



2011 Inaugural Address of Governor Mary Fallin

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Governor Brad Henry, Lieutenant Governor Lamb, Chief Justice Steven Taylor and members of the court, Constitutional Officers, Senate President Pro-Temp Bingman, Speaker of the House Steele, Honorable Members of the both the Senate and House, other elected officials, distinguished guests and the wonderful citizens of the GREAT state of Oklahoma, I stand before you today humbled by the deep honor and privilege to serve as YOUR Governor.

On November 16, 1907, Oklahomans gathered in Guthrie on the steps of the Carnegie Library in much warmer conditions than today to witness the historic inauguration of Oklahoma's first Governor, Charles Nathaniel Haskell. For the twenty-seventh time in our state's remarkable history, Oklahomans have gathered once again to witness the orderly transfer of governmental authority – and participate in history.

Yes, today we inaugurate the first female Governor in Oklahoma, and that is indeed historic. But just like the first 26 Governors of Oklahoma, I am foremost an Oklahoman who respects, embraces and celebrates our conservative values, the presence of divine guidance, the blessings of freedom, the privilege of self-government and the power of the people.

Pioneers who ventured to our state were in pursuit of a new life...a better life...for themselves and their families. They embodied the Oklahoma Spirit, a spirit of industry, creativity, ambition, and a sense of community. And through their wisdom, foresight and courage, prairies became productive farmland and towns were built on a once barren wilderness.

Our state has always been blessed with an abundance of natural resources, but our people are truly our greatest resource. It is our people, and that Oklahoma Spirit, that transformed an empty frontier into a bountiful state.

Our history brims with that infectious spirit of optimism. Yes, we have confronted difficult times - injustices, dust bowls, oil busts, a great depression, bombing and now a great recession. But Oklahoma has always emerged stronger because of the tenacity and resiliency of our people.

The most treasured words in our nation's Constitution are the first three, "We the people." For those of us who are elected to public office, we must never lose sight of the indisputable fact that we serve at the pleasure of the people and for the benefit of the people. Government is the ultimate people's business. We are elected to solve problems, not create them - to bring common sense thinking to the process – to listen to the people, and we not only have a responsibility, but also an obligation to keep them informed. We report to the people, and Oklahomans shall and will hold us accountable, as indeed they should. While many in Washington DC have forgotten these truths, I can assure you today that YOUR new Governor will live this truth every day I am blessed with the privilege to occupy this office.

While I was honored to represent the will of people of the 5th District in the United States Congress for four years, words cannot truly express how pleased – how glad – how thrilled I am to be back in Oklahoma. I could not agree more with the famous words of Dorothy in one of my favorite childhood movies, The Wizard of Oz, when she impassionedly declared "There is no place like home." Well, for me, there truly is no place like Oklahoma, and I am proud to call it my home. I am a daughter of the Sooner state – Cowboy educated and my favorite colors are orange, crimson and blue – make that Thunder blue. And, make no mistake about it – no one will work harder for the wonderful people of Oklahoma than YOUR 27th Governor.

As the new Governor of Oklahoma, allow me take a moment to express my appreciation on behalf of the people of Oklahoma to Brad and Kim Henry for their eight years of dedicated service to our state. Governor and First Lady, please accept our thanks for your service. And like you, Governor Henry, I am blessed with a wonderful spouse who was my loving and supportive partner every step of the way during the campaign and will continue to be so as we embark on our newest life chapter together. Wade, I love you, and I thank you. And, let me also say thank you to all our children. We are proud of each of you and love you.

Now, as we move into the second decade of the 21st century, we find ourselves once again confronting new issues and challenges. Yet we are also discovering new opportunities. And I am convinced there is no issue or problem that cannot be resolved by the talents and ingenuity of our people.

Our nation is slowly emerging from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Our state has fared better than most during these difficult economic times primarily because of the strength of our energy and agriculture industries. But, we have been impacted and too many Oklahomans are either unemployed or underemployed. That's why my administration will focus on policies that create jobs, that build a better and more productive business climate and that get Oklahomans back to work. And it is

crystal clear in my mind from my experience as a public official, we do not need more government, what we need is better government – and more efficient and effective government services.

