

State of the State
Governor David Walters
February 4, 1991

Lieutenant Governor Mildren, President Pro Tempore Cullison, Speaker Johnson, Justice Opala, Members of the Legislature, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, let me thank you for your swift and decisive action during the recent special session. Your efforts send a clear message to the people of Oklahoma and to business around the nation – that we are committed to job creation and economic expansion.

When some people tried to congratulate me for the early success of the special session – I pointed out that it's easy to call a session, it's tough to pass the legislation. The credit for success should go to your leadership and to you for your responsible and fast action. And so on behalf of all of Oklahoma I say thank you.

Our state and our nation begin this year with the uncertainty of war. Those serving in the Persian Gulf are constantly in our thoughts and prayers. As we continue to watch the events, to worry and to hope, our hearts go out to the Oklahoma families who have made the sacrifice of sending their sons and daughters, husbands and wives to the battle. They have answered our country's call. They have our gratitude, our admiration, and our total support. On the home front, we must not and we shall not let them down.

But even against the stark backdrop of war, we can be renewed in spirit by the promise of Oklahoma's future.

This year, my friends, we begin a new commitment to the people of Oklahoma.

Over the past several months, I have been meeting the voters of Oklahoma. I drove in one hundred degree heat on Highway 183 to listen to the citizens of Frederick tell us about their hope for new economic development in that border community. I ducked in and out of the rain on Main Street in Tahlequah, listening to businessmen speak with pride about Northeastern State University and what it means to the community and spent the evening there with a family who proudly and successfully started a blueberry farm. I attended rallies and meetings in Tulsa where community leaders talked about the need for quality health care and early childhood development. And I traveled Oklahoma Highway 58 to Fairview and U.S. 70 to Hugo, marveling at the beauty and richness of Oklahoma, symbolized by the farms and people who have chosen to make rural Oklahoma their home. And most recently, as Governor, I talked business prospects in Los Angeles and found that marketing our state is as easy as talking about the virtues of a best friend.

Yet, we still have work to do. Our state's jobless rate is still too high and Oklahoma's educational rating is still too low. Access to quality health care for the young, the poor, and the elderly is too limited, while access to drugs and the threat of crime isn't limited enough.

But even though we have obstacles to overcome, I can say that the State of the State is as great as are the people of Oklahoma. Certainly, we have a favorable climate and precious resources beneath our soil . . . a landscape of variety and natural beauty . . . and a geographic location that gives us access to major markets for our products. But, above all, our greatest strength is our people. Something about the hard times we've been through or how we settled this land makes us a special people. Hard-working, honest and friendly – we are special, we are Oklahomans.

There is nothing wrong with our soil, our air, our water, or our people – nothing to keep Oklahoma from being the best state in the nation. We must be a government that knows the people well enough to trust them and that has ability enough to lead them, with imagination, honesty and integrity.

In words that an assassin's bullet kept him from delivering, President Kennedy issued this challenge, "let us stand together with renewed confidence in our cause – united in our heritage of the past and our hopes for the future . . ."

With this in mind, during this legislative session we will deal with some tough problems. But I believe we will not face any problem greater than most Oklahoma families face each and every day. Surely, the widowed mother in Ponca City who must try to raise two sons on one income will face greater challenges than we. As we toil late into the night working on the state budget, surely we are doing no more than the convenience clerk in Ada who is working a night job to somehow pay for his education.

As we talk to constituents who need our support for the difficult problems they might be facing, let's remember the countless other Oklahomans with special needs for whom we are their best, and possibly last, hope of living with dignity. Let's also remember that state government can't do everything and, in fact, has no right to interfere in many areas of our lives.

Today this new administration offers the state a balanced budget as required by law. Behind the rows and columns of numbers are people, and their needs – and we will never forget that. Inside this budget blueprint is the beginning of a new partnership between Governor and the Legislature to create new jobs, improve public education, place increased emphasis on health care, and establish new programs to combat crime and drug abuse. **This budget seeks no tax increases.** Instead, we propose to manage our existing resources by cutting budgets, reallocating revenue and setting new priorities. That is the central commitment of my executive budget.

We will find new and innovative ways to encourage job creation.

The Department of Commerce in the Walters' Administration will marshal all our state's resources to encourage economic growth. Much of the nation is in a recession. Oklahoma, tempered by the tough times of the dust bowl, and the more recent oil bust, now stands ready to lead an economic resurgence. Let's bring people to Oklahoma who need a chance to begin again, by promoting the industries that already exist in Oklahoma. Let's restructure our present development authorities into a single financing entity which can aggressively provide venture capital for new business. Senator Fisher and Representative Hudson have filed a bill with my full support to end the alphabet soup proliferation of financing authorities which at best has led to confusion and at worst has contributed to gross mismanagement. Let's face the facts that we are a capital starved state and that we must provide the catalyst to generate the means for our businesses and recruited businesses to develop and grow. My budget strengthens rural development by targeting regional development funds and grants directly to communities whose very existence relies on their ability to create new jobs.

