

State of the State
Governor Henry Bellmon
January 3, 1967

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the First Session of the 31st Session of the Oklahoma Legislature:

My purpose in appearing before you today is to report that the State of the State is excellent. It has never been better. Two years ago, many of you heard me talk about an hour and a half to get that message across. I don't intend to make that mistake again.

In an effort to shorten my remarks and to reduce numerous voluminous state agency reports to a meaningful brief and understandable summary, much of the information I wish to present to you is included in the bound volume of graphs, maps and charts entitled a "Yardstick for Oklahoma," which had been placed before you.

The records show that in Oklahoma:

Jobs and personal income are up.

Roads and highways are now more adequate to our needs.

More tourists are spending more money in Oklahoma.

Teachers' and professors' salaries are up substantially.

Benefits to senior citizens and the needy are up.

Population of mental hospitals is down.

Waiting lists for admittance to schools for the mentally retarded have all but disappeared.

Funds for new facilities to improve efficiency of the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Public Health and the State Library are on hand.

Oklahomans are becoming better educated.

New training opportunities to prepare Oklahoma citizens for the world of work are available. There is no shortage of jobs in Oklahoma, but there is a shortage of skills.

Funds for the greatest institutional building program in state history are available.

Funds for the greatest turnpike expansion in history are on hand.

The textbook program has been fully financed.

State Employee's Retirement System is functioning well and reserves are up.

A new concept of regional guidance centers is now operational.

The Highway Safety Program has been improved.

The crime rate in Oklahoma has gone down contrary to trends nationally and in adjoining states.

More and better airports serve Oklahoma communities.

Much progress is being made in providing equal opportunity for all Oklahoma citizens.

The population of our state continues to grow.

A rapid industrial expansion is underway providing new jobs and new opportunities.

Oklahoma government is meeting the responsibilities thrust upon it by our growing state. There are many areas where progress can be observed that do not lend themselves to reporting as statistical data. Among these are the fact that Oklahoma voters have demonstrated a new sense of confidence in state government by:

1. Approving annual sessions of the legislature.
2. Approving two general obligation bond issues – one being the largest in our state history.
3. Amending our constitution to allow a governor to seek a second consecutive term.
4. Providing school districts with authority to increase local support schools.
5. Creating a system for establishing and supporting area vocational technical schools.
6. Electing a member of the State Senate as Governor.
7. Voting increase support for municipal government.

Progress in many other areas may be easily seen. Only last week, citizens and leaders of Ada broke ground for the first "State Services Center" to be built in Oklahoma, and so far as can be determined, the first to be built any place in the nation. Costs of this development are to be shared by local, state and federal government. State matching funds are available from the recent bond issue for the expansion of this program into other communities. The State Service Center program holds great promise for ending duplication, bringing closer coordination and increasing availability of the services provided by numerous state agencies. Representative Lonnie Abbott is to be especially commended for his contribution to the concept and realization of this new approach to government.

The new school code approved by the 1965 session of the legislature has now been operational for a year and a half. The improvement in educational opportunities, in teachers' salaries, in classroom size and in the relationship between educators and public officials is remarkable and welcome. For the first time in a generation the Oklahoma Legislature is able to undertake its work in an orderly manner without facing the turmoil caused by a real or contrived Crisis in financing common schools. As a result there is no present widespread interest in increasing state taxes.

The district attorney system has barely become operational, but improvement in law enforcement with a corresponding decrease in crime and improvement in highway safety appear certain.

Through administrative changes and action by the State Supreme Court terms of the 1944 budget balancing amendment have been clarified and strengthened. As a result the 1967 Legislature immediately has a firm budget figure to use in appropriating funds for the next fiscal year. The Court decision has placed the 1967 and 1968 Legislatures under stricter fund limitations than would have been the case otherwise. This condition will be permanently corrected in 1969 and it is greatly in the best interests of Oklahoma that the temporary nature of this problem be recognized and overt action avoided. A comparison of appropriations made by the 28th Legislature with appropriations made by the 30th Session will show the great progress which Oklahoma State government has made in meeting its responsibility:

INCREASED BY:

Higher Education	49.9%
Common Schools	41.6%
Textbooks	67.7%
Mental Health	22.9%
Highways	15.2%
Public Safety (Highway Patrol)	61.1%
Public Health	49.4%
Vocational Rehabilitation.....	50.0%
Industrial Development and Park Dept.	56.8%

Similar and accelerated progress should be possible in future years by maintaining and enhancing Oklahoma's favorable economic growth climate.

