

State of the State
Governor Johnston Murray
January 6, 1953

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE AND
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
TWENTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE
OF OKLAHOMA

Mr. Lieutenant Governor, Mr. President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives, and The Honorable Members of the Joint Session:

On January 9th, 1951, and again on March 6th, 1951, I had the honor and privilege of appearing formally but briefly before the august body which constituted the membership of the Twenty-third Legislature.

Time and circumstances, as they are wont to do, have changed a few faces here and there. Such changes were made by the greatest and finest people anywhere in the world, the electorate of the State of Oklahoma. Now it is my honor and privilege again to appear before you gentlemen who comprise the Regular Session of the Twenty-fourth Legislature.

To all of you, and to you individually, I want to state that the whole world shall know that you are recognized as the duly Representatives and Senators of your respective districts by my office and my entire staff, irrespective of geographical location of your district or your political affiliations.

By my acts, as well as by my public utterances, you know, or should know, that I do not consider the office of Governor in its service to the two-and-one-quarter-million citizens of Oklahoma as belonging to either of our great parties, nor to any group – minor or major – but instead, it is an office with executive and administrative functions and services for **all** the people of Oklahoma.

By the same token you gentlemen of the Senate and gentlemen of the House of Representatives must needs remember that regardless of geography or of party affiliation, your every act of commission, or omission. Yea! your every word, when officially given, affects not just your political party nor the people of your district, but every man, woman or child of the State as a whole.

As this administration began in 1951, I placed before the Twenty-third Legislature certain suggestions for enactment. These suggestions were directed toward a stabilization of our government that Oklahoma might attain and maintain a reputation for stability and progress before the entire Nation. A program of economy and no increase in taxes was my theme then. It still remains the same.

On the whole and in the main, the results accomplished were good, and together we have demonstrated that we have, and are capable of maintaining, a stable, progressive government during the biennium just closed.

I feel that at this time I should preface my remarks with a brief report of the progress made during these two years. Let me say at the outset that whatever success we have had, whatever advancements made, we are deeply indebted to the official family of Oklahoma as a whole, and I want here and now to express my gratitude to the elected and appointed officials of this State, and of its lesser subdivisions, for their unstinted support and cooperation. and to say to you that to these people must go a major share of the honors; without them and without their

aid and sustaining cooperation, our successes, whatever they are, would not have been possible. That mistakes have been made, I frankly confess, and for these mistakes, responsibility must be assumed by me. Wherever they are and whatever they are, I assure you that they were mistakes of the head and not of the heart. It shall be my fervent endeavor to see that they shall not recur, and I shall diligently work throughout the ensuing years with an insatiable desire to learn how to do a better job. I know full well that perfection cannot be attained, but I am likewise conscious that improvements can be made. With your help and the continued support of the splendid group of officials with whom it is my privilege to work, I confidently predict that we can do, and that we will do, a better job henceforth.

You will recall that in my campaign for Governor, I made an especial appeal to the "Plain Folks" of Oklahoma. They responded. I asked the Legislature to conduct itself in a manner that would best serve the interests of all the people. It responded. And throughout this administration the response of our people in giving approbation to the ends we have sought to attain has been nothing short of magnificent.

Early in the administration, Mrs. Murray and I adopted an open house policy on each Thursday afternoon, both at the Office of the Governor and at the Executive Mansion. We invited all of the citizens of Oklahoma, without regard to race, creed, or station, to come and be our personal guests and to see and observe the manner of conducting the government of our State, and the kind of people they had chosen to administer it. Multiplied thousands have accepted this invitation, and, without hesitation, I can say to you that from each handshake we have received inspiration and encouragement. It is good to know your fellow man, and we hope that by the same token every citizen who has shown us the honor of a visit on these open house occasions has gone away feeling that all mental hazards, if any ever existed between him and his government, have been removed. This policy of public contact will be continued throughout my administration, and during this Session of the Legislature, the members of these bodies and their wives and be invited to become hosts and hostesses with Mrs. Murray and myself on these occasions. You, too, will be the beneficiary of great inspiration and encouragement by this fellowship and relation with that class of the public constituting the "Plain Folk" who do not besiege you for favors, who do not want special privileges, but who will be everlasting grateful if they can only be left alone and permitted to pursue their vocation and their lives in the peace and in the happiness and in the exercise of the liberties which their Creator ordained, and which their government has pledged to sustain.

