

State of the State
Governor Henry Johnston
January 1927

TO THE JOINT SESSION AND FELLOW CITIZENS ASSEMBLED:

An analysis of my own feelings on this occasion reveals a profound sense of the weight of the responsibilities which assuming the office of Governor places upon me, and a consciousness of the weakness of my own powers as compared with the standard of their requirement.

I am filled, indeed, with a sense of appreciation and thanksgiving. I am grateful to this assembled multitude for their presence here and to the rank and file of the people of Oklahoma who by their very voice at the election made this event possible.

We have assembled to change administrations. How beautiful it is in American life that we are governed by our own consent; that rulers, judges and legislators are commissioned for an interval and then by process of law and the will of the people withdrawn from official activities and retired to private life without a disturbing element or a thought of bloodshed or revolution.

A peculiar characteristic of the American people is that of restless haste, intensive progress. Numerous and melancholy are the instances wherein the people, with immoderate and intemperate haste, have clamored and become dissatisfied because the remedies which they desired were not forthcoming as from a magic wand.

Humorous and melancholy also are the instances when a new administration has been sadly obstructed by those who have recently been in power.

Unto these I drop the timely and solicitous petition that the first class accord their desires with the due and orderly processes of the Constitution and with the law-making and the administrative power. And to the second element I suggest that they can best prove their worthiness to have been entrusted with the power which once was theirs by remembering that in the ranks of private citizenship the honors they have borne should be a continual guarantee that they themselves shall prove the best example by maintaining respect for the law and honor for those in official station.

Before the magnitude of the undertaking which I this day assume, I humble myself, and ask that I may be given the wisdom, the rectitude of purpose, the zeal for the right, and the divine guidance to discharge the solemn functions of chief magistrate of the State and chief counsellor to the legislators with safety and decorum, as the friend and representative of the people. Such being the feelings with which I assume the station to which I have been called, it is in a spirit of thankful participation in a splendid privilege that I pause to turn my fervent supplication to the source of all good and perfect gifts, the Ruler of Rulers, who presides in all proper councils and deliberations and assemblies of men.

May our Heavenly Father bless and prosper this occasion and pour His sweetest benefactions upon this assemblage.

May He animate our hearts with sympathy and love, one toward another.

May we be constant in our fealty to Him and steadfast in His service.

May He give us firmness of will wherewith to strengthen our good resolves and endow us with a competency of wisdom wherewith to execute His deep designs.

May the executive acts and the ministrations of the officers of this State express His will and accord with the divine plan for the people of Oklahoma.

May His laws find expression in the statutes of our State.

May the strength of the State be found in its fidelity to justice and may His judgments prevail in our courts.

May His gentle sovereignty reign in the hearts of our people.

May universal kindness become a daily practice among us and may peace and harmony gladden every heart.

When the day was new and my life was young, I cast my lot with Oklahoma. I knew and was a part of its territorial life.

On the 16th day of November, in the year 1907, at 12 o'clock Washington time, I stood near the steps of the Carnegie Library at Guthrie and witnessed the union of Oklahoma and Indian Territories, and the passing of territorial government. I witnessed the birth of the 46th State in the American Union, and the addition of the 46th star to the National emblem.

I commingled with and knew its people. I participated in that history-making epoch. I shared in the activities. I joyed in the result.

A new State was born, a commonwealth annexed to the Union. Great and illustrious men were called into power, and with marked ability and becoming dignity they guided the destiny of the State. I am also mindful of the worthy and illustrious men who, as their successors, have preceded this administration, and of the splendid progress, growth and development which their wise policies have brought to our State.

Sec. 2 of Article VI of the Oklahoma Constitution reads:

"The Supreme Executive power shall be vested in a Chief Magistrate, who shall be styled 'The Governor of the State of Oklahoma'."

It shall be my purpose as such officer to dedicate my time, my strength, and should the occasion arise, my life, to the service of the State.

Remembering that it was the trust of the people of Oklahoma which has placed this power in my keeping, I shall, insofar as compatible with the demands of other public duties, be accessible to the petitions of all.

