

**State of the State Address
Governor Frank Keating
February 5, 1996**

Lieutenant Governor Fallin, members of the Cabinet, Speaker Johnson, President Pro-Tempore Taylor, Members of the House and Senate . . . and my fellow Oklahomans:

Eighty-nine years ago, the 112 delegates to Oklahoma's Constitutional Convention gathered to make a new state. It was a difficult process. The convention lasted three times as long as expected, and the chairman wore out three gavels. The document they produced was ten times as long as the United States Constitution, and we've had to amend it many times over the years. But when it was completed, the proceedings of the convention had this to say about the new state of Oklahoma:

They said it is "destined to be the grandest state in the grandest country."

The founding fathers of Oklahoma were ever optimistic. They saw the potential in our land and our people. They knew what Oklahoma could become.

In eleven years, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our admission to the Union. As we examine the State of our State in this, our 89th year, I have but one message for our Legislature and our people:

It is time to make of Oklahoma what our founders predicted. By the year of our centennial in 2007, we will be the "grandest state in the grandest country." It is time to make Oklahoma great.

Our geography, our climate, our soil, our mineral resources -- and most of all, our people -- all these elements have combined to bring us success and progress in even the most difficult of times. Oklahomans don't fail . . . but unfortunately, we have gotten very good at starting over. Through boom and bust and Depression and boom again, Oklahomans have prevailed. When both government and the private sector act as partners, the results are always better.

If we need a permanent lesson on how government and our people can work together for the common good, let's remember the tragedy of last April 19th in Oklahoma City. Government did its part -- with courage and compassion and efficiency. But the real story was written by our people -- the volunteers, the helpers, the good neighbors who established what has been hailed all over the world as The Oklahoma Standard.

Not long ago I had the opportunity to join General Norman Schwartzkopf at the Grand National Quail Hunt in Enid.

He said he's been all over the world, he's seen wars and disasters large and small, but never had he seen a response like Oklahoma's. I told him it was no surprise to me. Oklahomans know what government's role is -- and they understand their own. They know the meaning of partnership, and they know that partnership can't be one-sided.

Our task is to forge a true partnership between government and our people that will make Oklahoma great. We begin that task today.

Last spring, some of you in the Legislature and I disagreed on many things. We will have our differences in 1996. That makes for healthy debate, and I know you join me in welcoming that debate.

But it is important to recognize where we have agreed:

We forged a series of tort reform measures that will limit excesses in civil suits. We held government spending to reasonable levels and trimmed budgets where cuts were

necessary while increasing spending on essential services. In a year when budgets were tight, we enforced a 2.5 percent budget reduction in most agencies while we began a careful examination of how our government serves the people. That's a sensible and prudent way to do business, and I applaud legislators of both parties who joined in this effort.

We passed vital reform legislation -- the first true welfare reform in decades, as well as limits on death penalty appeals.

We established the machinery to permanently solve the midterm school funding challenge.

On two occasions the leadership joined me in action to safeguard Oklahomans. We approved contingency funding to lease private prison space and prevent the early release of hundreds of dangerous criminals, and we moved quickly to offset the loss of federal funds for essential state services during the budget shutdown in Washington. The leasing of private prison space was an Oklahoma first -- it showed that we can work together to find innovative solutions to our problems.

But that does not mean we won't have our differences. Let me remind you that there are principles that make up my growth agenda, and while I may bend on some specifics, I will not break.

The voters of Oklahoma and America sent a clear message in 1994: Restrain government, trim its costs, operate it with honesty and efficiency and stop overregulating and overtaxing free Americans. That was the message I promised to deliver.

I will do all I can to work with both parties in the House and Senate, but I will not betray my obligation to the principles our citizens endorsed in 1994.

That includes the fundamental principle of taxation. High taxes stifle economic growth, low taxes stimulate it. Together, we must resist a tax increase. It's not government that needs to grow, and it's not going to on my watch.

