



# Byrd's Eye View

*Making sense of the numbers*

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State Auditor & Inspector

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## State Auditor & Inspector Cindy Byrd

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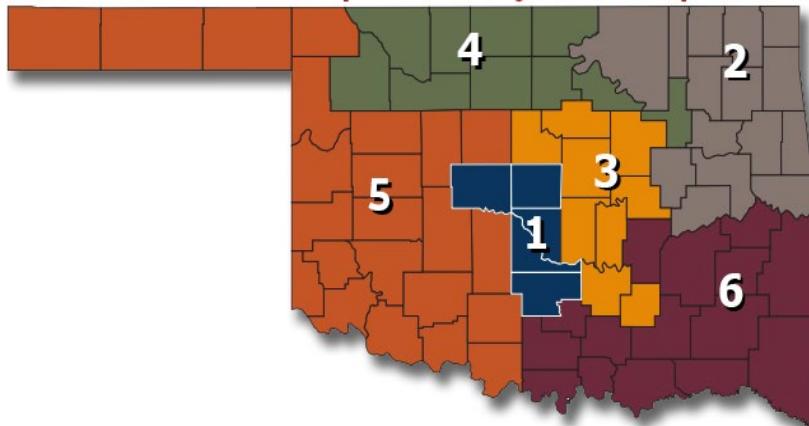
### OKLAHOMA TURNPIKE AUTHORITY – THE TOLL YOU PAY

On the State Auditor's website, [www.sai.ok.gov](http://www.sai.ok.gov), you'll find more than 37,000 audit reports dating back to 2001.

Included among this vast collection of public spending information are financial statement audits, performance audits, investigative audits, operational audits, treasurer reviews, annual comprehensive financial reports, single audits, and agreed-upon-procedures audits.

That's a lot of audits and they're not all conducted by SAI. In Oklahoma, audits of municipalities, school districts, trusts/authorities, and some state agencies are conducted by private sector accountants or firms. All audits of public entities are required to be filed with SAI which serves as a repository for this information.

#### Oklahoma Turnpike Authority District Map



Included among the tens of thousands of audit reports are the annual financial statement audits of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA).

Created in 1947 to construct, maintain, and operate the Turner Turnpike to connect Oklahoma City to Tulsa, OTA's role has expanded over the years.

In 1953, the purpose of OTA was redefined to permit construction of additional turnpikes and its board changed to add six members, one for each district in the state. These changes were ratified in January, 1954 through a statewide referendum.

Today, OTA operates and maintains 11 turnpikes, primarily in the northeast quadrant of the state with two turnpikes in the southeast section, and one turnpike in the southwest running from southwest Oklahoma City to Texas.

The fiscal year and calendar year coincide for the OTA so December 31<sup>st</sup> is the last day of any fiscal year. The most recent financial information available is FY2020.

The original turnpike, the Turner, regularly earns the most in toll revenue annually. In FY20, the Turner realized \$73.45 million in tolls. Second was the Will Rogers which runs from northeast Tulsa to Missouri and reported \$66.1 million in tolls collected.

In contrast, the 21-mile long Kickapoo turnpike which connects I-40 (near Harrah) to the Turner (near Jones) opened in late 2020 and collected \$158 thousand in tolls.

Of the \$302.6 million paid in tolls in FY 20, passenger vehicles accounted for \$178.263 million (about 58.9 percent) while commercial vehicles accounted for \$124.354 million (41.1 percent).

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Turner	73,452	79,235	76,931	73,068	64,196	61,920	60,263	57,302	57,201	55,678
Will Rogers	66,114	67,745	66,121	62,110	55,355	53,775	52,242	49,888	50,749	50,022
John Kilpatrick	41,922	45,551	43,983	41,117	36,312	34,206	31,175	28,023	28,035	27,382
Creek	31,226	35,348	34,651	33,240	28,435	27,209	25,698	24,000	24,487	24,562
H.E. Bailey	30,418	34,312	32,604	30,589	26,650	25,604	25,157	23,743	23,519	22,761
Muskogee	20,752	21,705	21,065	20,156	18,389	17,969	17,129	16,323	16,372	15,718
Indian Nation	15,721	18,267	17,826	16,665	14,552	14,742	14,260	13,964	14,047	13,407
Cimarron	12,362	13,861	13,572	13,470	11,743	11,649	11,581	11,251	10,917	10,084
Cherokee	9,596	10,389	9,975	9,730	8,622	8,207	7,790	7,542	7,490	7,324
Chickasaw	896	1,016	988	934	810	770	775	710	680	686
Kickapoo	158	n/a								
<b>Totals</b>	<b>302,617</b>	<b>327,429</b>	<b>317,716</b>	<b>301,079</b>	<b>265,064</b>	<b>256,051</b>	<b>246,070</b>	<b>232,746</b>	<b>233,497</b>	<b>227,624</b>

