

State of the State
Governor George Nigh
January 8, 1980

Lieutenant Governor Bernard
President Pro Tempore Howard Speaker Draper
Members of the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Legislature

With your help last year, Oklahoman were given the largest single tax cut in our history. Not only did we eliminate the so-called tax on tax by restoring State credit for federal income taxes paid – which gave single taxpayer a reduction in taxes – we expanded the number of our citizens eligible for the double homestead exemption. This particularly helped the elderly the disabled.

We took the first step in developing our water resources when we created the Water Resources Fund.

As we speak of legislative accomplishments, I emphasize that these are ours – yours as well as mine. I appreciate your work and commend your leadership. The past year also reaffirmed my belief that you have outstanding leadership. Speaker Draper and President Pro Tempore Howard are able and dedicated.

The television cameras remind me that through our educational television system, this is the first time any governor has had an opportunity to reach every citizen in the State.

As we go through the budget, bear in mind my goal is to be as successful at providing other services for total Oklahoma as we have with educational television. It should make no difference who you are or where you live in our State when it comes to receiving state services.

I am fulfilling my pledge to provide an open and accessible administration. I am visiting each of the 77 counties in each year of my administration. The first Thursday of each month is set aside so any citizen can see me on any subject. Hundreds have come – some only wanting to voice their views and concerns, some with problems I have no authority or power to solve. But many have brought problems that have now been solved and ideas that can be used.

Because of distance and economy, not all can come to the Capitol. So we are now scheduling some of these days open to the public at locations across the State. No appointment is necessary.

My wife, Donna, opens the Mansion to the public every Wednesday afternoon.

We continue our commitment that all voices be heard in a Nigh administration. I am proud of the calibre of my appointments that include and reflect all segments of our people.

All people must be included, not only in appointments, but also in employment. Emphasizing my commitment, the Legislature – at my request – transferred the State's Affirmative Action Officer directly into the Governor's office.

As I said last year, I support – and stand ready to sign – your resolution to adopt the

taxpayers a break and still have sufficient growth to finance State government. I am proud of the votes of confidence you and the people of this State have given in this area. Even with the tax reductions, with proper management and prudent, necessary legislation – as I am recommending – we can have growth in revenue available for appropriations virtually the same as last year.

Apart from growth, three elements are vital to make this year's budget total \$1.2 billion. They are: 1) a change in the cash flow reserve law; 2) the transfer of University Hospital to DISRS; and, 3) the addition Children's of \$10 million over tin the capital outlay funds earmarked for higher education. This latter figure is to be funded from one, or any combination of the following three sources: newly-found revenue not now certifiable, re-enactment of Federal Revenue Sharing for the States, or, surplus cash which may accumulate toward the end of the fiscal year.

While Oklahoma's future looks brighter than ever, caution is demanded because of at least three areas over which we have no control. Our conservation tax is declining; we're concerned about our estimated revenue from the gross production tax; and, gasoline tax revenues are declining with decreased availability and better conservations.

A key element to the development of budget is transfer of the operations, responsibilities and funding of the University Hospital to the Department of Institution, Social and Rehabilitative Services. This makes \$12.6 million available for other areas of State government.

My primary concern in recommending this transfer is, however, my belief that the people of this State deserve a first-rate adult teaching hospital, with patient care second to none. I am not criticizing employees, staff or physicians at University Hospital. Rather, I am recognizing there has been an historic inability, or unwillingness, to properly fund this facility.

Six years ago we were literally on the verge of being forced to close Children's Hospital. That facility, with its teaching and patient care responsibilities, was transferred to DISRS, and, today, under the capable direction of Lloyd Rader, the facilities and patient care at Children's Hospital rank among the finest in the entire world.

Children's and University Hospitals, sitting side-by-side, dramatically illustrate what I'm talking about.

The hospitals already utilize many of the same services and professional staff and share many of the same concerns and responsibilities. Good management sense dictates they be under the same administration.