Instead, I challenge you to give full and fair consideration to an agenda of growth-oriented tax cuts. While we have seen encouraging signs of economic growth during the past year, let's not delude ourselves into calling a promising resurgence a boom. We're growing at a rate of about 2.5 percent. Our goal is not just to sustain that growth, but to increase it.

To truly measure Oklahoma's economy, we can't simply look at last year and smile about a marginal increase. We have to compare our state with the rest of the nation.

Last week, a new report by a distinguished economist detailed the differences between Oklahoma and other states in the areas of economic growth and taxation. The report drew a clear and unmistakable link between excessive taxes and sluggish growth. It makes sense: when government takes too much from the people, the people and the economy suffer.

For too many years, Oklahomans have been forced to swim against an increasing tide of taxation and excessive government spending. The results are all too obvious.

Oklahoma's per capita income continues to fluctuate between 81 and 82 percent of the national average. That means Oklahomans make about 81 cents on the dollar. Where a typical American earns a dollar bill, an Oklahoman gets three quarters, a nickel and a penny. And there are signs that we're slipping: the current projection says if we don't make some changes now, per capita personal income for Oklahomans will fall below 80 cents on the dollar by 1997.

That's not good enough.

Oklahoma compares poorly to our neighbors. Per capita income in Texas 90 cents or better and in Colorado it's more than 100 percent of the national average -- and we're falling behind. In Arkansas, it's still less than 80 percent -- but they're gaining, and they're not just gaining on the national average, they're gaining on us. In 1962, Arkansas stood at 62 percent; today they're at 78 percent and rising. It doesn't take high-level mathematics to see Oklahoma slipping into last place in our region.

There are 16 Oklahoma counties that border Texas, from the Panhandle down our west border and along the Red River. Right across the border in Texas are their sister counties -- the same climate, the same terrain, the same rural economic base.

In every one of those 16 Oklahoma counties, per capita personal income is less than in their neighboring counties in Texas -- sometimes by 20 points or more. Remember, these counties are virtually identical, with one exception: Texas has clearly done a better job of creating a growth-oriented business climate.

On January 12, Colorado Governor Roy Romer told his state legislature it was time to control economic growth. He spoke of an embarrassment of riches -- growth that threatens to overtax Colorado's communities and road system. He called for a statewide summit to determine what kinds of growth are best for Colorado.

Well, I'd like to have Roy Romer's problems.

We compare even more poorly with much of the rest of America. Since the early years of the 1980s, the gap between the national average and Oklahoma's per capita income has been gradually widening.

Today that gap is about \$5,000 per year -- that's \$5,000 in purchasing power and investment potential for every man, woman and child in Oklahoma when compared with the rest of the nation. Is it any wonder we're still 45th in income and sixth in poverty? That is unacceptable for a state with our people and our resources.

The picture is even worse for rural Oklahoma, where four out of every ten Oklahomans live and work.

Unemployment is 32 percent higher in our rural counties than in our cities.

Per capita income is lower. Rural Oklahomans make about 65 cents on the dollar.

Transfer payments from government -- welfare and other forms of public assistance -- make up one quarter of all income in our rural areas, up from 18 percent just 15 years ago.

Oklahoma's economy won't get stronger until all Oklahomans truly benefit from growth. We cannot and we will not leave rural Oklahoma behind as we grow our economy for the next century.

Later this year, I will convene an economic growth summit that specifically targets the needs of rural Oklahoma. I would ask members of the Legislature from both parties who represent rural districts -- send me your ideas. Rural Oklahoma is the soul of our state; we must help it grow.

We can celebrate marginal improvements all day long, but if we don't make real economic progress by gaining on the national average in personal income, we're just treading water. You can't tread water forever; eventually, you drown.

Our goal is a basic one: it's time to make Oklahoma rich.