(Presented in thousand of dollars)

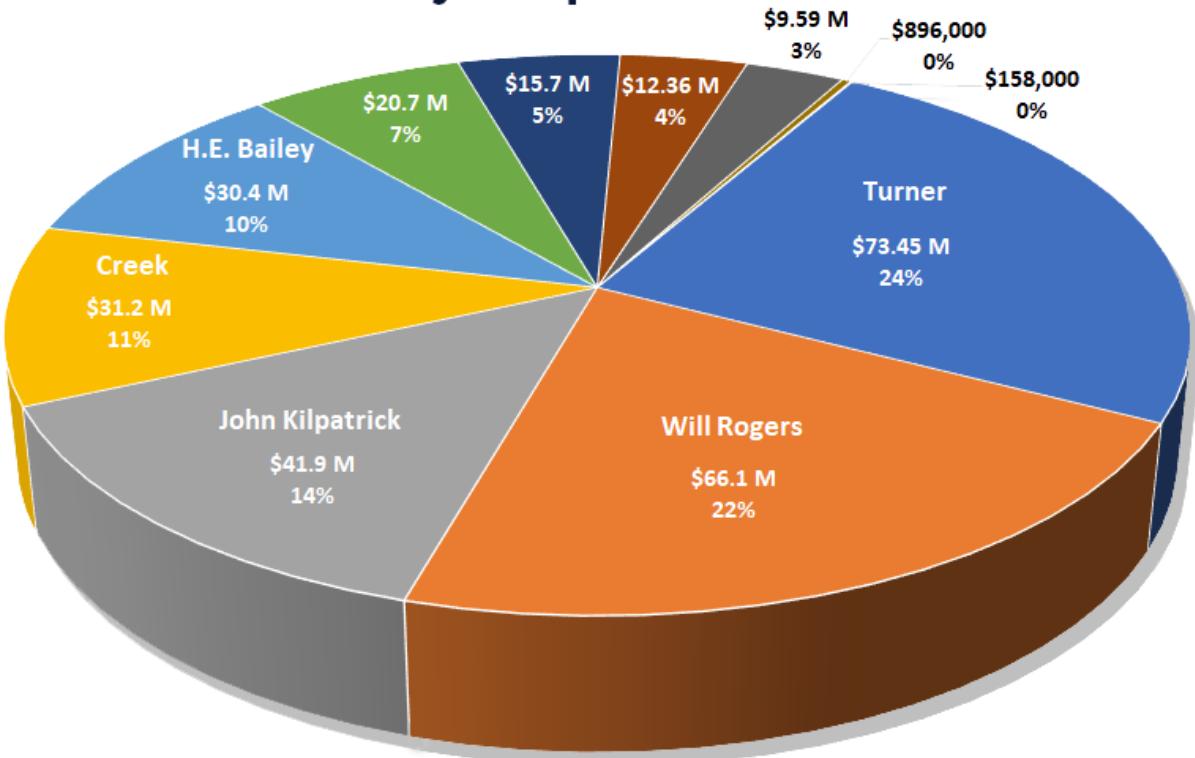
COVID-19 is credited with a drop in revenues in FY20 as businesses were shuttered for several months and people limited travel around and through the state.

Even accounting for the pandemic, FY20 reported the third highest year for toll collections in the last decade. The chart above ranks the turnpikes by revenue amounts.

The original Turner Turnpike accounts for almost one in every four dollars collected in tolls. The Turner and Will Rogers turnpikes total 46 percent of all tolls collected in FY20.

The OTA relies primarily on revenues from tolls, investments, and concession leases to pay all operating and maintenance costs for the turnpikes and to pay off bonds issued to finance construction. If necessary, a 1992 law permits the OTA to utilize available additional motor fuel excise taxes for payment of its debt service. Each month, if the motor fuel tax isn't needed, the money is disbursed to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT).

