

Gubernatorial candidates Kevin Stitt and Drew Edmondson continued to go round and round last week, with each accusing the other of misleading the public on their tax policies while former Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett showed up in campaign plugs for both candidates. Cornett, who lost a bitter Republican gubernatorial runoff battle to Stitt on Aug. 28, endorsed Stitt on Thursday for the Nov. 6 general election. "My campaign for governor was about holding high expectations for Oklahoma to succeed, improving our education system, and expanding opportunity for all," Cornett said in a news release. "To accomplish this, we need strong, trustworthy leadership to unify our state and get our fiscal house in order. I believe Kevin Stitt is the right candidate to move Oklahoma forward, to raise the standards on education and health, and to demand better outcomes from our state government," Cornett said. "Please join me in voting for Kevin Stitt on Nov. 6." A few hours later, Edmondson's campaign Facebook page displayed an image of Cornett signing a copy of his book, "The Next American City," for the Democratic nominee. "Enjoyed a quick visit with Mick Cornett today," reads the Edmondson post. "He'll officially endorse my opponent today, and that's OK. He'll still have a seat at the table if I'm elected, as will anyone who has good ideas about how to move our state forward." On Twitter, Stitt said he was "thrilled" by Cornett's endorsement of him and "excited to have him on our team." The Stitt campaign seemed less enthusiastic about an endorsement of sorts from current Gov. Mary Fallin, who earlier this week told the Enid News & Eagle "I, of course being Republican, support Kevin Stitt." This prompted a zinger from the Democratic Governors Association, which supports Edmondson. "Mary Fallin threw the full power of her 17 percent approval rating behind Kevin Stitt and his bid to be Oklahoma's next governor," said the DGA, referring to a recent Morning Consult Poll that put Fallin's approval at 17 percent, the lowest of any governor in the nation. The DGA and Edmondson are trying to link Stitt to Fallin, while Stitt is portraying himself as a complete outsider with

no links to Fallin or anyone else now in state government. Stitt spokeswoman Donelle Harder reiterated this point Thursday when she told The Oklahoman the campaign did not seek Fallin's endorsement. The Stitt campaign also charged Edmondson with hypocrisy over a TV spot that says Stitt wants to raise property taxes. The ad seems to cite an Oklahoman story in which Stitt said he thought local governments should have the option of increasing property taxes if approved by voters. Stitt's campaign doesn't dispute he said that, but points out Edmondson also supports the concept. "Edmondson is selling a false image to distract from the fact that he is a tax and spend liberal like Hilary Clinton, his candidate for president," Harder said. Edmondson's camp says the ad isn't just talking about that particular proposal, and points to Stitt's statements on school funding. Without specifically advocating for higher local property taxes, Stitt has said he favors a reworking of the state school funding formula in a way that would encourage districts to ask for more local money. "Kevin Stitt's only proposal for raising the revenue education needs is to allow local governments to raise property taxes on their residents," said Edmondson campaign manager Mike Clingman. "He talks often about raising property taxes to make public schools compete." Edmondson's dig on property taxes may have been aimed at Stitt's farm and ranch allies, whose industry organizations steadfastly oppose any property tax increase, including those from which agriculture would be exempt. Stitt's campaign doubled down on its claim that Edmondson wants to raise income taxes, citing a November 2017 story in which he proposed a top rate of 6 percent for higher incomes be submitted to voters. The current top rate, which applies to almost all taxpayers, is 5 percent. Edmondson has said he wants to eliminate a long-term capital gains tax exemption, which would have the effect of an income tax increase for a relatively small number of tax payers, but has not mentioned a rate hike in quite some time. We're No. 5: It may come as a surprise to Oklahomans, but their state government is one of the most fiscally fit in the country,

at least by one set of measurements. That's according to the Mercatus Center, a program at George Mason University funded largely by conservative and libertarian interests. The ratings are based on fiscal year 2016 and so don't take into account some of the state's most recent trials and tribulations. Oklahoma ranked first in trust fund solvency, which includes pension plans and some forms of debt, and third in long-run solvency.

Overall, the formulas reward minimal debt and long-term liabilities. Elections and campaigns: The Oklahoma Education Association endorsed Edmondson. Libertarian gubernatorial candidate Chris Powell released his 2017 income return to an Oklahoma City television station. The returns show Powell and his wife earned \$84,271 last year. Edmondson previously released his return. Stitt has not released his.

Powell said he has received an "A" rating from the Oklahoma 2nd Amendment Association, a gun rights group. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti was in Oklahoma City, ostensibly campaigning for Edmondson "which the Stitt campaign was quick to use against Edmondson. Garcetti, who earlier this month hosted a fundraiser that partly benefited the Oklahoma Democratic Party, is contemplating a presidential run. Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland, a Democrat, endorsed this year's Republican candidate for the job, state Rep. Glen Mulready, R-Tulsa. Americans for Tax Reform endorsed State Question 793, a constitutional amendment that would make it easier for big box retailers to have their own optometry and optician clinics. ATR is best known for its "no new taxes" pledge. The Oklahoma Silver Haired Legislature, a senior citizens group, also endorsed SQ 793.

Meetings and events: The Oklahoma Republican Party will hold an election night watch party at the Chevy Bricktown Events Center, 429 E. California Ave., Oklahoma City. The event is free but reservations are required through <https://bit.ly/2OI3Bed>. Attorney Kevin Adams will discuss judges at the Tulsa Area Republican Assembly meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Golden Corral, 9711 E. 71st St. Oklahoma Observer Editor Arnold Hamilton will speak to the Creek County Democratic Party at 6 p.m. Thursday at Freddie's BBQ and Steakhouse, 1425 New Sapulpa Road. Stitt will speak to the Tulsa Republican Club at 11:30 a.m. Friday at the Summit Club, 15 E. Sixth

St. Bottom lines: Tulsa received the state's best score 65 out of 100

on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index. The HRC is a national

LGBTQ organization. ... The state's colleges, universities and technical schools exceeded this year's goal

for degree and certificate completion, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education said. The

state is in the fifth year of Complete College America, an initiative to increase

the number of Oklahomans with post-secondary degrees and professional certifications. Randy Krehbiel 918-581-83

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