

**State of the State
Governor David Boren
January 3, 1978**

GOVERNOR NIGH
SENATOR HOWARD
SPEAKER WILLIS
MEMBERS OF THE 36TH LEGISLATURE

In 1960 a man of great vision for Oklahoma wrote, "I stopped my car on a gravel mountain road. I heard the deep yet strangely soothing rush of wind through thousands of pine boughs. This was the only sound. As far as the eye could see were billowing folds of the Winding Stair Mountains. Close by they were splashed with the magnificent colors of fall. This moment was the end of a quest begun many years before. The search that started when I was a child of ten working with my father in a cotton field. At that time, this great and wise man said 'I want you to help refurbish the land that men have stripped and clear the streams that they have muddied. Here in this mountain valley could be the workshop, ---'." The writer went on to say that he could envision economic opportunity and jobs for bright young people with the right development of our natural resources. He could see a quality of life unsurpassed through conservation. He said he understood why Franklin Roosevelt twice listed his occupation when registering to vote as "a planter of trees."

The writer was, of course, Robert S. Kerr. He concluded his book, *Land, Wood, and Water*, by saying that the potential for the future is plain for all to see in Oklahoma. He warned, however, "it takes faith, but not blind faith."

Oklahoma is a special place. We can point to many facts that indicate that our state is literally coming into bloom. Our full potential is just beginning to be realized. We can look at an unemployment rate which is one of the lowest in the nation, and the fact that Oklahoma is one of the top ten states in the per capita spendable income of its citizens. This year broke all previous records for new outside investment in our state, nearing \$700 million, with almost 10,000 new direct jobs created. Our workers in Oklahoma produce more per hour than those in almost any state and we rank in the top group of states in the percentage of our people who obtain additional training beyond the high school level. The Oklahoma farmer is the most productive worker in the world and has contributed in countless ways to the building of our state. Today these farmers and ranchers are fighting for their very financial survival. We must never forget that their fight is our fight. When agriculture, our number one industry, suffers, Oklahoma suffers.

Still, overall, the quality of life we enjoy in Oklahoma is the envy of the nation. There are many other ways that we can measure our progress. We have made major gains for our educational system, in preserving our natural and scenic areas, in improving management of government through employee limits, mini-cabinets, legislative performance audits, and other methods. We can measure Oklahoma's progress in reduced welfare rolls and the reduced waste of human talent that it represents. Whether it's the excitement we have at the opening of our state's newest and longest hiking trail in

McCurtain County or the satisfaction of seeing the first new correctional facilities in over 60 years, we all can feel that Oklahoma is dynamic and progressive.

In Oklahoma we know that the future is not to be feared. It is to be embraced as a new challenge, as a hope for a better life, as an opportunity to be seized and mixed with hard work.

Oklahoma's sense of history is strong because our pioneers are people we know or have known personally and not just from history books. They taught us the importance of building for the future. They dealt not only with their immediate problems but they anticipated our needs.

In election years particularly, it is tempting to look only at short range programs with quick results. We must not yield to that temptation. Our challenge is to deal not only with our immediate problems, but to look into the future at our long range needs. We need to look at our fundamental needs. We cannot meet them in one year but we can make a start. Like Oklahoma pioneers, we must plant seeds for the future.

In my recommendations to you this year, I have tried to set manageable and realistic priorities. I have done my best to devise programs that plant the right seeds for the future. I need and seek your help in refining and improving these programs.

The program presented for your consideration is written within the bounds of a balanced budget. The budget allows for approximately \$90 million in increased investment in state services. This includes \$18 million in conservation tax revenues. We hope and expect that the constitutionality of the tax will be upheld. However, pending a final court determination, it would not be wise to spend the entire proceeds. We have already set aside a sufficient amount to pay refunds on income taxes if the tax is upheld as anticipated.

The budget does not call for any reduction of the state's reserve account. This fund had a balance of \$78 million at the end of the fiscal year. If left untouched, it will grow to over \$90 million by the end of this fiscal year. It is my belief that we should not alter the reserve fund. The reserve fund balance gives us enough money to pay the costs of running the state for almost two months. It is a savings account for the taxpayers. In times of national economic uncertainty, such a reserve is wise and prudent. We can take pride in the fact that we have greatly improved our position compared to three years ago when we only had a reserve sufficient to operate the state for about ten days.

Nearly all of the programs which I am recommending to you are interrelated with the budget. First, I earnestly seek your support for the creation of an Oklahoma Water Development Authority and the provision of \$300,000 to start a revolving fund for the Authority.

