. Chad Caldwell told a crowd of about 50 Enid area business and community leaders Tuesday.

Caldwell, an Enid Republican, spoke on restrictions for students, higher education funding and other state government topics during the Enid Day at the Capitol gathering in Oklahoma City. He joined Rep. Carl Newton, Sen. Roland Pederson and several state officials speaking at the event, organized by the Greater Enid Chamber of Commerce.

"There are addictive qualities to social media," Caldwell said, "and like we do with other addictive items in our society, we regulate that and we put on age limits."

Without new state laws, young teens with a cellphone have virtually unlimited access to social media,

Caldwell said, calling for a state law to prohibit or limit that access.

"I believe in personal liberties, but we have safety thresholds, and that's what I view this as, a safety threshold — just like we have with alcohol, tobacco and tattoos," he said.

Caldwell, who has been frequently spoken out on education funding issues, was questioned about Gov. Kevin Stitt's call for consolidation and less duplication of degrees at the state's 25 two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

"I think that it was more of a conversation starter, probably, than anything else," Caldwell said. He acknowledged the need for regional colleges to provide easier access to higher education, but he encouraged education leaders to collaborate and find more cost-effective ways.

Jeremy Hise, vice president of the Enid campus of Northern Oklahoma College, praised the level of cooperation between NOC,

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Rep. Chad Caldwell speaks to about 50 Enid area business and community leaders meeting near the State Capitol on Tuesday. Rep. Carl Newton (left) listened after offering his own comments on legislative issues. (Jeff Funk / Enid News & Eagle)

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**WEATHER**

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Today, sunny. Northeast wind at 6 mph, switching to southeast by afternoon. Tonight, 30% chance of showers and storms late. Southeast wind at 6-8 mph.

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 Page designed by: David Christy

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Drawing: Wednesday

# Historically Speaking

By David Christy

Every Friday in the News & Eagle



**A3**  
Wednesday  
March 6, 2024

Page designed by: David Christy

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## SOLAR FARM

Continued from Page A1

in February 2023? In Jerald's letter, he states that it is 'to inform NextEra of the city's position and that the city's position is that the Skeleton Creek solar farm is a permitted use in A-1 zoning, therefore no further review by MAPC is appropriate and NextEra may move forward with the project.' This action is out of the authority of the city manager and it is this council's responsibility to ensure that the city manager is not working outside of the law on the city's behalf."

Patricia Shaw said everyone should be concerned with the project and that the effects on the environment would be "extremely damaging."

"Besides the damage done to the earth to collect the rare elements to make the panels," she said, "the most damaging will be to the people who live there and go to school near the site. Their farmland will be less productive, property values will go down, and there is significant risk and harm from a battery fire that will threaten lives, including Enid. How would any of you feel if it was in your backyard? It was so arrogant of you to push for a project that will destroy people's lives and livelihoods."

Wendell Shaw said he was present to not talk about an imaginary boogeyman, but an actual boogeyman: the 5,000-acre solar farm.

"Five thousand acres out of production for 30-plus years for 78 lithium battery energy storage systems," he said, "and the city administration's callous embracing of the project without regard to those folks most imminently impacted by it. It's not a farm, farms produce food. There was zero consideration given to the potential hazards."

"There is no reason to be associated with the solar array, the lithium battery storage systems and their danger to both humans and wildlife. You can abort yourself from these responsibilities because this proposal is not directly within the city limits, but throwing the people under the

bus who have no representation here is entirely on you. The carrot on the stick seems attractive when you expect to get the carrot, we're just getting the dirty end of the stick."

Gary Hunter said he lives within the area of the project and said the lithium ion battery storage section will be next to his home. He spoke on the difficulty of putting out a fire erupting from the storage area.

"There is no way to put out one of these lithium ion battery fires," he said. "The local volunteer fire department doesn't have the manpower or the equipment to suppress these fires. During this 36-48-hour fire, because it just has to burn itself out, the prevailing winds in the summer will take these toxic fumes from these fires right into east Enid. So all of Enid is potentially in danger if more than one or two of these batteries caught fire."

Caroline Beebe said more research and safer regulations are needed for the solar project.

"And I have questions. Why the secrecy? Most people in Enid don't know anything about it, but the ones I've talked to, they don't want it," Beebe said. "So you need to get this out to the people and let them decide. What about the contamination of our water? Land made barren for hundreds of years because of these batteries. Natural gases from the lithium battery fires; battery fires will happen and our fire departments don't have the equipment to handle them. Who is going to foot the bill for this equipment?"

Loren Dierksen said the water needed to fight such a fire would be about 10 million gallons, which he said was equal to 15 city blocks of water a foot deep, or about 20 times the water of Champlin Pool.

