

State of the State
Governor David Walters
February 3, 1992

Lt. Governor Mildren, President Pro Tempore Cullison, Speaker Johnson, Chief Justice Opala, Members of the Legislature, Women and Men of Oklahoma:

Our legislative session starts later than many other states so I have had the benefit in preparing my comments of seeing what other Governors have said to their legislatures and citizens. Most talk about past accomplishments, and no tax increases, many talk of bond issues, education and jobs, a few talk of unity and everyone smiles.

Some of my remarks won't bring many smiles because they are not happy ones. Much of what I have to say will be tragic but I believe a necessary statement of truth. We do have things to brag about, you and I. Legislatively it was a good year. Budget cuts, combined with a small amount of new funds, allowed for strong budgets, particularly in education. You should feel a special pride to have played a part in public policy that has given this state a higher increase in education funding last year than any other state in the nation and did not raise taxes. Your actions have kept Oklahoma competitive and fiscally strong during a severe nationwide recession. No small task. I could recite more, but we've talked about these things before.

Instead let me take this time to share a few thoughts about Oklahoma, from my perspective.

A cautious word about my perspective. When I decided in 1986, with Rhonda's acquiescence, to run for public office, people often asked what was important to me. I told them then what I had always known, what I value most; first, our family and second, my integrity.

So you can imagine the horror Rhonda and I felt after the inauguration a year ago to watch as skillful political terrorists who had publicly vowed to destroy me were given such comfort by opponents and so much attention by a media that seemingly wanted a story more than they wanted the facts. Why? I don't have a good answer. Rhonda and I have been enthusiastic, idealistic, sometimes naive, but capable of enormous work to achieve our goals and to achieve good things for Oklahoma. Why then the mauling, the feeding frenzy, the slow water torture?

I am an outsider. The first real outsider to serve as Governor in the states' modern history so I don't engender much trust with the insiders, which to my surprise, included the capitol media. But even that doesn't seem to merit the unprecedented assault on my integrity during this last year. The assault knew no bounds.

After being accused of virtually every possible indiscretion and criminal act a new low was reached when a reported with KTVY Channel 4, without any shred of evidence or any possible basis, inferred, on the air, that I probably had something to do with the tragic death of an FBI agent.

I called my son from an economic development trip (I was out of town) and he tried to make the best of it by reminding me that he had frequently said, throughout 1991, "Well, Dad, at least they haven't got you for murder or sex." Now he simply said, "At least you have one to go."

When we recently verified that a group had met in January to discuss hiring a woman and hiding a camera in the hopes of getting an embarrassing photo of me, I could only smile and think that we had now exhausted Shaun's list.

I recall being asked at one press conference last fall, after a series of vitriolic questions by the capitol press, if it was true that I had been on the grassy knoll on that fateful day in November, 1963. I appreciated the humor particularly from a young television reporter who told others at a social function that his negative stories about me were his ticket to Dallas. It worked, and he now works for a Dallas station.

As you recall, the press gathered in August from four corners of the state believing that I was going to resign, even though we carefully explained that was not going to happen and that they had been set up by an opponent who knew the rumor itself would harm us.

So there we were, what a circus. Just a rumor without any basis. Someone finally asked the question, I said no and boom, they had their story. "Governor Denies Resignation" was everywhere, on T.V., radio and front page. The public suddenly assumed because such rumors were now on the air that this must be likely or even imminent. The political terrorists were thrilled the media took the bait and I was further damaged.

As I surveyed the room with live cameras and lights turned on, I wanted to hold up a mirror and say look at yourself, look at what you are doing, look at what you've become. I should have.

Because then the guns turned to my son Shaun, and his mother and I watched helplessly as the media dogged him. Forty-seven T.V. stories in one week, even though he didn't use drugs and cooperated fully. A single seed nurtured for weeks by the authorities tested negative, but he was still made to endure a humiliating two hour lie detector test only later to read in the newspaper the assistant DA say that yes, he had been treated more severely because of who he was.

