

Mayor Kathy Taylor
State of the City

(Presented at the Tulsa Metro Chamber annual State of the City luncheon)

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Thank you David for that great introduction and happy 100th Birthday to ONEOK, a great Tulsa Company.

Thanks to the team at the Tulsa Chamber, along with their corporate sponsors. I am honored you are here.

I believe you are here because you care not only about the **current state of our city** but, more importantly, the **future state of our city**.

Being Mayor is a challenging job but a satisfying job—the City is a very diverse business—with core services ranging from building roads, ensuring we have safe water supply, to retaining businesses.

City employees are on call 24-7 but I know when I put my head on my pillow at night—our team has had a positive impact on the lives of Tulsans.

This is the responsibility we feel every day as City employees, knowing the decisions we make or fail to make will impact future generations.

Over the last nine months, during the campaign and after I was elected, I have spent time *listening*. I *listened* to what Tulsans see as the needs of our community—as you shared your concerns, hopes and dreams with me for this city. So I will talk to you about the state of the city—**current** and **future** based not solely on my vision but your vision.

That's important because moving this city forward is *not* just about budgets, it is *not* just development projects, and it is *certainly* not just politics. It is about Tulsans; your spirit, your hope and your concerns.

There are so many things happening in our City but I want to focus on the top three priorities you have told me are important:

- Economic development
- Education and,
- Public safety.

I want to summarize the past five months since I took office and brief you on actions we are taking to address the issues and introduce you to just some of the people who are making it all happen. And as I highlight both the actions and the people, please know these actions and these people are simply representative of many more things that are happening to move this city forward.

This is where we started. I was elected April 4th and took office six days later. We faced a budget deficit and a budget presentation deadline 20 days later, and in the meantime I was advised the new BOK Events Center was \$65 million over budget.

We had City employees who had taken wage and benefit cuts for several years and are now 9 to 38% below market wages.

And you understand how critical it is to retain quality employees. It is critical to a city's success just as it is to your businesses.

We had fairly flat sales tax collections particularly when compared with our neighboring communities, but that volatile 2 cents sales tax has remained Tulsa's sole source of funding for general operations.

Our first order of business was to build a team from inside and out. We improved communications at all levels - weekly meetings with city council, weekly emails to employees. With the help of 3 new team members, people at the beginning of their career—Christian Helm, Monroe Nichols, Josh Davis—we began to plan a the first ever Neighborfests, respond promptly to citizen complaints, filled over 120 board positions from all corners of this community and planned a summit on gang intervention. And all the while the seasoned veterans at the city worked with me to figure out how we meet the serious budget challenges that face this city.

We didn't get here overnight and the challenges won't be conquered overnight, but we are working towards solutions—as a team.

Let's start with Public Safety

Police and fire (representatives) tell me they struggle to recruit and retain officers because of pay.

We have a commitment and a responsibility to provide ambulance service to every corner of this city, but because of a change in reimbursement rates several years ago that was not addressed, Tulsa is subsidizing EMSA \$1.3 million this year and even more next year in order to keep the service. Until we find a long-term solution, the problem will continue.

We have a police force that is losing officers at a rate of over 3 per month. We reinstated academies as a priority in our budget. But due to elimination of past academies, police overtime was at \$3.2 million last year. If we expect our city to grow, and address the crime rate we need to increase our academies *and* our pay. That will require some hard choices.

The choices are not between what is right and wrong, it is between what is right and right. The City budget is no different than your business or household budget. It is finite and there are areas that are non- core city services that we will need to take a hard look at continuing to provide.

We must also pay our firefighters and all other city workers a competitive wage to keep the city safe, provide the basic services we are responsible to the public to provide, and I believe strongly that we must pay them competitively because **it is simply the right thing to do.**

We are working on the solution but as you know it means either increasing revenues or decreasing expenditures. Increasing revenue on 2 cents is a long process. It means more development, more retail sales in our City or increasing the amount we pay to run our City. Even if sales tax collections were up 5% next year—which is what Oklahoma City is experiencing—that would only raise an additional \$7 million for our general operating fund.

With salaries already 77% of the general fund, the budget decisions will be difficult. I am working right now with my management team and the City Council and with employee groups, including the FOP to find a solution.

But, we have recognized that public safety is everyone's responsibility and nowhere has that recognition been more clear than through the actions by ministers in our community.