Our state is now confronting yet another challenging budget year. But with that challenge comes the opportunity to seriously examine how we conduct the people's business. It is time to ask the probing questions, the "why" questions – why have we done it like this for years and why can't we consider a different approach – a new approach – a modern approach. And, yes, we must be courageous and willing to move forward each time we find a better way, a better solution for the benefit of the people of Oklahoma. We will undertake new methods and we will constantly strive to improve what we do and how we do it. And let there be no misunderstanding – we will act, because the status quo is unacceptable. My administration will be focused on creating jobs and growing our state economy, not our state government.

As YOUR Governor, I can assure you I will work with the leaders in the Senate and House to pursue common sense policies and programs capable of delivering greater efficiency and higher value to our citizens.

I look forward to working with Senate Pro Tem Brian Bingman and House Speaker Kris Steele to put forward a pro-jobs, pro-growth agenda and build squarely on my vision of a vibrant business climate. A climate of enterprise where ideas flourish, new companies are created, existing companies are expanding and businesses from around the globe are locating to Oklahoma because this is where they can succeed.

Indeed, in Oklahoma what we need are more jobs, not more taxes – let me add – more private sector jobs. We must make certain Oklahoma's business climate can attract new capital, new investments, which produce new jobs and retain existing jobs. And while we want new companies to locate in Oklahoma, we also want Oklahoma companies to grow.

For them to do that, we must make improvements in our regulatory environment, tort reform and our workers compensation system, so that employers can create more jobs rather than dealing with red tape and government bureaucracy. And while we are on the subject of improvements - plenty has been spoken and written about incentives. Here is the bottom line: tax incentives that produce jobs...stay; Incentives that do not produce jobs... go.

And if we are going to lay the foundation for long term prosperity and job growth....we must not overlook the importance of education. We must do better in Oklahoma. Too many children are dropping out of school. Too many students are ill-prepared for college. Too much money is spent on administration and not enough money is spent on educating our students. As YOUR Governor, I will work hand in hand with the our new State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the new Secretary of Education to examine our current system and determine – with the insights of parents, administrators, teachers and students – what can be done to seriously and legitimately address the shortcomings in our public education system and, in many school systems, reverse years of decline.

We have pockets of excellence in education across our state – in K-12, CareerTech and higher education. But what we need is a canvass of excellence throughout ALL of Oklahoma. We cannot fall short in creating that canvas or reforming education, because the price is too high.

That is why in my administration, mediocrity will never be acceptable. The measuring bar is moving ... and it is moving up.

As today's ceremonies come to a close, I'd like to ask for the help and guidance of my Heavenly Father. I pray for wisdom, discernment and strength for those of us chosen by the good people of Oklahoma to legislate and administer.

I'm also going to continue to draw on the wisdom I've been blessed to have received from countless Oklahomans. Years ago, I had the opportunity to meet a man named Ed Vesey and hear his story. Ed is believed to be the last person living who was aboard the USS Oklahoma during the attack on Pearl Harbor. And I've been thinking a lot about something he once told me.

Ed, who is 90 years old and lives in Moore, told in vivid details his personal story of events on the USS Oklahoman that fateful day. He still feels the pain of the loss of his good friend and roommate during the surprise attack. He remains appreciative to this day to his fellow midshipmen on the USS Maryland who pulled him from the debris and body filled waters. After the Navy, Ed finished college and became an engineer and traveled around the world on business, and had a large family with his wife. Ed has lived a full life and his motto is simple:

"Life is one whale of an adventure. Grab hold, and go with it"

So, Ed, on this day, when we begin a new important – yet promising - adventure, we will heed your advice. We are grabbing hold of the opportunities and challenges before us as we go to work for the people of Oklahoma; and today marks our start. So let's get busy!

Thank you for being here today. God bless each one of you and may God Bless the Great State of Oklahoma.