## FY20 Toll Revenue by Turnpike



The FY20 annual report states gross revenues to OTA totaled \$321 million while operating expenses totaled \$123 million leaving \$198 million available for debt service. The total debt service in FY20 was \$83.898 million.

OTA had \$1.721 billion in outstanding revenue bonds as of December 31, 2020.

To maintain its operation, OTA employed 634 Oklahomans including 138 Toll Operators and 123 State Troopers. When you fold in the concessionaire employees for McDonald's, Subway, and the concession stores, OTA reported 1,100 employees in FY20.

You've probably heard an argument over the years that a toll was supposed to disappear after the toll road was paid off. That may have been the original intent. The 1954 referendum approved by voters changed that concept.

OTA reports "The people of Oklahoma voted in 1954 to "cross-pledge" the turnpike system. By this action they voted to commit the tolls collected on all turnpikes to pay the debt service, maintenance, and expansion for the turnpike system, not each individual road."

OTA also notes that ODOT would need an additional \$150 million annually to complete the routine maintenance and capital rehabilitation currently performed on the Turnpike System.

There are 626.7 miles of toll roads in Oklahoma. Here's a list of the turnpikes, when each opened, and the length of each in miles:

Turner	1953	86 miles
Will Rogers	1957	88.5 miles
H.E. Bailey	1964	94.6 miles
Indian Nation	1966 & 1970	105.2 miles
Muskogee	1969	53.1 miles
Cimarron	1975	67.7 miles
John Kilpatrick	1991, '00, '01	30.3 miles
Cherokee	1991	32.8 miles
Chickasaw	1991	13.3 miles
Creek	1991, '92, '00, '01, '02	34.4 miles
Kickapoo	2020 (2021)	21 miles

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## AUDITOR'S CORNER: STATUTORY AUTHORITY FOR OVERSIGHT FALLS TO THE GOVERNING BOARD



Local officials are, geographically, the closest to their constituents. They typically know where you live or at least how to find you. The smaller the community, the closer the relationship between those who govern at the consent of the governed.

Most of the complaints and requests for Special Audits we receive involve smaller communities and school districts in which the elected officials either refuse to exercise their oversight authority, or they're not responsive to residents asking questions and seeking documents.

I'll address the latter in a moment. First, I'd like to discuss the failure of many elected officials to actually know what's going on at city hall.

Two recent audits – the Town of Tryon and the Town of Lone Wolf – show the town boards bear the responsibility for thousands of dollars being misspent, often without their approval or knowledge.

I fully appreciate that public service, especially volunteer public service, can be difficult even in the best environment. You're sacrificing time with your family, maybe from work, and personal activities to spend hours going over background information related to upcoming agenda items and projects. You're discussing town business at the coffee shop instead of how the high school baseball or softball teams are doing. It becomes a big part of your life.

Because you asked voters to give you the opportunity to serve them. Because you're giving your time and energy to be a public servant. You have a fiduciary responsibility to do things that are in the best interest of the residents or school patrons you represent including the safeguarding of public assets.

In both audits, town employees were spending money without the approval or knowledge of the town boards. Trustees weren't looking over financial statements, approving payroll, reviewing checking account balances, or questioning credit card statements.

In the Town of Tryon, three former employees, including the police chief, misappropriated \$79,320 in payroll. When the Board discovered their Town couldn't meet its financial obligations, they requested a Special Audit.

In the Town of Lone Wolf, the Board requested a Special Audit after its independent accounting firm provided information on questionable financial activity when auditing Fiscal Years 2015, 2016, and 2017.

We found records supporting financial activities of the Town were disorganized, incomplete, and sometimes missing. The Town's office manager was doing a lot behind the scenes to hide her misappropriation of funds through unauthorized payroll, unapproved insurance benefits payments for her children, and improper use of the Town's credit card.

In all, three Lone Wolf employees were improperly benefitting financially from their positions with the Town.

When boards are engaged, these activities are much harder to conduct and, if something wrong is going on, it's usually found and corrected much quicker.

This would be a much longer article if I went into all the times local officials have thwarted and frustrated local residents by not providing records required to be released under the Oklahoma Open Records Act. All public officials, elected or appointed, should keep in mind you work for and are accountable to the public.

Transparency should always be a value in government because, while priorities change, values remain constant.