Marcy Gardenhire, from Oklahoma City, in a letter to the editor recently said, "The bullet of vengeance veered off course and lodged fatally in the heart of a young man who could not bear the pain." Ad so, 39 days ago we lost him. He's buried now in a cemetery on Northwest Highway.

This is my perspective. The two most important things to me, my family and my integrity have been virtually destroyed.

So what can I share with you from this perspective? First, I want to thank the thousands of people for their expressions of sympathy and support; loving, caring and meaningful letters from children and parents, elderly, farmers, business people and others.

They are good, these people. They are a loving and compassionate people. I can argue that Oklahomans are better than others but we can all agree that they are good. More conservative than some may like, more tight-fisted than some think is prudent, but they are good and God bless every one of them.

So, why is it so hard for us to come together on their behalf? Why is it necessary for the press to denigrate, destroy, distort? This problem does not reside in a single publisher, it is widespread. I understand that many in the press perceive that they are only doing their job and their function is to question, but a public already concerned about the press would be shocked to see some of their behavior up close and personal.

The Wall Street Journal recently commented on Walter Lippmann's book "Public Opinion," and said Lippman asks how can an editor bring any order to the torrent of daily events? The only possible way is that the editor must bring to each day some organizing principle that exists independently and prior to the events themselves. Journalism brings to events of the day what Lippmann calls "stereotypes." That is, the news the reporter records and the editor prints is not, and cannot be, a simple recounting of the facts. It also reflects the stereotypes journalists bring to the news.

These stereotypes can be incredible impediments to our progress. People sometimes ask why I get shellacked by the Tulsa World; they understand the motives of Oklahoman, but why The World? The capitol reporter for The World told a member of my staff prior to the start of this administration that, "Your guy Walters is as wishy washy as Boren and as crooked as Hall." That comment was unfair to David Boren but that stereotype has been reflected in every story written about my administration by that reporter. Every story . . . dozens of stories. What makes these biases and false stereotype particularly dangerous is today's technology. In the past it took 30 days to kill someone's character, today it takes about three.

It's not just the reporters. Former political opponents from both parties have given interviews to try to reinforce their own negative stereotypes of me and our administration.

I am a hard campaigner, I play to win, I play by the rules, if you attack you'll get a similar response. But between elections, I believe we have an obligation to use the opportunity given us by the electorate to work for progress. I have been both the victor and the defeated and I believe this applies to both. This obligation should extend beyond public pronouncements. For example, my opponents have perfected two different techniques. One is to form a newsletter so its lies can be quoted as a news source. This is not unlike the way the national media has used the Star's accusations against Governor Bill Clinton. The second more disturbing technique is to take advantage of the courts and file nuisance lawsuits or cause investigations to be initiated in order to distract or even destroy.

Rhonda and I have no personal wealth and I make a lot less money than I did in business, but I sought to be Governor, and I expected that, but I did not expect to have to hire numerous private attorneys that represent us in a libel suit brought by a disgruntled former opponent, a ridiculous investigation caused by a disgruntled former employee, a Federal Election Commission complaint brought by the Chairman of the Republican Party. It is expensive, distracting and the worst kind of political terrorism.

We have to ask ourselves the questions – How can we have key citizens working so hard to cause failure and expect our state to meet the challenges that we face? As the President said in his State of the Union, how can we tolerate a political strategy that attempts to stop all progress and then decries the lack of improvement?

We have to begin to understand that when insensitive public officials, combined with a reckless media, can drive a young man to his death – something is wrong. I will not have my son's death trivialized by returning to business as usual.

Enough is enough.

I'm not even sure what that means. But I can tell you that it's time for us to begin to discuss whether there exist any limits. How far do we go in our search for truth? What proof is required before reputations and lives are assassinated on the evening news?

When, in the media's soundings on the character of public officials, is it appropriate for the media to display some of the character and responsibility that they seek?

