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OKLAHOMA STATE TREASURER

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The Treasurer's Report

By State Treasurer Scott Meacham

What a difference a few years can make. From the depths of a recession to a strongly rebounding economy, Oklahoma, in its true pioneer spirit, has weathered the storm. As the state song says, "You're doin' fine Oklahoma!"

Just two years ago, we were in the second year of a revenue shortfall causing across-the-board, mandatory cuts in state agency budgets endangering education, Medicaid programs and many other vital state services. Businesses were closing and workers were being laid off. Today, things have dramatically improved as budget surpluses have resulted from Oklahoma's improving economy. Businesses have reopened and rehired.

The recently completed session of the Oklahoma Legislature resulted in even more good news for Oklahomans. I am proud to have been able to work closely with Governor Brad Henry to accomplish several very important initiatives.

Sometime this fall, Oklahoma taxpayers will receive rebate checks from the state totaling around \$100 million. Another \$100 million will be invested for our state's future in the EDGE research endowment and related programs. To help further grow our economy, the corporate capital gains tax on Oklahoma-based properties was eliminated to encourage more capital investment in Oklahoma.

We were finally able to begin addressing our road and bridge maintenance problems with a five year plan to pump an extra \$170 million each year into maintenance. We have taken a giant step to improve our higher education system with a \$500 million capital improvement program.

A program to help National Guard members and their families, Operation Homefront, was recently signed into law by Governor Henry. It provides a \$250,000 life insurance policy for Guard members, a 50-percent tax exemption on military pensions and an income tax check-off for Guard families.

On the health care front, the Legislature authorized an Oklahoma Smart Card to enable low income families to purchase prescription drugs at a discount by taking advantage of manufacturer discount programs and network savings.

To help improve education in Oklahoma, lawmakers passed the governor's Achieving Classroom Excellence (ACE) initiative. The first year of a four-year plan to raise teacher pay to the regional average was approved. Full-day kindergarten was fully funded. The ACE initiative also contained reforms designed to promote student achievement and school accountability. To encourage college attendance, the state will now pay for Oklahoma high school students to attend up to 12 hours of college during their senior year.

Since Governor Henry took office in 2003, I have been honored to serve on his cabinet as Secretary of Finance and Revenue and as Director of the Office of State Finance. I have worked closely with the governor to help him improve our state's economy, create jobs, improve health care and bring excellence to our education system.

On June 1st, at the request of the governor, I left the Office of State Finance and assumed additional responsibilities by accepting appointment as State Treasurer. Robert Butkin, our previous State Treasurer, resigned to take a job in the private sector. Robert accomplished many great things during his tenure; but most importantly, he restored trust and integrity to the office.

I look forward to carrying on that tradition of maintaining public trust and high ethical standards. As the state's banker, I look forward to calling upon my experience as the former Chief Executive Officer of First National Bank & Trust of Elk City.

You deserve nothing less than to have complete confidence in the management of your tax dollars. I will work hard to make sure your trust is maintained.

I will also work to make sure other programs affiliated with the treasurer's office – unclaimed property and the Oklahoma College Savings Plan, for example – provide the services you deserve.

This session, we convinced the Legislature to substantially increase the state tax deduction for contributions to the Oklahoma College Savings Plan. Now, families can deduct up to \$20,000 each year for contributions to the plan and the earnings grow tax free!

Our unclaimed property program helps reunite Oklahomans with lost money. In the weeks ahead, we plan to become more proactive in finding the owners of lost property.

It is all part of serving you – the people of Oklahoma. I am honored to serve as your State Treasurer. I look forward to improving upon the current operations and maintaining the trust and integrity of this office.

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