"I don't know where this water is going to come from, but it's not going to be available," Dierksen said. "It's going to cost the rural fire departments or any fire departments \$1 million for a ladder truck and it costs \$1,000 for hazmat suits for

each person who has to be involved."

Laura Dierksen said a group of residents spoke with a local firefighter about a potential lithium ion battery fire, such as three that happened in New York state last summer.

"A four-month-old battery storage facility caught on fire. Thirty-six hours of continuous water flow; 1,000 gallons of water per minute from the top of the ladder truck, 2.1 million gallons of water total; 100 firemen in full hazmat gear; toxic smoke plume led to evacuations and shelter-in-place orders," she said. "What precautions will be taken to protect our community from fire hazards? This storage area lies in the area of Pioneer-Skeleton Creek Fire Department. What happens when lightning strikes this area?"

Doug Glenn said he opposed the solar farm being on the flight path of pilots training at Vance Air Force Base, with the solar farm causing pilots to potentially hesitate on ejecting from the aircraft, such as a crash that claimed the life of pilots in recent years.

"I was one of the first ones who walked up and saw that dead pilot in that airplane with his arms held up like the ground was the last thing that he saw," Glenn said. "I said arms because his hands were cut off at the wrists. Why would we want to subject our student pilots to this danger?"

Scott Jenson said he agreed with the "myriad of legitimate, intelligent and compelling concerns" shared by residents during the public comment portion of the meeting.

"I got two questions for you: What's more important to you? Out-of-state money or protecting the rights, safety and voices of the people that live here," Jenson said. "What if you and your chosen experts are wrong? Who will pay the price? The out-of-state givers of the greenbacks, you or all of us?"

Holubar is a reporter for the Enid News & Eagle.

## ENID DAY

Continued from Page A1

Autry Technology Center, Northwestern Oklahoma State University and local high schools.

His specifically asked for continued state funding of concurrent enrollment, where qualified high school students can take selected college-level classes.

Hise said such classes encourage high school students to continue their education.

"If they just complete one concurrent enrollment class, they are more likely to attend college," Hise said.

Caldwell, however, pushed back on that concept, saying the state was "paying twice" for high school students taking college classes.

"More people getting more education — I'm all for that," Caldwell said, but he argued that many students taking the advanced classes would have gone to college anyway.

- Management of water rights, especially groundwater aquifers.

- Driver's licenses and access to training for farm youth.
- Incentives to recruit large animal veterinarians to rural Oklahoma.

## LAST STATUE

Continued from Page A1

benefactor T. Boone Pickens and "We Will Remember" inside Gallagher-Iba Arena dedicated to the 10 men who lost their lives in a plane crash during the 2001 basketball season.

Holden had started on Eaton several times, but other projects always put Eaton on hold. Holden had wanted to do the sculpture for more than 20 years. Holden had met Eaton when he was 5, a youngster riding his horse in a parade. He got to sit on the lap of his idol and dreamed of sculpting his childhood hero.

The monument would be his 25th and his last. It seems appropriate that the two would have their final ride together. Oklahoma A&M had been modeled after Ivy League school Princeton with their orange and black colors and tiger mascot.

But when Eaton was seen riding his horse in a veterans parade in Stillwater in 1923, students wanted to embrace the western heritage of Oklahoma and the cowboy image of the once deputy marshal Frank Eaton.

In 1958, a papier-mache head in the image of Eaton first appeared at an OSU football game and since then, the mascot has improved. There have been 95 Pistol Petes promoting the legacy of Western history and art as did Eaton and Holden.

There will only be one Pistol Pete and the man who sculpted him. They will be honored in the fall at OSU, possibly at the first football game. The base for the monument is already in place on the southwest corner of Duck Street and McElroy behind the Cowgirl softball complex.

"This has been bittersweet, but this is what he always wanted," Edna Mae said.

The two legends will always be together on the OSU campus.

Byrd is a reporter for the Enid News & Eagle.

## VOTE

Continued from Page A1

was essentially tied with Trump in early results. But the former president carried other states that might have been favorable to Haley such as Virginia and Maine, which have large swaths of moderate voters like those who have backed her in previous primaries.

Not enough states will have voted until later this month for Trump or Biden to formally become their parties' presumptive nominees. But the primary's biggest day made their

rematch a near certainty. Both the 81-year-old Biden and the 77-year-old Trump continue to dominate their parties despite facing questions about age and neither having broad popularity across the general electorate.