The First Amendment is the lifeblood of our democracy and I believe fervently in open, robust and unintimidated expression.

But if malice becomes the motive what happens to free speech, and who then wants to take the risk of public service? No wonder this capitol is so often perceived as a shrine to the status quo. When someone is fired for incompetence and they can use the merit system and the media to seek revenge and tell, unchecked and without recourse, lies that are easily proved false, who is going to stand and fire the next incompetent person? Why in the world would people of sound mind and normal intelligence offer themselves and put their families and reputations in jeopardy?

Nina Totenberg, a veteran public radio Washington reporter, said in an interview on C-Span a week ago, that people in government are "not as smart as they used to be" because the smart ones, she said, realize that "you can't get things done like you once could." I'm not surprised.

Why are we here? I believe the reason you are here is the same reason that I'm here. I want that Oklahoma family around the dinner table to feel strong and secure, spending their time talking about a job that supports them and schools that prepare them. I don't want them to live anxious, troubled lives that worry about the next house payment, the lack of a job, poor schools, or their next meal.

This is a great goal and a good desire but we can't begin until we summon our consciences, all of us, officials, publishers, reporters and the public, and reject malice.

Debate and argue 'til the cows come home, fight if you must, but reject malice. Each of us has to set limits for ourselves. We have to do it as individuals; we have to do it in our respective professions. Let's stop rewarding those among us that tear down, and respect those that build and take risks.

1991 will never be worth the cost but I have to believe that something good can come from these events. With Rhonda and my family at my side I will continue to fight as Governor for the Oklahoma that I believe in.

We have got to come together so we can go forward. I'm ready and I ask you to join me. We have big problems that demand our attention and a challenging agenda in front of us.

Take a good hard, honest look at this state, strip away the political rhetoric and what do you see? You see a state that lacks capital for its businesses and its growth, population declines in the west and northwest, extreme poverty in the southeast and two major urban areas that cannot bring themselves to cooperate. You see an economy still based on the sale of raw commodities and our industry is dominated by low value added manufacturing. Our natural gas industry is in melt down and our wage earners only earn 83 cents when the nation's average wage earner gets a dollar. Sobering, isn't it?

But look at what we have to work with, look at our people – honest and hardworking. Company executives from New Jersey who recently located their business in Oklahoma thought they were telling something new by relaying that Oklahomans don't have to be begged to come to work or coddled to do a good job. Look at the productivity of the Goodyear plant in Lawton . . . double the average for other plants in that industry.

This is no rhetoric. We have great people here and we have everything else, climate, resources, pro-business attitudes, and if it makes any difference, one of the lowest tax rates in the nation.

Let me say that again . . . no tax increases last year when 35 states raised taxes, no tax increase this year. Not since the boom nine years ago, have we put two years back to back without an increase in taxes. Now, I'm proud of this and you should be too because this gives us an edge and makes us competitive. We are 38th in the nation in state and local tax burden per capita and 34th when adjusted for our average personal income. Our total tax burden puts us in the bottom 25% of states.

Let's admit it . . . we have an edge. Let's be proud of it . . . we are emerging more competitive and we have great people and resources to work with. Now what do we do with it?

We change, we get progressive and we get aggressive. Listen to what Secretary of Commerce Greg Main will tell you about how we get more capital into this economy. We asked for a consolidation of our job creating financial authorities last year and we ask for it again this year. If you will approve it, we can get \$50 million of badly needed equity capital into our struggling economy, saving and creating thousands of jobs. You have in front of you a workers comp bill that resulted from a task force I assembled. It is balanced, it improves the system for injured workers, and it reduces the cost for Oklahoma businesses. We are already competitive with our worker's comp system we have now, but you give me this bill and we will absolutely go to town in Texas, California and other states that are now forcing their companies to look elsewhere.

