

**State of the State
Governor George Nigh
January 8, 1985**

Lt. Governor Bernard
President Pro Tempore Randle
Speaker Barker
Members of the First Session of the Fortieth
Legislature

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I think this is about the tenth time I have addressed a joint session. The first time as Governor, delivering a State of the State speech. in January of 1963. I would tell you that now having been in my second term and having been Governor to fill two unexpired terms and having been a participant in several Special Sessions that I know that from a State of the State speech always come two things.

First of all, disappointment. I know that everyone in this room will find something about which to be disappointed. Disappointed because of what I said was a priority and I didn't mention something else as a priority or mention it second. Disappointment because of the things I left out. 'Oh, he didn't mention such and such.' I am trying to honor a brevity of speech so that we can get back to the regular television programming. I know that there will be disappointment because of what is included and what is left out.

You have before you, you have in your offices, my budget book. The press has it. I will allow you to look at that at your leisure, of course, and suggest to you that I will not refer very much to the budget book because I have been making announcements over and over about what I would recommend and you have it before you.

There will be disappointment about what I mention and don't mention.

Secondly, I will be nervous. People can't understand that. That the Governor or the President or a Senator or House member who is speaking before a group and does it time after time appears to be nervous. I remember one year I had a loose tooth, a front tooth. I was scared to death that on live television the Governor was going to lose his tooth. One year I had just returned from Mexico and wasn't feeling too good. I was teen really nervous then. One year I sent my speech up and asked them to put it on the Speaker's desk. I arrived and had no speech. They had given it to Dan Draper. It had been highlighted and Dan told me, 'You know, George, you are really trying to make me happy. You even underlined what you wanted me to see.' I am always nervous and so you get different degrees. Today I feel a acknowledge little more comfortable but I am still a little bit nervous. I can remember the time I was here when the President of the United States Ronald Reagan, spoke and I had blood poisoning. I was a little nervous. I can remember that the last time I was here someone had put a black hat in a sense of humor on the podium. I don't know what this shell is, if this is a message to me. If this is to bite the bullet; I though this meant, 'Boy, we will get you one way or the other, Nigh!' There always are messages around here but today I want you to know that I am not speaking from a prepared text because that makes me nervous to read. I had my tooth welded in. I have been on a diet. I had a physical. The doctor says I'm okay. I wore my own white hat and I brought my speech with me.

I am kind of leery of speaking from this because my pastor speaks from a notebook and not too many Sundays ago, he gets from chair and goes to the pulpit and he takes his notebook with him and as he made the move he lost a page out of his sermon. He didn't notice it. He was just going along and he had it all out there and he was reading and he was down to sin and he finally came out against it and he was reading it and he said, 'And as Adam said to Eve in the Garden of Eden, there must be a loose leaf out here.'

So, I'm a little goosey, I brought my speech. I have it here and I want to visit with you.

I appreciate so much the relationship that you and I have. I always say having started here on the back row, having been here as Lieutenant Governor in joint sessions for Mexico sixteen years and now having the opportunity of serving longer than anyone as Governor, I enjoy that relationship because I know that I can only sign what you send to my desk. Sometimes when I say I did this or this administration did that, I really might stop and say that included Representative and Senator so and so and go down a list of one hundred and fifty. I always want you to know that I acknowledge that as far as legislation goes, it is a team work. The Administration falls a little heavier on my shoulders, more of a responsibility than I am willing to assume.

I appreciate my relationship with Oklahoma. In county after county, city after city, in year after year, they have been good to me, kind to me and I hope at least somewhat in return they perceive that I have tried to be good to them.

I like Oklahoma. I like Will Rogers. He is my favorite Oklahoman. That will get me in trouble. I remember when we used to have a legislative effort because there were those who thought that we had too much of Will Rogers in Oklahoma. Can you believe that? That we were slighting other people because we were honoring Will Rogers too much but just for the record, he is my one, number one Oklahoma hero. I like his philosophy, his humor. He had a way to solve the traffic problems. It was simple. No one could drive until the car was paid for. He had a philosophy of how to make money in the stock market. Buy low, sell high. If it don't go high, don't buy it.

He had a great sense of humor. Oklahoma's George Gobel got his training down at Altus Air Force Base. That's when he first became a noted comedian, in the military in Oklahoma. He has always attributed his Oklahoma humor, etc. But it isn't important to be serious, is what my point is. It is important to be serious about important things.

Today I am here to tell you that the condition of government in Oklahoma needs to be changed for the better. In short, the state of the state needs reform. Not change for change's sake. Not busy work. Not window dressing, but actual constructive, substantial reform. Not just to change to look good but to change only those things that need to be changed.

