

OKLAHOMA CITY — One-fifth of Gov. Kevin Stitt's Cabinet members are women, and no one in the group is black. House Minority Leader Emily Virgin, D-Norman, is one state leader who believes that the governor's Cabinet should be more representative. "I would say it is very concerning because I have seen the difference it makes when women are at the decision-making table because of the different perspectives they bring," Virgin said. Stitt's 15-member Cabinet comprises three women and 12 men. Two of the Cabinet members are Native American. None is African American. Oklahoma's population is 50.47% female and 49.53% male, according to U.S. Census Bureau population estimates as of July 1. The state's population is slightly more than 65% white, according to the bureau. "I think Gov. Stitt has an opportunity to make sure all Oklahomans are represented in his Cabinet, but now his Cabinet is not reflective of the population," Virgin said. Baylee Lakey, a Stitt spokeswoman, said Stitt sought out and recruited a number of women and people with various backgrounds for Cabinet and agency posts. "Because of this process, Gov. Stitt's Cabinet includes three women who are making state history by being the first females to serve in the roles of Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of Science and Innovation, and Secretary of Native American Affairs," Lakey said. Members of the Oklahoma Legislative Black Caucus who were contacted also expressed concerns about the lack of minorities on the Cabinet. "I would just say that in this day and age, we should be intentional about having government reflect its people," said Rep. Regina Goodwin, D-Tulsa, who serves as chairwoman of the Legislative Black Caucus. "I am talking about capable people," she said. Another caucus member, Sen. George Young, said the majority of Stitt's Cabinet members are middle-aged white men who come from a business background. Young, D-Oklaoma City, said it is troubling when that many members come from one demographic group because they tend to have a limited view of the issues. Stitt has said he wants to run the state like a business, Young noted. But "the state is not a business," he said. "The state of Oklahoma is there to fulfill

the needs and hopes of the citizens of Oklahoma.â€• Carly Putnam, Oklahoma Policy Institute policy director, was also asked about the makeup of the governorâ€™s Cabinet. â€œOklahomans deserve a government that represents them,â€• she said. â€œThere is a concern at the very basic level that we donâ€™t have that.â€• Michael Junk, Stittâ€™s chief of staff, said that when the governor was filling the positions, he was looking for people who were the most qualified for the posts. The governor also was facing financial limitations at the time the Cabinet was formed, Lakey said. â€œWe were operating on a budget that was the same size of the Governorâ€™s Office budget in the early 1980s, without adjusting for inflation,â€• Lakey said. â€œIn light of the new FY 2020 budget, the Governorâ€™s Office is working to ensure our Cabinet members, many of whom are currently operating in a voluntary capacity, are properly compensated.â€• Stittâ€™s office has received an additional \$2 million from lawmakers, bringing his budget to \$3.7 million. FEATURED VIDEO

Barbara Hoberock 405-528-2465 barbara.hoberock@tulsaworld.com Twitter: @bhoberock Be the first to know Get delivered 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.