

Americans like choices, and for the most part they like schools, so at first blush, “school choice” would seem to be something on which everyone could agree. But in politics and education policy, “school choice” can be a code phrase for vouchers, one of the most divisive issues in education. Also known as education spending accounts, vouchers use state money to pay for children’s private education. Republican gubernatorial candidate Kevin Stitt says when he uses “school choice,” he’s mainly talking about charter schools. He has said on several occasions in recent months that he does not favor vouchers, except those already in place. Those programs are for children with disabilities. Democrat Drew Edmondson says Stitt is signaling to voucher supporters that he’s really on their side. He points to an eight-month-old video of Stitt speaking to the Oklahoma Conservative Political Action Committee and the endorsement of the American Federation for Children, a group started by U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to promote school choice, especially through vouchers. In the February video — which has also caused Stitt some trouble because of his response to a question about childhood vaccinations — Stitt says he would “look at” a voucher program like Indiana’s and definitely supports charter schools. On Friday, Edmondson’s people said Stitt’s education plan would require \$1.9 billion in new money and a doubling of property taxes. In a press release, they said that much would be needed to get Oklahoma to first in the region in per-pupil spending and that Stitt has indicated that any new money for schools should come from local taxes. On Friday, Stitt said he’s never promised to make the state first in per-pupil funding, only teacher pay. And his education policy statement backs that up. In pointing that out, though, Stitt walked right into an Edmondson jab. “If Mr. Stitt thinks the teacher walkout was just about a pay raise, he wasn’t listening to the teachers,” Edmondson said in his press release. “We need to get more money in classrooms. We need text books that weren’t written in the last century, and we need to invest in our kids the way the states around us do.” Stitt says

he wants a â€œtop 10â€• public school system. Independents unite: Three of the five independent candidates for statewide office appeared at a Friday afternoon press conference in Tulsa, touting what they say is a united front against the major parties. Lieutenant governor candidate Ivan Holmes, a former state Democratic Party chairman and candidate for state school superintendent, said he decided to run as an independent as â€œan experiment.â€• Holmes figured voters are so put out with both parties that they were ready for something different. So far, it doesnâ€™t seem to have turned out that way. Contributions have been slim, and getting their word out has proved difficult. Joining Holmes were treasurer candidate Charles de Coune and labor commissioner candidate Brandt Dismukes. Jackie Short (corporation commis and Larry Huff (state superintendent) are also independent candidates. De Coune has been particularly aggressive in his attacks on his Republican opponent, state Rep. Randy McDaniel, R-Edmond. There is no Democrat in the race. De Coune says McDaniel has been â€œone of the most damagingâ€• members of the Legislature over the past 12 years because of McDanielâ€™s handling of the state pension system. Dismukes, who admits to being camera shy, has to get through state Rep. Leslie Osborn, R-Mustang, and Democrat Fred Dorrell. Among his issues: reopening a Tulsa Labor Department office. Holmes said the independent candidates are pledged to open government, open audits and a beefed up Ethics Commission. Chamber endorsements: OklahomaBizPAC, a political action committee affiliated with the Tulsa Regional Chamber, has endorsed 19 area legislative candidates in the Nov. 6 general election. They are: Sen. Roger Thompson, R, Senate District 8; Sen. James Leewright, R, SD 12; Sen. Kim David, R, SD 18; John Haste, R, SD 36; Rep. Kevin McDugle, R, HD 12; Rep. Scott Fetgatter, R, HD 16; Rep. Kevin Wallace, R, HD 32; Rep. Jadine Nollan, R, HD 66; Jeff Boatman, R, HD 67; Lonnie Sims, R, HD 68; Sheila Dills, R, HD 69; Carol Bush, R, HD 70; Karen Gaddis, D, HD 75; Rep. Ross Ford, R, HD 76; John Waldron, D, HD 77; Rep. Meloyde Blancett, D, HD 78; Melissa Provenzano, D, HD 79; Stan May, R, HD 80; Kilmyrn

Easley-Graf, D, HD 98 Campaigns and elections: The Tulsa firefighters union, IAFF Local 176, endorsed Stitt in the governor's race. Also endorsing Stitt was the Family Research Council, a conservative advocacy organization headed by Oklahoma native Tony Perkins. Edmondson's campaign tried to counter a six-figure opposition ad campaign by the National Rifle Association with endorsements from longtime law officers, including longtime investigator and forensic artist Harvey Pratt. Pratt's suspect sketches have been used in many high-profile cases, including the Oklahoma City bombing, the Girl Scout murders, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and Wichita, Kansas's BTK killer. Edmondson, a member of the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Hall of Fame, said he had an A rating from the NRA during his 16 years as state attorney general and that "it have not changed." Family Farm Action endorsed Democrat Mark Myles for attorney general. Family Farm Action describes itself as a progressive advocate for small farmers and rural communities. The Oklahoma Democratic Party will have an election watch party beginning at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 6 at the Embassy Suites Downtown Medical Center, 741 N. Phillips Ave., Oklahoma City. Vying for agencies: The George Kaiser Family Foundation submitted one of the 136 preliminary applications for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The Trump administration says it wants the two agencies moved out of the Washington, D.C., area. Also applying were Pawnee County and a consortium of Oklahoma State University, Langston University, the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce and the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. Want to see more like this? Get our local education coverage delivered directly to your inbox. Sign up! * I understand and agree that registration on or use of this site constitutes agreement to its user agreement and privacy policy.