



2026 Gubernatorial Interviews

Mike Mazzei

The Tulsa County Republican Party Candidate Support Committee conducted gubernatorial candidate interviews between January 13 and February 10, 2026. Each candidate received the same questions.

Candidates did not know the questions before the interview, nor the responses of other candidates.

The committee gave 45 minutes to each candidate to speak on the record without interruption. Candidates were not directed on how long to answer each question. Each candidate was free to speak longer or shorter on particular questions as he or she saw fit. With the remaining time available after answering each question, each candidate had the opportunity to revisit previous questions or talk about new topics the committee did not ask. You will see those comments at the end of this document.

Each interview was conducted by a male and female interviewer asking each question. Other Candidate Support Committee members in the room remained silent during the 45 minutes. In a few instances, interviewers carefully asked follow-up questions to clarify the candidate's comments or to address an angle to the issue that had been covered in earlier interviews. When these questions are in the transcript, they are surrounded by [brackets].

The text below faithfully presents the word-for-word responses from each candidate. The committee used accurate AI tools to both transcribe and gently "clean" incomplete or run-on sentences into complete sentences in the candidate's own words. The committee used the same transcription process for each candidate without manual human subjectivity to faithfully convey each candidate's presentation of these ideas to voters. The resulting transcripts are verified by human comparison to the original audio recordings.

For questions or comments about this interview, please contact candidates@tulsacountygop.org.

Table of Contents

Candidate's Political Philosophy, Family, & Business.....	2
Education.....	4
Life.....	6
Taxes.....	7
McGirt.....	8
Prosperity.....	9
Closing Statements.....	11



Candidate's Political Philosophy, Family, & Business

Do you identify as a conservative, moderate, or liberal?

Please give us your definition of what your answer means.

Oklahoma Red State Conservative, please.

[A conservative is] A person who believes in limited government, free enterprise, and protecting our rights and liberties.

Oklahoma is often called the buckle of the Bible Belt, and many voters will be interested to know if you attend church regularly. Could you please share with us more the importance of faith in your life?

I endeavor every day to follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who commands us to be light and salt in this world. And so He is my Lord and Savior, and with His help, I am fortunately saved by grace. I endeavor to be about the Father's will and the Father's good works, and with the help of His Holy Spirit, I am grateful to be a part of the Lord's name.

I guess one of the most recent examples is that after a car accident in 2008, I was a physical invalid for 10 years. I couldn't walk, sit, or stand without pain. But the Lord's help and faithfulness, through family and friends, helped me to never give up, and Galatians 6:9 became a daily life call for me to persevere. In doing so, if we persevere, the Apostle Paul tells us that we'll reap a great harvest if we never give up. So without the Lord's provision, I never would have made it through that terrible life crisis.

It wasn't as hard for me, but hard on my wife and hard on my kids. Apparently He's giving me my physical abilities back. Someday, Jared, we're going to talk about why I'm not allowed to golf with the Almighty. Other than that, I can walk five miles and swim a thousand meters, and I do think all the Republican candidates should prove their worth by swimming a thousand meters—in the pool, of course.



2026 Gubernatorial Interviews - Mike Mazzei

What does your family think about you running for such a demanding position?

It depends on the family members. My wife, fortunately, as a former teacher and homeschool educator and guidance counselor, is all in on this mission because, like many of you, she's very troubled that only 20% of Oklahoma school kids can read at grade level. She and I together have been part of education policy for a long time. We feel like we have the right answers to set Oklahoma on a different track.

Now, of my five kids, Amy—they're all supportive. One wants to be sure he's never in a photo of anything, and the others are pretty happy with whatever comes as part of the process. But fortunately, they're very engaged, very supportive, and they love their dad.

Does your family share your views and values?

Oh yes—voted for Trump three times. Funny story is, in 2004, when she was telling her friends I was running for the state senate, she kind of told everyone, "Oh, he just needs to get this out of his system, and after he loses we'll go back to normal." But we've always been Oklahoma conservatives, and she's passionate about, given this age in our lives, how do we always testify to Jesus, and how do we fix this mess that the radical left has foisted upon our schools and our culture, because we've got to give something better back to our kids and our grandkids.

How will your business be affected by your candidacy and possible term or terms in office?

Well, fortunately, we learned during my twelve years in the Senate how to manage the company with great value and service for our clients and our business during my years of public service and when I was Oklahoma Secretary of Finance. So we've already figured out how to appropriately handle that.

We have a CEO in waiting, Lord willing. Once I win, we have a plan in place to take excellent care of the clients, my teammates, and the next generation of what will transpire.



Education

What are your ideas about funding education and rural infrastructure with money generated by sports betting or gaming revenue?

