

Tom Bates, who has held a variety of state government roles over the past 20 years, will head up a project to make the state's social services more accessible, Gov. Kevin Stitt announced last week. Bates is currently interim Health Commissioner but expects to leave that position as soon as Stitt appoints a successor. The Stitt administration said Bates' new assignment is to develop a plan to simplify and streamline the ways Oklahomans interact with health and human services agencies by working with the Governor's cabinet and the directors of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, the Department of Health, the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Judicial Affairs, among others.

As I've looked at how we serve Oklahomans, I've seen how hard we've made it for them to engage with us," said Bates. "Around the state, we make Oklahomans go to multiple offices and multiple websites just to get the services they are entitled to, and it's all very confusing. We've got to stop giving people the runaround."

Bynum honored: Tulsa Mayor G.T. Bynum has been chosen for the National Guard Association of the United States' Patrick Henry Award, Oklahoma Adj. Gen. Michael Thompson announced. Bynum, who will receive the award Monday in Denver, is being honored for his role in securing funding for the 138th Fighter Wing Training Center at Tulsa International Airport.

Booker donates: While visiting Vernon AME Church last week, Democratic presidential candidate and U.S. Sen. Cory Booker contributed \$1,000 to the \$1 million campaign to restore the historic building on North Greenwood Avenue. Booker also spotted a wallet on the ground behind the church as he was leaving and had it returned inside.

Candidates and elections: Stan Young has launched a campaign for the 2020 Democratic nomination in state Senate District 35, which includes Tulsa's Brookside area and neighborhoods south of downtown. Young is the third Democrat to join the race to succeed Republican Gary Stanislawski, who is term-limited. Democrats consider SD 35 one of the most winnable Republican-held seats in the Legislature. FreedomWorks, a national organization closely linked to the tea party movement of a decade ago, has

endorsed Terry Neese in the 5th Congressional District Republican primary. That seat is currently held by U.S. Rep. Kendra Horn, a Democrat. Bottom lines: First District Congressman Kevin Hern touted vocational education at a meeting on Tulsa Technology Center's Lemley Campus. ... The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture last week warned of the possibility of an African swine fever outbreak. Be the first to know Get local news 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.