I ask you also to move swiftly to remove the tax from the reservation businesses in Oklahoma and preserve this growing telecommunications industry. I ask that you pass Senate Bill 198 and give our horse and racing industry a change to compete nationally. The facts are clear and you should not hesitate to help this industry and preserve hundreds of millions of dollars of investments and thousands of jobs in Oklahoma.

If you act on these matters we get jobs; if you don't, we can join the rest of the nation in this ominous national recession.

While we are building jobs let's look to those things that invest long term in the quality of Oklahoma. Clean air, water, land – the people of Oklahoma cry out for the protection of our environment. As I reviewed our environmental problems, I created the first ever Secretary of Environment, a governor's council on environmental quality and held an environmental summit with Governor Clinton to develop an environmental compact with our neighboring states. It was not enough. So I have offered positive comprehensive program that makes good business sense. Pass it and your children will enjoy an environment better than what we enjoy today. While you're at it let's quit dragging our feet and face the music. Let's finally pass a consolidation plan for our environmental agencies. We have studied this one enough.

After we invest in our environment, let's heed the advice of a highly successful Rural Summit and invest in our rural areas. I have outlined a serious first step in sustaining and providing opportunities for growth on our farms and in our small communities. The strength of Oklahoma depends on the strength of our rural areas and that strength will be substantially enhanced by your quick action on nine bills on our rural agenda. In addition to this legislation, there will be 17 separate executive actions initiated by my cabinet secretaries in agriculture, commerce and transportation. This

rural agenda will begin to address the needs of parts of our state too often left out of our programs.

You can make Oklahoma the first state to draw a line in its rich soil and say we are not going to allow the extinction of a way of life so fundamentally good.

The ultimate long term investment is in our own human resources and yet we waste so many with our limited or unfocused attempts to provide secure neighborhoods and towns. Every day a growing number of Oklahomans fear for their personal safety. Gang violence, drug abuse, decaying neighborhoods and bulging prisons have got to concern us more than how we can stop another Governor from trying to make sense out of a confused law enforcement structure and blatant overlaps and duplications.

We've just completed our conference on violent crime organized by Secretary McBride and it was instructive for me to scan the audience. While law enforcement and corrections were well represented, so too were business men and women, educators, social service experts, childrens' program advocates and others. The solutions to crime are long-term and they are community bases. I will ask you for better tools, better pay, better organization, but most importantly we will continue to ask for a high priority on attacking the causes of crime, not just its results and effects. We are not going to be lax and we are not going to turn prisoners loose early; instead we have to reorganize and rehabilitate. I hope you will put aside your past views on changing state law enforcement. If so, we can lick this problem too.

Beyond all this, we have a challenging budget to approve.

For months, the cabinet has met and worked on my budget recommendations for the state. Policies were debated, priorities were established, and long-term trends analyzed. My recommended budget meets our commitments to education, satisfies our obligations, funds new initiatives, provides for a performance-based pay increase for state workers and does not raise taxes. This budget also calls for a widespread cut of 5% in personnel services because we can afford it and it's the right thing to do.

I ask that you give the cabinet the flexibility to cut personnel budgets as each of them sees fit so that we can reverse an increasing expenditure trend that is not in this state's interest. A cut of \$50 million reallocated to high priority needs is the difference between a bad budget year and a good budget year. I have also recommended a supplemental appropriation of \$16.4 million including \$9 million for DHS. Secretary of Human Services Ben Demps is doing an excellent job of reorganizing, cutting and trying to meet financial demands that we cannot control. I will ask that this supplemental appropriation be funded from the rainy day fund.

This short term fix does not address the longer term health care funding needs at DHS. The Federal Government has recently given us an opportunity to generate additional revenue from our health care providers so we can match federal medicaid dollars and provide more health care through these same providers. For several years Oklahoma has missed this opportunity and our loss of federal money for health care is probably now measured in billions of dollars. We can no longer miss the chance to care for our sick. I will ask you to act this year to fix this problem.