We have seen a number of successes in attracting new businesses and jobs to Oklahoma during the past 12 months. I've met with more than 50 corporate executives

and made more than two dozen economic development trips. Oklahoma is a hot property today. Investors know who we are, and they are favorably impressed.

That is why I join the Legislature in calling for prompt action to renew the Quality Jobs Act. It is an investment in our future and a primary attraction for potential employers.

New industry is vital to our economic future. But our true prosperity lies where it always has, in the hands of our homegrown businesses, especially those small businesses that create so many of our jobs.

Government can't assure their prosperity, but it can do everything possible to help by getting out of the way and encouraging new jobs and new investment.

This Legislature has done well in establishing programs designed to attract large new businesses to Oklahoma. This year, let's remember the small business owner who creates most of the jobs and wealth in our state. Let's begin by creating the kind of friendly tax environment that encourages small business to grow.

Let us put to rest once and for all the myth that Oklahoma is a low tax state. We are a middle-tax state, and we rank disturbingly high in those areas of taxation that have the greatest negative effect on growth. When you adjust for personal income -- the only fair way to reflect how taxes affect individuals and businesses -- Oklahoma ranks 24th in total revenues collected from the our citizens, 14th in sales taxes, 18th in marginal income tax rates, 14th in motor fuel taxes and 15th in inheritance taxes. Those are real dollars taken from the pockets of real people.

What happens when we ease the tax burden? Those people have more money to spend and save and invest. They create new jobs. They start new businesses. Between 1965 and 1993, the ten states with the highest tax burdens saw median per capita income rise by 63 percent. But for the states with the lowest taxes, median income rose by almost 92 percent. Is it any wonder that Oklahomans, paying taxes that frequently discourage growth and penalize success, still make little more than 81 cents on the dollar?

I will propose a series of tax cuts and credits to boost the growth of Oklahoma businesses, including credits for those businesses that contract with other Oklahoma businesses to modernize and upgrade computer systems. To assist rural Oklahoma, we must implement tax credits for businesses engaged in value-added processing of Oklahoma agricultural products. Each company hiring an Oklahoma college graduate deserves a tax credit, to help keep our young people in Oklahoma. To encourage new businesses, we should exempt the first \$25,000 in corporate income from taxation for the crucial first five years of a new firm's life. Finally, I will again challenge you to repeal, once and for all, the Oklahoma Franchise Tax. It is complicated, it is a tax on debt and it stifles growth, especially for new and emerging businesses.

Our rural areas are heavily dependent on energy and the products of the family farm. I will propose an income tax credit on production from our most marginal wells, the wells most often operated by small and independent oil companies, and estate tax relief specifically designed to ease the burden on families when farms and businesses pass from one generation to the next. If ever a tax penalized success it is the inheritance tax on the family farm or business.

Finally, our retired citizens who worked for government pay no taxes on the first \$5,500 in pension income. Private sector retirees are taxed from the first dollar. I urge you to equalize the tax burden for older Oklahomans by extending the \$5,500 exemption

to all retirees, staging this tax cut in over five years. It's time to treat all older Oklahomans alike. Oklahoma is a good place to retire; let's keep it that way.

The gross production tax credit would become effective on July 1, to rush aid to our beleaguered energy industry. The other tax cuts would begin with the 1997 calendar year. As these tax cuts are phased in they will total \$143 million in annualized savings to the people of Oklahoma. For fiscal year 1997, revenues will be reduced by \$32.8 million.

And while we're granting growth incentives to business, I challenge Oklahoma employers to join with Corporation Commissioner Ed Apple in promoting Project 1000. During 1996, let's hire an additional 1000 Oklahoma college graduates to keep them at home and help build our economy from the ground up.

As we begin the reform of our tax code we must also face the persistent crisis in workers compensation. From 1990 to 1993, workers compensation costs in Oklahoma ballooned by 16 percent, compared with a 2 percent reduction nationwide.