I think it's nonsense. I was in the legislature when the people of Oklahoma were sold this bill of goods that, "Let's do a lottery and that'll get more money for education," and then, "Let's do higher-class forms of gaming because with casinos we'll be able to put more money into education."

And we have put more money into education, and some of that gambling money has, quote unquote, been "dedicated to education." Since I was in the legislature early on, the education funding level has gone from \$2 billion to \$4 billion, and we're still 49th or 50th.

So that is specifically not the answer to improving education and dealing with the infrastructure problems, the policy problems, the transparency problems, the oversight problems, and the accountability problems.

You were really good at taking notes, Amy. I've got to make my answer shorter so Amy doesn't have to write so much.

Do you support school choice, including the use of tax dollars to help families pay for private or home education expenses?

The current structure of school choice tax credits is not how I would have devised the program, versus some of the other school choice systems like Arizona. Having said that, I support parents' rights to have as many options as necessary so they can be the ultimate determiners of what is the best school option for their children.

We had my five kids in a combination of private school, public school, special needs school, and homeschool for six years, I believe. So there's no one-size-fits-all. Parents are the ones who are going to know what's best for their kids.



Do you support requiring all Oklahoma public school students to pass a reading evaluation before advancing beyond third grade?

I believe the third grade reading gate is an important piece of accountability. Although it is a tough standard and a tough milestone for accountability, without it the system doesn't work.

When I was in the Oklahoma legislature, we passed what was then called the end of social promotion. Today, through the Mississippi model, it's called the third grade reading gate. If you talk to the education experts from Mississippi—and I've read about this, I've studied it, I've researched it—they said the whole thing falls apart unless you have a third grade reading gate. For too many decades, we've just pushed kids along, either because the school establishment didn't want the accountability or the radical left were worried about the self-esteem of the kid.

Well, up to third grade they have to learn to read, and then after third grade they have to be able to read to learn. So I believe that third grade reading gate is essential to educational milestones.

It got so watered down because the liberal establishment—principals and the superintendent—said, "Well, we need this exemption," or "We can't have this many tests to really assess all the kids," or "We're teaching to the test." They came up with one excuse after the next, and it was unfortunate nonsense. And a lot of the legislators at the Capitol caved. So we have to do it right this time.

We have a state that did it right for 10 years and proved that it can work. They will testify that the third grade reading gate was part and parcel of requiring the curriculum to go to phonics, hiring hundreds of reading coaches and specialists, and creating an infrastructure within the state—from the State Department of Education to coaches at the local schools—that could really address the problem.

The goal, of course, is not to punish anyone, but to get proper assessment and get them the help they need. And I think if we build the right infrastructure and the right oversight, then there'll be a proper time to "fold in," quote unquote.

Please identify what factors you believe are causing the failure of the Oklahoma public school system and explain your plan as governor to make Oklahoma a leader in education.

Well, we often use the phrase, "we don't have a money problem, we have a money management problem," and I believe that's a unique skill set I have after building a \$1.6 billion wealth management



2026 Gubernatorial Interviews - Mike Mazzei

firm, being chairman of the Oklahoma Senate Finance Committee for 10 years, and then serving as Oklahoma's Secretary of Finance.

In order to remake Oklahoma K through 12 education, we have to get transparency, oversight, and accountability. That would be a very lengthy white paper discussion, and I don't want to make your fingers sore, Amy. But suffice it to say, one of the most critical components to begin that landmark transformation is to make the system more accountable to the parents.

And we're not going to make the system more accountable to the parents until we change school board elections to the general election date. I have told everybody across the state, in collaboration with my friends in the legislature and with respect, I will not sign any piece of legislation coming out of the Oklahoma House of Representatives until they put moving the school board election dates up for a vote. Because that is the most fundamental piece we can start with to get real transparency, oversight, and accountability.

Life

Do you believe that human life begins at conception and that the unborn must be protected regardless of the circumstances of their conception?

I am 100% pro-life. I voted for every piece of pro-life legislation. I've got a perfect 100% score from the days when Oklahomans for Life kept ratings, and I even kept track of all the pro-life legislation. During my hard season of medical procedures and absences due to the medical issues I was dealing with after the car crash, when there was a pro-life bill, we made sure I got to the Capitol. So my very first job in politics was actually surveying our pro-life task force in the United States Senate during the 80s right-to-life movement. It goes back to my very, very, very beginning.

Do you support ending the practice of abortion in Oklahoma without exception?

My daughter—heaven forbid—had to face a tragic situation, rape or incest. I don't think I could... well, suffice it to say rape, incest, life of the mother, or at least in my case, the issue tends to be rape and incest when I think about my daughters, any type of abuse that's out there. In that one and only case, I would leave those decisions to my daughter, if you will, between her and our God.



