

LOCAL ■ STATE ■ NATION



Donnie Anderson, director of the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics; Paul J. Larkin of the Heritage Foundation; and former DEA official Christopher Urben, are sworn in before testifying to members of Congress. (Photo provided)

POT FARMS

Continued from Page A1

industry was another theme in his testimony.

At the hearing, witnesses and Democratic and Republican lawmakers called for the federal government to take stronger action against illicit marijuana farms — operations that have spread nationwide and have been found in large numbers in Oklahoma.

The two-hour session was led by Rep. Josh Brecheen, R-Okla., who chairs the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations and Accountability of the House Committee on Homeland Security.

“We are holding this hearing today because we’ve enabled these foreign organizations with potential links to the Chinese government to build up a sophisticated network throughout the United States,” Brecheen said at the hearing. The groups operate “at scale and with sophistication, crossing state and national lines, beyond the normal capabilities state and local law enforcement can combat.”

Several witnesses and lawmakers cited reporting last year by The Frontier and ProPublica that revealed how Chinese criminal groups took advantage of weak laws in Oklahoma to dominate the global black market for marijuana. The reporting also documented the groups’ use of forced labor and their ties to the Chinese state.

“The billions of dollars generated by illegal marijuana are not staying in the United States. They help finance China’s Belt and Road Initiative — a global strategy designed to expand China’s influence as America pulls back on foreign aid,” said Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Shri Thanedar, D-Michigan, a state where illegal marijuana operations have been recently identified. “Illegal marijuana proceeds also fund Mexican cartels that traffic deadly fentanyl into our

communities. And the black market is riddled with human trafficking, human smuggling and forced labor.”

Possible actions

To confront the issue, Christopher Urben, a former senior DEA official, urged Congress to create a federally funded interagency task force modeled on the campaigns that dismantled Italian mafias in the 1980s and 90s.

“Federal funding, coordination, and authority combined with state and local resources is desperately needed,” Urben said. “I would ask that you fully fund a task force to attack these networks.”

The task of cracking down on marijuana farms has primarily fallen to state and local authorities, which generally only have the resources to raid farms one-by-one and arrest their managers. But Urben said farm managers are only low-level operators that are easily replaced by the criminal organizations that employ them.

The purpose of the task force would be to target out-of-state and foreign ringleaders using federal racketeering, money laundering and organized crime charges. It would include translators for regional Chinese dialects, data scientists, counterintelligence specialists, money to recruit confidential sources and financial crimes investigators.

Urben and Anderson also called for Congress to look into restricting WeChat, an encrypted Chinese messaging and payment platform that investigators say is frequently used for money laundering.

Thanedar criticized the Trump administration’s reported decision to shutter the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force program, which has coordinated multi-agency cases against international organized crime for decades,

including investigations of Chinese groups in Oklahoma. The Justice Department has begun replacing it with Homeland Security Task Forces that emphasize immigration enforcement, according to media reports.

Thanedar said he also is concerned that the Trump administration’s recent deployment of federal law enforcement agents to fight street crime in American cities has diverted resources from investigations of transnational organized crime.

Paul J. Larkin, a fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, suggested Congress expand federal review of agricultural land purchases. This approach mirrors Sen. James Lankford’s proposed SOIL Act, which would require federal authorities to review land deals for national security concerns. The bill passed the Senate in 2023 but was not signed into law. Lankford reintroduced the proposal in March.

Larkin also called on prosecutors to target the Chinese government itself. There is evidence that Chinese officials are aware of organized criminal activity, he told the panel, and cited The Frontier and ProPublica’s reporting on ties between criminal groups in Oklahoma and Chinese officials in his written remarks.

“As the Supreme Court of the United States has made clear, ‘(t)he doctrine of willful blindness is well established in criminal law,’ as is the principle that the government may establish proof of a conspiracy entirely through circumstantial evidence, which appears to be in ample supply on this point,” he wrote.

The Frontier is a nonprofit focusing on investigative and watchdog journalism. For more information or to donate, go to www.readthefrontier.org.



Pete Reed speaks at the Greater Enid Chamber of Commerce on Thursday about his efforts to raise money for a monument honoring Native American veterans to be erected at the state Capitol complex. (Kevin Hassler / Enid News & Eagle)

FUNDRAISING MISSION

Continued from Page A1

point, understand what it is we’re doing,” he said.

Once the money is raised for the First American Warrior monument, bids will be solicited from Native American artists to create the artwork, Reed said.

Force 50 Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that is involved in other veterans issues besides the monument project.

“We have no overhead. All of the money that comes in is used for the projects, either for public awareness or for health research, surveys, program development and things like that, for health and mental health,” Reed said. “In fact, we’re still number one in the nation for veteran suicides. Not a proud thing to be Oklahoma, Oklahoma’s number one in the nation in suicides, among veterans, and Native Americans are a large population of that suicide rate.