I will direct that oil overcharge monies received by the state be used for energy related programs to encourage local economic recovery, to fund research directed towards increasing the demand for natural gas including the expanded usage of compressed natural gas. We are developing new targets for our economic development efforts, better follow-through and research, a concreted value-added industries program,

and a substantial capital formation programs. Our new cabinet secretaries for Commerce, Agriculture and Tourism will be directed to better coordinate an expanded marketing effort. While these improvements by and large will be made within our current budget, some legislative authorization of new programs will be sought. Let's together send the message again, job creation will be a top priority – and no one, no one, will work harder to bring new industries and new jobs to their state than Oklahoma will.

Your courageous passage of HB 1017 last year may have been the most important piece of legislation in Oklahoma during the past twenty years. But we can't stop there. I have recommended increased funding for education, particularly Higher Education from existing revenue and from a new education building and equipment package that we will ask the voters to approve. If we do not commit ourselves to strengthening higher education, we will lessen our capacity to attract new investments like United Airlines. Together, let's continue the fight for quality education in this state.

From new revenues we will made an additional \$75 million available for common education funding in FY-92. Beyond this, I will recommend that \$6 million of funds cut from other state agencies be appropriated for our schools. When the increase in direct tax allocations is included, FY-92 funding for common education will have increased by \$89.1 million.

I am also recommending that the State Department of Education reduce its administrative cost by \$1.5 million. Secretary of Education, Sandy Garrett, has put in place a reorganization plan which will accomplish at least this level of savings. I am also requesting that all local school districts review operating budgets and reduce administrative costs by 10%, for a savings of as much as \$10 million dollars. The savings should be reallocated to teaching and to meet the requirements of 1017. Adding these additional funds to what is now available for elementary and secondary education, and including the maximum for internal reallocations, my budget calls for an increase of \$100.7 million to help school districts meet all new requirements.

I am also working with the Secretary of Education to hold fast on standards implementation, and accelerate the timetables for education reform. Finally if you and the people of Oklahoma approve our education building and equipment bond issue, which does not increase taxes, we will have the most advanced fiber optics telecommunications network and the most sophisticated comprehensive computer technology applications of any system of public instruction in this nation and perhaps the world. Because of your past work and our new determination we are on the verge of becoming a model for others who want the best education for their children.

The limited increases in our higher education budgets in recent years, and the growing gap between Oklahoma higher education and other states in our region, mean that a high priority has to be placed on our colleges and universities. My budget proposes funding increases for higher education of \$61 million dollars. We will request strong evidence of reallocation of administrative expenses to direct instruction and research. Most of the education capital improvements package I've proposed will go to colleges and universities. Oklahoma higher education has been very patient with us, let's not respond by being passive.

Yesterday at the National Governor's Conference, I listened to experts and saw Governors wring their hands over their state's educational systems. They struggled with

how to relate education to the work place. Poor transition to the work force, particularly for non-college bound students, was cited as a key problem.

We don't have all the answers in Oklahoma. But I took special pride in telling the nation's governors that Oklahoma is the leader in this area because we have the finest votech system in the nation. We should never take this system for granted. Vocational-technical education will continue to get strong support in my administration.

We are in the midst of a health care crisis across America. In Oklahoma, rural hospitals are closing, unable to provide any service to citizens who choose to live in our small communities. You can have a great job or a good education system but when you lose access to health care many Oklahomans have to move. I have recommended an increase in appropriations for the Community Physician Match Program; this is a first step toward providing new physicians in Oklahoma's most underserved areas. I have also asked for a complete review of our medicaid expenditures and our distribution of indigent health care dollars. We can do better and we will.

At the same time, we have to strengthen the management of social service programs that provide care and assistance for thousands of needy Oklahomans. The current organization of the Department of Human Services is due to historical funding convenience, not management efficiency or service delivery. I am proposing the establishment of a separate agency to serve our senior citizens. I believe Oklahoma Medical Center will work better if we remove it from D.H.S. And I am also proposing a separate agency to deal with the problems of children and youth. Their future is the most important investment we can make – and they deserve special attention. Some have said wait, go slow, let's commission a study. The time to act is long past due. On page 31 of the Terry D. report a footnote indicates that the authors could not secure an accurate figure of the number of juvenile cases that we have in Oklahoma. If our current organization can't produce a simple statistic it would be naïve of us to expect this same organization to solve these important problems.

To prevent the erosion of Oklahoma's social services and to insure that we are doing as much as we can at the lowest possible cost, I am asking Dr. Garth Splinter to lead a Health and Human Services team to make a series of recommendations on what's working and what isn't, and at what cost. I anticipate a tough review, specific ideas for change and a quick time table for implementation. As the social service agencies meet the constraints required by my budget, I am instructing them to place the highest priority on children's issues, particularly perinatal programs.

Next, we must stop the wholesale early release of convicted felons. **We can be progressive without being permissive.** My budget includes operating funds for the Department of Corrections to contract for private facility beds – the quickest way to gain additional capacity in the prison system. I have included appropriations to fund the operations of ten additional work centers, three in this year and seven in FY-92. The work centers will each house forty to sixty inmates who will also work on community projects. Additionally, I have recommended funding for facilities inside the prison system which will provide 200 more cells, and over \$5 million in substance abuse, literacy and job training to reduce the number of repeat offenders.