That we would look around and keep what's good, eliminate what's bad and get on with it. Change – Change that would bring about a change in the thrust of the state of Oklahoma. Reform doesn't necessarily mean change; change does not necessarily mean reform. You have to have some other ingredients.

Reform could be that you just kind of improved upon what you were doing. You altered it a little bit, but it wasn't the dramatic change. On the other hand, change is not necessarily reform unless it's for the better.

I submit to you today that we need to change in three areas. We need to 1) change our government; 2) we need to change our direction; and 3) we need to change our attitude.

Lieutenant Governor Bernard, President Pro Tempore Randle, Speaker Barker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Joint Session, My Fellow Oklahomans, today is D-Day. This is Decision Day for Oklahoma. The past six years that I have seen as Governor there are facts that need to be pointed out. It is a fact that for four years legislators and governors reduced taxes in the state of Oklahoma while other states were raising them. That is a fact. It is a fact that we refused to raise taxes the fifth year when other states were raising them. It is a fact that we had to raise taxes to preserve the progress that we'd been able to bring about over the past few years. It is a fact today that this is Decision Day once again, that we are going to chart our course for the future. We're going to decide where our ship of state sails. We're going to make tough decisions.

There are a lot of new members; congratulations to the new members. Congratulations to Senator Randle and to Representative Barker in their new elections. And, congratulations to those of you in all the House who were elected and came back and half of the Senate. The decisions that will be made here this year, as tough as they are, will be no tougher than the decisions made last year ring under the leadership of Senator York and Speaker Barker when tough decisions were made. And then, the important thing about that is that once those decisions were made by both parties, and it's important to point out that the Republican Party as well as the Democratic Party, the majority of each party voted to increase taxes last year because it was to preserve the progress. And the voters responded in a positive way. There was no backlash; there was no throw them out; there was no get rid of the rascals. There was support in appreciation of having done what had to be done in a tough time.

We need to make changes. We need to make reform. We need to make reform in government. It's more than a buzz word. Under the leadership of Senator Randle and Speaker Barker's leadership, you already have committees at work and long-range committees. The House Republicans, the Senate Republicans have already made reform recommendations. The Governor's High-Tech Council that you asked me to create and the Governor's Reform Commission and many hundreds of citizens across the state have already made recommendations; they talk about it. The problem is there may be so many that it overwhelms us. We cannot let the need of many reforms deter us from doing the best that we can. And reform, of course, is in the eyes of the beholder.

We need a reform government. Many times today there is no accountability. Sure I'm the Governor; yes, I'm the Chief Executive, but it's difficult to be accountable. With the National Governors' Association and this state recognizes, of the 50 states, the weakest government form of governorship in the United States is right here in Oklahoma. There are boards and agencies that I remove, lists that I have to use to appoint commission members, there's an inability to get my own viewpoints or your viewpoints good before board commissioners, although I appreciate so much the many people, men and women who give of their time. I've got to point out that we need more accountability. Those same people should be on the organizational chart; the Governor's office, the executive branch, should be stronger, not at the expense of the legislative branch, but strong within the executive branch. The mountainous load of boards and commissions; there are some 300 of them of which I'm supposed to have day to day . . . day to day . . . working knowledge and it's difficult. No cabinets. Many of the key people statewide elected or appointed by other groups, but the combined effort of all of us working together, we can make some changes.

I've recommended that we change a couple of offices. I don't want the Governor to appoint the Attorney General. I don't want the Governor to appoint the Treasurer. I don't want the Governor to appoint the Auditor and Inspector. It just happens this Governor has already appointed the Superintendent of Public Instruction, so that's no takeover. I just think why don't we hire by the School Board the Superintendent of Public Instruction. We hire the Chancellor; we hire the Director of Vo-Tech; but we elect the State Superintendent and then the Governor appoints him a board. That's an example.

We need to strengthen accountability. We need to make sure that management is not cumbersome. We need to make sure that fairness is the word of the day and we of course need to make sure that cost effectiveness are our bywords.

We need to be fair on car tags. It isn't fair that truck owners literally get a free ride while car owners pay literally through the nose in comparison. They ought to be equalized. They ought to be fair. No one should expect anything less than fairness. Anyone who stands apart and says don't change my good deal, I've got something that's unfair, so don't take it away from me. I'm saying to you we need to look and make sure that things are right.

We need to revamp the tag agencies. We need to remove the patronage system from the tag agents. I commend the Senate and its leadership and the House for agreeing. We need to be doing things to change the tag agent delivery service. I for one will continue to support the competitive bidding process unless it's extraordinary circumstances, everything required or nonrequired should go through the competitive bid processing. There might be exceptions, but let the exceptions stand out on the table in the clear of day.

I will oppose any effort to change the competitive bid laws of the state of Oklahoma to make them looser or less enforceable. We need to inventory our facilities. Just because we have an institution in our town doesn't mean it has to always be there. It doesn't mean it needs to be closed. But we need to inventory our facilities to see if we using them properly.