With that in mind, I'd like to invite municipal officials and employees -especially in southwest Oklahoma – to a special and informative discussion on the Open Records Act. The event is hosted by Hillary Communications and the Lawton Constitution. This free seminar is scheduled for Noon to 4:00 pm on Thursday, April 21, 2022, at the Apache Hotel Ballroom, 2351 E. Gore Blvd., in Lawton.

Municipal Attorney Amanda Mullins and I will be presenting information on the Open Records Act including examples of when local residents, rebuffed by their town officials in efforts to obtain records, petitioned for a Special Audit and the resulting lack of transparency.

My goal is to help public officials do things right. This seminar is one way of spreading the word on what to expect when you're elected or appointed to office. Transparency and Accountability lead to Open Government that earns public trust!

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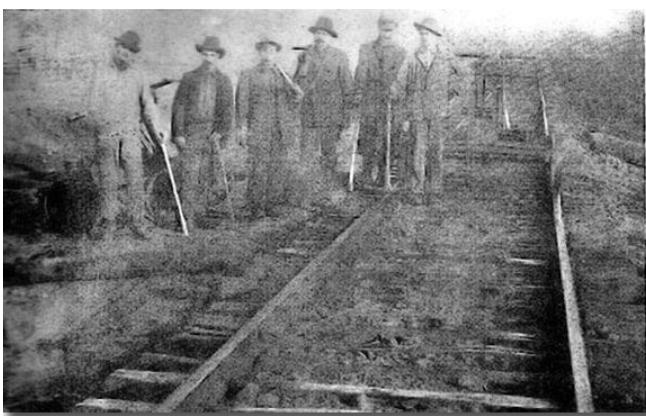
# IRISH INFLUENCE IN OKLAHOMA

## Irish Influence in Oklahoma

Just looking around the state, you might not realize the impact Irish immigrants and their descendants had on Oklahoma. That may be, in large part, because the Irish tended to blend into the tapestry of residents without maintaining separate cultural celebrations and recognitions.

According to the [Oklahoma Historical Society](#), the presence of many first and second-generation Irish (and Scots-Irish) can be traced as part of the federal relocation of American Indians, especially the Five Tribes. *"Many of the mixed-blood members of the groups that moved to Indian Territory in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century had an Irish parent or spouse."*

In the early 1800s, a few Irish trappers and traders settled in what would become Oklahoma. Some US Army personnel stationed at frontier forts of Indian Territory were also of Irish descent.



A group of Irish-born railroad tracklayers known as "John Scullin's Irish Brigade" and many other Irish employees helped to establish lines for the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway Company (MK&T). Several stayed in the territory, and many married into the Indian Nations.

A number of Irish participated in the land runs that established the Oklahoma Territory. According to an article published in the *Tulsa World*, [\*State Rich in Irish Heritage\*](#), June 24, 2007, Irish immigrants and their immediate descendants

were dispersed across the state though an especially large number settled across north-central Oklahoma – largely in what is now Kay County.

Although their culture and heritage vary significantly, there is a lasting bond between the [Choctaw and Irish](#) dating back to the Great Potato Famine that claimed the lives of more than a million people in Ireland.

In 1847, when the Choctaw people heard of the dire conditions of the starving poor in Ireland, they gathered \$170 – about \$5,000 in today's dollars – and sent it to the Memphis Irish Relief Committee which forwarded it to the General Irish Relief Committee in New York City.

The Choctaws, who had suffered the loss of 20 percent of their people during the Trail of Tears relocation to Indian Territory less than 15 years earlier, felt a kinship to the tragedy suffered by the Irish. Their generosity did not go unnoticed and created a lasting bond that still exists today.



Former President of Ireland Mary Robinson traveled to the Choctaw Nation in 1995 to personally thank the Choctaw people for their contribution a century and a half earlier.

The people of County Cork commissioned a sculpture to the Choctaw Nation in 2015 named *Kindred Spirits*.

The nine, 6-meter-tall stainless steel eagle feathers, each unique, that make up the sculpture create the shape of an empty bowl symbolizing the hunger suffered by Irish people in the famine and "represents this great moment of compassion, strength, and unity" artist Alex Pentek told *The Oklahoman*.

The connection between Native Americans and Irish Americans extended beyond the Choctaws.



In 1850, Frank Murray left his native Ireland, along with nearly two million of his fellow countrymen, to find fame and fortune in America. The 25-yr old Murray instead found he had left behind famine for pre-civil war tension in the states. He would struggle to get by until fortune eventually smiled on him.