Regionally, only Missouri showed a significant increase, and it was still less than ours. In Colorado, workers comp costs declined by seven percent. Arkansas dropped 18 percent, New Mexico 35 percent and Texas almost 40 percent. It is hardly a coincidence that these states have enacted sweeping workers comp reform measures.

The reforms passed in Oklahoma in the past few years are a beginning -- but they are only a beginning.

As a percentage of personal income, Oklahoma's workers comp system is the tenth most expensive in America, and the most expensive in our region. Gradual reductions in costs are good, but gradual reductions won't help beleaguered employers hire more employees or expand their businesses. Our wasteful and costly workers compensation system is a drag on our economic growth and an insult to the workers it was designed to help.

This year, let's complete the task of workers comp reform.

I urge you to pass comprehensive reform legislation that will equalize the burden of proof, reduce legal fees and stop fraudulent claims. Attorney General Edmondson has effectively increased fraud investigations; let's support his efforts by restoring balance to the claims system and protecting those claimants who are genuinely injured on the job.

Workers comp fraud doesn't just victimize insurance companies. It steals from all of us -- especially from the honest workers the system was designed to protect.

Finally, to help Oklahoma grow and prosper we must enact Right-to-Work.

Right-to-Work isn't about unions or management. It's about the freedom of individual Oklahomans to choose. A labor union that serves its members well and responsibly will thrive with or without compulsory membership. And if you doubt that employers avoid Oklahoma because we lack Right-to-Work, listen to them as I have on two dozen economic development trips. Right-to-Work will help Oklahoma grow. It will increase personal income. It will give us one more vital tool to draw business to our state and keep the businesses we have.

Let's put one myth to rest once and for all: Right-to-Work is NOT a wage cutter, it's a wage builder. Between 1989 and 1993, total personal income in 21 Right-to-Work states grew 24 percent faster than in non-Right-to-Work states. That's real progress.

Last year, the House courageously voted to give our citizens the right to vote on Right-to-Work. I challenge both houses of the Legislature to follow their lead during this

session. Let's have the courage to vote, openly and honestly, on this important issue. Let's not assassinate it in committee.

While we create a tax and regulatory climate that encourages jobs and prosperity, we must also look to the structure of government.

State and local government is big business in Oklahoma. Our per capita government employment is still the tenth highest in the nation. We must restore the traditional American sense of government as a means, not an end . . . of government as servant rather than master controller . . . of government limited to specific public tasks that can't be done in any other way.

Wherever possible, we must reduce the size of government and return responsibilities to the private sector and the individual citizen.

Where government works well it works very well indeed. It saves lives, protects our citizens and provides necessary services. Our state employees are dedicated and honest. Last year, 50 of those employees joined the Governor's Performance Team to take a tough, realistic look at state government and to ask some hard questions:

- Is it efficient?
- Is it effective?
- Are these things government ought to do?
- Can some of them be done better by the private sector?

Their answers helped form the core of an extensive report by the Governor's Commission on Government Performance. The Commission said much of our state government is not very efficient, and far from economical. They found duplication, excessive regulation, a lack of accountability and outright waste. They suggested that common-sense business practices could be applied to government and make it better. These are state employees, people who work in government every day. Many of them are with us today, and I would ask that they stand in the gallery to receive our thanks.

I also applaud members of the Legislature of both parties who have stepped forward to sponsor legislation that would implement many of the reforms proposed by the Commission. I don't intend to list them all today; we will spend much of the remainder of this decade debating and considering ways to improve state government. But I ask that you keep three goals firmly in sight:

-- If government is doing a necessary job, find ways to do it better, including consolidation of agencies and functions.

-- If it can be done more effectively and economically by the private sector, privatize it.

-- If the job isn't necessary, stop doing it. Anything that spends public money for something that fails to advance the public good is wasteful.

I will do my part by making necessary changes and reforms by executive order where appropriate. I ask you to do yours through legislation and, when constitutional changes are required, by allowing the people of Oklahoma to vote on these vital issues.