The only contest either of them lost Tuesday was the Democratic caucus in American Samoa, a tiny U.S. territory in the South Pacific Ocean. Biden was defeated by previously unknown candidate Jason Palmer, 51 votes to 40.

Haley, who has argued both Biden and Trump are too old to return to the White House, was spending election night watching results in the Charleston, South Carolina, area, where she lives. Her campaign website doesn't list any upcoming events. Still, her aides insisted that the mood at her watch party was "jubilant."

Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate, meanwhile, was packed for a victory party that featured hors d'oeuvres including empana-

das and baked brie. Among those attending were staff and supporters, including the rapper Forgiate Blow and former North Carolina Rep. Madison Cawthorn.

## Portion of Illinois to close for concrete repairs

West Illinois from Jackson to Quincy will be closed Wednesday so workers can complete concrete repairs.

According to the city of Enid, the closure is expected to last until Wednesday, March 20.

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Cindy Roberts  
M.S., CCC-A  
Audiologist

## VDA

Continued from Page 1

lations.

He said his job as past chairman of the OSMPC was to write that paragraph and make sure all appropriate parties had the information and were discussing it. He said when solar farms starting becoming more prominent in terms of planning around the country, that state law didn't address them.

Cooper said when a proposed solar farm in Garfield County by NextEra Energy Resources came before the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, Enid Mayor David Mason asked him to meet with them. Cooper said he then went to the Defense Department director, who already knew what the stance of the Federal Aviation Administration was, which was to have the local airport make the decision on how it would impact area pilots.

Cooper said his job was to leave it up to the experts to make the decision, and that the VDA did not have a particular stance it took publicly.

"At no time, either on wind turbine request or the solar request, the Vance Development Authority does not have input in any of those decisions," Cooper said. "Our job always was, or mine, as either leader or chair of the Military Planning Commission, was to make sure the entities were contacted."

David Clinton, a voting member of the VDA, spoke against the solar project as to the negative impact it would have on Vance. He said he is a second-generation member of the Air Force and has two sons in the branch, and that the only motivation he has for the concerns over the solar farm are for the love of Vance and love of the Air Force.



Construction continues on a new hangar at Enid Woodring Regional Airport. (Billy Hefton / Enid News & Eagle)

He said he was concerned there wasn't a VDA meeting for seven months, and that the information Cooper had provided to city commissioners in October was information the rest of the VDA had not seen. He said the Air Force and the FAA for the most part can't object to construction projects unless there is a tall structure in a flight path or if the project is on their property.

He said he had concerns about the size of the solar farm, which would be around 5,000 acres, and the fact there wasn't a comparable one in the country as close to an airport as the Skeleton Creek one would be to Enid Woodring Regional Airport and Vance. He said Edwards AFB in California has a 4,600 acre solar array, but that that base is 450 square miles and the solar array is not in the approaching or departing flight path. He said it was hard to have all the right facts about the impact of the Skeleton Creek project when there was nothing

to compare it to.

Clinton said he has heard the FAA hears daily complaints about the glare from solar farms, and that since the Vance pilots train in a rectangular pattern they would inevitably have the glare in their view while training. He said there also would be more bird hazards, as birds are attracted to the solar panels due to them looking like a lake, which causes more obstacles for pilots. With the lithium battery storage for the planned solar farm, he said there would be concerns with what equipment local firefighters would need to combat the issue if a fire happened.

Clinton said people needed to rethink their motives and agendas, although Cooper responded by saying there has never been a specific stance or agenda the VDA has taken toward the project.

"There is no upside to Vance Air Force Base for this project. Zero. Best case, best possible case is this has a neutral impact on Vance

Air Force Base," Clinton said. "It most likely will have a negative impact on Vance, but could have a significant impact on base. We will be the guinea pig for a multi-thousand acre solar next to an airport. There's not another one this big that exists."

Col. Charles Throckmorton, commander of the 71st Flying Training Wing at Vance, said when the FAA and Defense Department agree, it's hard for him to say he's in disagreement with that. He said there are a lot of what ifs, and for him to go against those organizations wasn't possible due to not having all the information to be able to do so.

During public comment on the solar panel project, Suzanne Hunter said she has lived in the area of the proposed solar farm for 40 years, due to it being a good area for agriculture.

"These past few months have been very distressing. We have researched the effects of the solar panel farms, and we can

say this industrial monster is not wanted in our neighborhoods or in our area or between Vance Air Force Base," Hunter said. "Opposition of this solar panel farm extends to the aviators from Vance Air Force Base and Woodring Airport. It's a fact that the glare from the panels will present a threat to these aviators. Do we value our Air Force Base, our airport or our aviators? We do. We need to look ahead. Would we be so irresponsible as to make decisions that would affect Enid, Vance Air Force Base and Woodring Airport?"