2026 Gubernatorial Interviews - Mike Mazzei

I have several legislative friends that plan on introducing the end of that “manifestrone,” if I’m saying it correctly, 486 Manifestrone, and yeah, we need to eliminate that in Oklahoma. Several friends, like Representative Jim Olson, are planning on... [interrupted].

Life begins at conception. God’s law and America’s founding documents consistently affirm the right to life for every human being.

My voting record shows I have never flinched on my opposition to abortion. As a matter of public policy, I would allow an exception when the life of the mother is at stake. If forced to make the terrible decision between two people dying or one person dying, the clear moral choice is to save the life we can.

Taxes

Many states like Texas, Florida, Tennessee have eliminated their state income tax and found that it stimulated economic growth and prosperity. Do you support eliminating the state income tax in Oklahoma?

I not only support it, I’ve written about it, I’ve studied it, I’ve modeled the job at population growth of the nine no income tax states versus Oklahoma’s job and population growth.

In my first year of a Mazzei administration, I will propose reducing the personal income tax rate from 4.5% to 3% as step one in a three-part program to become a no income tax state.

Suffice it to say there are \$1.7 billion worth of tax credits, deductions, rebates, and exemptions. If you wipe all those out, you can literally lower the tax rate from 4.5% to 3 to 3.2, and you still have the same amount of tax collections that we have now in order to pay for core services. So that’s the big component of step one—just getting rid of the junk that inflates the necessity to have a higher tax rate.

Ironically, when you study the 1.7 million tax returns that the Oklahoma Tax Commission processes, the effective tax rate is actually 3.1%. So we’ve built all this stuff into the code that makes it feel good, but at the end of the day, everyone’s really paying, if you divide your total tax and your total income, about 3.1%. That’s the details of step one.



Do you support freezing property taxes on the primary residence of seniors over 65?

Absolutely. And I'm the first one to come up with the plan how to do so. So it turns out in Tulsa County, the way to abolish property taxes for seniors is to understand that 10% of Tulsa County tax collections—about \$100 million of almost our \$1 billion of tax collections—are paid by seniors 65 and over.

Well, by cutting costs and restraining costs, because tax collection growth has literally gone up six to seven percent per year the last five years, and properly collecting some fees in the court system that aren't being paid, a la documentary stamps—because a lot of people aren't actually paying—we can probably absorb, thanks to ongoing growth in property valuations, that 10% drop. You can see our plan at MikeForOK.com because we've actually put it on there, along with several others that I know you will rush on to visit. [/sarc]

McGirt

What are your ideas about the McGirt versus Oklahoma decision?

Well, it opened up a keg of worms, obviously, and a 5–4 decision created a whole cascading set of issues.

You can't turn back the clock, so maybe the courts will reconsider that decision at some point, but we're in the landscape of post-McGirt decision. The court is generally clarified—or at least Oklahoma courts—that the McGirt issues really need to be constrained to major crimes, and the rationale behind tribal sovereignty and existing reservations shouldn't necessarily have a domino effect on tax collections, regulation, and speeding tickets in Tulsa.

We need to end up with that level of clarity, obviously, because we can't have 40 different rules for 40 different groups in the state of Oklahoma. Fortunately in Oklahoma, we do have a pretty good history of dealing with some of these complex issues through honest and respectful negotiation.

The fact of the matter is our Native American fellow Oklahomans—and we are really all tied together—our fates are all the same. We all want good schools, we want good roads, we want access to healthcare, and we want fair and just laws. So I believe we need to have a win-win mindset with collaborative negotiations, which is the job of the governor, to deal with some of these complex issues like we've done in the past on tobacco taxes and hunting and fishing licenses and other items.



2026 Gubernatorial Interviews - Mike Mazzei

Because it's much better to negotiate these issues than it is to litigate these issues and just be at the mercy of one court decision after another court decision after another court decision. My history in both business and politics is if you respectfully collaborate together, you can have win-wins for all parties.

Prosperity

How do you make Oklahoma the most business-friendly state in the nation?

I do have a mastery in finance, money, and economics. And one of the first and most important ways is to make sure Oklahoma is the most friendly place in the nation for money to operate, which is why we have to become a low income tax state.

Second thing we have to do is stop wasting money on items that are terrible return-on-investments for taxpayers. Some people call it corporate welfare, some people call it chasing mega deals, but there really is a way to mathematically understand what provides a good return on investment for taxpayers and what doesn't. And then once we get rid of the garbage that only helps a special few, then the third component is how do we put force, energy, and financing behind Oklahoma-based businesses with best practices, advanced marketing and sales techniques, and access to easy capital, which has always been a difficulty in Oklahoma.