You will have before you at the beginning of this Session the reports of the departments, institutions, agencies, commissions, and individuals who represent the official structure of the government of Oklahoma. These reports have for their purpose giving you an explanation of the acts and doings of the various entities since you last convened. Although it is tedious work, I beseech you, do not treat these reports as material for filing. Give them a careful and critical study, for it is from them that much valuable information can be ascertained that will guide you to a clearer answer of the problems that will beset you. From the experiences indicated, much information will be available to you concerning the places where waste and extravagance may be evident, and, likewise, where funds previously provided have not been adequate. I urge you to take full advantage of this data and all other sources before you act finally on any given project. Hasty legislation passed because of a sentimental or emotional appeal, or to appease what seems to be a popular demand, often proves to be an Albatross hung to the necks of its creators.

For your convenience, I am submitting the budget message separately, and in addition to the remarks that I shall make here, I am filing also a written message which, because of its volume, would be impossible for me to deliver within the time that I might reasonably be expected to consume. I hope you will treat this written message as an extension of these remarks. In it I have tried to lay down the broad principles of the aims and hopes of the administration. I have tried to recount for you the accomplishments thus far. I hope that in the exercise of your judgment and discretion you will agree with me that the accomplishment of the purposes covered will be beneficial for the State as a whole. I have tried to steer clear, as nearly as possible, of that type of legislation which could wear the label "special privilege," that is, legislation beneficial only to particular groups and generally detrimental to the public as a whole.

In a well-governed State where human rights and dignity are treated with respect and zealously protected, there is little need for "special privilege" legislation. You are well aware of the fact, of course, that this type of legislation is usually sought by those who want some right or privilege not ordinarily granted to the rank and file.

It is not the quantity of legislation that an assembly may "grind out," but rather the quality that places the mark of statesmanship upon the authors. The people of Oklahoma do not look to this Assembly for legislation to be measured in reams of paper or the thickness of books, but they do await with wondering anticipation the quality and character that you will write into your enactments.

From the very brief perusal that I have been able to give it because of its belated production, I have noted with a feeling of deep apprehension that in the report of the Legislative Council there are contained many suggestions which have for their purpose the further regulation and restriction of different types of perfectly legitimate business. I beseech you, take a second look at any kind of legislation which has for its purpose encircling and binding legitimate business with more regulations, limitations, and restrictions than now exist. Heaven knows, most of them are regulated enough. The exceptions, if there be exceptions, you should, of course, deal with, within the limits of reason. I have given particular notice to the fact that where an abuse appears, such as in the sale of narcotics or habit forming drugs, that there is usually a rush and a demand to prescribe further statutory burdens and duties upon the legitimate drug trade. The average legitimate druggist is an honest person. He knows and respects his friends and his customers. This man doesn't need further regulations. We lose sight of the fact that it is the bootlegger of drugs, the illegitimate dealer, who neither knows or respects regulations or restrictions, who constitute the offenders. The only way to reach him is through a system of penalties for his depredations. I cite this example to you by way of suggestion only as to what I mean when I defend before you the rights of a legitimate businessman to be able to pursue his vocation in peace, being restricted only by such regulations as are necessary for the protection of the public health, safety, and morals.

I hope that with the advancement of the years it may well be said of Oklahoma that as this grand State grew to maturity, both in years and existence and in intellectual development, she pioneered the principles of individual and property rights, believing always that the least governed people are the best governed people.

In the budget message which is being submitted, you will note as a preface that I have invited you to give careful and critical study to every single item that it contains. You will remember that the allocation of appropriations and the division of the monies available is a matter primarily legislative in its nature. Let no one cause you to forego or delegate this important part of the functions of your office. You will also remember that the items contained

