

# THE OKLAHOMAN

## POLITICS

# A racist campaign message caused ire among Oklahoma Democrats. But it wasn't real, it was AI



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### Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

A fake audio recording of Oklahoma State Rep. John Waldron, allegedly making inflammatory racial remarks, circulated before the Oklahoma Democratic Party Chair election.

The Black Wall Street Times initially published a story based on the audio but later retracted it, citing evidence that the recording was AI-generated.

Experts warn that AI-generated disinformation poses a growing threat to elections, and Oklahoma lacks laws specifically addressing this issue.

Days before Oklahoma Democrats were planning to elect a party leader, phones started buzzing.

A recording began circulating of a voice, claiming to be state Rep. John Waldron, making inflammatory racial remarks about his opponent for party chair.

A local news publication jumped on the story.

Except Waldron, who eventually won the election, said it wasn't him.

Evidence suggests the voice was actually **generated by artificial intelligence**. Who was behind the recording, and for what purposes, is still unknown.

But the flash controversy points to what experts warn is a growing threat in Oklahoma and across the nation as AI becomes an increasingly easy tool to spread political disinformation and influence elections through lifelike audio and video clips.

## **AI could change the election cycle landscape**

AI could transform elections and campaigns, said Brad Carson, a former Democratic congressman from Oklahoma and the co-founder and president of Americans for Responsible Innovation. The nonprofit supports the development of AI while pressing for government regulation of it to protect the public.

“It will also be used to make very inexpensive but creative advertisements that will flood the internet,” Carson said. “AI will also be used to better target voters, and it will enable individualized messaging to the voters.”

While some states have laws that prohibit using AI to simulate people’s likenesses, Oklahoma does not. Voters are left to detect what’s real and what isn’t.

Waldron said he heard about the audio attributed to him from people who contacted him and asked if it was true. Waldron said it was completely fabricated.

“If you play back the recording of my voice now with the actual audio recording that was being distributed, you can tell that they’re very different,” said Waldron, a former teacher from Tulsa. “I was born and raised in New Jersey, and there’s a Western Oklahoma twang to my voice there, so it sounds very weird.”

The Black Wall Street Times published a story about the remarks after the audio circulated among Democratic Party members. Waldron said he was not contacted before the story published online.

Waldron contacted the publication about the fake recording. The story is no longer online, and in its place is a retraction and a story titled “Fake AI Audio Used in Oklahoma Democratic Party Election.”

Nehemiah Frank, the founder and editor-in-chief of The Black Wall Street Times, declined to speak with The Oklahoman about what happened.

The updated story, which includes Frank's byline, has an editor's note saying the publication had retracted its original story about the remarks.

**More:** [Rubio calls AI impersonation a 'real threat' but common with technology](#)

The Black Wall Street Times said it had used Resemble.ai, a forensic audio analyzer that detects synthetic voices, and acoustic and waveform analysis. Based on those results, the publication became convinced the recording was generated using AI.

“These findings point to a sobering reality,” the story explaining the initial article stated. “Deepfake audio has advanced so much that fake clips can mimic real speech and fool even trained listeners.”

Carson said Resemble.ai is a legitimate tool used to detect AI-generated audio.

## **As technology evolves, making AI-generated voice clips gets easier, and harder to detect**

Sean Harrington, the director of technology and innovation at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, said voice-cloning systems need relatively little to produce convincing imitations. They can use only a few minutes of source audio, a sample of the real speaker's voice. As the technology evolves, it makes it harder for detectors to scan for hints such as timing artifacts, breath irregularities and spectral fingerprints.

“The deeper concern is scale: Thousands of synthetic clips can be generated and shared across social platforms long before any forensic check occurs, while retractions or corrections rarely travel as far or as fast,” Harrington said.

The Oklahoman shared a recording attributed to Waldron with Harrington, and he said such a recording would be “trivially easy” to create.

He said it would only take a few voice recordings of a minute or two of the person it is intended to sound like, and the AI-generated content could be made to say anything.

There have been cases across the U.S. of AI being used for political gain.

Earlier in July, someone used AI software to mimic Secretary of State Marco Rubio's voice and contacted foreign ministers, a U.S. governor and a member of Congress.

In early 2024, New Hampshire residents received robocalls posing as former president, Joe Biden. The AI call discouraged voters from voting in the presidential primary.

Like the Biden deepfake, the Waldron deepfakes were aligned with an election.

Waldron, who is also a state representative, faced incumbent Alicia Andrews and Kevin Dawson in the election, which occurred on June 29.

One version of the audio attributed to Waldron was circulated in a text message along with a photo and a quote.

The quote, attributed to Waldron, raised questions about qualifications of Andrews, who was then the party chair.

Andrews is Black. Waldron is White. The voice on the audio recording also criticized Black leadership and referenced the speaker's time working at Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa, a school that has a large Black student population.

The quote is dated June 7. Waldron said he was at a forum in Tulsa that day but said he did not make those remarks.

"The only times I referenced Alicia Andrews in forums would have been related to the election as background," Waldron said.

Regarding Booker T. Washington's leadership, Waldron said he never made any statements about that on the campaign trail.

Andrews said she heard some of the recordings purported to be Waldron but found what she listened to so disturbing she chose not to finish listening.

## **'A lot of work to do' ahead of 2026 elections**

Reflecting on the situation, she said it shows the Oklahoma Democratic Party "has a lot of work to do, first with unity and moving on for preparation for 2026."

"I am a Democrat, I am an Oklahoman, and I wish the best for the Oklahoma Democratic Party, and I think what that is is for the party to forge ahead with the plans that Chairman Waldron and his team have laid out," Andrews said.

Though it is still unclear where the audio originated, Waldron said he is hopeful that authorities will find out. He said he doesn't want to speculate about what happened without having firsthand evidence.

Lee Anne Bruce Boone, the executive director of the Oklahoma Ethics Commission, said she would not be able to confirm or deny whether the commission was investigating the incident, but noted she is not aware of an investigation.

Waldron said he intends to introduce legislation in 2026 that would address AI deepfakes in political campaigns.

Carson said AI-generated content could be required to be clearly labeled and social media companies could be better held responsible for hosting unlabeled AI content that is not taken down when requested. He said that criminal laws could be updated to specifically target the use AI for fraud or election interference.

People also need to be educated about how pervasive AI is, Carson said.

Andrews also foresees some dangers for continued use of AI in politics, particularly in Oklahoma.

“If this is any indication, we will be in a place where we will have to question everyone and everything — which you already have to do in politics,” Andrews said. “But now you have to question, ‘Did that person say it?’ Even if you hear it in their voice.”