

State of the State
Governor George Nigh
January 3, 1984

"Lt. Governor Bernard, Speaker Barker, President Pro Tempore York, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Joint Session, Ladies and Gentlemen of Oklahoma. Does anyone today really believe that God meant for Oklahoma to always have average as its goal? Jack Durland, the former president of Cain's Coffee, wrote that when you are average you are simply the best of the lousiest or the lousiest of the best.

Is the goal of Oklahoma to be average? Is the goal of Oklahoma in education to be average? Do the parents of some 606,000 grade school, high school and junior high, mid school students each day send their 606,000 Oklahoma public education students off to school to learn how to be average? Do 155,000 college students at the junior college and the four-year colleges and the comprehensive universities work all of those 16 years of their life in education with the goal to be average? Do 150 adults who in some way through continuing education, extension courses, or whatever sacrifice and work and hold down two jobs and go to school at nights and on weekends with the goal to be average? Do the 74,152 students in high school that are taking vo-tech make those special efforts to take those special courses to be average? Do the 97,797 adults who are enrolled in the vo-tech programs, already having finished their normal years of education, do those 97,000 adults continue to go for education in vo-tech to be average? Is the high tech committee that this joint body passed in resolution calling upon the Governor to appoint in the various industries that it represents across this state have as its goal in high tech in Oklahoma to be average? Did Jim Johnson tell the Cowboys in Houston, 'Get out there, boys; and be average'?

Almost 400,000 students that attend public education in Oklahoma should never be satisfied with the goal of being average, but should always strive for excellence. I don't know about you; but for my kids, I want the best. I know that you also and those of you in Oklahoma also across this state in all counties want the best for your kids. Perhaps you and I didn't learn what we needed to learn. We don't know what we need to know, and it may be too late for us; but it's not too late for those who are coming behind us. No more excuses – let's put our kids in first place in Oklahoma.

You and I have a lot in common – not just that we all have served in this body, these two bodies in the Legislature; not that we all ran for office and said we'd do our best and that we'd try to listen to the people and try to mesh them together. But we have a common denominator, you and I, in that we share the constituents of this state. So you collectively and me as Governor share, you and I share collectively the constituency of this state. The difference is that your constituency is confined to a designated area that is smaller than mine. So whoever you represent, I represent. My constituency is 77 counties, 69,000 plus square miles, and over 3 1/2 million people; and you and I share that in common. And we also share in common our dreams for the best for Oklahoma, whether it be rural or urban or east or west, no town is too small, no county is too far for us to be concerned about and its place in the future. We the people must include 'we'; so while we represent them, they also have the right of a voice to be heard.

Where did it all go? Yes, we've had phenomenal growth in Oklahoma these past five years; and let me tell you I'm proud of them. Where did it all go? Well, among some places that it went were those areas where we were playing catch-up, that this state – still caught in the

family and friends are if at all humanly possible. That's excellence. My goal for mental retardation is not to lock everybody up who has a mental retardation program; but to return those who can to society, let them let them live in halfway houses, let them live and participate just like everybody else. Institutionalizing is average, but giving them an opportunity is excellence.

Special gifted and talented children in school deserve excellence. A neonatal lives an average number of days or weeks or months. I know of no parent talking to me about the University Hospital whoever asks, that their neonatal child lived the average age. Handicapped – I know of no handicapped person or any family whose life is touched by handicapped who said, 'Well, let's just let them do what the average want'. Handicapped people until the past few years couldn't travel the turnpike and even participate in the programs that we had provided in the facilities that we had provided on the turnpike system. They want excellence. Medi-flight lifting off by helicopter from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center over there going to the site of an injury of a car wreck, going to the site of a stroke patient or a heart attack patient or a burn patient and lifting them up and taking them to the hospital of their choice – that is excellence. Doctors in the rural communities across this state that had never dreamed that their medical cares could be provided for by a professional, licensed, practicing doctor, M.D., or osteopathic doctor today in community after community across this state sees for the first time doctors and hospitals – and that's excellence. Turn on the tap and get the water – the average person can, but how about the community in the Panhandle that the well caved in and they were pumping dust or the black community in eastern Oklahoma that had boiled its water for seven years? The state came along and we provided them water, and that's excellence.

The veterans of this state – those who offered to give the supreme sacrifice but who are still living and in problems. This state turned to its veterans and said, 'We won't give you the average veterans' program of the United States'. This state provides an excellent veterans' program, an excellent program for the National Guard. The average length of time to build a highway with federal funds from the day that they think it until the day that they turn the first spade of dirt is seven years average. No chamber of commerce, no legislator has ever come to my office and said, 'Let's take the average length of time to build a road'. And we have sped up highway construction across this state in every county as we strive in excellence in a transportation network. And when the railroads shut down in Arkansas and Kansas and Texas and shut down across the other states in this country, ladies and gentlemen, the average state let them shut down and let the rails go back to the grass. But in Oklahoma this Legislature stepped forward and bought mile after mile of a railroad track to preserve our transportation system to bring rates down for our wheat farmers. We weren't satisfied with being average, we were excellent.