The following analysis expresses my conception of my official attitude:

To govern, or preside, has been the destiny of men of every type. The fool and the sage, the weak and the mighty, the vicious and the good, the timorous and the brave, the craven and the martyr. It has, however, been the fortune of but few to govern with distinguished excellence. The consciousness of power universally produces one of two alternative. It either begets generosity of mind and cautious gentleness in its exercise, or it generates a subtle poison whose symptoms are egotism, arrogance, hauteur, cunning, deceit, littleness, oppression, and excess. To learn that obedience and authority go hand in hand, that he who is chief must be servant of all, is the initial step to progress.

Order and obedience are the chief requisites of a happy and successful State. And the way to these is found in the sympathy of the people for the policies of the Government. Only those novations of progress are wise which are in fact drawn from the aspirations and practices of the people, and which express their ideals when in their better temperaments and in their holier moods.

The way, therefore, lies in the direction of popular enlightenment, in the moralization of the people themselves, in their understanding of the divine purposes of their laws, the genius of their own government, and their free participation in the exercise of its authority.

Let us be forever aligned on the side of progress and reform, but enact nothing for which the people themselves are not reasonably well prepared.

It has often been claimed and too often justified that a political platform is a mere means of getting into office.

Let me assure you that never in my history have I broken faith with a constituency and up to this time I have an unbroken record of having carried out every pledge and platform made to the people. And that you may know that my personal promise and declarations, as well as the platform covenants of the party upon whose ticket I was elected, shall be in good faith written into our laws and carried into execution, I here and now renew the covenants, and declare unto you that, without mental reservation and without evasion, subterfuge or deception, they are each and all scheduled for administrative attention, that they may be carried into full and faithful performance.

The people of this great State have by their ballot commissioned the Legislature and this entire corps of officers to execute a sacred trust.

Our Commission

They have delegated authority to us. The campaign platform and the campaign issues constitute the commission and letter of authority with which we approach the State Capitol. That we may measurably approximate the standard of their expectations, with consecration to the task, let us labor like the trusted agents and faithful servant the people believed us to be when we received the commission.

The first policy to which I invite your attention is the necessity of improving our school system.

The time has arrived when the State must no longer temporize with the common school question. The children of the poorer school districts are entitled to the same opportunity as those of more favored localities. While the need of standardizing the length of school terms is great, it at the same time furnishes a golden opportunity for service. Let us provide relatively equal opportunity for the education of the children in all the districts of the State.

From a National standpoint, education in the United States lacks coherence, unity and system. And a condition now obtains which is not altogether creditable to the government or to the American people. I favor memorializing Congress to create a national department of education, whose officers shall be friends of the public school system of the United States, and whose head shall have membership in the cabinet of the President.

The United States is the only first class nation on the face of the globe without a national university. Oklahoma should take the lead by memorializing Congress to provide for and establish a national university at Washington.

It would seem to accord with history and precedent and with the due proprieties of this occasion for me to allude not only to the principles but also to some of the leading policies which should govern during my administration.

First: Justice demands that the essential revenues of the State should be derived from the business which organized systems of government build up and sustain and from those who under such system abundantly prosper.

A common sense of honesty also dictates that in imposing the burdens of supporting the State, the same should be apportioned with approximate equity and a reasonable degree of accuracy. And this shall be a guiding principle of my administration.

Turning now to our policy and practices, glaring inequities and inconsistencies in the present tax laws of the State become apparent. Our Legislature should tend to equalization therein.

It is evident that for carrying out an extensive road program and the improvement of the schools and the general educational system, additional revenues will be required. It is also evident that in no event should there be an increase in the tax of any person, property, or right now paying a just burden of the expense of government. We must attain the result by taxing

those classes of persons, business and property that have heretofore enjoyed immunity by trick, artifice, subterfuge or legal or administrative favoritism. And it is rather plainly apparent that enough property and persons of this class are readily discernible within the State to produce the revenues required and at the same time afford a reasonable reduction on ad valorem taxes.

Third. With respect to election, the people are not only ripe for a change in tow important particulars, but they are weary almost to disgust at unseemly abuses. The administration must correct both. We should first enact legislation which will provide with certainty the honesty of every count and the return thereof. Second. In our effort to establish popular government, we have made so many State Officers elective, that 75 to 90% of the voters go to the polls wholly uninformed on the name, reputation, residence and past history of at least one-half of the candidates on the ticket. The relief as to this point should be two-fold, the first and more important of which is that a number of officers we now elect should either be appointed or made heads of some bureau or commission of some department of the State Government.

