



## **June 2026: The Month Oklahoma Steps Onto the National Business Stage**

**By Lisa Lee Martin**

June 2026 is a turning point for Oklahoma business. The state that once flew under the radar is now earning a reputation as one of the best places in the nation to start and grow a company, even as it wrestles honestly with questions of equity, workforce, and long-term prosperity.

Earlier this year, national rankings and corporate lists placed Oklahoma near the top of the conversation for business growth, and the companies carrying that visibility are no longer hard to name. Tulsa-based ONEOK stands out as one of the highest-ranked

Oklahoma-headquartered companies on Fortune's list, joined by Devon Energy in Oklahoma City and Tulsa-based Williams. Forbes-style major employer rankings and other national lists highlight organizations such as the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Bank of Oklahoma, the University of Oklahoma, and the Cherokee Nation as top large employers. Add to that familiar private-sector brands like Hobby Lobby, Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores, QuikTrip, Paycom, and BOK Financial, and you start to see a roster of Oklahoma names that signal real scale and staying power.

Together, these companies form a kind of shorthand for Oklahoma's economic footprint—energy giants, tribal nations, financial institutions, retailers, and technology employers that showcase the breadth of the state's economy. They anchor the skyline, support thousands of jobs, and, increasingly, show up on the same national lists as firms from New York, Texas, and California. For smaller founders and growing ventures in places like Kay County, that visibility helps validate Oklahoma as a serious place to plant a flag while still enjoying the advantages of operating in smaller, close-knit communities.

You can feel that momentum in conversations across the state: lenders talking about new pipelines, founders planning expansions, and chambers of commerce leaning into startup language that once belonged only to the coasts. At the same time, analysts note that Oklahoma still trails much of the country in personal income growth, and business surveys reveal leaders balancing optimism with caution about the labor market. It's a reminder that a pro-business reputation is only powerful if it translates into better lives for workers and families.

June's calendar reads like a roadmap to that transformation. On the small-business front, statewide events like Connect 2026 and the Oklahoma Business Expo bring together owners, industry professionals, and startups in a B2B networking environment, with breakouts on capital access, marketing, technology, and scaling. Economic developers, site selectors, and major employers gather at the Select Oklahoma Conference on Economic Development to talk about aerospace, defense, energy evolution, infrastructure, and talent pipelines—the backbone sectors of Oklahoma's growth story. Business media and statewide organizations amplify these efforts with coverage of investment announcements, employer rankings, and policy developments that shape the environment in real time.

For those of us working out of Kay County—Newkirk, Ponca City, Blackwell, Tonkawa—these statewide conversations filter down into very local realities. In Ponca City, major employers such as the Phillips 66 refinery, Dorada Foods, and Mertz Manufacturing anchor the industrial base, while the Ponca City Development Authority works to attract new projects and support existing businesses. Downtown Newkirk, through efforts like Newkirk Main Street and the local chamber, leans on historic preservation and small-town charm as economic tools, turning heritage buildings and local events into platforms for entrepreneurship, tourism, and creative work.

What strikes me, as a filmmaker and entrepreneur based in Kay County, is how these big-picture conversations intersect with the stories of rural and small-city Oklahoma. This region knows what it means to rebuild, adapt, and diversify—whether that's reusing historic buildings, recruiting light manufacturing, or nurturing homegrown media and content ventures. In a county where agriculture, industry, and creative work sit side by side, the question is not whether opportunity exists, but how to align it with the people who live here.

Across Oklahoma, similar dynamics are at play. In Oklahoma City, leaders are moving ahead with plans to reimagine the historic Gold Dome as a concert venue instead of allowing it to be demolished, treating preservation as a form of economic strategy. Major civic projects, including the Clara Luper Civil Rights Center and new river connectivity for destinations like the First Americans Museum and OKANA, show how infrastructure can carry stories as well as

people. Each decision—whether in a large metro or a rural county—signals what kind of economy the state is building.

As I move between production planning, location scouting in historic Kay County buildings, and calls with streaming partners for RM Entertainment Channel, I see the same question surfacing everywhere: What kind of growth do we want? Workforce research and day-to-day experience alike suggest that workers want more than wages—they want meaning, flexibility, and a sense that their work connects to something larger than a bottom line. June 2026 gives Oklahoma a chance to answer that with courage: to combine a top-tier business climate with a deeper commitment to honoring its history, preserving its landmarks, and investing in people from the largest cities to the smallest county seats.

The entrepreneurs, investors, and policy makers who show up this month—at expos, conferences, county meetings, and community events—are not just networking. They are deciding what Oklahoma will stand for when the national spotlight gets brighter, and whether places like Kay County will be fully included in that story.