Sympathetic to the North, Frank carried mail between Fort Washita and Fort Arbuckle. He ended up in Fort Gibson when the Civil War ended in 1861. He would eventually meet and later marry Chickasaw native Alzira Powell, a 21-yr old widow with a young daughter.

The trio headed to Pauls Valley in 1869 where Murray became successful working for fellow Irishman Smith Paul. Frank and Alzira married in 1871 and Murray, now wedded to a native Chickasaw, was able to buy land in the nation.

They left Pauls Valley and settled in Elm Springs, a picturesque spot overlooking the Washita River. Murray renamed the place Erin Springs after his homeland (and possibly after his sister though this fact isn't as clear to historians).



Together, the couple would raise cattle and grow corn on 20,000 acres in what is today, far northwest Garvin County. By 1888, the Murrays owned more than 26,000 head of cattle with cornfields running five miles long and three miles wide.

Frank had chosen a spot along a stage route and worked out a contract to sell his crops and cattle to the U.S. Army. Almost 30 years after leaving Ireland, Frank had realized his American Dream.

Murray died in 1892 at the age of 67. Although his business empire suffered for a while after his death, Alzira salvaged enough of the crumbling business to again achieve prosperity.

She added a third story to the mansion she built with Frank which provided plenty of room for her family of nine children. Once the largest structure in the Chickasaw Nation, the Murray family would eventually deed the home to the City of Lindsay.

Sixty years after Alzira's death in 1924, the newly created Lindsay Community Historical Society began work to restore the home to its original early twentieth century elegance. Today volunteers provide tours and true historical accounts of its former occupants.

Women of Irish descent also impacted the establishment of the 46<sup>th</sup> state.

In 1907, Oklahoma elected [Catherine Ann "Kate" Barnard](#) as its first Commissioner of Charities and Corrections, the only office for which a woman could be elected. Barnard was only the second woman in the country elected to a statewide office. Remember, women didn't attain the right to vote until the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution was certified on August 26, 1920.

Born to Irish parents in Geneva, Nebraska in 1875, Barnard would make her way to Newalla, Oklahoma in 1891. In 1895, she obtained a teaching certificate and taught until 1902. She became a secretary for the territorial legislature in Oklahoma City and in 1904 was selected as a territorial hostess for the St. Louis World's Fair.

It proved to be an eye-opening experience as her exposure to the slums, crime, and other related social ills in the "big city" would set the course for the rest of her life. Barnard began to work as a social reformer and did considerable charity work.

She would serve two terms working on behalf of prison reform and child labor issues – much to the chagrin of the male-only legislature. She is credited as a significant player in the enactment of compulsory education laws, statutes implementing a ban on child labor, and she worked to pass legislation to eliminate unsafe working conditions and the blacklisting of union members.

It was during her second term that Barnard's advocacy and national speeches led then-Speaker of the House William H. "Alfalfa Bill" Murray to rally the legislature to defund Barnard's office. Murray would go on to become the state's ninth Governor.

Barnard, largely faded into obscurity for a time without a lasting legacy for reform and female political activism in Oklahoma. She died alone in an Oklahoma City hotel room on February 23, 1930. Barnard was buried in an unmarked grave.

Gone but not forgotten, Barnard was inducted into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame in 1982 and her grave was provided a proper marker. On May 15, 2001, a bronze sculpture of Barnard titled [Our Good Angel, Kate](#) was dedicated by the State Capitol Preservation Commission.

In Tecumseh, an elementary school building on the National Register of Historical Places is named after Barnard.



Many capitol visitors, both children and adults, take the time to sit next to Kate for a photo or selfie with one of our state's pioneering women.

The Irish established a presence in our great state before statehood and, while they largely blended into the social fabric of our state, many left a lasting mark on its values and history.

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## CAPITOL RENOVATION IS ALL BUT FINISHED!



The last major piece of the \$275 million Capitol restoration and modernization project was completed this week when the ribbon was cut opening the Oklahoma State Capitol Museum on Tuesday, March 22, 2022.

With 4400 square feet of exhibit space, the museum features 13 exhibit cases with more than 125 artifacts on the history of the Capitol building and the work of Oklahoma state government.

The museum is on the ground floor just to the left of the Visitor's Center entrance and across from the bronze seal in the center of the rotunda.