Fourth. Our present court system is not meeting the requirements, and the most grievous of all our complaints is the long delay and the elements of confusion which have existed in the Supreme Court for the last five or six years.

It is time to take drastic measures to remedy this evil, and the same should be done by Constitutional amendment along the lines indicated by the Oklahoma State Bar Association.

Fifth. We are faced with the necessity of taking care of our State institutions, providing for their growth and expansion, meeting them with the spirit of friendship and yet with that guarded restraint which shall have due consideration for economy and substantial frugality in our expenditures.

Sixth. We pledged to the people efficiency and economy in the administration of affairs and promised that there would be no increase and if possible that there would be a decrease in ad valorem taxes. We also promised no unnecessary or improper increase in any other variety of taxes. We promised to curtail waste and extravagance wherever discovered.

Seventh. We promised conservation of natural resources, bona fide efforts at re-forestation, terracing, and use of proper and economical methods of restraining floods and safe and conservative methods looking to the impounding of surface water and providing for irrigation. And at the same time promised an absolute repeal of those unwise burdensome and oppressive provisions which authorized the issuance of bonds against the lands and endangered the homes of our valley farmers.

Eighth. It shall be my pleasure to anticipate the rapidly settling condition of our State and to purchase parks, playgrounds and outing reserves and to adopt the wise and progressive policies of the Isaac Walton League in Propagation and preservation of wild life.

Ninth. Wise as are the provisions for the care of the widow and the orphan, but steps should be taken to extend their terms to numerous cases now excluded from those benefits.

Tenth. The Oklahoma statutes respecting the desertion of wife and children by able-bodied husbands and fathers, while in some respects excellent indeed, are not sufficiently comprehensive. And the same should be re-written in the light of the statutes of other state, with a view to protecting those dependent persons against outrages upon their dependency.

Eleventh. In the matter of prison administration and the treatment of convicts, first, let me remind you that the worst abused power in the State has been that of the pardon and parole system. It has been used as the football of politics and of caprice, or the expression of emotion and sentimentality, and occasionally for the corrupt motive of betraying justice and selling the trust of the people for sordid consideration of money or other things of value. And this points with steadfast, ominous certainty to the necessity of creating a board of pardons, with due restraints against the capricious or improper use of the executive's power of clemency.

The object of conviction and punishment of crime is fourfold:

1st. To every cause there is an effect, and a broken law carries within itself the inherent justice of a penalty. The first object, therefore, is to punish, and that because of the crime.

2d. To restrain the criminal from further crime.

3d. To act as a warning and example unto the others.

4th. To afford the State the opportunity to work reformation in the heart and mind of the offender.

It shall, therefore, be my policy to give full consideration to all four of these elements. I recognize, however, that the fourth specification, namely, REFORMATION, has, in the history of prison administration, been largely obscured. In recognition of the fact that the greatest good to humanity is rendered thereby, I shall endeavor to bring reformation into its rightful place. This will, in addition, bring the greatest saving to tax money and the highest public service.

Twelfth. We are proud of the Workman's Compensation Law, proud that it was in Oklahoma that the first constitutional workman's compensation law was written. It was a master stroke in behalf of humanity. But like all other discoveries, experiment and physical test disclose mechanical and fundamental errors which in themselves point the way to improvement. With sympathy for the vast number of our injured workmen in the fields of industry, we must take greater care for their safety and security, provide for their wants and add greater protection in their hour of need.

Thirteenth. The history of strikes in the United States and other nations conclusively proves the great industrial loss and economic waste of these turbulent methods of handling disputes between the capital and labor. For all other controversies which reach the breaking point, society has long since decreed that courts of justice or their equivalent should take charge of the emergency and administer the proper remedy; but for the wrongs of oppressed labor or for the settling of disputes and bona fide contentions between capital and labor, our humanity still resorts to the strike, the lockout, armed men and brute force.

Though we approach this problem with uncertainty and trepidation, yet understanding, kindness of purpose and a sympathetic heart should enable us to work out a reasonable and just substitute for the present crude, dangerous, expensive and disastrous methods.

Fourteenth. The abolition of wasteful policies should obtain in all the architectural and engineering work of the State.

Fifteenth. We stand committed to a thorough policy of law enforcement, to sobriety and the exclusion of the use of intoxicants from the Statehouse and from all public business. We shall in good faith carry out this pledge.