As we sweat out another tight operating budget, I will initiate a study of the assets of Oklahoma State government. Hundreds of millions of dollars are lying around in unproductive assets that can be made productive without cost or risk to the public.

Bond reserve funds that don't get us a significant break on interest, insurance funds that can be privatized, power plants and airports that could be sold.

The money we raise from such reforms could be endowed for research and technology, job programs, or health care. Most of all, they can be put to work intelligently for the Oklahoma taxpayer.

Last August when I said Oklahoma should look at other health care systems and change ours, the objections were plentiful. More officials now understand that we cannot follow the Federal Government's example and continue to stubbornly refuse to face the health care crises. We have to take the work of the Health Care Commission, the rural access to health care committee, and the legislative task force on health care and take steps to begin the transformation of this system.

Here again, the public is ahead of us on this issue. They want to change health care. I faced an audience of 600 for a meeting just on health care in Muskogee and listened to their concerns and ideas. By default, the Federal Government has delegated the problem to the states and we dare not default. Somewhere in Oklahoma right now a mother with a sick child is confused about where to go for care and how it's going to get paid for. I hope she doesn't wait too long. I hope we don't let our fears and biases cause us to wait too long to change a broken and collapsing system.

Education is always a priority and it always should be. This year we must respond to the public vote on HB 1017, not by breathing a sigh of relief, but by being even more aggressive with education reform. As we continue to meet the annual education funding challenge without tax increases, we cannot engage in a debate over what reforms can be deferred; rather, we have to ask how to accelerate and add to what has been started. I will push hard this year to define and implement the deregulation component of our efforts by empowering our local communities to do more to achieve our education and human resource goals.

Let's tell the state that we haven't forgotten that we have two other components to our educational system besides common education; those are higher education and Vo-Tech.

I noted this weekend that a new National Governors Association study concludes that when companies, particularly high-technology companies, are deciding where to locate, proximity to quality education and research facilities is now more important than proximity to markets. My own experience is that higher education and VoTech are almost always questions discussed by new corporate prospects. Please join me in recognizing the operational needs of all three educational branches and please join me in getting a capital improvement bond issue in front of the voters as soon as possible. This bond issue will meet critical capital needs but it will also do something else; it will put hundreds of millions of dollars into our economy. It will provide a real economic boost as we fight off the downward slide of the national recession.

Many things in front of you are exciting, including the new volunteerism department proposed by Secretary of State John Kennedy, expansion of our road and bridge programs by Secretary of Transportation Delmas Ford and our efforts to instill total quality management and empower employees as proposed by Secretary of Human Resources Oscar Jackson.

Many things in front of you will challenge your political courage in this election year. Budget cuts, reallocations, controversial issues and tough choices – it is *your*

courage that will carry us forward. Albert Einstein said that, “Significant problems cannot be solved when we created the problem.” We have to change.

We can either change or simply spend our time responding to the frustration orchestrated by the activists of negativism – cynics so extreme they have lost their faith even in representative democracy.

I have never been, nor will I likely ever be, a member of this legislature, but I feel close to so many of you. I feel a deepening respect for these legislative institutions and for your ability to do the job your constituents elected you to do. You come from where I come from, many of you are good friends. As we share our dreams for Oklahoma a common bond has grown out of our mutual hope for our state.

I need your help to pass our program – it is a good program and it deserves your support.

This things *will not* happen if we play politics, if we accept malice, if we cower from insensitive and shallow attacks. They *will* happen when this side joins with that side and these leaders join this Governor and we resolve to *reject malice, to reject the past, to reject those destructive elements that would tear down this government and this democracy.*

Together let us pledge that we will do good things for a good people who deserve to be, and who have the capacity to be, the best. Simply the best.

These are my thoughts from my perspective on Oklahoma.

Thank you.

Upon motion of Senator Roberts, the Joint Session was ordered dissolved at the hour of 1:25 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.