The Commission said we deserve a government as good as our people, and I agree. Your challenge is to carefully weigh and consider these recommendations.

This Legislature has an opportunity to enter history as the most significant popular assembly since the Constitutional Convention, 89 years ago. You can remake and modernize our government.

Now, we turn to this year's budget. The first stirrings of economic growth have increased projected tax revenues and cash on hand by more than \$287 million. Our first task is to establish priorities -- NOT to frantically spend every dime. In the past, when faced with a dramatic increase in revenues, some legislatures have adopted the "spend it all" approach: they've rushed to spend every dime with little regard for consequences, and woke up with a terrible headache. Well, we're going to use better sense in fiscal year 1997.

Priority one is reducing the tax burden and stimulating economic growth. That's where this year's increase in tax revenues came from -- economic growth in the private sector. This new revenue is not a game show prize: it is taxes and fees paid by our people. Our first order of business must be to give some of that money back to the people who earned it in the first place and help stimulate further growth and prosperity. Government doesn't create a penny of real wealth. It merely borrows it from the people. When government reaps a windfall from the taxpayers, those taxpayers deserve the first dividend.

Priority two is to create savings from the implementation of real reforms in state government. Each reform we implement will not just return savings this year; it will reduce the cost of government in the future, easing pressure on those budgets which may not be as flush as this one. I encourage you to balance cost-saving reforms against available funds in a realistic way.

As you pass reforms with real savings, log those savings as part of the available funds -- and appropriate them wisely.

A third priority forces us to confront the continuing budget crisis in Washington.

In the long run, we do not know what financial responsibilities will be handed over to the states as Congress reshapes the federal-state relationship. We can only deal with those realities as they become law. But in the short run, it is vital that we maintain Oklahoma's Rainy Day Fund as a true emergency resource, should the federal budget debate again threaten funding of vital state services. If any part of the federal government closes for business again this year, it may fall to us to finance essential programs. That's what a savings account is for, and prudence demands that we maintain the Rainy Day Fund intact. I will again veto any effort to break Oklahoma's piggy bank to fund non-emergency needs.

As we look to the operational categories of state government we must also set priorities -- and the first priority of government is to assure the safety of our citizens.

My budget will increase spending on public safety by \$55 million, including a \$7.6 million supplemental appropriation to fund the action of the Contingency Review Board that leased private prison space to incarcerate our worst offenders.

New funding will add 1,144 new prison beds in fiscal year 1996 and 1,603 beds in 1997, hire additional personnel, increase fees paid to county sheriffs for housing state inmates and make our newly established juvenile justice system fully operational. We will also move swiftly to lease additional private prison space should such action be necessary.

Let there be no mistake: we face a prison crisis. Our alternatives are clear. We can continue to release violent predators or we can dramatically upgrade our ability to lock up the truly dangerous offenders who rob, rape and kill innocent citizens. The first alternative is unacceptable. Under my administration, the revolving door is closed.

To send a clear and consistent message to those who persist in criminal behavior, I urge you to pass a workable truth in sentencing law that requires violent and chronic offenders to serve at least 85 percent of their time.

To do any less is to shirk our first responsibility -- the responsibility to assure public order and safety.

If we are to be a truly modern state, we must upgrade our transportation system. I will propose an additional \$40 million in highway spending for construction and maintenance.

Last year we passed a comprehensive welfare reform bill designed to reduce caseloads and restore citizens to dignity and independence. The savings from that measure are already apparent, and we will take further steps in 1996 to reduce the excessive administrative costs in Medicaid by \$8.8 million. For those reasons, we can reduce welfare and public assistance spending by approximately \$19 million for fiscal year 1997 without cutting benefits to the truly needy.