in this budget are made up from the requests submitted by those seeking the money to spend. No matter what you may have heard or read, I say to you now that I have at no time, directly or by any reasonable implication, given assent or approval to any plan that involves a reckless departure from the fixed order of things as they presently exist, nor have I approved nor do I now approve large and unusual increases in the appropriations for the conduct of any department. To fulfill the reasonable needs, it is, of course, urged that you do that which is necessary and proper. Essential necessities should receive, and I know they will receive, your first consideration, leaving those projects which may be considered in the nature of luxuries or non-essential to be taken care of after we have satisfied the reasonable demands of the paramount subjects, such as roads and highways, education, necessary state institutions, and other departments that fit into this category. In this connection, may I be permitted to suggest and to express the hope that you will find that the Legislative Council has inquired deeply into the subject matter of the budget. If this is true, it will shorten the period and alleviate much of the inquisitorial burdens which you must carry. If such has not been done, it would seem that a wise and prudent action to be taken by this Legislature would be to make provisions for some properly authorized legislative agency, such as the Legislative Council, to perform this service in the interim. Such an authority could check each item of suggested appropriation and be able to give you knowledge of the reason and necessity therefore when you assemble here for general legislative purposes. With this kind of procedure, it is my considered judgment that most, if not all, of the argument favoring annual sessions of the Legislature will fade and disappear. You need not be reminded, I am sure, that legislative sessions every two years, extended as they have recently been, have caused severe public criticism. This can be averted by expeditious handling of legislative affairs. Annual sessions would, in my judgment, accomplish nothing more than to inject the Legislative Branch of the government into the administrative affairs of the State. This should be avoided. Separation and independence of the three branches is the key note to the success of our present form of government. It would be just as unwise and imprudent for the Legislative Branch of the government to encroach upon the administrative field as it would be for the Judicial Department to write extensive opinions on what the law ought to be rather than what it is. I realize that some good men believe otherwise, but from this trend of thought I must respectfully dissent without any intention of being disagreeable about it.

While we are discussing the subject so closely related to the general theory of economy and taxation about which I have so frequently addressed you, let me say that if I were going to suggest a new title for an old song, this year I would name the theme "Let's Give the Tax Payer a Break." In this connection, for the purpose of double emphasis, I repeat here a chapter contained in my written message on the subject of economy. I quote:

"ECONOMY

"Since the beginning of this administration and before, you will recall that the question of economy in public expenditures has been emphasized and stressed. My campaign in 1950 gave heavy emphasis to such a program. I urged it in the 1951 Session of the Legislature. If there could be any doubt but that the public approves this program, we have only to remember that in the 1952 general election a most resounding and emphatic "no" was uttered by the electorate of this State on certain initiative and referendum matters which had for their purpose increasing public burdens and public expense. Common sense and common honesty direct and demand that we should give heed to these emphatic directives.

“Some progress in regard to achieving a more economical administration of our Government has been made, but I say to you, in all candor, that the progress made is infinitesimal as compared to the things that can be done and the things that ought to be done. We need not try to fool ourselves or the public either. Although we kept within the revenues during the past biennium, we did not accomplish many of the major savings that should have been accomplished. As for myself, I feel obliged and will continue to feel obliged to consistently and urgently direct your attention to these things. There are many ways in which great economies can be effective. I cannot enumerate them all, but you have the facilities at your command to ascertain and determine where this can and should be done.

“Some of the major economies that I have feel should be given immediate attention are:

“1. The consolidation of boards and commissions wherever possible.

“2. The elimination of all unnecessary boards or commissions.

“3. The abolishment or consolidation of unnecessary institutions. It is quite apparent that a number of institutions are being maintained in this State for which no real need exists, and the time has come to view this problem realistically. The price is too great for us longer to bury our heads in the sands of reckless spending and overlook this transparent fact.

“4. The elimination, as far as is possible, of the lump sum appropriation for the reasons made obvious in another portion of this message.

“5. The inauguration of a system by which budgetary requests can be investigated and checked with authority by some proper agency other than the group which expects to do the spending. I have repeatedly affirmed, and now reiterate, that the individual or institution expecting to spend the money appropriated should not be given too much latitude in fixing the amount of the appropriation. It is but human nature for such individuals or institutions to make demands greater than the real and actual needs.

“6. A complete survey and re-study should be made of all offices to determine whether or not the personnel of such office or institution exceeds that of reasonable public needs and demands. I would favor a system of merit under which incompetent and inefficient help could be eliminated, and under which competent and efficient help could be retained and advanced. Neither the State Government, nor any of its branches; should ever be used as a dumping ground for political parasites.

“The above numbered items are only a few of many of both major and minor consequence to which this body should direct its attention. They are sufficient, however, to impress the general idea which I have, and which, I am sure, the public generally has, as to how the State’s business should be conducted.

