

**State of the State
Governor Roy Turner
January 4, 1949**

*Mr. Lieutenant Governor,
Mr. President of the Senate,
Mr. Speaker of the House of Representatives and
Members of the Joint Session:*

The program enacted by our Twenty-first Legislature has been widely acclaimed as one of the best and most constructive in the history of our state. This praise is well deserved, and to the members of our Twenty-first Legislature, who are here today, I wish to extend my warmest and most sincere commendation. You did the work, and to you belongs the credit.

I believe that the people of our state have definitely shown that they have growing confidence in their legislators.

By making it possible for you to serve without great financial sacrifice, our people have shown the same sympathy in your problems that you have shown in theirs.

I believe that their confidence and their sympathy has been based largely upon the constructive approach our recent legislatures have made to Oklahoma's governmental problems.

I am confident that every member of our Twenty-second Legislature is intent upon performing a genuine public service – the kind of public service that will be worthy of the confidence our people have reposed in you – not only by reason of your election, but also by reason of the new and greater value that they have placed upon your service.

I am here today to perform my constitutional duty of placing before you my recommendations for a governmental program for the next two years.

As I did while I was a candidate for office, and as I did in my message to our legislature two years ago, I wish to make full acknowledgement of your law-given right to approve, revise, or reject whatever recommendations I shall make.

Certainly I shall recommend only those things, which I sincerely believe will redound to the benefit of our state. Whatever I recommend will transcend purely partisan, political, district or sectional lines. I have always held – and I still hold – that we cannot make progress by counties or districts. Either we make progress as a state, or we do not make progress at all.

And now, before going into the discussion of our problems, I want to add that during the last two years I have enjoyed – and I have been very grateful for – a warm and cordial relationship with the members of our Twenty-first Legislature.

I wish to establish and maintain that kind of relationship with the members of our Twenty-second Legislature. The problems of the people in your districts are my problems, just as they are yours, and I shall welcome every opportunity to work with you in solving them.

TAX POLICIES

The legislative session which is opening today may well bear with greater import upon Oklahoma's future than any session we have ever had. I see this session as a cross-roads session. Either we shall yield to the mounting pressure for greatly expanded governmental services – a course, which would be marked by skyrocketing taxes – or we shall do our utmost to steer a middle course, providing essential services with what resources we have at hand, without destroying the equilibrium of our state tax structure.

We are well aware of the fact that our budget requests far exceed our revenue. Budget requests show that we could use \$30,000,000 more than we shall have in providing desirable governmental services. However, I do not believe that this legislature desires to take the responsibility for placing upon the people of our state the additional tax burden necessary to finance all requests for appropriations.

And there is another very important factor which should be considered in the establishment of our state tax policy for the next two years. That factor involves the preservation of the confidence of our state investors, who will be watching this legislature to see whether tax reforms adopted in the past are here to stay, or whether Oklahoma will revert to a tax system, which is punitive to business and industry.

The worth of the legislation enacted two years ago is reflected in the business gains we have made during the last two years.

For example, in the face of a 10 percent national decline in the number of corporations chartered during that period, Oklahoma has made a gain of 10 percent.

We have obtained new industries, and our home industries – instead of moving to other states – are now expanding. Since 1946, Oklahoma's manufacturing payroll has increased from \$130,000,000 to \$175,000,000, and by no means is all of this attributable to higher wages. During this period, Oklahoma has added approximately 13,000 employees to our manufacturing and processing payrolls. Meanwhile, our taxable valuation on new properties has increased \$20,000,000.

But, among many potential out-of-state investors – a definite air of skepticism remains. We can dispel this skepticism only by maintaining policies designed to produce a tax climate favorable to business and industry.

I feel that if we can finance our governmental operations during the next two years without resorting to large tax increases or to heavy new taxes, we shall not only have rendered a great service to the people of Oklahoma, but we shall also have placed our state in a position, which will merit the full confidence of potential investors.