No issue is of more vital importance to the future of our state. All of us are aware of the serious potential water shortage problems in many areas of our state. Planning must begin now if we are to head off major problems which loom as early as the year 2000. The average lead time for federal water projects from authorization to the beginning of

construction is now 22 years. We cannot wait until a severe crisis develops before we act.

We do not yet have enough information to make any final decisions about the question of water transfer. However, we can act this year in a way which will keep our options open for the future and will help bring us together to develop Oklahoma's precious water resources for all Oklahomans.

Governor Kerr many years ago predicted that we would see the day when a barrel of water was as precious as a barrel of oil. That day is fast approaching. We should not let the debate over water transfer prevent us from moving ahead in the area of water development.

The need for water development is statewide. In areas of eastern Oklahoma, considered rich in water, one third of all the people live in homes not served by adequate water and sewer systems. Last July, 196,000 people in our state in 37 communities were forced to ration water. Fifty-eight other communities were on the brink of rationing.

The principal cause of these problems in many areas was not a shortage of water but a shortage of adequate water delivery systems. Some 200 municipalities and rural water districts all over the state are in need of additional water treatment and distribution facilities. Many of these communities are growing but they lack the local financial resources or bonding capacity to finance water and sewer facilities. Even when federal funds are available, all too often Oklahoma communities are unable to provide required matching funds for federal grants.

The proposed legislation, which has been aided by the work of your interim committee on water, will be jointly authored by members of both houses including Senators Holden, Murphy, Lane, Funston and Capps and Representatives Morgan, Bernard, Parris, and Cotner.

The legislation is patterned after successful programs in other states. It creates an Oklahoma Water Development Authority. The Authority would replace the Water Conservation Storage Commission retaining its current powers, but expanding its purposes and capacities to help meet the need for local water development. Through a program of grants and loans financed by legislative appropriations and the sale of revenue bonds, this program can help provide matching funds to get many needed local projects under way. The program would be designed to serve the neediest of Oklahoma's communities first, and to combine loans and grants in such a way as to make needed financing available at affordable rates.

While protecting basins of origin and not committing the state to any federal water plan, it does provide a sufficient showing of state initiative in the area of water development to keep our options open in the future.

As precious as our natural resources may be, our human resources are the most important of all. We want a state where all of our citizens have equal opportunity

without regard to race, sex, or economic condition. I recommend to you a \$1.7 million program to strengthen our services to children and youth.

We have done much in the past three years to strike at the results of crime and delinquency. For example, necessary investments in corrections and law enforcement have been made. But we must continue to invest in the prevention of social problems by striking at the root causes. One million dollars included in the program would be appropriated to Child Guidance Centers operated by the Health Department. These centers provide services including those of counselors and child psychologists to help children and parents with emotional, learning, speech, hearing or adjustment problems. The funds would provide services to 5,500 children in need who are not now served. It would also establish direct services into 28 counties now totally without service.

Another \$500,000 is needed to expand the capabilities of our 20 Regional Education Service Centers. These centers diagnose learning disabilities in school-age children and prescribe remedial programs. They serve some 75,000 school children with special needs and also evaluate some 25,000 handicapped children each year. Two hundred thousand dollars for group homes for juvenile offenders is also recommended. This along with juvenile shelters, will offer alternatives to sending juveniles to prison. It is an important investment in Oklahoma's youth. Some 14,000 juveniles have problems with the law each year in our state and these programs can help these troubled young people return to a useful and productive life.

I also urge the adoption of two more programs for the health and well-being of our people. The first is full state funding for the cervical cancer screening program for the remainder of this year and for next year. Federal funding for this program was halted last summer and I have continued it on a partial, temporary basis with discretionary, emergency employment funds. During the past three years this program has screened over 250,000 women for cancer. As a result, 1,000 cases of cervical cancer and 12,000 other significant health problems were discovered and treated.

A second program is aimed at providing more help for our senior citizens. I have requested that the Department of Institutions, Social and Rehabilitative Services expand its community meals program for senior citizens. This program now provides one free hot meal per day to persons over 65 years of age in 22 counties. We will serve as many additional communities and counties this year as possible. I am also proposing once again that we increase the monthly assistance check to the elderly by \$5 per month. Representative Sparkman will offer a legislative resolution calling for the increase and it has my full support.