Those benefits should work to sustain, rather than to undermine, the family. The family is our society's basic unit -- and our children must be a primary focus of government policy. Their future is our future, but their future is all too often placed in jeopardy by abuse, neglect and divorce.

I urge your support for proposed legislation which would cushion the terrible effects of divorce. We can no longer afford to dissolve families on a whim, and we can no longer afford to place children last.

Judges should have the right to require family counseling when children are involved, both to protect their interests and to seek grounds for a possible reconciliation. Not every family can or should remain together, but it demeans us all when marriage becomes as disposable as a used tissue.

And let's make no mistake about the issues of domestic violence and child support: Oklahoma will be a no-tolerance state for abusers and deadbeats. Where children and abused spouses are concerned, you can no longer run and there's no place to hide.

As we work to ease the pain of divorce for our children, we must also assure that the tragic case of young Ryan Luke is never, never repeated. Some have said the system failed Ryan Luke; in fact, some of the people administering that system failed, and those responsible should be ashamed. The courts will punish the murderers of Ryan Luke. It is our responsibility to provide the tools that will protect other children from vicious abuse.

I will propose increased funding to strengthen child abuse investigation and prevention, and I encourage the Legislature to seek new ways to make the system work for the protection of all children. In our deliberations on this most vital of all issues, let us never forget the name of Ryan Luke.

Finally, I will propose significant increases in education, carefully targeted to support reform and improvement of our schools, vo-tech centers and colleges and universities, and to confront the growing crisis in our teacher retirement system.

Higher education will receive an additional \$56 million in direct funding.

We will inject \$11.2 million to fund retirement contributions and ask that charges for remedial education programs be increased by \$4.4 million. It is unfair to ask Oklahoma taxpayers to teach high school graduates how to read.

I also encourage the legislature and the Regents for Higher Education to study and adopt workable reforms suggested by the Governor's Commission on Government Performance.

By freeing funds now obligated for course and administrative duplication, our higher education system can put more of our existing dollars to work in the classroom, where they belong.

Our outstanding vo-tech system will receive additional funding, including \$4 million to boost the Quality Jobs Program and funds for the Tahlequah training center. Vo-tech education is a job-builder. The dollars we invest there today will reap true dividends tomorrow.

Our common schools are the one educational institution that touch every Oklahoman. I will propose \$101 million in additional funding for our schools.

First, we must address the unfunded liability in the Oklahoma Teachers' Retirement System -- a \$4.2 billion financial train wreck waiting to happen. Sixty-six million dollars is needed now to fund increased employer contributions to the system, but that is at best a temporary measure.

For the long term, we must carefully examine our educators' retirement program and make those changes necessary to safeguard future benefits and assure its permanent stability. I will work with the Speaker, the President Pro-Tem and education officials to assemble a task force charged with that responsibility. If we've learned one lesson from the federal budget crisis, it is that trouble doesn't happen overnight.

It took years to dig this hole and it will require more than a quick fix to solve it. Solve it we will, beginning with an immediate infusion of funds to assure the system's actuarial soundness.

I will also propose full funding of fiscal year 95 and 96 midterm requirements for growing school districts -- and an additional \$22 million, firmly tied to a permanent solution to this annual problem.

It's bad business to pay last year's bills with next year's income, but that's what we've attempted to do with the midterm issue for decades. Before this session adjourns, we must have a workable plan to fully fund our growing schools without an annual crisis.

The Great Expectations program, modeled on the teaching philosophy of Marva Collins, has scattered true points of light across our state. You can tell a Great Expectations school from the moment you walk in the door -- and you can tell a Great Expectations student by the light of learning that shines in his or her face. I will propose \$1.2 million to expand the Great Expectations program so that one day, every school in Oklahoma will have great expectations of our young people.

I applaud Legislative proposals to deregulate our schools and adopt a true school choice plan. It is also vital that we upgrade technology in our schools, but it is equally important that we plan before we leap. I will propose an initial appropriation of \$300,000 to begin linking our school libraries with the growing ONENET system.