Management considerations may suggest still further transfer of responsibilities, functions, buildings or facilities within or between other agencies. I have asked all of the minicabinets to study and assess their own responsibilities and facilities to assure proper and efficient utilization. Later in the session I may offer other transfer suggestions for your consideration.

We are faced each year with requests for capital improvements that far, far exceed our capabilities. This year – before even considering higher education's needs – we had requests for \$95 million, as compared to a capital improvement fund of only \$30 million. Under current procedure, each agency makes independent requests with no knowledge or regard for the facility

I join in your continuing efforts, through the Sunset Law, to routinely review the purpose and need of government agencies, boards and commissions. I have abolished several entities by Executive Order, and, where necessary, have created advisory councils or task forces which require no State funding and which – by the same Executive Order – expire at the end of my term rather than becoming another permanent institution of government.

The Cabinet brought to my attention two universal problems of State agencies: lack of procedural training and personnel system shortcomings.

Next month, by Executive action, a special task force will begin a training program for fiscal agents and policy level administrators. Similar programs are underway in purchasing procedures, personnel procedures and other administrative matters.

This will more effectively utilize our resources, at no additional cost, while reducing problems created by unfamiliarity with complex statutes and administrative procedures.

Additionally, there is a strong need to inform certain agency employees of the effect of changes of law each session. By Executive action, I am creating a Post-Legislative Training Program for that purpose.

As Lieutenant Governor in 1959, I recall the passage of legislation – under leadership of Governor J. Howard Edmondson – to create the State Personnel Board and Department, providing a merit system of hiring and promotion.

The merit system stands with the budget balancing amendment as two of the most important reforms in Oklahoma government since statehood.

Today, almost every agency of Oklahoma government has serious problems in hiring, training and retaining personnel under the present system. I have no criticism for any person in the existing system, but the system itself is inept and inadequate. We must all share responsibility for this situation, as we have underfunded and underutilized the potential of the existing department.

I recommend a major overhaul, creating a true personnel system. I want to make it clear that my intent is, absolutely, to protect the integrity of a merit system of hiring and advancement.

We must undertake a comprehensive study of the weaknesses and strengths of our present Personnel Department, taking remedial action where necessary. My proposal includes four specific objectives for long- range, cost-effective benefits:

1. A systematic review, for the purpose of reclassification, of every job presently defined by the State Personnel Department,
2. Establishing, for the first time, a recruiting program in those areas of specialized personnel needs;
3. Creating, for the first time, a comprehensive and continuing training program for State employees. Such programs, possibly even allowing college credit, can prepare employees for greater responsibilities and advancement in government service through career and

Adequate transportation systems are the bedrock of our trade and commerce, crucial to our way of life.

Railroads and rail services are just as important as roads and highways.

It is ironic that in 1980, when international economics and fuel costs are showing the importance of national and statewide rail service, many aspects of rail transportation in Oklahoma face discontinuation. Even more difficult to understand are suggestions of abandonment of railroad right-of-ways.

A large amount of our products go to the marketplace by rail. If rail lines are abandoned, and the right-of-ways relinquished, we can easily foresee, within our lifetimes, the State or Federal government buying back – at tremendously increased prices – the same right-of-way and reconstructing the same lines.

The Department of Transportation's budget contains a \$24.5 million increase. This continues my commitment to answer the demand I hear across the State – we need better roads and highways.

The budget calls for a continuation of the industrial and recreational access roads. The ability to provide access to industrial sites immediately is a major selling point as we confer with industry wanting to expand and create new jobs. The success of this program is a credit to the Legislature.

Last year we provided a one-time \$6 million appropriation for counties to repair severe winter road damage. For the same purpose, this year I recommend a like amount to cities and towns under 3,000. I further recommend early passage of this measure to aid communities in planning their budgets.

In my view, we have the same obligation to assist small towns as any other unit of government. We have developed, through a federal grant with the Ozarks Regional Commission, a pilot program so successful that the President's staff is considering recommending the program nationally.