In considering policies, which would improve our financial positions, we should keep two objectives in mind:

First, we should strive for a general tightening of our existing tax laws to provide for their more efficient application.

Second, we should avoid, as much as possible, the creation of new boards and commissions, which add to the cost of government, from the tax dollar.

Under our present tax structure we shall have approximately \$10,000,000 a year more to appropriate during the coming biennium than we had during the last two years. Because of governmental services, which have already been expanded – (in some instances by the vote of the people) – this additional revenue will not be sufficient to enable us to meet all potential requirements.

BUILDINGS

As a matter of policy, I believe that we should defer as much new construction as possible, making provisions only for buildings, which are essential to our emergency needs.

We cannot finance, or justify, in my opinion, a huge construction program during this period of extremely high building costs.

But we are facing what can accurately be described as a critical situation which has been brought about by deferred maintenance of our present buildings. A great deal of this

maintenance has been deferred since 1932, and this legislature will have my full support in devising a practical means of financing a program for the modernization and renovation of our present plants. High building costs will be reflected in this program, but I believe that the program is justified on the basis of its emergency character, plus the fact that such a program would provide greatly needed space at our various institutions and reduced maintenance costs thereafter.

COMMON SCHOOLS

Our two major financing problems involve state school aid and highways. We are well aware of both the demand, and the justification, for better financing of these two branches of government. In my opinion, if the wisest and fairest solution of these problems is to be affected, they should be considered together.

There is one most important factor, which makes the immediate consideration of school financing inadvisable. I am referring to the possibility – and the probability – of federal school aid. At this time, we do not know what form a federal school aid bill would take. However, we have good reason to believe that in writing a federal school aid bill, the Congress will take adequate precautions to prevent the states from shifting any of their school obligations to the national government.

If there is to be federal aid for schools, we shall want Oklahoma to be in a position to qualify for it. By writing a school aid bill before the Congress acts, we would be risking the possibility of placing ourselves at cross-purposes with national legislation. This is a risk we should not take.

The Council of State Governments, of which Oklahoma is a member, has advised us that 44 state legislatures will be in session during 1949.

Each of these legislatures will be facing the same problem, which now confronts us. Congressional delegations of each of these states will be fully advised of the urgency attached to federal action on school aid.

In view of this, we have reason to believe that the Congress will place this matter high enough on its agenda to make its disposition a matter of information for all state legislatures in session. I therefore recommend that action on our school aid bill be deferred for a reasonable time to avoid the possibility of placing our state in a position, which would make it difficult – or even impossible – to qualify for federal aid. I further recommend that – as one of its first acts – this legislature memorialize Congress for early action on this matter.

Meanwhile, I suggest that other matters pertaining to public education be considered. And we must not lose sight of the fact, that the primary responsibility for support of common schools rests with our local communities.

Property assessments have been raised, but are still below what they must be, if we are to have adequate local school support. The state cannot continue to pay an ever-increasing proportion of school expense, which should be met from local sources.

I urge a continuation of the reorganization plan, which was started by our Twenty-first legislature. I also ask that this legislature make provision for the correction of minor flaws which have developed in this plan. I ask your consideration of a proposal to establish larger school administrative units. This can be accomplished by making the transportation area the administrative unit for schools. But in establishing larger units we must see that unit-wide representation is provided.

We should revise and codify our laws relating to common school education in order to provide greater efficiency in the control, administration, and supervision of public education.

The revolving fund established by our last legislature for centralized purchasing of transportation equipment has resulted in a savings of approximately \$1,000 per bus. Without increasing this revolving fund, I recommend that our State Board of Education be given legal authorization to act as agent for schools, which desire to purchase transportation equipment on a cash basis.

We should continue the development of our facilities for vocational training by making it available to more boys and girls adapted to such training, especially in the fields of agriculture, home economics and trades and industries.

Training in trades and industries will grow in importance as the industrialization of our state continues.