Sixteenth. The public forum, the pulpit, the bench, the bar, are deeply concerned in the crime wave. It springs from many causes, some of which are basic, but its most powerful aid, its fortress of security, is in our method of administering the criminal law.

Through influence, money, delay, and sharp practice the criminal laws are too often made a farce and outraged justice cries out in the streets and lifts up her voice in the sanctuary of our courts. Let us speed up the trials in criminal cases and take the steps necessary to bring lawbreakers to justice.

Seventeenth. We renew the pledge to the people to use our utmost efforts to remove politics and political influence, place hunters and pie grabbers, from the control and disturbing influence they have so often heretofore exercised over the State University and other educational institutions.

At this point, however, it is well to remember that institutions which are receiving the shelter of being removed from politics, should themselves keep the faith and not permit institutional blocs to so entangle them in the politics and policies of the State as to endanger the welfare of the institutions or bring disrepute upon the State.

Eighteenth. The Cotton growers experience with the crop and market of 1926, the recently shattered fortunes of livestock growers, the wreckage of the wheat farmers of 1922 and 1923, the increase in farm tenancy, the withdrawal of unwise and occasionally vicious governmental policies, abetted by incapacity, negligence and indifference on the part of the various States, fundamentally endangers the life and welfare of our republic.

To meet this condition, we have set out in some detail a program of farm relief, which it shall be my pleasure, as your spokesman, to devise and carry into execution.

Oklahoma, together with the great West and the agricultural parts of the Nation generally, has suffered from (1), the constriction of credits; (2), the contraction of the currency; (3), banking discrimination against us; (4), extortion by excessive tariffs levied in the interest of manufacturing favorites, and the people have been emburdened with worse than war-time prices on necessities, while (5), products have been pressed downward under adverse and unscientific marketing conditions. (6), Our National administration has cruelly destroyed international commerce.

Nineteenth. The people and the State have been denuded of power in the snatching of authority by the Interstate Commerce Commission from the railroad and corporation commissions of the States.

Twentieth. The highly organized carrying or transportation industry has been specially favored by the authority issued to them by the Federal Government to consolidate into large and powerful groups.

Twenty-first. The transportation industry has also been made the beneficiary of the highest freight and passenger rates and the highest percentage of profits in their history, carrying with it rate discriminations against every location in this State.

Twenty-second. Patriotic duty and public necessity compel the farmer to produce a surplus without which the money grabbers of the world could corner the market, extort conscienceless prices from the whole people, starve the poor, oppress the labor that creates the product, and destroy our international commerce and obliterate our balance of trade. Thus the question of the surplus becomes primarily a public problem involving the matter of storage and of markets, and is therefore a public question.

Twenty-third. The gambler in futures, the speculator in farm products, plunders the producer and the consumer alike.

While primarily these and numerous others are governmental problems, the State should courageously lend its cooperation to their solution.

Twenty-fourth. Transportation facilities at present demand hard-surface roads, to keep pace and step with the requirements of the age and time. No plan of advancement is complete which fails to take into account the necessity for building and maintaining an adequate State-wide hard-surfaced road system.

Oklahoma is developing an advanced highway program. We have pledged that this program shall be carried out to the end that a comprehensive system of State-wide intercommunicating hard-surfaced highways shall be constructed or provided for under the supervision of a State highway department. Neither this administration nor any department or branch thereof shall enter on a period of destruction, but, holding fast to that which is good, must develop a program on a more safe and sane foundation, with greater economy, with greater efficiency, shortening the "detour" period, and expediting the building of such roads.

The enumeration of the peak-points-of necessity is not designed to exclude many others to which, in due time, public attention will be called.

The foregoing program is for the entire official family.

Unto my fellow officers I shall give, and of them I ask, personal friendship and that mutual relation which gives as well as reposes, confidence, and which receives as well as gives counsel and admonition. In our relationships with those who come for official consideration, I ask that friendship be given its just recognition and proper sway, but that in all affairs of the State we remain devoid of favoritism, that impartial judgment may always prevail.

Let every one of our official family remember that first he is a citizen, and that to be a citizen is greater than to be a governor or a Senator. Official duty, therefore, involves not only the full and faithful performance of official obligation, but that as a citizen, sharing the common lot of all, the officer should be loyal to his government, prompt in the performance of the duties he owes to society, faithful to the Constitution, respectful to the laws, and conscientious in their observance and execution.