We need to have good management and to continue the Office of Finance Service Information system (OSFI). It costs money to save money. Reform does not necessarily mean immediate cost reduction. The cost reduction may not come up for ten years.

We need to eliminate duplication. We need to study higher education to see are we really fulfilling our purpose with the institutions. If they are, fine. If they're not, Let's do the study. Let's look.

We need to have enforceable laws. The number one requirement of the liquor laws should be that it be enforceable. Enforceable. Whatever it is, regardless of what I recommend, regardless of what you want, it needs to be enforceable.

We need to make sure that ethics are still at the high place. People in government probably should not be doing business with government. It doesn't appear right. We need to clearly look at ethics and performance.

We need to reduce boards and commissions. We need to be concerned that we're going to eliminate turf fighting. And here today, I want to say to you that as far as I am concerned, anyone that is responsible to me in the executive branch of the office that unduly resists any effort to change because

they are unduly protective and overprotective of their turf, I will try to make every effort that they are removed. We need to be fighting for better management and better government and better cooperation.

We need to remove unnecessary restrictions. I do not support any new agency that I can think of whatsoever. The only new agency I want to see comes out of merging other agencies into one.

We expect a lot out of our employees. Our employees deserve the right to expect more employees need and deserve a pay increase. I'm recommending to you an across-the-board to make up for the years apart of the makeup of the years of our standstill, performance pay left up to the decision of the administrative heads to reward productivity and an extension of the longevity to say those who hang in there with us over the years 'we appreciate it.' We have the same commitment that the federal government has. Ronald Reagan has just signed a pay increase for all federal employees, all military personnel, from the Vice-President on down. State of Arkansas yesterday, in legislative council, and the Governor agreed of a pay raise for their employees. We have an obligation to our employees. We're training too many employees for other opportunities. We have the same sense of responsibility to those who are former employees in the retirement systems. We need to increase retirement benefits. We should not in any way as we look at retirement threaten or jeopardize the retirement program of any existing person. But to have seven different retirement systems and different retirement systems within the seven and to say that if you're a veteran you can get credit in this system but you can't get credit in that system, doesn't make sense. We need to guarantee that we're going to give all retirees an increase just like employees but we need to look and we need to be fair and we need to say 'do we really have too much, could we do better?'

We need to reform government. We need to reform our directions. We've got to change the direction of this state of Oklahoma. We've got to continue to combine and work for the partnership of education and economic development. The Ship of State is aground financially. We have waited for the long heralded recovery and it has never come. I am one who stood here and said 'let's wait, let's wait.' I stood here because all the experts said 'it's coming, it's coming.' And it isn't here. But we can continue to wait on high dry ground and wait for the tide perhaps to come get us, but I say we need to change our direction. We need to hustle; we need to hit the ground running; we need to do our own thing; we prime the pump; we need to be aggressive; we need to change our approach. We need to put education and economic development in tandem as we look to the future of Oklahoma. Jobs and opportunity remain the number one priority. Knowledge is power. Trained intelligence is the chief factor of a state's productivity and of it's general health."

What is our commitment? When we were talking to 3M about coming to Tulsa, I went over there and met with Tulsa leaders and we talked to 3M about coming to Tulsa. 3M looked at me and said 'Governor, what can you do for higher education; what can you do for high-tech; what can you do for research?' They said 'In Texas we've talked to the Chancellor of the Texas University; he says whatever we want, he'll give us and use his own funds.' He's not responsible to the Governor, he's not responsible to the Regents, he's not responsible to the Legislature. He just says we'll do it. And 3M said what can you do for us. And I said 'Well, I can ask the Legislature to appropriate some money. I can then ask the Regents (remember we know that they are constitutional) would they pretty please put it into this special program. Then we'll look at all 27 universities and try to convince the other 26 or the other 24, that we're not really treating them unfairly. We have got to do this and then hopefully we can commit to you some programs. 'And the guy says 'is that a commitment?' And they went to Texas.

What is our commitment to education? A diploma should mean something. Education should be worth something. Being more than smart but to know where and why. We need to raise the standards

of education. We need to test our students; we need to monitor them as they proceed; not to check up on them to be detective work but to check on them to see if we're preparing them. Do remedial work, lower level. Don't get into college and teach remedial classes. Train them as they to go. Trained and skilled and competitive in the vo-tech system or the higher education system or the common schools.

We need to reform our direction; we need to diversify, whether it be agriculture or tourism, historical society in its missions, the wildlife people. We need to change our direction.

We should not be afraid to advertise. We should have a foreign market place; we should have an officer in Europe; we should have an officer in Japan or Asia. Why? Thirty states do. We should have an office in Washington to represent you and me. Oh, we have a congressional delegation but we need a state office there. We need to be out advertising in the market place; we need to have incentives.

