



## Oklahoma Institute panel discusses public service in state

By Bridget Nash, Staff Writer

October 14, 2008 11:50 pm

— Oklahoma Institute, a project of Oklahoma Heritage Association and Gaylord-Pickens Oklahoma Heritage Museum, held its first panel Tuesday afternoon in Kerr-McGee Auditorium at Oklahoma City University. The panel, titled “Public Service in Oklahoma: a panel on championing community engagement,” was broadcast live through interactive television at Enid’s branch of Northwestern Oklahoma State University and Cameron University in Lawton.

The panel was moderated by Renzi Stone, president and CEO of Saxum Strategic Communications, who serves on the board of directors for Leadership Oklahoma, Creative Oklahoma, Allied Arts and Greater Oklahoma City Chamber.

Panelists featured were Clayton I. Bennett, Kathy Taylor, Mickey Edwards and John Tyler Hammons. Bennett is president of Dorchester Capital, an investment company, and chairman of Oklahoma’s National Basketball Association team, the Oklahoma City Thunder. Bennett also serves as chairman of Oklahoma State Fair and Oklahoma Industries Authority and has participated in many civic organizations in the past. Taylor currently is the mayor of Tulsa and has served as Oklahoma’s chief economic development executive and was the first cabinet member in history to be given oversight of three state agencies, Oklahoma Department of Commerce and Tourism, Workforce Development and Oklahoma Employment Security Commission.

Edwards is a former congressman and currently is a lecturer at Princeton University. He is vice president of Aspen Institute and director of the institute’s Aspen-Rodel Fellowships in Public Leadership program. He served Oklahoma in Congress for 16 years and also has taught at Harvard Law School and Georgetown University as well as spending time as a regular columnist for many newspapers, including Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Examiner and Boston Globe.

Hammons was elected mayor of Muskogee May 13 in a runoff election in which he received 70 percent of the vote. Hammons is famed as one of the youngest mayors in the history of the country. Now 20 years old, Hammons was just 19 when he was elected.

He is a fourth-generation Oklahoman and a member of the Cherokee Nation. He attended the University of Oklahoma and now has transferred his enrollment to Northeastern Oklahoma State University, where he is majoring in business administration.

As moderator, Stone asked the panelists a series of questions having to do with the topic of public service. The first question asked by Stone was, “Is public services tied to the prosperity of our communities?” “Civic participation is absolutely essential,” said Edwards. He continued to say the cultural aspects of community are of utmost importance and those aspects include symphony orchestras, art museums and heritage museums in each community.

Taylor expressed her concern over “voter apathy” in communities and said one of the most important things a person can do to fulfill their civic duty is to register to vote and then go to the polls every chance possible. Hammons said it is very important for people to care about the community in which they live, and make an effort to create the changes that need to be made.

“You can’t motivate a group that doesn’t want to be motivated,” said Hammons, expressing the difficulty of encouraging those apathetic citizens to do what they can to make a difference.

“I think consistency is very important in building organizations, in building communities, in building culture,” said Bennett.

Edwards said his experience in other states in the country has brought him to a realization which makes him proud of Oklahoma. He said while other states and communities seem to have a tendency to break themselves

down into groups, Oklahoma is “broken into one: Oklahomans. Oklahoma is all one big community.”

Another question Stone asked was what the difference is between the generations of public servants?

“I think my generation is the world’s first global generation,” said Hammons. “We see things as ‘Earth,’ not so much as Oklahomans or Texans ... That’s the great thing about our generation.”

Hammons also said the younger generation is very active in public and civic service but they are active in non-traditional ways such as blogging, learning about things on the Internet and communicating through e-mail and text messaging.

“That is civic engagement,” said Hammons.

Bennett said he believes the younger generation was very active at the polls when it came to bringing an NBA franchise to Oklahoma City.

“I would suggest that it was a lot of the younger generation that really helped us drive that,” said Bennett.

“(They were) very involved, very informed.”

The panel lasted from 3 until 5:30 p.m., with a short question-and-answer session from the live audience as well as the satellite audiences.

Oklahoma Heritage Institute and Oklahoma Heritage Museum plan to make Oklahoma Institute a regular event with panels on many subjects.

A schedule of upcoming Oklahoma Institute panels has not yet been released.

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