“While the suggestions that I have made herein pertain mostly to executive and administrative branches of the Government, I do not feel that it is amiss at this time that I should direct your attention also to the fact that the same general public is deeply interested in legislative economy, and I mean that term in its broadest application, such as time, space, and

money. The business of the State is usually stalemated during a legislative session. The public does not believe that sessions of the legislature extending for five or six months are necessary, and they feel that such business can be transacted much more expeditiously. This expectation does not seem unreasonable, and it would be difficult to convince any thinking person that great savings in time cannot be effected in this branch of our Government.

“I am also suggesting that you limit yourself, as much as possible to the use of space. With rents as they are and with building prices at an unprecedented high, this request I hope you will receive in the spirit in which it is given, namely, that of pointing out a need and asking your indulgence and cooperation. We can’t afford to pay excessive rents, and we ought not to be driven to the point of building high priced buildings at this time.

“I also urge that you limit your expenditures for legislative purposes as much as is consistent with sound policy and efficient operation. We all know that many legislatures in the years gone by have employed a larger personnel than was needed for this purpose.

“In this particular section of my message, although I have spoken rather bluntly, I assure you that I am doing it with the deepest respect. I have discussed most of the matters herein contained with more than a majority of this body on different occasions, and these members have privately agreed with me. I have every confidence that they will also publicly help to bring about these accomplishments. An educated and an alert public awaits our answer and they are not going to accept a negative.

“We should not stop either with an effort to reform our State Government. Equal emphasis should be placed upon the defects of our county, municipal, and school district affairs, and wherever possible and as often as possible, legislation should be enacted to streamline, modernize, and make efficient all of these branches of our Government. Economy and efficiency should not be applied to one branch and withheld from another. The application should be made with equal weight in all branches of the Government and upon all persons connected with it, be his station high or low in the category of official life.”

Giving the tax payer a break, as you well know, is not a new nor novel plan with this administration; that it has been popular with the tax payer is an openly demonstrated reality. Both the press and the public have gratefully accepted the efforts that have been made in their behalf, and my only regret is that we haven’t accomplished more. Many members of this Legislature made their respective races upon the basis of economy and no new taxes. I know they will demonstrate their sincerity. Woe betide the man in these days of tax-consciousness who runs on a platform of savings and performs on a platform of spending.

I have dedicated the major portion of my written message to aims and purpose designed to give the tax payer a break. I am hopeful that this message will receive wide dissemination and publicity, and that the tax payers of Oklahoma will light their individual candles by advising you whether or not they approve in principle the things that are suggested. He of humble station has as much right to be heard as the man who speaks for and represents the accumulation of wealth and property. The voices of the “Plain Folks” when added together in a mighty call for stabilization, frugality, and economy, will drown the siren wails of he who screams for special advantages and legislative exemptions from the burdens that are the price of good citizenship. I commend to your especial study, and to the especial study of all that hear me, the following additional chapters in my written message:

1. Taxation and Tax Equalization.
2. The Assessment and Taxation of Personal Property.

3. The Road Users Tax.
4. Uniform Purchase and Contract Code.
5. Reformation of Counties.
6. Governor's Joint Committee on Reorganization of State Government.
7. Roads and Highways.
8. Education.
9. Tax Exemptions.
10. Appropriations Generally.
11. Lump Sum Appropriations.
12. Deficiency Appropriations.
13. Surplus Accumulations.
14. Ear-Marking of Revenues.

Every one of the above mentioned subjects have been conceived, studied, and written with the very definite view of eliminating worn out and obsolete methods and practices, and establishing reforms and procedures with a definite objective of giving the tax payer the kind of a break that he has so long needed and which has been so long neglected.

By whatever degree the objectives just stated are accomplished, Mr. Tax Payer will have received another break. Not only will he be the beneficiary of thrift, economy, and efficiency, but he will have moved one step nearer to the day when local self-government will have been restored to him in fact as well as in theory. He will no longer have to depend for the operation of purely local institutions on Federal handouts and State support. As he has lived and learned, Mr. Tax Payer is becoming more and more inclined to view this type of Government with suspicion and alarm. He has found that at the end of the rainbow of promise, instead of a pot of gold, a yoke of debt awaited him.