I have asked Secretary of Safety and Security Bob Fitzpatrick to reorganize our law enforcement efforts. State law enforcement agencies should be combined into one unified, coordinated, crime fighting organization. Duplication of administration,

communication, and support services is weakening our fight against crime and drugs. Consolidation will mean both more and tougher law enforcement.

I have asked Attorney General Robert Henry to assume the lead in renewing our efforts to attack substance abuse in Oklahoma. The Drug Policy Board should be given a statutory foundation; doing so will enable programs such as those providing for Drug Free Schools to be more targeted and focused. The Attorney General, the Secretary of Education and I have agreed to set among other goals this important goal: a drug abuse prevention program, like the D.A.R.E. program, in every school in every district in the State of Oklahoma.

In our rush to diversify the economy we have in the past overlooked agriculture – no more. I have elevated the Commissioner of Agriculture to a cabinet level post and I have asked for a significant reorganization of our agricultural programs. We intend to shift internally substantial funds to aggressive marketing and other programs that help our farmers and ranchers.

This session's debate will be intense over how our environmental programs should be organized. I have elevated Environment to a cabinet level position. Some consolidation of environmental functions in state government must occur as a complement to our economic development plans. My new Secretary of Environment and I will play an active role in this reorganization.

We can't afford the things we need if we are unwilling to cut the things we don't need. I am recommending a reduction of \$40 million dollars in state agency operating appropriations. We don't spend money on bad things in state government, but we do spend money on low priority programs that once were high priorities. Our needs and priorities change and so should our budgets. I propose to reallocate the savings to areas where our needs are the greatest. We must invest more in education, prisons, and in a new employee incentive program. I have today directed state agencies to take immediate steps to reduce their current FY-91 expenditures. I will ask that any savings a state agency generates this year will be used to soften the impact of their budget cut in FY-92.

A developing national recession and uncertainties in the Federal budget, as it relates to our state, makes it critical to put away as much money as possible to reduce the need for a tax increase in future years. I am committed to funding vital state services, but we should not do so through tax increases. The state's Rainy Day Fund shows a current balance of \$153 million. My recommendation is that those funds should be saved, not spent, so we will have them to meet the demands of harder days.

The time has come for Oklahoma to take a leadership role in drafting and working for a national energy policy. I have elevated to a cabinet level post the Secretary of Energy and will charge this individual with the task of working with producing states and our nation's policy makers to draft an energy policy for Oklahoma, and if Washington doesn't do it, one for the nation. Every Administration since Truman has pledged to provide a national energy policy. It is undoubtedly a complex and difficult task. Our policy for Oklahoma will concentrate on two major points: conservation and conversion to natural gas. We intend a broad based attack ranging from funding the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Technology for conversion research to inserting our views in the national debate. An effective national energy policy, coupled with the conservative state budget that I have proposed, can mean that while the rest of the nation is experiencing a recession, Oklahoma can surge ahead.

Today, by Executive Order, I am establishing a new code of conduct for all the men and women who make state service their career. We have thousands of dedicated, hard-working employees in state government. Because I feel so strongly that any individual betrayal of the confidence placed in a state worker adversely affects all state employees, I am requiring strict new financial disclosures for agency heads, cabinet secretaries, and others who make daily decisions on state purchasing and finance.

Unfortunately, our society still bears some of the age-old burden of bigotry and inequality. We will chart a new future for minorities in state government. We cannot afford to waste the talents of a whole portion of our people if we are to meet our human and economic potential. This year, I will call a Governor's Conference on Minority Issues. This statewide conference will bring together participants from all segments of our society and the Oklahoma economy. Let's celebrate our past successes, let's identify the ongoing weaknesses and then let's chart a plan of action that will guarantee equal employment opportunities for all Oklahomans.

Finally, we must examine all of state government to achieve greater efficiency and accountability. I will be proposing statutory and constitutional changes which will restructure, eliminate, or reform many of the operations of state government. I ask you the Legislature, as well as the people that you represent, to become involved in this important effort.

Today, I renew my pledge to be the hardest working governor in our state's history. You may not always agree with me; but I want you to know that I will do all that I can do to make this session, and the next four years, a success for all of us. As I close I want to express my thanks to you again for the excellent work during the recent special session.

As I mentioned earlier, I attended a meeting of our nation's governors in Washington yesterday. On an early morning run, I went past the National Archives where, on the building, carved in granite, are the words, "What is past is prologue." I was reminded that the late Senator Kerr is said to have once asked a cab driver what those words "What is past is prologue" meant? The cab driver said, "that's simple, Senator. It means you ain't seen nothing yet."

We may not adopt these exact words as our theme . . . but the quality of this legislature, the ability of your leaders and our renewed spirit of cooperation between me and you means that we can in good faith tell Oklahoma's citizens that they have the leaders in place to move Oklahoma . . . that we will change this state . . . and we accept the charge of making Oklahoma the best state in the nation.

Upon motion of Senator Roberts, the Joint Session was ordered dissolved at the hour of 1:00 p.m.

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.