I also wish to place strong emphasis on training in agriculture and home economics. Our 4-H and FFA organizations have made splendid records in national and international competition.

Yet, only 20 percent of those eligible are receiving 4-H and FFA training. Gradual expansion of this program would be a great boon to Oklahoma's future agricultural economy.

TEACHERS' SALARIES

It is imperative that further increases in teachers' salaries be granted. In this matter, I shall favor the most liberal treatment possible consistent with a balanced state budget.

In considering new rates of pay for teachers, we should also consider raising teaching standards throughout the state.

I recommend that authority, power and direction be given the State Board of Education (subject to judicial appeal) to set up and enforce proper and fitting standards of qualification for all teachers and administrators.

I also recommend that we establish a system through which our teachers will profit by staying on their respective jobs, rather than by transferring from district to district from year to year.

Experience and ability should be definite factors in every teacher's progress toward higher pay brackets, and, in revising our pay scales, we should definitely recognize the value of successful experience.

I further recommend serious planning toward establishment of a twelve-month pay plan for all teachers.

TEXTBOOKS

In the general election of 1946, our people approved the establishment of a free textbook program.

Our last legislature appropriated the sum of \$500,000, which enabled us to make a small start toward vitalization of the free textbook amendment.

I recommend the further vitalization of the amendment by financing new textbook adoptions to the full extent consistent with funds available.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Our institutions of higher education continue to do excellent work in their field. Although I do not believe that this legislature can meet their budget requests – especially as they pertain to new buildings – I wish to urge that the treatment accorded them be as liberal as our state law requiring a balanced budget will permit.

The cost of higher education is increasing rapidly. In view of this, I ask this legislature to give full consideration to Oklahoma's participation in regional education.

This plan offers economical means through which, in the future, Oklahoma students will have access to educational facilities in many fields which are not now available.

There is no question that our medical school stands in need of expanded facilities – facilities for which it will be difficult to pay. It is my recommendation that we explore all avenues of revenue, which our university hospital can provide for itself. I am advised that other states have made far greater progress in this field than has Oklahoma.

Since the Twenty-first legislature convened, Langston University has become an accredited institution and further improvements at that institution are desirable. I recommend that this legislature make provision for the establishment of a school at Langston University qualified to award Master Degrees, in education.

This can be accomplished by providing for the continuation of Langston's \$20,000 library appropriation, which is now in effect, and with the expenditure of \$25,000 a year for additional instructors in graduate work.

Inasmuch as many of our Negro citizens are qualified for – and desire – graduate work leading to M. A. degrees in education, this opportunity for their convenience and advancement should be provided.

HIGHWAYS

Our highway department has made a commendable record during the last two years. The impact of our highway improvements has been felt in every county of our state.

A summary of highway department work on roads on the state highway system – exclusive of farm-to-market roads – from January, 1947, through November, 1948, shows that 755 miles of new highways were completed, while an additional 239 miles is under construction.

These projects involved the construction of 191 bridges, of which 134 are completed and 57 are under construction.

In addition to this, reconstruction and special maintenance work on 3,991 miles of highways was completed, which special maintenance work on 993 miles is under way.

The total cost of these projects, including new construction and special maintenance, completed and under way, will be nearly \$42,600,000. This figure does not include routine maintenance, on which an additional sum of \$7,820,000 has been expended.

I wish to discriminate between special maintenance and routine maintenance. Special maintenance is designed to raise the standard of a road by reconstruction or replacement in kind. Routine maintenance is designed only to restore a road to a useable condition.

Our farm-to-market program has resulted in the completion of 1,152 miles of roads, costing \$8,708,000. Projects under construction cover 307 miles, costing more than \$2,800,000. There have been 149 bridges built on farm-to-market roads, and 42 more are under construction. Our farm-to-market projects, therefore, have aggregated 1,459 miles of roads, costing more than \$11,500,000.

