

# THE JOURNAL RECORD

## **Periscope: Mississippi, cheeseburgers and a New Year's resolution**

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With 2017 knocking on our door, our attorney general headed off to run the federal agency he's been suing since he took office, a new president who lost the popular vote by a wide margin but won the electoral college by an even wider one, the state Legislature facing yet another budget hole big enough to swallow Monaco, and the Thunder making hay without – wait, what was his name again? We believe in Russell! – we need some resolutions for the new year.

Thanks to one website or another, everything from cheeseburgers to economic freedom has been ranked by someone. The rankings are sometimes based on legitimate health, economic or education research; sometimes they're based on one guy's sarcastic take on his preference in cheeseburgers or nightclubs.

We are an anxious people when it comes to such lists, half-jokingly repeating the “Thank God for Mississippi” lament when we score poorly in teen pregnancy or obesity rates while touting the triumph when we get good marks for our low cost of living. We wring our hands and hope someone said something nice about us the way junior high school girls fret over their social status in the school cafeteria.

This year, Oklahoma was ranked 46th in health. We scored well in a few categories, such as childhood immunizations, the number of pertussis (whooping cough) cases we've had, and our relatively low rate of excessive drinking, but our scores for physical inactivity, drug-related deaths, smoking, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, preventable hospitalizations and a host of other problems were far, far away from honor roll status.

On the bright side, we did beat Mississippi, which was ranked 50th. We also beat Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama.

It's surprising to note that despite the pain of what will now be three budget-shrinking years running, Oklahoma ranks high in fiscal solvency. The Mercatus Center at George Mason University put Oklahoma in eighth place on a list that weighs states' debt, available cash, long-term obligations, etc., and figures out which states are closest to going belly up. We not only beat out Mississippi, we beat darn near everybody.

*Business Facilities* magazine didn't put Oklahoma in the Top 10 for business climate, but we made their lists for wind power, workforce training, economic growth potential, industrial electricity rates, and infrastructure improvements.

Oklahoma's education system didn't fare well, coming in at number 45 on the list produced by *Education Week*. Massachusetts topped that list with a score of 86.8; Oklahoma was ranked well below the national average with a score of 68.2. That was better than only five states: Alabama, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, and, yes, Mississippi.

We came in (ouch) 42nd on a CNBC list of America's Top States for Business. We scored especially poorly in their categories labeled Economy (44th), Quality of Life (48th), Technology and Innovation (43rd), Education (44th), and Workforce (41st). Our biggest strengths on that list were Cost of Living (sixth), Cost of Doing Business (13th), and Business Friendliness (12th).

The CATO Institute reminds us that we're the second-freest state in the union, though, and our newly loosened liquor laws could push us to No. 1. Mississippi? No. 36. And beer! Thrillist put Oklahoma at No. 26. Mississippi finished dead last. Take that!

There's a lesson in all that listing. If Oklahoma wants to attract business, which is to say jobs, continually declining taxes isn't the answer. We'd move up the ranks by spending money on health, education, and quality of life.

That's what I propose for Oklahoma's New Year's resolution: Improve the business climate by spending on health, education, and quality of life.