Let me give you two examples:

When three young kids were shot as a result of gang violence this spring, Reverend Warren Blakney took the lead to immediately organize a dialogue on gang issues. He brought ministers together to develop a plan on how they, using their time and their resources could impact the issue.

And then there is Rev. Donald Tyler. I remember so well attending services in his church one Sunday after a young person in Tulsa was killed due to gang violence. He called every young person to the front of the church. He then looked out over that congregation in a way that only he has, and charged everyone there, as parents and as a community, to look at these children's faces and promise to keep them off the streets, promise to keep them out of harms way, and promise to provide a safe respite for them in their homes.

Rev. Blakney and Rev. Tyler didn't wait for government—they didn't wait for someone else to solve the gang problem in our community. They didn't wait for more police officers to be hired. They didn't wait for new programs to address this awful violence. And they didn't stand back and hope the problem would simply go away.

They just stepped up and took the lead on bringing people together as a community to address this issue head-on.

And as a result of their inspiration, I am hosting a gang summit in Tulsa that will take place over the next two days. This summit is bringing together the Mayor's office, the US Attorney and hundreds of others who deal with our kids everyday to find a solution and stop this awful needless violence. Know that there are many others who have followed their example and are making an impact to make life better in Tulsa.

Great opportunities exist in the area of economic development. We have competitive economic development tools in this city but they have been scattered. We spent two months this summer meeting every Friday with TED - Tulsa Economic Development. The enthusiasm was amazing and we listed all the tools the City has to help businesses grow and stay in Tulsa. We will be putting them together in a virtual tool box so companies know what we offer and how to access it. We have organized a new department of economic development headed by a great business professional- Don Himelfarb, and the City's tools are all in his toolbox. Don's decades in business are already making an impact on this City. The future economic health of this city depends on supporting entrepreneurial growth, growing the companies and the jobs for tomorrow's economy.

With our tools in hand, I think **our city** is poised for growth and prosperity.

Attraction of workforce is the single biggest issue for current employers. Part of that attraction is about quality of life.

Thankfully, the new BOK Events Center is back on track and back on budget. Because of the hard work of the City finance and public works team, a creative solution with our architects, builders and engineers, and our partnership with County and regional officials, this world-class Cesar Pelli designed structure will be completed. It will be built as originally envisioned thanks to the investment of private partners---to date, over \$16 million of additional private funds have been pledged.

We have a new head of Workforce Tulsa, Jay Stephens, with an exceptional background - and of course we are working with our new Tulsa Chamber president Mike Neal. Don, Mike, Jay and I are working together to address the needs of business—and ensure that we capture the expansion opportunity in our core business clusters including energy and aerospace.

I know that our challenges are many as we work to rebuild, rehab and retrofit our city for the future. But we must not just be satisfied to build the highways that connect our city, we must dare to build the digital highways that connect Tulsa with the rest of the world. With this in mind, we are analyzing how we move this city into a modern wireless environment.

My (IT) team, headed by Ben Stout is working within city government and also partnering with the private sector to assess our capabilities and inventory our infrastructure regarding wireless technology. This will serve as a future business tool, but also as a vital and necessary part of our infrastructure for public safety and emergency communications. Building wireless technology into our city's future assets will help us retain and attract young creative minds to fill our workforce and invent the companies of tomorrow. The work by Step up Tulsa to make our city known for innovation is a priority.

We are seeing young people return to Tulsa, with two great young professional groups that have added energy to this city.

An example is Elliot Nelson. Elliot grew up in Tulsa and returned to invest his time here as an entrepreneur. His businesses have become an anchor of the revival of downtown's Blue Dome District. Elliot, please stand and let us say thank you for your contribution to making the quality of life better in Tulsa!

Bold new ideas are being talked about for collaborating with our higher education institutions on innovation, developing the river, major investments have been made for downtown residential development – and all have a common thread-building more public-private partnerships, because I know that the city cannot accomplish great things alone.

But economic development is fueled by a quality workforce, so education is a vital priority in my administration. Susan Neal fills the inaugural position of Director of Community and Education Initiatives in the Mayor's office and we are working on initiatives to support education and jumpstart economic development.

The first is early childhood education. The good news is that Tulsa is already a nationally recognized leader. We have a 30-year history of community and now private commitment to keep Tulsa at the forefront. Because of the *private* sector's leadership and commitment, I intend to leverage city resources when possible in support of early childhood education programs. I am proud to say to **any family** with young children, you **need to be living** in the city of Tulsa. We have more three star, high quality child care centers than anyone else in this region.