I imagine the sixty thousand people a day, in westem Oklahoma City, who take a detour while we try to speed up a West Bypass that's been in the making some fifteen years, kind of impresses that this state would commit to excellence and that we have reduced that and we have announced a program to complete that ahead of schedule and beyond the furthest that anyone had a few years ago.

The area of the quality of life and libraries being made accessible to the handicapped, public libraries being made accessible to the handicapped arts, the performing arts being sent out to the rural communities. Not just if you live in the cities you can have in the quality of life, but anywhere in this state you can enjoy the arts, now under our programs.

And the Health Planning System and the Health Science Center and the State Health Department,

Lincoln said 'I do the very best I know how, the very best I can and I mean to keep doing so until the end.' The very best. Let's do our best to enable Oklahoma to do its best. These past five years we have literally been leading the way in Oklahoma. We've been the model, not the imitator. We are in a moment of reassessing, of re-evaluating. And as you climb a mountain there are two ways to look, folks. You can look down at how far you've come and you can look up to how far you've got to go. And it's important that you look to the past, but it's more important that you look to the future.

In education we keep referring 'let's get back to the basics – the three R 's.' I submit to you today in Oklahoma, the Legislature is faced with the basic three R 's of state government. The basic three R's of reform, of reduction, and of revenue. There are those who ask which comes first, the cart or the horse. I would say to you it's more of a question of which comes first, the chicken or the egg. They come at the same time, that reduction and revenue and reform should be approached all at the same time. You asked to amend my call at the last special session so you could address cuts. I did. I've called upon you for reform time after time and many of them you've passed, but there's still more to be done.

We have reduced the cost of state government. Last session we carved out \$90 million dollars. This session we're looking at (and I recommend that we carve out around \$150 - \$175 million dollars) next session will be at a reduced rate.

Reform, reduction and revenue. Reform means to change for the better, not change reduction for change's sake, but to change for the better. Reform is not necessarily going to save you a bunch of money. Reform can be costly and it should be judged not at what it costs but what it costs you not to do it. Reform, immediate and long-range. By executive order I have created a council on reform of state government and will by next weekend appoint a state-wide committee (bi-partisan) to look at the long-haul at reforms that they could recommend and reforms that the citizens of the people of Oklahoma could recommend and reforms that you could make to them during the interim that they could recommend for change for the better in state government. As we look at how to make it more efficient, more cost effective, more responsible and more credible, in the short - haul you and I have an obligation to also address reform. tant

I call upon you to continue to reassess the ethics and merits and the conflict of interest legislation. I call upon you to look upon the agencies, boards and commissions with the idea of abolition and consolidation. Some states have seven, eight, nine, twenty agencies. In Oklahoma, through the Budget Office and their accounts, we have a hundred and eighty-five budgeted agencies. I call about for reform and will submit to you in a message, in writing, in the next couple of weeks additional recommendations for reform for the short-range solutions and today the budget message has been delivered to you and to Oklahoma (which I recommend that you can keep in mind that it contains recommendations for really three fiscal years) that we continue to look at reductions. Some people would have you think that we have not made any reduction in state government whatsoever. They tend to forget that a year ago in the last session we reduced by \$90 million dollars Senate Bill 69 appropriations for the General Fund. They seem to forget that in November, a year ago, I put into effect an executive order of a freeze and through attrition and reduction-in-force, for the first time in the history of the state of Oklahoma we have less state employees than we had the years before.

We continue to look for ways of reductions. All agencies should basically share across-the-board basically, as all Oklahomans should share in these reductions of expenses and services. But you have to make allowances in several instances. Frankly, I don't think all growth is evil,

include a three year program. It does include the words temporary and permanent. It does include the word failure of revenue, reserve. It also provides the trying to capture all funds. And I would say not necessarily in passing, but we need the ability to capture all funds.

Thirty million dollars is being carried over by the Department of Transportation of our federal funds, of our taxpayers money, because we can't match it. Next year, at the rate that we're going, they estimate their carryover \$50 million dollars of Oklahoma taxpayers' money sitting in Washington that we can't get back because we're required to match it. It has nothing to do with the failure of revenue or reserve or shortfalls, it has to do with not getting our own dollars back. You're building mass-transit in Washington D.C. and highways in New York Mingo Valley Expressway and Highway 75 and Highway 69 and the Northwest Passage and the Central Expressway. We're building roads in Connecticut.

Matching and getting and capturing all possible funds includes the matching of private funds at the 21st Century Center at OSU and the Energy Center at O.U. I called the legislative session into special session twice, first to address the shortfall and the second session to address the long-range, both times you went home. Now you're back and I'm here with you and the problem is also still here with us. We can't adjourn, we have to address them. Cooperating, each recognizing the problem, each working toward to the solution, pulling together.

I read and I close with the headline that the chances of this being passed, my plan, are slim. Folks, the chances for progress in Oklahoma are slim. The chance for excellence in education is slim, the chance for high-tech and economic development in Oklahoma are slim. If God wanted us to be average he wouldn't have made us Oklahomans. Thank you."

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.