The circuit-rider city manager program provides an opportunity for small towns to share the cost of professional management. Towns that otherwise could not afford to pay a professional city manager now reap the benefits of prudent management. This program can be continued with \$75,000 funding through the Department of Economic and Community Affairs.

As Lieutenant Governor, I developed a detailed understanding of the importance of tourism and recreation as a profitable and revenue-yielding industry for Oklahoma. Nothing about being Governor has changed my opinion. Indeed, tourism and recreation are more important to me now.

Rising fuel prices may bring many back to the day of "See Oklahoma First," and we have so much to see and enjoy. We must continue promotion of Oklahoma's tourist attractions and recreational resources, whether in the public or private sectors. These elements, and the service businesses which complement them, comprise a vigorous industry and an integral part of our economy.

producers and consumers will be helpful. I am asking the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture to administer this service and coordinate with the Department of Energy, and expect to announce a detailed program in the near future. I am also calling upon the Governor's Food and Agriculture Advisory Committee, headed by the Lieutenant Governor and Mr. Czar Langston, to advise me on this subject.

Oklahoma farmers are producing more per acre than at any other time in the history of man. They are doing their job of producing, and it is our responsibility to help develop better market opportunities.

Through Oklahoma's Department of Agriculture and regional efforts with other states, we will concentrate on developing new world markets.

One man in State government already has expertise in both international trade and agriculture: Lieutenant Governor Spencer Bernard. I have called upon him, and he has accepted, new and increased responsibility in this area. I want to take advantage of his knowledge, skills and experience to help us better serve the needs of the farming community.

Oklahoma's agribusiness depends on an effective and economical transportation system – not only the railway and highway, but the waterway. Rising fuel costs will prove we were wise in the development of the Arkansas River water system.

While some governors face reduced budgets, negative growth and little hope to change trends, we are fortunate to have a growing economy – made possible by an outstanding work force and a quality of life that is an attraction in itself.

As a State that is a major producer of energy – oil and gas production – we need to support the industry. Much of the policy governing this industry is set nationally, and I intend to do everything possible to assure that our voice, as a State in support of fair energy policies that recognize the industrial and corporate needs, is heard in Washington.

At the State level, we must assist national goal of reducing reliance on foreign oil and accelerate the development of domestic energy sources – particularly oil and gas production. In this vein, I support the concept of dividing the responsibilities and duties of the Corporation Commission if it will shortcut the extensive time and red tape currently required by the Commission to do its proscribed business.

Conservation of energy use must be a constant goal and practice. This is a national matter, important to us all.

Our efforts in industrial development have been complemented by the strong leadership of Dr. Francis Tuttle in our Vocational-Technical Education system. To continue to strengthen Vo- Tech, you are asked to increase appropriations for industry training, area and high school vocational programs, the Displaced Homemakers program, and our successful program to work with potential dropouts.

We have seen the Oklahoma Educational Television network develop from infancy, with only a few hours of programming per day, to a modern, full time system with programming matched by none. The good news is my recommended expenditures will now actually complete

We are recommending a record salary increase for teachers which will average \$1,045. This salary plan stresses career and professional development. It provides teachers with \$200 increments for each of the first 15 years, increases the benefits for attaining higher degrees, and gives everyone across-the-board increases. While the average increase is \$1,045, no teacher will receive less than an \$800 raise.

As with State employees, I recommend able for education support personnel an across-the-board 8% raise.

Special programs in common schools will always receive particular emphasis from me. With thanks to Dr. Leslie Fisher, I am proud of a special reading improvement program begun last year. I asked then that the program begin in the elementary, K-6, grades, and today I ask you to beef up the existing program and begin expansion into the intermediate levels. Within a total of four years, we will have brought this special reading improvement program to all grade levels.

