

Governor Mary Fallin State of the State

February 5, 2018

Lieutenant Governor Lamb, statewide elected officials, Speaker McCall, President Pro Tem Schulz, members of the court, honorable senators and representatives, Cabinet members, tribal leaders, distinguished guests, and citizens of Oklahoma –

It is my honor to present to the second regular session of the 56th Legislature my State of the State address and the final one of my administration.

I would like to take a brief moment to thank my fellow Oklahomans for the honor and the opportunity of a lifetime to serve as governor of this great state. My family and I have really loved meeting so many outstanding Oklahomans from all across the state.

Words cannot express how much I appreciate the sacrifices of my entire family, their love and support over the many years I have served the state – my loving husband, Wade, and our combined family of six children. Two of our children are here – Christina was just three years old when I sat at the back of this chamber over 27 years ago as a freshman legislator and my son, Price, was four months old. He's out of state on a business trip. My stepson, Adam, and his wife, Elizabeth Christensen, are here with us today.

I also want to express my deep gratitude to my ‘extended family.’ That extended family includes three groups:

- My faithful prayer warriors;
- My Cabinet members and staff, past and present, and;
- My informal advisory board composed of dozens – maybe hundreds by now – of Oklahomans who intercept me when I’m getting a Diet Coke at the On Cue on Northwest 23rd Street. They make sure I slow down to listen to their wisdom, their concerns and their common sense.

I’d also like to thank all the legislators and elected officials for all of your work. We’ve set many goals since 2011, accomplishing much, and still have more opportunities ahead of us. Legislators, it’s great to see you again. What has it been – a little more than a month since you’ve met here?

Seriously, I appreciate all of your time and efforts during the past year, and agreeing to come to my calls for two special sessions. I feel we are making progress. I understand how difficult and challenging this past year has been for you.

Tradition tempts me to take this opportunity to reflect on the past seven years on what has been my blessing to serve as governor of the state we all love. But today is not for yielding to tradition. Today is not to look over our shoulder, but to press on ahead for a better future.

And that, my friends, is the last you will hear from me today about the previous seven years. Let’s focus on the future and make sure we recognize and embrace the opportunity we have in front of us.

The constitution of the great state of Oklahoma makes it my duty today to provide a budget and to report on the health of the state. Neither duty, however, will be fulfilled by what I say here. The budget and the health of our state are not mine to determine. Instead, both will be decided by what this Legislature does in the next couple of weeks.

Let us make no mistake about it: This is an historic, defining moment before us. What we do as a unified group of people elected by the citizens of our state could be considered the moment in time that changed Oklahoma.

We are in a unique period as this legislative session begins with a concurrent special session. We also are at a special point in Oklahoma's journey because the prospect of a brighter path forward is so very near.

Only in Oklahoma, would a group of private business and community leaders care enough to work so tirelessly in a bipartisan manner to sculpt a series of budget and reform compromises that can bring new life into an entire state and put us on a better course.

Only in Oklahoma, can we gather in this House of the People to demonstrate yet again what we know is at the heart of Oklahoma. The basic truth is this: When the hardest challenges come, when a crisis threatens, that's when Oklahomans rise as one to show our state, our nation and the world the Oklahoma Standard.

Now, it is our solemn duty to raise the torch and show again that the Oklahoma Standard lives. And when the people say we can't do it, and we can't solve our budget crisis and give our teachers pay raise or we can't bring better accountability – let's show them we can!

Tradition also again tempts me now to talk you through the elements of the budget package you will be considering. Instead, the proposed budget is detailed in the materials provided to you. By now we are all familiar with the choice before us with the Step Up Oklahoma plan.

Yet, for all of us, there are parts of what is proposed that we may want to embrace, and there are parts that we may want to reject. Our goal this session should be to fix our chronic budget crisis and address important policy goals.

We know there are no perfect solutions or plans. We know there is no perfect legislation. But, we also know that compromise is at the very core of the budget on which you will vote. Just as compromise formed the foundation of America, I believe compromise can fortify the foundation of Oklahoma.

As we consider recurring revenue, let's be clear – it is not revenue alone that gets us to a place of budget stabilization.

We have to include reforms as well. My budget includes money for agency performance and accountability efforts, which will ensure public resources are being spent appropriately and help address public confidence in state governance.

Our state is at a crossroads. The actions we take will be a game-changer.

It is time to decide which future we want our families and children to have.

One path would be to continue year after year with an air of uncertainty that consumes our thoughts, drains our hopes – like the old saying of robbing Peter to pay Paul – then Paul runs out of cash. If we are to effect change, we can't keep doing the same old thing and expect a different result.

That path will lead to more chaos at the Capitol. We have to ask ourselves – What kind of future do we want to have? Do we find it acceptable to have four-day school weeks? Is it acceptable for Texas to steal our teachers and leave our classrooms short of teachers? We all know Oklahomans expect us to beat Texas – on and off the football field!