In other business, Cooper gave updates on some projects taking place at Vance. He said the \$8.4 million to be used for the planning phase of a new squadron operations center for the base has been received and planning and design is underway. He said it is the top military construction project for the base, and they hope to have the design done in the near future and then go about securing funding for the construction of the facility.

He also gave an update on the project to replace Eisenhower Elementary School, which is on the base's property. The proposed construction of a new school would be around \$30 million, with Enid Public Schools needing to provide 20% of the cost and 80% coming from the Defense Department.

He said about \$540,000 has been acquired from the OSMPC, and the next thing to happen is the grant will be received. The engineering and design of the school will cost about \$980,000, and the grant would help pay EPS' portion of the design phase.

The VDA also voted to

approve the nomination of George Pankonin, former chair of the VDA and former Enid mayor, to be the vice chair.

Keston Cook, director of Woodring, gave an update on construction projects at the airport. He said the iron is going up on the east hangar, and within eight weeks it could be ready for use. He also said the south ramp reconstruction is complete and the runway is now open, and the first T-6 aircraft from Vance have been parked there.

The VDA also reviewed Cooper's role with the organization. The budget for the VDA is \$171,000, with scholarships budgeted at \$30,000; travel and conferences at \$18,500; and Cooper is paid \$120,000 a year. He is an independent contractor and the scope of his duties include monitoring any base realignment and closure actions with regard to the Defense Department, Air Force and federal and state governments; maintaining contact with Oklahoma Strategic Military Planning Commission, state of Oklahoma legislative bodies and executive branch, members of Congress, Oklahoma representatives in Washington and the staffs of the authorization and appropriations committees; assisting the city of Enid and the VDA with military appropriations for Vance; acting as liaison for the general economic development work and infrastructure funding as directed by Mason, who also serves as VDA chairman, between the VDA, Enid, the state and the federal government; and providing reports to the VDA and the city commission at public meetings.

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# TRENDING

ag & energy

“FROM THE CITY’S PERSPECTIVE, (ENID) HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT ENERGY, OIL AND GAS, AND NOW MORE AND MORE IT’S BECOMING ABOUT RENEWABLES.”

## NextEra expects energy project to shine

By Tanner Holubar  
Enid News & Eagle

Constructed by NextEra Energy, Skeleton Creek Energy Center has a mission to combine wind, solar and battery energy storage systems and help create longterm, sustainable renewable energy for Enid and Garfield County.

In 2020, the project’s wind energy portion was completed and is operational, with a capability of generating up to 250 megawatts of wind energy that can power 150,000 homes, according to NextEra.

The next phase of the project is solar and storage that could generate up to 250 megawatts of local solar energy to pair with a 252-megawatt, four-hour battery storage system.

Naomi Morrison, company spokeswoman, said solar panels capture sunlight and produce power, and Skeleton Creek has the ability to store it for later use.

“As sunlight hits the solar panels, the photovoltaic energy is converted into direct current electricity (DC). The direct current flows from the panels through inverters and is converted into alternating current (AC). From the inverter, some of the emissions-free energy goes into a battery energy storage system to be used at a

later time, while the rest of the energy travels through the power grid for delivery to homes and businesses,” Morrison said.

Batteries using stored energy can provide important services to help balance and improve overall power grid operations, she said. Storage can complement renewable energy by storing wind and solar energy when plentiful and redistributing it to customers in times of need.

Batteries can help make more renewable energy available over more hours of the day, similar to a traditional power plant, she said.

The solar and battery storage portion of the project will bring an estimated \$65 million in additional

tax revenue, and the construction of the facility will utilize up to 200 temporary construction jobs.

Enid City Manager Jerald Gilbert said the Skeleton Creek Energy Center is yet another example of the city’s commitment to renewable energy, as there have been several wind farms constructed in the area to go along with the project.

“From the city’s perspective, the city has always been about energy, oil and gas, and now more and more it’s becoming about renewables,” he said. “It just kind of continues that legacy; however, it is also, you could say, a continuation of the agricultural legacy, too, because they do this on land. With the wind farms

from various different companies around Enid, as far as I can tell, (it) has worked out fairly well for Enid.”

Gilbert said the facility would overall be a benefit for Enid, especially with job creation. The estimated 200 workers constructing the project results in more sales tax for the city, and there also will be employees needed to operate the facility once it is operational.

Gilbert said NextEra likely will break ground this year and open the facility in 2025. NextEra is working on the project’s final design. As the team gets closer to the construction and has final designs, more information will be available as to the location of the solar farm, officials said.

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