In addition to this, contract lettings in December, and as of today, provide for 72 miles of roads and 16 bridges on the state highway system costing more than \$2,200,000 plus 191 miles of farm-to-market roads with 40 bridges, costing more than \$1,870,000.

Our farm-to-market program has made good progress as a result of finances provided by the ear-marking of one cent of our gasoline tax for farm-to-market roads.

I am advised that approximately one-third of our counties have made excellent progress, that approximately one-third of them have made fair progress, and that approximately one-third of them have made unsatisfactory progress due to slowness in submitting projects to the Highway Department.

This essential program should be expedited. I feel that it can be by eliminating the three-district road system, which now exists in each of our counties.

Economies to be achieved under a single county road building district are highly desirable and should result in a more productive road dollar. I favor the adoption of this plan together with an increase of one-half cent per gallon in our gasoline tax, for the construction of county roads on school routes and mail routes.

Inasmuch as this money would be used exclusively for rural roads, I further recommend that no agricultural exemptions be allowed on this tax.

We are aware of Oklahoma's precarious position in regard to federal aid as it pertains to diversion of our road user taxes. I ask this legislature to establish Oklahoma in a position, which will guard us against the loss of federal road aid as a result of diversion of road user revenue.

This can be done at the present time by ending the diversion of automobile and farm truck license revenues from highway uses.

I propose that these revenues be placed in our general fund, and that an appropriation equal thereto be made from the general fund surplus for use in highway construction and maintenance.

I would urge that this money be earmarked directly for highway department use, except for the fact that, if we were to approach the problem in this way, we would deprive our highway department of the use of funds from this source until March, 1950. This we cannot afford to do.

Automobile and farm truck license revenues are now earmarked for common schools. In depriving our schools of this money as a means of ending diversion, it is imperative that a like sum be restored to the schools in full through a general fund appropriation, and I recommend that this appropriation be apportioned to counties on the same basis as that used in the apportionment of the tag money in the past.

And I wish to make it clear that in appropriating such a sum from our general fund for schools, we are not justified in assuming that we have granted any increase in state school aid.

At this time, \$14,000,000 in primary road construction is programmed for 1949. This \$14,000,000 uses all federal aid for primary purposes available for 1949.

By adding an appropriation equal to tag licenses we would have a total of approximately \$20,000,000 in 1949, and not to exceed \$15,000,000 in 1950, for both primary federal aid and state aid construction.

All primary type roads now being built are 24 feet wide. Of necessity they must be from four to six feet wider than roads built a few years ago. They also are of better design. Labor and material costs have increased sharply. All of these factors contribute to the facts that roads being built now cost approximately twice as much as roads built in 1942. Even so, our roads costs are below the national average.

It is evident, therefore, that the present outlook for a road program is not encouraging. Yet, the demand and need for highways is so great that I do not believe we are justified in cutting our program very far below that which has been carried out during the last two years.

The construction of a toll turnpike, approximately 100 miles in length, again will be before our legislature.

At this time, a survey of this project is under way, and I shall have no recommendations to make until the results of the survey are available. However, I would like to leave this thought with the members of this legislature: if the turnpike is not built, we will be under the necessity of making very extensive improvements in the existing free road serving this territory. Funds for such improvements are not now available.

Such improvements would require a very large sum of money, much of which otherwise would be available for use in other highway construction.

MENTAL HOSPITALS

Liberal appropriations were made by our last legislature for our mental hospitals. Although these appropriations enabled us to make some improvements, our facilities and service in this field are far from adequate. Members of this legislature, who have visited these institutions, will vouch for this statement.

Most of the unfavorable conditions in our mental hospitals are the result of outmoded buildings, over-crowded buildings, and shortage of personnel. I feel that if we are to have an emergency building program and a building modernization program, these institutions – together with our state orphanage at Pryor – should have first call upon any funds made available for the purpose.

In some instances, our shortage of personnel is being caused by our lack of housing facilities for employees. I believe that this legislature should make a thorough study of conditions at our mental hospitals and should take such steps as may be necessary to remedy these conditions.