As we reward our outstanding students, we should also honor our best teachers. House Bill 1017 established a system of merit raises for master teachers, but it has never been funded. I will propose \$10.9 million for an outstanding teacher bonus program to reward those educators who serve as examples of excellence, not just to the children they teach but to their colleagues as well.

At the same time, it is vital that we fully consider creative school reforms. School choice, charter schools, shared administrators, school savings accounts and other proposals prefiled for this session will open our schools to innovation and true improvement. Since 1990 we have increased annual school funding by nearly three quarters of a billion dollars. That money has financed some improvement -- but our citizens have the right to ask, "Is money the only solution?"

We know that it is not. In the end, good schools spring from good neighborhoods, where parents and school patrons support the process of education. By extending to them true choice, by establishing charter schools that reflect a community's hopes, by encouraging the kind of rigorous standards associated with Great Expectations schools . . . we will translate that financial investment into genuine excellence for our children.

Every new dollar we invest in education must be a reform dollar. To do anything less is to cheat our children. In the past, some have thought it sufficient to simply increase funding for schools. That is not the answer. The answer is a three-part formula of high academic expectations, rigorous accountability and community involvement. Our schools are first of all accountable to the families they serve.

That is why true school choice and innovative site-based programs will do more to improve education than even the most ambitious levels of spending.

Just four months from now, thousands of young people will graduate from Oklahoma's high schools and colleges. The members of the Class of 1996 will be like those who have gone before them -- they'll have dreams and hopes and a healthy spark of ambition.

Most will want to stay here in Oklahoma, to build their careers and homes and families. Sadly, many won't have that option.

The Class of '96 will meet employers who can't hire someone right now because of excessive workers' compensation rates. They'll find too many offices already filled with workers handling regulatory paperwork and tax forms. They'll hear "don't call us, we'll call you" too many times, and they'll go to Texas or North Carolina or Arizona.

Many of the members of the Class of 1996 will be lost to Oklahoma forever, because Oklahoma didn't do enough to keep them home. And they will not understand how a state with our superb workforce, our abundant natural resources and our pioneering heritage could allow this to happen.

We can no longer afford to waste the best and brightest from one more graduating class. Those graduates and the things they have learned are a shared investment. I challenge you to join me in sending them a positive message in the next four months: Let us assure those eager new graduates that Oklahoma is going to do all it can to make our state an employment mecca. Let's stop exiling our best young people.

To assure their future and ours, I challenge you today to set two fundamental goals.

First, by the year of our centennial, every high school student in Oklahoma should enroll in and complete an academically demanding core curriculum that will raise our state's ACT college entrance test averages to exceed the national average.

Second, let us resolve NOW that by 2007, Oklahoma's per capita personal income will reach and surpass at least 90 percent of the national average. It is time to finally match our earning power with our brain power.

Let our actions as leaders and lawmakers focus on those goals. And let me assure you today that I will support actions that advance that agenda -- and I will oppose anything that impedes it.

Oklahoma's time is now. The world has seen our spirit in adversity; now, let us display that same spirit in triumph. On our centennial day in the fall of 2007, all of America should be talking of the Oklahoma miracle, a great resurgence of spirit and hope and prosperity and growth. But we must begin today.

We can do business as usual -- the business of low expectations and tarnished dreams, of special interest politics and pork barrel gluttony, of half measures and failed initiatives.

Or we can modernize our government and prepare for the new century.

We can remove government barriers to growth and prosperity.

We can assure the safety of our citizens and construct a transportation system second to none.

We can build a government worthy of our wonderful people.

The Class of 1996 is watching us today. They are young and hopeful and proud -- and they will not listen to the tired old excuses.

The Oklahoma Centennial is just 11 years away. Let us work together, starting now, to make it a true celebration of greatness.

Thank you, and may the Good Lord bless our beloved Oklahoma.

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.