Visitors are greeted with a five-minute animated presentation projected in a 270-degree arc displaying a brief history of the Capitol.

Among the artifacts on display is a working draft of the Oklahoma Constitution, a 1970's-era voting machine, and the quill pen President Theodore Roosevelt used to sign the Oklahoma Statehood Proclamation.

The Oklahoma State Capitol Museum is open to the public from 7 am to 7 pm Monday through Friday, and from 9 am to 4 pm Saturday and Sunday.

Currently, just a few building materials remain in the building as renovation from top to bottom and the south plaza to the roof is complete.



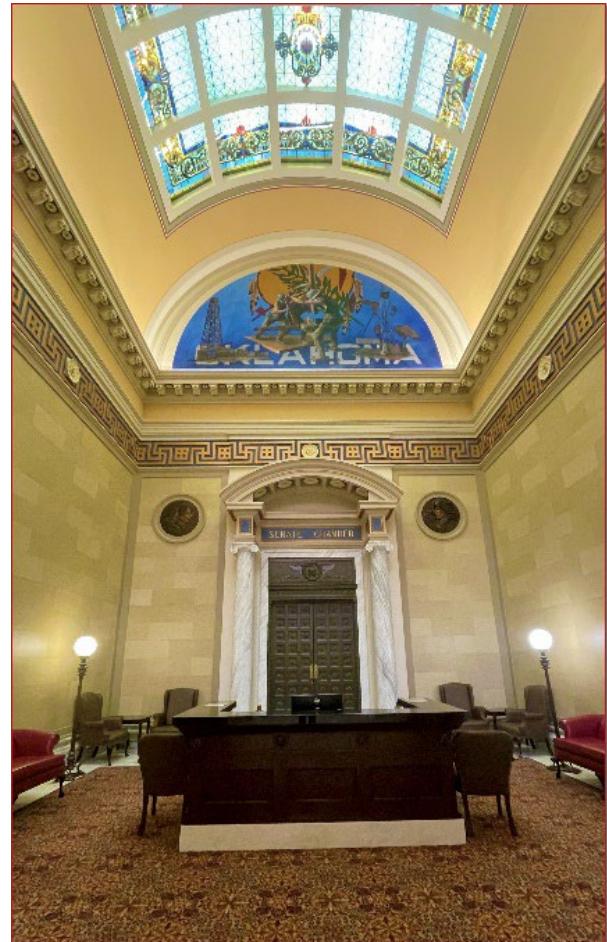
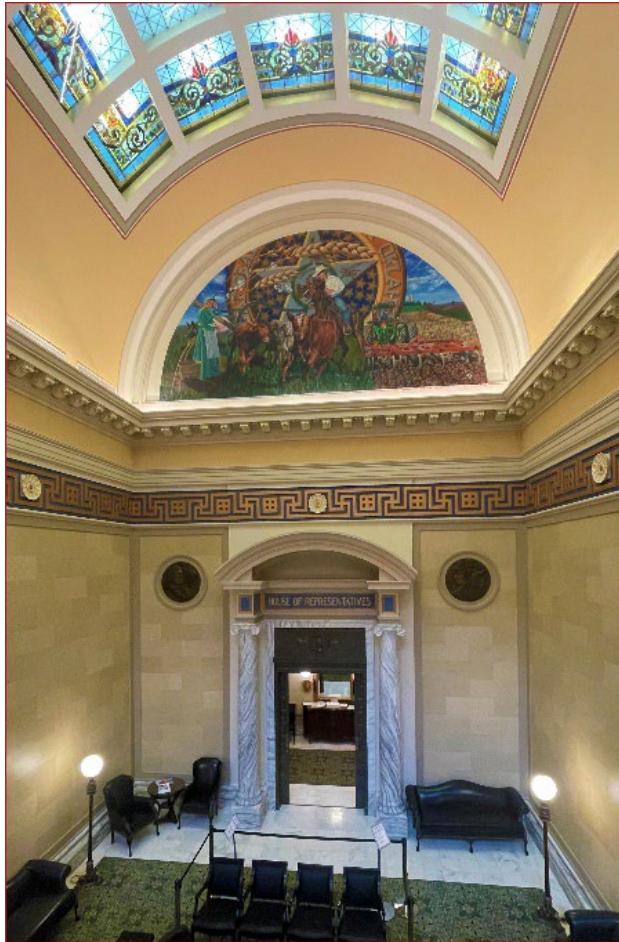
Visitors to the House and Senate chambers are greeted with fully reupholstered and restored seating in the gallery. In the House, the double decker box that had enclosed seating below and the press gallery above is gone. For decades, the media sat behind and way above House members. Now, they sit behind and above the Speaker's dais effectively putting the fourth estate on display.