“In fact, we’re going to be working with our brand new research project come November. We’re partnering with University of Central Oklahoma to do a statewide survey and research project on suicide ideation and suicide itself. And from that, what the foundation will do is develop a program that we can recommend to the VA to address the issue.”

Donations made be made online at force50foundation.com by clicking on donate, then clicking on “Donate to the Native American Warrior Project.” Donation checks also can be mailed to Force 50 Foundation, P.O. Box 722838, Norman OK 73070. Be sure to write Warriors on the memo line so the donation goes to the right project.

Reed’s goal is to get \$25 donations from 100,000 to raise the \$2.5 million needed.

“It’s not that we don’t take large donations,” he said. “We’re working on that behind the scenes, but George and I always said ... he said, ‘Big donations are important; however, grassroots statewide support solidifies your cause.’”

Kevin Hassler is associate editor of the Enid News & Eagle.

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Flights snarled at Dallas airports over equipment issues

DALLAS (AP) — Hundreds of flights in and out of Dallas were delayed or canceled Friday as telecommunications equipment issues disrupted one of the nation’s busiest airports, federal officials said

The Federal Aviation Administration said it was slowing flights at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport because of

a “reported local telephone company equipment issue.” The same problems were also impacting Dallas Love Field, according to the agency, which said the issue did not involve FAA equipment.

The FAA expects the delays to continue well into Friday night.

According to FlightAware, as of late Friday afternoon, nearly 700 flights in

and out of DFW Airport were delayed while about 200 canceled. About 160 flights were delayed in and out of Love Field while one flight was canceled.

A spokesperson for Love Field said they were in “constant communication” with partners including the FAA as they “work to manage the situation and minimize disruptions.”

Corrections

We strive for complete accuracy in all our work, but if you do find an inaccuracy, please email editor@enidnews.com or call (580) 548-8140.

Vietnam prisoner of war's name misspelled

Retired Air Force Lt. Col. William R. “Bill” Schwertfeger’s name was misspelled in an article in the Friday edition of the News & Eagle.

Schwertfeger flew F-4 Phantoms in the Vietnam War. He was shot down over North Vietnam and spent 407 days as a prisoner of war in the Hanoi Hilton.

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NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY:
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

The Department of the Air Force invites you to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed T-7A Recapitalization at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the Department of the Air Force (Air Force), has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for public comment that analyzes the potential environmental consequences associated with the proposal to recapitalize the T-38C Talon flight training program at Vance Air Force Base (AFB) with T-7A Red Hawk aircraft. Recapitalization would entail introduction of T-7A aircraft and flight operations at Vance AFB and associated special use airspace to replace all T-38C aircraft assigned to the installation; changes to the number of personnel and dependents in the Vance AFB region; and construction and upgrade of operations, support, and maintenance facilities. The Air Force’s Proposed Action is to replace all currently operating T-38C aircraft at Vance AFB with up to 99 T-7A aircraft. Varying numbers of aircraft and levels of aircraft operations are reasonable alternatives. Along with the No Action Alternative, three action alternatives are evaluated in the Draft EIS.

OBTAIN AND REVIEW THE DRAFT EIS. The Draft EIS can be downloaded from <https://vance.T-7ANEPADocuments.com>. A paper copy is on reserve at the Enid Public Library at 120 W Maine Street, Enid, Oklahoma 73701.

PUBLIC COMMENT. The Air Force requests comments from interested local, state, and federal agencies; federally recognized tribes; and interested members of the public. Written comments can be submitted at <https://vance.T-7ANEPADocuments.com>, by email to chinling.chen@us.af.mil, or via postal mail at the address below. For further information, please contact:
Ms. Chinling Chen, AFCEC/CIE
Attn: Vance AFB T-7A Recapitalization EIS
Headquarters Air Education and Training Command Public Affairs
100 H Street East, Suite 4
Randolph AFB, TX 78150
(580) 213-7273.

To ensure the Air Force has sufficient time to consider public input in preparation of the Final EIS, please submit comments by October 14, 2025.



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Circulation: 548-8114 circmgr@enidnews.com
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Publisher: Mike Kellogg (580) 548-8135
Executive Editor: Beau Simmons 548-8104
Advertising Director: Leslie Magalos 548-8105
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Business Manager: Jamie Denny 548-8110
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(USPS 334-330)
The Enid News & Eagle is published Tuesday through Saturday by CNHI, LLC, at 227 W. Broadway, Enid, OK 73701.
Periodicals postage is paid at Enid, OK 73701.
Member of The Oklahoma Press Association.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Enid News & Eagle, P.O. Box 1192, Enid, OK 73702.

Retirement Announcement

Sanku S. Rao, M.D. is retiring from medical practice as of September 30th, 2025, after 46 years of dedicated service to the Enid Community. In 1979, he was the first Gastroenterologist to provide specialized services in Northwest Oklahoma.

Christopher Schultz, D.O. will assume the practice, along with all the patient medical records as of October 1st, 2025.
His phone number is 580-205-2009 and is located at 330 E. Cherokee, Enid, OK.