Do we just accept that without a budget fix, we will just cut provider rates and other essential health and human services for our most needy and vulnerable citizens? Do we believe the only solution to helping our mothers and fathers and sons and daughters and friends who are not violent, but need substance abuse treatment, is to warehouse them in prisons? Or will our state be more successful if we help them put their families back together, get jobs, and become taxpayers?

Do we think this is just how it is and it's the best Oklahoma can do? No. Absolutely not. We can and we must do better.

We need to dig down deep in our souls and recall the Oklahoma Standard of neighbor helping neighbor, as we did during the Murrah federal building tragedy. We need to restore the attitude that we are Oklahoma Strong. We can fix it – like we felt after the Moore tornadoes struck. In the face of crisis, Oklahomans come together and solve the problem.

The people of Oklahoma expect excellence and demand we solve our state's problems. That is why we were elected – to lead, roll up our sleeves, get to work, solve problems, and find solutions.

This is a defining moment for our state. We have two clear choices – We can continue down a path of sliding backwards, or the second path is to say “Enough is enough! We can do better! We deserve better! Our children deserve better!”

This is a great opportunity to address ongoing challenges, to strengthen our state's image and brand.

As we know, close to 100 Oklahomans from across the state have developed a plan called Step Up Oklahoma to put our state on a fiscally stable path, bring about much-needed reform, give our teachers a \$5,000 pay raise, and break the gridlock. We don't want to be like Washington, D.C.

Because of the urgency of the situation, this outside group, in a very short time, has endorsed both reforms and revenue. They support ideas that are against their own financial interests in order to further our state's interest. They have come together to help this legislative body unite behind a plan to move Oklahoma forward.

They did it because they love Oklahoma. We love Oklahoma. Now it is time for us to step up, be courageous, do our jobs, and pass this plan!

Without passage of this plan, there are important policy initiatives that can't be advanced. Initiatives that each of you are passionate about, whether it's education, criminal justice reform, health and human services, transportation, or restructuring inefficient government entities.

All five former Oklahoma governors, who are still with us – Republican and Democrat - have endorsed this plan. They have shown us what it's like to put aside partisan differences and join together for the good of our state.

The time to act is now.

No more delaying. No more putting things off. No more kicking the can down the road. No more addressing long-term budget problems with short-term solutions.

We can do this, and we must do this now!

Governor George Nigh said the Step Up Oklahoma plan would “help our state break free from the boom and bust cycle that harms all Oklahomans.”

He said the very nature of compromise means that Oklahomans on both sides of the aisle may not like everything in this plan, but we must come together as Oklahomans and move past partisan politics that stand in the way of progress.

Governor Frank Keating said: ‘Paralysis and dysfunction are not credible public policies. Revenue failures damage the credibility of the state. The civic and business leaders have thrown us a lifeline.’”

I’ll conclude with some final thoughts because this is a time for action. We’ve talked too long with no permanent solution. In fact, when members of this Legislature cast votes on the budget in the days ahead, my prayer is you will remember your fellow Oklahomans’ dreams and hopes of a prosperous state.

Before you cast your vote, focus on the teacher who will see a \$5,000 salary increase not just as a way to pay bills, but as a validation of their vital vocation, and a business community that sees how committed we are to a strong, educated workforce.

Or perhaps, as you reach for the vote button, you may want to picture in your mind a caregiver who seeks the state’s help so an elderly mother or father can live out their final years with security and dignity

Or maybe – before your vote – think about the young college students in this chamber. Much of their future and that of an entire generation of Oklahomans rests with the decision you make when we appropriately fund education.

Remember the important policy initiatives we have implemented to be “smart on crime” with treatment for those with substance or mental health issues and how it affects our state’s success.

Too few Oklahomans are getting the treatment they need for substance abuse and mental health issues, and are instead winding up in our criminal justice system.

We need to stop warehousing moms and dads, sons and daughters in prison when many just need substance abuse treatment.

We need to continue our focus, and can do so without jeopardizing public safety. There are bills proposed by the Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force that are smart, data-driven solutions to safely and prudently fix our criminal justice system. Send them to me to sign.

Remember all the road and bridge construction you’ve seen across the state and the good image it gives Oklahoma when we invest in its infrastructure.

Remember our desire for safe homes and communities when we make decisions this session that may or may not affect our prison population, which is at 112 percent capacity.

Remember the great policy strides we’ve made to enact the Department of Human Services Pinnacle Plan to meet the needs of abused or abandoned children. We now have more safe, loving foster care homes. In fact, Oklahoma has the highest number of gains in foster care homes in the nation!

Ronald Reagan once reminded us America is too great for small dreams. Friends, Oklahomans also deserve more than small dreams. They need solutions to allow their big dreams to come true.

Before us is a rare opportunity to bring forth an enduring reality for a promising future. Oklahomans deserve nothing less.

Now is the time to summon courage.

Now is the time to invest.

And now is the time to do the people's work.

Let's make Oklahoma a special place where we and our children and their children choose to live.

May God guide you, may God bless you, and may God bless Oklahoma!

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