We need to address economic development and do it in conjunction with education. We have a responsibility to the parents, to the students, to the teachers. Quality education demands quality teachers; quality teachers deserve quality pay. I'm saying let's get on track again and raise our teachers' salaries. Let's at least start raising our teachers' salaries once again to keep them in the classroom where they would like to be if they could afford to be. We do that the same way with across-the-board and career ladder pay. That includes support personnel at all levels.

And finally we need to change our attitude. Oklahoma needs to reach down and pull itself up by its boot straps and change its attitude. It needs to look at itself and say 'this is Oklahoma, that old spirit that we had in eighty-nine that we're getting ready to celebrate our 100th Anniversary adventuresome; out there driving the stake in the ground with your name on it saying 'I'm staking my claim to the future.' We need to stake a claim. We need to be positive; we need to be on to Oklahoma. We need to worry about our image. Sometimes it doesn't do any good to say 'well that's not true.' It's what we're perceived to be that is keeping us out of the corporate rooms all across this country.

When I was on an economic development tour (at the expense of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, not of the state) we were in Hong Kong and the president of the largest bank in Hong Kong stood up at a breakfast that he hosted for us and said 'Oklahoma. All I know about Oklahoma is what I read in the Grapes of Wrath.' This is 1984 referring to 1934, 50 years or more ago. The president of the largest financial institution of the financial center of the world said all I know about Oklahoma is the Grapes of Wrath.' We need to worry about our image. We have to keep in mind that we serve the public. We have to keep in mind that we appreciate our employees. We have to keep in mind that we respect our teachers. We have to keep in mind that we support our law enforcement. We have to keep in mind we have to help those with special needs.

The budget premise that I have given to you is based upon three basic premises. Yes, it's an increase. Yes it's \$201 million more than you appropriated last year. But the budget puts in \$207 million into economic development and education programs alone.

Based on the premises that if you are satisfied and you don't want anything to happen. (I mean you just want to let it cut) not saying reduce where you can but you just want to cut, then leave everything alone. You will then have to cut \$121 million approximately. You'll have to cut something out and the bucks are in education.

My budget is based on the next three premises: that if you want to maintain the status quo you need to change 1) the constitutional formula; 2) you need to use some of the pension reserve funds

without jeopardizing the pension system and 3) (which is the obvious one) appropriate the unappropriated funds. That will maintain the status quo. It won't do anything else.

If you want to get us back on track, if you want to get us moving again, then we can extend the sales tax, (make it permanent like we should have done when we started in my opinion). It would allow us to do all these other things. Then if you want to enhance that you can vote for the lottery. The lottery is an enhancement. The budget book that you have is based upon those premises. I would say that we need to shape our own destiny.

Oral Roberts told this story and I want to close with it. For those on television, I think they've already gone back to the 'Young and the Restless' or 'Days of Our Lives', but if they're still with us, I apologize for going over a minute. But Oral Roberts told this story: It had been a bad year and he was reminded of the football game between the big animals and the little animals. The big animals were just running all over the little animals in the first half of the football game. It was like 45-0 at the end of the half. They went into the locker room and I don't know if they did one more for the Gipper or what but they came out, kicked off the second and the big animals received from the little animals at the second half and the lion took the ball back in its end zone. He didn't touch it down to bring it back to twenty. He said he's going to go all the way and he came out roaring out of the end zone and suddenly the clouds gather and the lightning struck and the thunder clapped and the ground shook and the dust flew and he was thrown down the 15 yard line. He came into the huddle and the other big animals said 'what happened?' He said 'it was the centipede.' The tiger said, 'give me the ball.' So it was a hand-off and he ran right in and the tiger got the ball and he ran into the line and he could see daylight and he was going to go all the way (85 yards) and suddenly the clouds gathered, lightning struck, thunder clapped and he was thrown for a 5 yard loss. He came back to the huddle and they said 'what in the world was it?' The tiger said it was the centipede. And the hippo said 'give me the ball.' The hippo took the ball (he was the fullback) and he ran right into the middle of the line and the same thing happened. The hippo was thrown for a loss. He came back in and they said 'what happened?' And the hippo said 'it was the centipede.' The coach of the big animals went over to the coach of the little animals and he said 'where was that centipede in the first half?' And the coach said 'he was putting his shoes on.'

When people look back at this time in Oklahoma's history where we have done so much and then we hit a lull and our ship of state hit high center, I hope that when they look back to this session and they say 'what was happening in Oklahoma?' **'We were just putting our shoes on!** We can shape our own destiny if we reform; if we change our government; if we reform our direction and if we reform our attitude, we can as we should move Oklahoma ahead. 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.