Other education programs deserve equal attention. I recommend the creation of another 354 programs of special education and for the gifted and talented, another 10 new programs for the blind and hearing impaired, and additional support for the highly successful "Echo" program to detect hearing impairment in pre-school children. Further, I ask 16 additional community education programs, 50 more badly needed elementary counseling programs, and 24 new library media improvement programs.

For public libraries, I ask that you increase per capita support by another \$235,000. And, I strongly urge the funding of \$175,000 to make all local libraries in the State barrier-free to allow total access for the handicapped.

Our progress in responding to the needs of the handicapped has been commendable – but we need to do more.

The Board of Affairs, at my direction, has created a special section, staffed by the handicapped, to implement regulations for handicapped preference in central purchasing.

The Governor's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped, under the able leadership of Don Davis, has brought national recognition to our efforts – but we still need to do more.

Therefore, I propose creation of the Office of Handicapped Concerns to deal with the whole range of needs and concern of the handicapped. The Governor's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped will become an integral part of this agency.

We must continue to expand health and medical services to our local communities. Funding is proposed for the Health Department's highly successful Guidance Service programs to enlarge and expand them to additional communities. We are providing a major increase to the Physician Manpower Training Commission. This is a vital part of our efforts to train and locate physicians and osteopathic doctors across the State, particularly in our small communities.

All Oklahomans deserve the most complete human services we can deliver. In response to that need, I recommend an exciting and responsible change in the concept of our mental health delivery system. I have asked Dr. Frank James to emphasize the development of a totally

These facilities dot the face of our State, providing nearby leisure time recreational opportunities for every Oklahoman. This is the second year of a four-year program of investing \$6 million per year in recreational facility improvements.

We have spoken today of Oklahoma's bright future, and of our efforts to improve the quality of life. But, if our people cannot feel secure, and are not in fact safe, then other efforts are wasted.

I am particularly proud there is a new spirit of cooperation in the area of law enforcement. All law enforcement agencies are now on a single minicabinet, and that forum has resulted in a bond of mutual assistance and understanding. I commend them.

Responding to the plea of Oklahomans for more and better law enforcement, we can do no less than equip our law agencies with the very latest technology and more manpower. Substantial budget increases are provided for the Department of Public Safety, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation and the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

At my specific direction, the OSBI has developed a specialized unit to assist local communities in combatting the frightening increase in the rate of sex crimes. Your funding will assure the expertise local law enforcement needs for this problem.

To help local communities fight against crime. I recommend a major expenditure of \$1.9 million by the OSBI for purchase of a sophisticated fingerprint computer. This computer, only the fourth of its type in the country, will automatically make fingerprint comparisons and identifications that are simply not now possible.

With the completion this year of the one-man, one-unit concept, we have been able to actually have more Highway Patrol Troopers on the roads. To further increase overall coverage, I make three recommendations: additional troopers on the turnpike; additional courtesy patrol officers to assist the public and relieve troopers of some non-law enforcement duties; and, voluntary extra shift compensation.

Important to any discussion of law enforcement in Oklahoma is our progress in the field of Corrections. We have made great strides, but obviously much remains to be done. My budget again contains sizable increases to help meet these needs. I specifically recommend increases in areas involving security, funding additional correctional officers and development of an Plans officer cadet training program.

Our new Corrections Director, Larry Meachum, brings candor and frankness, and fresh ideas. His recommendations for alternatives to incarceration and his development of plans for institutional improvements will speed total compliance with the Federal Court order. I urge you seriously consider the options he brings to you.

Let me once again thank you for your spirit of cooperation.

I join your leadership, President Pro Tempore, Howard and Speaker Draper, in encouraging a productive and short session. I have tried to contribute to your ability to do your work in an expeditious fashion by providing each member of the Legislature, as well as the public, every major portion of the budget in advance of this session today.

capitalizing on these assets we can continue to benefit all Oklahoma.

It is altogether proper for us to commemorate the time and year that inspired the late Rodgers and Hammerstein to create the song now famous throughout the world, “. . . You’re doing fine Oklahoma, Oklahoma, OK!”

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.