The administration of the mental health law enacted by our last legislature has revealed that some minor phases of the law, should be revised. This observation certainly is not to be construed as a reflection upon the work of our last legislature. Its handling of this highly technical matter has won the deserved praise of the National Committee on Mental Hygiene. Nevertheless, few laws have been written which could not be improved upon, and I am requesting attention to our mental health law on this basis.

PUBLIC WELFARE

Oklahoma is doing a tremendous job in the field of public welfare. This program is costing both the federal and state governments a great deal of money. However, our public welfare program has been greatly liberalized without an increase in state taxes.

Our Department of Public Welfare still depends upon our state sales tax for revenue, which is matched by federal funds. Sales tax collections have soared, and this, together with additional federal aid, has enabled us to increase our average old age assistance payments from \$42.18 to \$51.69 per month, since our last legislative session. The maximum payment now is set at \$58.00 per month as compared with \$45.00 per month two years ago.

Aid to the Blind and to Dependent Children also has been increased. Indications are that the increased payments to the aged, the blind and dependent children all can be maintained as long as sales tax collections continue at their present level and as long as assistance rolls are

stabilized. I feel that it is also notable that Oklahoma's ratio of administrative cost is the second lowest in the nation.

A few months ago, Oklahoma was in danger of losing federal aid in its public welfare program because case reviews were nearly 20 percent delinquent. I have been advised that this delinquency has recently been cut to less than 3 percent.

There is a segment of our population, not eligible for old age assistance, but unable to work because of illness or other physical handicap. The maximum assistance these people can receive from the state is set at \$14 per month. I believe that this maximum should be increased, but that there should be rigid supervision of this service.

Another phase of state welfare service involves our adoption laws. I ask that this legislature consider and act upon a report soon to be made by our Children's Code Commission.

I wish to take this opportunity to publicly commend the members of our Children's Code Commission for the work they have done in this field without resource to a state appropriation.

Oklahoma's high ratio of children receiving state aid is due largely to our laxness in permitting fathers to escape the responsibility for the support of their children. A general tightening of our child abandonment laws with provision for enforcement should have a place on the agenda of this legislature.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The use of Oklahoma's public streets and highways has become fatal to 500 persons annually. Many hundreds more are being injured. Property losses caused by traffic accidents are tremendous.

Public education and law enforcement are needed in any program designed to reduce our traffic fatalities, injuries, and losses. I recommend the enlargement of our state highway patrol to provide better traffic law enforcement. I propose that this expansion be financed by an increase in our drivers license fee to whatever extent is deemed necessary by this legislature. I also ask that the recommendations of our state Safety Council and of our recent Governor's Safety Conference receive your careful study and appropriate action.

AGRICULTURE

The improvement of our schools, our farm-to-market roads, and improved vocational training in agriculture, will be of definite benefit to our farmers, but I have another proposal, affecting agriculture, which I shall ask this legislature to consider.

This proposal calls for providing a vehicle for substantial expansion of our agricultural research program on a shelf-sustaining basis.

I shall not go into the details of this plan because they are complex and a description of them would require a great deal of time. I shall say, however, that many of our producers already have requested such a program and have indicated their willingness to pay for it on an equitable basis.

Our agricultural experiment stations are equipped to handle the extra work and can apply additional funds directly to research in products supporting the program. Several states have successful laws, providing for agricultural research and we shall have this legislation as a guide in our consideration of the ways and means of accomplishing the result desired in Oklahoma.

CONSERVATION

Conservation of our natural resources – soil, forests, water, minerals and wildlife – is of prime importance to Oklahoma. We now hold a high place among all the states in soil conservation. We have become known as the pace-setting leader in the conservation of oil and gas.

The federal government is now spending more than \$30,000,000 a year on the development of soil and water conservation in Oklahoma. This program includes flood control, irrigation, industrial and municipal water, hydro-electric power, recreation and navigation.