Imagine 10,000 Oklahoma-based businesses that are just wonderful little gardens growing around next door, and we use best practices to grow five jobs each—well, 50,000 jobs—versus, let's give a billion dollars to the United Arab Emirates to give us an aluminum plant here in the state of Oklahoma, ship all the profits overseas, and promise us 1,000 jobs.

Many of us have seen our homeowners insurance rates nearly double in recent years. What can Oklahoma do to bring homeowners' insurance rates in line with other states?

Call Mark Tedford.

(Representative Mark Tedford is an insurance agent.)

Well, we have a file-and-use system that pretty much, from what I understand, Jared, is the insurance companies say, "Here, we're filing with you our rate increases," and then that's all they have to do.



2026 Gubernatorial Interviews - Mike Mazzei

Whereas down in Texas, they actually have to provide a more robust round of information to justify certain premiums. And Texas is pretty big—I think they have as many hailstorms as we do—yet their homeowner insurance rates aren't number one in the country like ours are.

So I think that's a big component that we need to study. And call Mark Tedford.

Do you support full transparency of all annual revenues and expenditures of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority?

Absolutely, as a matter of fact, I have said publicly I think we need to put a pause on any new turnpike construction until we get, one, the results of the audit that's being performed by our friend, State Auditor and Inspector Cindy Byrd, and two, once we have the results of Auditor Byrd's audit, we see a much more thorough approach to total transparency for the turnpike users.

Because everyone was kind of told time and time again, "Oh, let's do this turnpike and we'll get it paid for," and then it's not paid for, but we do a new turnpike. And lo and behold, there's \$4 billion of turnpike debt that needs to be paid for, but they want to launch another \$13 billion worth of projects.

[About ending tolls when the construction costs have been paid] Well, that sounds great, but in true honesty, I don't know all the financials related to paying off the debt, how long it's going to be. I am a true auditor's report, so I don't think there's enough information to actually...

Well, the hard part was the Transportation Authority, and the reason it's become this fiefdom unto itself, which I believe the legislature needs to change to get to your question, is it's what's called a non-appropriated agency. Non-appropriated agencies don't go through the level of oversight that's not great to begin with on the appropriated agencies.

So because it's a non-appropriated agency, it doesn't have very good transparency, and you can't really get to the bottom of the finances or how, for example, they even use appropriately or inappropriately eminent domain powers. The legislature does need to, in my opinion, change the law statutorily to create not just a requirement of transparency, but some more strenuous oversight within the executive branch of government.



Closing Statements

Could you identify the three most important policies you would fight for as governor to make this a better state for Oklahoma families?

We want to overhaul the tax code to become a no income tax state and abolish property taxes for seniors 65 and older.

We want to transform schools with a major statewide literacy program, with the architecture and the accountability to get thousands upon thousands of Oklahoma students reading at grade level.

And then our third priority is to secure Oklahoma land for the people of Oklahoma by enforcing Article 22 of the Oklahoma Constitution, which forbids the foreign ownership of land. I will sign the necessary executive orders first day in office, enforce the Constitution, and evict these Chinese communists out of the state of Oklahoma.

Do you have any additional thoughts on the questions we asked, or about any other topics we have not covered today?

One thing we didn't deal with is waste, fraud, abuse, and government efficiency. So given my skill set in the financial world, when I was in the Stitt administration, we did something positive in that we raised the state's savings account to a billion dollars for the first time. I was there two years.

One thing that I would like to see happen with more force in a Mazzei administration is taking advantage of these reams of reports from the state auditor and these reams of reports from the Incentive Evaluation Commission to save tens and hundreds of millions of dollars of unnecessary government spending.

In 2019, Auditor Cindy Byrd did a study of SoonerCare, and she came up with \$1.6 billion of questionable cost. Well, that was seven years ago, so that number's got to be \$2.5 billion by now, given just inflation, Medicaid expansion, and all that stuff. But no one's ever done anything about her recommendations and following up on that audit from 2019.

That is just one of 10 different items we want to take very serious action on to create millions upon millions of dollars of savings, so we have less waste, fraud, abuse, corporate welfare, green energy nonsense. I do like reminding everyone, Jared, that back in 2015 I am literally the guy who killed the \$1.5 billion giveaway to wind power.



2026 Gubernatorial Interviews - Mike Mazzei

Before we talked about green energy scams, that was the original scam in Oklahoma, started I think in 2000. But that's a great example: we got this many jobs and we spent a billion and a half dollars. And we've got other items that are happening along those lines now—get better return on investment for taxpayers, fund reading specialists, become a no-income tax state. So I did want to make sure we got into government efficiency.