The reformations I have suggested contain not only financial relief, but relief in efficiency and competency in the kind and type of administration that he will receive. By uplifting the standards of efficiency and obliterating as much as possible the stigma of political favoritism, the trend will be toward honesty, integrity, and strengthening the public confidence in State and local Governments. Happy am I to say that in Oklahoma we have been cursed with a minimum of corruption, but I hasten to add that any corruption is too much corruption, and I want to see the day when the price for corrupt practices will be both severe and certain to the end that those who did practice such shall have been driven from public life.

When I was last privileged to address you, I directed your attention to the fact that the public conscience was sorely troubled with the problems of world unrest, the national emergency, plans for the defense, and the ever mounting burden of taxation necessary to meet the conditions. Serious as the conditions were at that time, they are more critical now. The dogs of war still stalk the planet and free men everywhere are compelled to keep constant vigil, knowing not the day or the hour when the demons of lust and aggression may seek to break through and destroy the last vestige of human dignity and human liberty. The horizons of the future, so far as we can see, contain neither hope nor promise that this situation will cease or improve.

A new national administration is about to assume the reins of our Government. Upon the shoulders of this administration will be placed the Herculean task of undertaking to hold in

abeyance that gang of lustful, godless men who, in quest for power, would destroy every semblance of moral advancement made since an all wise God delivered to Moses on the rugged slopes of Sinai the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments – a moral code for the guidance of God fearing people. Without them to guide us, peace cannot dwell upon this earth. Whether the new administration and its concepts of Government comport with our own political philosophy is beside the question. When the time comes to defend the American heritage against the onslaughts of the dragons of hell, we are Americans all, and let us therefore, with solemn determination and the courage bequeathed to us from our forefathers, uphold and sustain every righteous move of the oncoming administration direct toward the preservation of this Nation and its ideals, the perpetuity of freedom and the protection of the free world – the God fearing world, wherever protection is needed.

In this connection, let me solemnly warn you that bankrupt and insolvent nations can no better conduct a war of defense than a war of aggression. Neither can bankrupt and insolvent states or states which have dissipated their substance by extravagant spending, contribute their just share to the national defense. From every hill and every valley, from plateau, plain, city, town, and hamlet, throughout this entire State, when the clarion call to arms has sounded, Oklahomans have marched unflinchingly with bared breasts and undaunted courage to the defense of this Nation. Their bodies lie on every battlefield, and even now they stand guard on the cold and barren peaks of Korea, fighting your battle and mine on far flung foreign fields, that the destroyers of your home and my home may be kept within the boundaries of the Iron Curtain that they have builded against civilization and decency. I know not what course others may take, but, as for me, I am willing to forego, to curtail, or to eliminate, if need be, functions that we might like to enjoy, but which we cannot in good conscience undertake to enjoy while bullets whine and bombs are bursting around the bleeding and mangled bodies of our own flesh and blood.

As for me, I shall be content to undertake, as nearly as possible, to maintain our present standards while mothers, wives, and sisters wait and pray for the return of the loved one who is today giving every measure of devotion necessary to permit one to breathe the breath of freedom and to enjoy the comforts accorded me by the greatest Nation and greatest State on the top of God's green footstool.

I know that you and everyone of you will join with me in these sentiments. I know that you will proceed with greatest caution, realizing full well that the building of institutions of marble, the expansion of the benefits to be derived from civil government and civil affairs, mean nothing if through our lack of foresight, if through our lack of planning, if through our lack of a spirit of forbearance, we construct today only to have such construction destroyed tomorrow by the bombs of an aggressor against whom we have not sufficiently planned to defend ourselves. Let us join together, you and I, in a solemn pledge to the people of America – to the people of Oklahoma – that we will forebear any and all extravagance, any and all unnecessary indulgences, doing that only which is necessary and essential, until the day shall come when the uniforms now being worn by valiant men from Oklahoma shall be folded and laid away in the vaults of memory, and these fine men shall again with us enjoy the blessings of liberty in the pursuit of peaceful vocations.

Invoking now the aid of our most powerful Ally, your God and mine, to guide you and direct you in your deliberations, and to give unto me wisdom and courage that I may creditably discharge the duties imposed upon me, I leave you with sincere confidence that the result of your efforts will be received with appropriation by grateful people.

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.