There are many other areas needing special attention. I recommend that \$6 million in new funds be given to the Transportation Department to help keep pace with inflation and meet pressing needs. The replacement or renovation of unsafe bridges, particularly on school bus routes, is a top priority. The Department of Transportation estimates that 6,000 of the state's 31,000 bridges are deficient. Many of these bridges are on county roads. From this appropriation, I urge the expenditure of \$2 million for the development jointly by the Department of Transportation and County Commissioners of projects to correct the deficiencies. Funds will be available as a federal match or for full

state funding for construction costs. The program will build on experience gained this past year with our pilot program and will use research on prefab bridges done by the O.S.U. Center for Local Government Technology.

Generally speaking, county governments throughout the state have experienced severe financial hardship. Local resources have not kept pace with the increased costs for needed services. In some cases, state or federal governments have contributed to these budgetary problems by requiring new services or by reducing revenue bases. Changes in the state's judicial system a few years ago resulted in a net decrease in county revenues.

To relieve the financial strain on the county general fund, I propose the allocation of \$900,000 to the 77 counties on an equal basis through an appropriation to the district court budget. Each county would use its share to pay a portion of its cost in operating the offices of either the district attorney, the county election board, or the district court clerk. No change would be made in any office currently elected on a local basis. This program will strengthen local governments at the grass roots by relieving a part of their financial burden.

Strong action is called for this year on utility rates. As the cost of energy increases, utility rates are severely affected. Our Corporation Commission simply does not presently have adequate resources to stand on an equal footing with the utilities which they are to regulate in the public interest. For the sake of all consumers, we must make certain that every penny of any increase in utility bills is fully justified.

To accomplish this task I am authorizing the three additional auditors for the utility division as requested by the commission.

But I feel that more is needed. My budget will ask for additional funds for three Administrative Assistants to do rate research, one for each commissioner. In addition, I recommend funds to set up a special Utility Rate Watchdog Unit in the utility division. This Watchdog Unit will be composed of three senior rate analysts with upgraded compensation to attract highly qualified professionals. Their sole function will be to analyze rate structure in order to insure Oklahoma consumers of the lowest possible rates consistent with an adequate supply of energy.

I again recommend to you legislation, remaining on the House Calendar ready for further conference, in the area of public disclosure of lobbying activities. To enable the people to know more about the operation of their own government and to strengthen public confidence in government, it is my hope that this session will complete the positive work in this area started last year. I commend the leadership and members of the legislature for proposing rule changes in both houses to assure the completion of the work of the legislature in the shortest possible time. In good faith, I believe that these rule changes should be given a chance to work before any other proposals are considered in this area. In addition to these major programs, there are several other items contained in my budget recommendations. The budget includes necessary adjustments in supplies, utility costs and other operating costs of state government. It provides for wage adjustments to comply with changes in the federal minimum wage law and funds for an additional one-step merit increase for all state employees.

The budget continues to emphasize the needs of our educational systems. It recommends an increase of \$17,275,000 for higher education. It also recommends an increase of \$35,169,000 for public schools which will fund a \$700 increase in teacher's salaries, plus 260 new classes for special education and for the gifted and talented. It recommends \$2 million to be distributed to schools on an ADA basis for salary increases for support personnel, and a 20 per cent increase for elementary counseling. I also support increasing the retirement benefits for retired teachers, many of whom taught in earlier years at great sacrifice. These benefits would be set at two per cent per year taught on a base of \$12,000. The budget also includes \$800,000 for improvement in the equipment pool of the state's vocational-technical education system.

In the area of law enforcement, funds are provided to add 20 additional highway patrol troopers and to provide 40 additional hours of training for local law enforcement officers.

A 50 per cent increase in funds for the auditing staff of the Examiner and Inspector's office is requested. As you know, in January, this office will be consolidated with that of the State Auditor according to the constitutional amendment voted by the people. This change provides the legislature with an excellent opportunity to review and modernize the functions and procedures of both offices. I am recommending that certain of the auditor's functions be transferred to the treasurer's office and some to the state budget office with an annual savings of over \$33,000. It will also be necessary to assign the duties of the Commissioner of Charities and Corrections to other offices.

I look forward to working with you this year. In these next few weeks we have a chance to meet some pressing needs for our state. We also have a chance to do more. Bob Kerr said he understood why Franklin Roosevelt listed his occupation as a planter of trees. This is the time for taking a determined look into the future. This is the time for renewing the pioneer vision that built our state. Let us resolve that this legislature will be remembered as one which planted seeds for the future harvest.

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.