Our Grand River Dam Authority has undertaken a huge expansion, involving the production of additional hydro-electric power, which will prove to be of great benefit to our rural electrification program, and in obtaining new industries.

I ask that this legislature be alert to – and act favorably on – all practical proposals, through which our overall conservation program can be improved.

VETERANS

Representatives of our veterans' organizations wrote a splendid veterans' program, which was enacted by our last legislature.

Representatives of these organizations again have prepared a legislative program, and it is my recommendation that we again comply with their requests to the full extent of our ability.

INSURANCE

Certain proposals involving modifications of our Workmen's Compensation Insurance law will come before this legislature.

I ask that you consider these proposals in a double light – first, how they can be made effective without working any injustice on Oklahoma labor; and second, how they can be made so that they will contribute to our general effort toward obtaining new industry.

PENAL INSTITUTIONS

In regard to our penal institutions, I ask that you give full consideration to a report made by a special prison committee authorized by the legislature.

This report is designed to help us develop a better prison system, a highly desirable objective.

I also ask that some study be given to making it possible for our out state penal institutions to sell more prison made goods to state institutions. I recommend this as a needed economy measure.

Additional and better qualified supervisors of prison industries are needed to assure better prison made products.

I wish to invite our legislature's attention specifically to the further improvement of our parole system, which I believe can be achieved by providing probation or parole officers for all appropriate courts. This service as recommended would be self-financing from criminal fines.

PARKS AND ADVERTISING

I ask this legislature to provide for a continuous program of development at our state parks. I also request that our industrial advertising program be continued.

PURCHASING

I favor a general tightening of our state purchasing methods. I do not wish to refer to this as centralization of state purchasing because no state ever has achieved complete centralization.

I believe that any such plan should be modified to fit Oklahoma's specific needs. I recommend that this legislature provide a greatly improved purchasing system under the State Board of Affairs – a system designed to provide the efficiency and the savings found in good private purchasing methods. The program will require good buyers, good specification writers, inspectors, and testing laboratory facilities. I do not favor disturbing our state departments, which have established sound purchasing methods.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

A great deal of fact-finding work has been done by our legislative council and by the special committees authorized by the legislature. Research and reports on many phases of state government have been compiled and are available for the information and the use of every member of the legislature.

This work should prove to be of great value and assistance to you in your deliberations. Members of our legislature, who serve on the council and on the special committees, as well as to a very large number of private citizens, who gave their time to this work, are to be most highly commended.

Now, in presenting these matters to you, it has been my purpose to suggest only what I consider to be some of the most pressing phases of our legislative program. There are other matters, which will require your consideration, and I shall deem it my duty to place them before you from time to time.

With so much work at hand, it is obvious that we must immediately establish unity of purpose and action, if we are to have a progressive and productive session.

I believe that this legislature will receive more public attention than any other. This is a wholesome situation, and I shall do my utmost to encourage it. During the last two years, the newspapers, which publish my weekly newsletter have increased from 144 to 177.

During the same period of time, radio stations, which broadcast my regular state program, have increased from 14 to 33, and there is a possibility that this number will show further increase during the next few weeks. I shall continue to use the media regularly to acquaint our people with the immensity of the problems, which now confront our state government, and with the progress we are making toward solving these problems.

Meanwhile, I wish to repeat, in substance, something I said in addressing our legislature two years ago.

It is this: Each and every member of our legislature will have my full and complete cooperation in every effort to write a program, which will be of benefit to our state, and which will stand as a credit to this legislature.

There will be no formality or protocol in the Governor's office. We shall be far too busy for that. Formality and protocol are not conducive to teamwork, and teamwork is what we wish to achieve.

I shall need your counsel and advice, and I shall extend to you any and all assistance, which is within my power to give. All of us are here with a single purpose, and that is to be of maximum service to the people of Oklahoma. Working together, I know that we can – and I know that we will – achieve this purpose.

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.