A major feature of this climate is the protection recently accorded Oklahoma workers by legislative action establishing a State Minimum Wage, a Prevailing Wage Law, increased Workmen's Compensation benefits and a record by the State Industrial Court of prompt and equitable settlement of claims.

Agriculture is a major contributor of new wealth in Oklahoma and legislative action to accelerate elimination of Brucellosis, provide specialists in marketing and production of special crops, close the open range, create the Wheat and Peanut Commissions and repeal the unfair production tax on fertilizer, has been highly beneficial. Further action along these lines is needed as well as increased support for agricultural research and extension to help provide the technology Oklahoma farm and ranch operators will need to meet the mounting demands to help feed a hungry world.

Arnold Glasow once wrote that "When you give honest advice, have one foot out the door." Since within a week, I will be totally outside government having made a complete transition from Who's Who to Who's that – I would like to offer a few parting suggestions:

While great improvement in Oklahoma can be proudly demonstrated, much remains to be done in developing programs and policies that will fully serve our growing state.

The executive branch of Oklahoma's government is badly in need of modernization and simplification. No thorough reorganization of departments to clarify responsibilities and consolidate agencies has been undertaken since statehood. As a result, 195 agencies now theoretically report directly to the Chief Executive. Also in most cases, boards and commissioners whose members are independent of and possibly unresponsive to either the Legislature or the Chief Executive or any other elective official, are in possession of ultimate authority. Problems could arise if an ineffective, incompetent or even dishonest department director, main his position to the board of commission members during their monthly or less frequent meetings.

A thorough overhaul of the executive department is long overdue. The goal of such an undertaking should be a reduction of the number of agencies, the establishment of clearly defined lines of authority, the shortening of the ballot and a reassignment of responsibilities. Such a reorganization should follow a careful study by competent authorities m governmental and business operation.

One natural result of the restructuring of the executive branch should be a strengthening of the Governor's office. No significant increase in staff or in appropriation has occurred in eight years. During this same period, overall costs of Oklahoma's state government has increased by 36.11%. Funds to substantially strengthen the Governor's office would be a wise investment in Oklahoma's development and in better administration of state government.

Perhaps the department of state government most in need of improvement is the Oklahoma State Tax Commission. While accurate projections are difficult to make there can be little doubt that substantial improvements in efficiency of operation and in tax collection could be realized by new and aggressive leadership on the Commission. Securing the leadership needed on the Commission will require a substantial increase in salaries paid the Commissioners and throughout the Agency. Efficient operation of the Tax Commission cannot be expected however until and unless the State Senate relaxes its control of Tax Commission appointments and internal operation.

The protection of air and water quality comes a matter of increasing importance nationwide and in Oklahoma. While our problems are less serious than the difficulties arising in more populous states, preventative action now will be less expensive and less disruptive than will measures required after the problems become critical. Especially needed at this time is action on the interstate mining compact, increased support for the program of topographic mapping now underway, development of a long range statewide water resources plan and stricter enforcement of water pollution regulations by the Corporation Commission or by a special agency.

No comprehensive program for the development of the State Capitol Complex or the physical plants of state agencies has ever been prepared and adopted. As a result appropriations and bond issues for construction of needed structures have been made without accurate knowledge of expected costs and without a clear idea of the ultimate result. Recently the State Board of Affairs has secured the services of Mr. Phil Wilber of Stillwater in developing a program for the development the Capitol Complex. This work is now complete but it needs to be expanded to include all state institutions by the creation of a Capitol Improvement Programming Office.

Oklahoma has made great progress in providing equal opportunity for all our citizens and in applying the Federal legislation relating to civil rights. In this area of activity the Human Rights Commission and Director have been of invaluable assistance. The time has come to strengthen and expand this vital function of state government. Oklahoma is one of the relatively few states where the Economic Opportunity Act has been administered without controversy and without scandal. To date the Oklahoma Office of Economic Opportunity has operated without appropriated funds but depending upon action at the Federal level, some additional state support may soon be required.

The 30th Session of the Legislature wisely activated a state planning section in the Department of Industrial Development and Park Department. Coordination and activation of existing long range plans for highway development, mental and public health, higher education, common schools, and community development are under way. Further support for overall state planning is badly needed.