Second is community schools. Community schools make school the center of support for children and adults. Our five Tulsa community schools have proven to increase achievement and reduce dropout rates. We will work with our school superintendents, including our new Tulsa public school superintendent, Dr. Zolkoski, our school boards, Step Up Tulsa and the Metropolitan Human Services Commission, to expand this successful model across our city.

Third is in the area of drop out prevention. Tulsa as a community simply must respond to its high school drop out rate of 29%. That is nearly double the state rate of 15%. Not only is this a travesty in the lives of these children as individuals, this statistic has huge implications for our workforce

As Mayor, I have the opportunity - and the responsibility - to bring together our community's resources to address this pressing issue. I intend to partner with our schools to convene parents, civic leaders, the health, education, and business communities as well as other policymakers to develop the needed support and infrastructure that we must have in our community to turn this tide.

THIS IS NOT AN OPTION.

Fourth - We are identifying legislative initiatives that we will vigorously support for higher education research opportunities which translates into jobs for Tulsans.

We must also partner with our excellent career technology institutions to make sure they have the resources needed to train our workforce in the high tech and applied fields that are in demand.

Finally, at all levels of education, I intend to engage my office, this city's resources...and I intend to engage you. Much like public safety, education of our kids is a community's responsibility.

I challenge each person in this room, each person who watches this broadcast- sign up to read, mentor or tutor a child in one of our classrooms. It takes a small part of your time and can change the life of a child, change the future of our community. Sign up sheets are on your table and at the door. And yes, I am literally taking names. It begins here, it begins with you and me and we must commit together today to forming a team to ensure all of our children have the opportunity for a good education, a good job. I know I talk a lot about teams, and I have just one more to talk about.

As I have said before, as Mayor, I have recognized that we have a dedicated group of city employees. One such person is Homer Lawley. Homer started working for the City 22 years ago and despite the many titles Homer has had over the years, everyone just says that he is a jack of all trades. He can build anything. He can repair anything, and can get any job done. But above all of that, he is respected by everyone who knows him. This summer my office hosted ten neighborhood celebrations in parks around the city. Homer worked in the extreme heat with other volunteers to set up everything - all with a big smile and a great attitude. I am here to say- Homer Lawley understands public service. And along with the 4,000 other city employees, he comes to work everyday with the purpose of serving the people of Tulsa. He makes life a little better for all of us. Homer, please stand so we can say thank you.

I hope each of you—as you see our City employees—will reach out your hand to say thank you!

The **future of our city** is filled with challenges but where there are challenges, there are great opportunities. Our city is struggling with an antiquated funding mechanism that limits our resources. We need more firemen, more police officers, more engineers.. the list goes on and on. But we cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed and mired in inaction. Despite those needs, we must work to implement bold plans.

We live in a city that a century ago was built by visionaries who did not think small. They built a city with steel, concrete, hard work and vision on a piece of unspoiled prairie. That city ultimately rose out of the ground to become the oil capitol of the world. **We were built** to compete shoulder to shoulder with the established economic capitols of the world. We can do that again- and we should not settle for less than what our founders envisioned.

We live in a city that is marching into our second century with our backs straight, our shoulders squared and our heads held high.

We live in a city that is poised for greatness. Downtown is developing. Our economy is diversifying. Entrepreneurship is thriving. People are buzzing with optimism.

We live in Tulsa, Oklahoma-- a city of unprecedented opportunity. It is up to each of us to have the courage to seize that opportunity. It won't be easy but nothing worth doing is **ever** easy.

So, I challenge you to set aside any fear of failure. Be willing to work hard for this City and take risk. Embrace change, bring innovative ideas to the table and work as a team across any perceived barriers to make big things happen. It is incumbent on us, each generation living in this City, to make sure we take full advantage of the opportunities presenting themselves so that we can leave the next generation of Tulsans standing on solid ground; so that we leave the next generation with the knowledge that we never wavered from building a city that reflected our values and our humanity.

Today the **current state of our city** reflects a strong sense of team spirit, a unity of purpose across political parties with our elected officials including our City Council and County Commissioners, and our state and federal lawmakers.

I challenge each Tulsan to roll up your sleeves and work with me as a team to make life better in our city. If you do, the future opportunities for Tulsa are limitless.