As a man among men, may it be the lot of each to be freed from hasty passion and ill-governed temper and to merit the reputation of just and upright manhood, of irreproachable integrity.

We and each of us combine these three—office, citizenship, and manhood. But the greatest of these is manhood.

Practicing the virtue of temperance, habitually careful, cautious and prudent, may each of us have the fortitude and patience to do the right, though it may be both unprofitable and unpopular, and to wait with an abiding faith that justice and honesty are in themselves their own reward and in God's good time will ultimately prevail.

To this high standard I make no claim of personal attainment. But to me it is an ideal that shines, like Bethlehem's star, above the birthplace of the holiest impulses of my heart, the noblest aspirations of my soul.

Let us foster a spirit of public inquiry in a free and open manner. To that end I shall, on the one hand, spurn the lobby, and on the other, extend to every legitimate business the hand of friendship and earnestly ask that they select representatives to meet at the State-house in conference with the Governor and other State officers and with members or committees of the Legislature, to talk over or advance any ideas or proposals they may have for better and more efficient and economical government in this State. It is my earnest desire to obtain the aid and assistance of the business men and leaders in all lines of industry in the up-building of Oklahoma.

In order to make effective the provisions of this program and to carry out this plan of procedure it is vitally necessary that all forces work in harmony, that unity of purpose which is so necessary to success be not marred or hampered by the intrusion of selfish interest and that the high ideal of service to our State and its people, whereby all are benefited and civilization given a forward step and an upward impulse, shall become a reality.

Listen not to the seductive whisper which would dull your ears to the call of duty or swerve you from the path of light.

First—Get the vision.

Second—Eliminate selfish interests.

Third—Study deeply the experience and mortality tables of men and measures and from these discern that service to humanity is the way of life.

Fourth—Work for the general good.

The Legislature has been in session one week, and has considered some matters of importance. There will be much yet to follow. Let this address be considered a message of general outline, foreshadowing some of the work to be done.

But no Legislature nor any other deliberative body ever rises to the occasion, unless it represent the spirit and in fact speaks as the audible voice of an intelligent and aroused citizenship.

I say unto the people of the whole State, as a solemn verity, that in the last analysis, the final ultimatum of your own domestic, industrial and economic welfare, reposes in the keeping of your own hands. I commend you to a faithful reading of the papers, to a discussion of legislative conduct in your social gatherings and ever in your casual meetings. Gathered in your Sunday Schools and Churches, your lodges and court rooms, freely discuss the news from the Capitol, criticize and comment fearlessly, supply your representatives and other officers with letters, telegrams and petitions, call them if necessary, over the telephone, for upon your wakefulness and eternal vigilance will depend the genuine success of this administration. It will likewise enable you to determine the advisability of returning or retiring those whom you have entrusted with official prerogative.

At the foot of a belfry, on July 4th, 1776, an old man caught the signal that the Declaration of Independence had been signed.

Upon the bell which that day flung abroad its message was inscribed from the tenth verse of the 25th Chapter of Leviticus.

“PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT
ALL THE LAND TO ALL
THE INHABITANTS THEREOF.”

That command of the Almighty refers to the jubilee or completion of the Sabbatical Year of seven times seven, which equals forty-nine, and the fiftieth year was the year of universal freedom.

No man is wise enough to know the inspiration of the bell-founder who chose that motto, nor why that particular bell fell into the hands of a particular watchful son-of-liberty, who should send from its shining throat the golden message of liberty.

Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, lived on for a full Sabbatical period and died on July 4th, 1826, fifty years from the day and hour that the Declaration was signed.

May we not hope that the spirit of the Sabbatical Year survives in our own civilization. And that, on each fiftieth year from the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the triumphant soul of Thomas Jefferson draws near to those he loves, and that the echoes of old Liberty Bell again “proclaim liberty throughout all the land and to all the inhabitants thereof.”

May we who have the faith be permitted to believe that the 1926 election was the visible manifestation of the third return of the Sabbatical Year and the response of the Democracy to the soul-cry of Thomas Jefferson unto his own—“Awake, Oh ye heritors of the Liberty I bequeathed unto you, and in my name

“Proclaim liberty throughout
All the land to all
The inhabitants thereof.”

Respectfully submitted,
HENRY S. JOHNSTON,
Governor.

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.