Much progress has been made in improving conditions at the state prison and other correctional institutions. However, further action is needed to provide Oklahoma with a correctional system oriented toward training or restoring convicted criminals to positions as law abiding self-supporting citizens. A report to be issued January 4, following a year long study by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, should provide valuable guidelines for the Legislature and the new Administration.

The Supreme Court scandals of 1964-65 have served to create a climate for meaningful judicial reform in Oklahoma. Many plans, including a recommendation by the Oklahoma Academy are available to members of the Legislature for study and guidance. Action to restore public confidence in and effectiveness of our judicial system is greatly needed and desired.

Attention needs to be devoted to the problem of housing future chief executives. Possible eight year terms, programmed highway developments in the area and new public attitudes may make a change desirable. The question of whether the governor's house is a public building or a private home needs to be resolved and new construction or major remodeling undertaken to provide the facilities which the Legislature feels are appropriate for the chief executive of our thriving state.

The 31st Session convenes in an atmosphere of new respect for government in Oklahoma, a diminished power of special interest groups, and new confidence in the future of our go-ahead state. Every member is to be congratulated upon his or her election to this law making body. I am confident that your experiences here during this first and hopefully shorter annual session, will prove to be one of the most interesting and personally rewarding experiences of your lives. I sincerely regret that I will not be a part of Oklahoma's governing and law making process and feel a great surge of sadness as I bid you farewell. I count a great many of you as personal friends and hold every member in high esteem.

The tolerant and cooperative spirit which has been displayed by Governor-Elect Bartlett and other state officials is impressive, and I am confident it will continue. I am pleased at the smooth transfer of authority between the outgoing and the incoming Administrations and at the diligence with which Governor-Elect Bartlett has applied himself in becoming acquainted with his new duties and responsibilities.

It has been said that "the world is not interested in the storms you encountered, but did you bring in the ship." I feel that the executive department of Oklahoma's government, acting in accordance with the program approved by members of the 29th and 30th Sessions, has faithfully brought Oklahoma's Ship of State safely through troubled times.

I am confident that leaders and members new and old of the Legislature, your new governor and state officials, will keep the ship on course during the years, ahead. I wish you Godspeed in the noble endeavor which you have undertaken.

Senator Boecher moved that the President Pro Tempore be authorized and

directed to approve expense claims for members of Senate, who attended meetings prior to the convening of the 31st Legislature, of the Committee on Committees and Rules and Committee on Employment and Printing, which motion was declared adopted.

Senator Boecher moved that the President Pro Tempore be authorized and directed to approve claim in payment of postage, providing each member of the Senate with one (1) roll of five-cent (5c) postage, which motion was declared adopted.

Upon motion of Senator Boecher, each member of the Senate was allowed the sum of Two Hundred Fifty (\$250.00) Dollars for expense of purchasing personal stationery.

President Pro Tempore McSpadden presiding.

About Digitizing the Governors' State of the State Addresses

Section 9, Article 6 of the Constitution of Oklahoma provides as follows:

“At every session of the Legislature, and immediately upon its organization, the Governor shall communicate by message, delivered to joint session of the two houses, upon the condition of the State; and shall recommend such matters to the Legislature as he shall judge expedient.”

From statehood in 1907 to present, the state of the state addresses of Oklahoma's Governors have been recorded in pamphlets, booklets, and Senate Journals. One could not foresee the toll that time would take on the earliest of these documents. When these items first arrived at the Oklahoma State Archives, the leather bindings had dried considerably, cracking the spines significantly. Due to the acidity in the paper, many pages have darkened with age. Some of the more brittle pamphlets crumble at the slightest touch.

Thus when we decided to digitize these materials, we faced two challenges: the safety of the original documents and ease of viewing/reading for patrons. Our primary objective was that the unique and historic qualities of the documents should be reflected in the website. However, older fonts would not digitize clearly when scanned and even using a flatbed scanner could cause the bindings to worsen. An image of each page would increase download time considerably and any hand-written remarks or crooked pages could be lost. We decided to retype each document with every period, comma, and misspelled word to maintain the integrity of the document while placing some unique images of the documents online. Patrons can download the addresses quicker and view them clearer as well as save, print, and zoom with the Adobe Acrobat Reader. We have learned much from our efforts and we hope that our patrons are better served in their research on the state of the state addresses of Oklahoma's Governors.