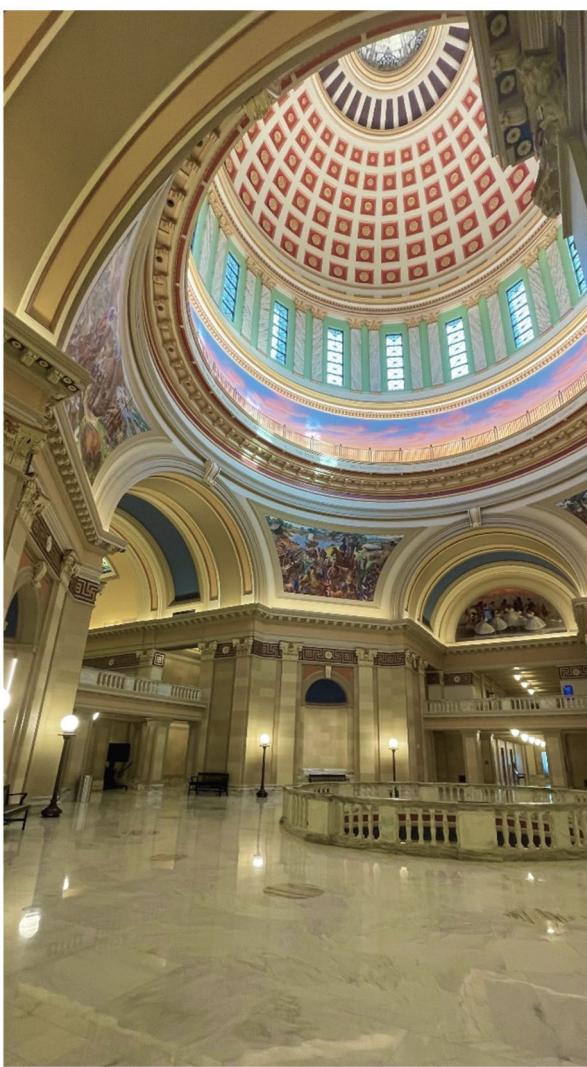
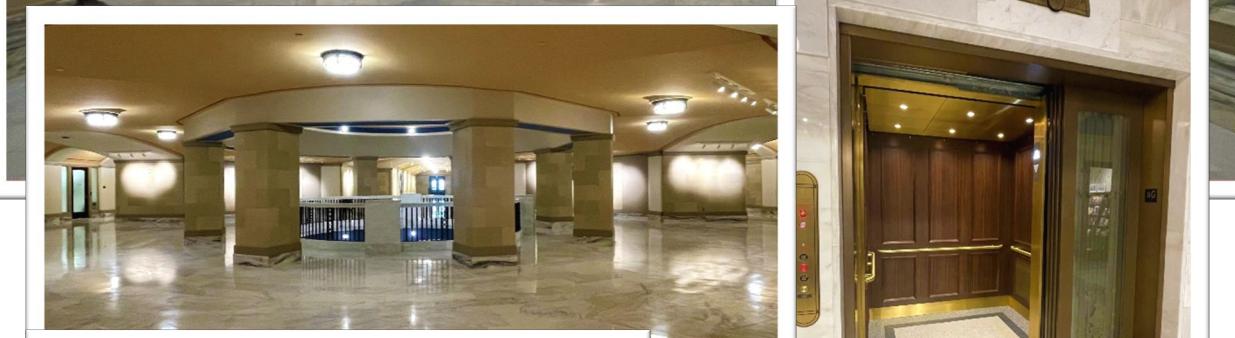
Whether restored or new, your nose will tell you the carpet, upholstery, and other fabric-related items were recently replaced.

While the elevators aren't any faster than previously, they do put elegance on display with new doors, paneled walls, tiled floors, and brass rails.

The work introduces early twentieth century design elements and provides visitors the opportunity to step into the past for a ride up or down the building's five floors.

Keep scrolling more pictures from your fully restored and modernized State Capitol building on the next page.





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