

2019 State of the City Address by Mayor G.T. Bynum

Thank you for that introduction and to all of you for being here today. As any of us in public service knows, you don't do it alone. Being mayor of Tulsa is the most challenging, rewarding, all-consuming job I ever expect to have. And I am thankful for the love and support I receive from our family. I want to recognize several of them who are here today: my wife, Susan; my Mom, Suzie; and the Dean of the Former Mayors of Tulsa, still taking care of business every day at the age of 92, my grandad - Bob LaFortune.

One of my favorite traditions we've started in recent years is 918 Day. We established 918 Day in 2018 to set aside one day when we celebrate the broad diversity of remarkable things happening in Tulsa. And as part of that, for the last two years I've taken a 24-hour tour of Tulsa. From midnight to midnight, I visit as many places and see as many Tulsans as I can in 24 hours. It is an incredible experience to see so many parts of our city – to see the bakeries at Bama running all night long making 2.5 million biscuits in Tulsa every single day, to see the sun rise over the city from the TPD helicopter while it is on patrol, to visit kids in schools and historic sites around the city – and there is never enough time to see everything you want to see! It makes you appreciate how much Tulsa has to offer.

But there is a human side to taking a 24-hour tour. The first year, it was awesome. I spent days in advance preparing, getting lots of sleep, hydrating, and I just rode this wave of positivity all day. I wasn't even tired at the end of it.

This year was different. I got cocky. I went with a group of Tulsans on a delegation to Israel and returned home at 4 p.m. on September 17. On the way home, I picked up some delightful stomach ailment. And so, when midnight rolled around 8 hours later I made the genius decision that the only way I was going to get through a 24-hour tour on 918 Day would be to not eat anything.

Let's fast forward to Hour 23. It's 11:00 at night and Councilor Lakin and I are at the Mohawk Water Treatment Plant. And I want to give a shout-out to Councilor Lakin because he's been there for the span of these tours both years. He climbs mountains, and he takes 24-hour tours with me. So, Phil and I are standing there in the water treatment plant and these wonderful techs are walking us through the water flow charts on a computer screen, and all my bad choices finally catch up with me. I feel like I'm going to faint. So, I think to myself, "If I keep moving my feet around on the floor I won't pass out."

And in retrospect, I am pretty sure to these poor guys, it looked like the mayor had not been drinking Tulsa tap water – staggering around while they are trying to make a presentation! Thankfully, Phil intervened, asked a few informed questions and shooed us on our way – to see the first issue of the Tulsa World come off the press and end the day.

All of that to say, this team we have at the City is the real deal. We lean on each other in times of need – sometimes, in my case, literally. I want to thank my partners in all we are going to talk about today: our City Auditor, Cathy Carter, and my colleagues on the Tulsa City Council. Councilors Hall-Harper, Cue, Patrick, McKee, Fahler, Dodson, Decter-Wright, Lakin, and

Kimbros are a selfless group of legislators and I am thankful for all the time and heart they put into their work on behalf of the citizens of Tulsa. I feel so fortunate to work with an extraordinary City Council as mayor. Even with four new faces on the Council since last year, we have continued the team approach that allows us to avoid the unproductive bickering of the past and instead work together to move Tulsa forward. Councilors, thank you.

And it's not just the elected officials. We are so fortunate that some of the best minds in Tulsa have chosen to dedicate their talents to public service at the City of Tulsa. Their work is garnering attention all around the world.

And speaking of international interest in what we are doing in Tulsa, I want to say what an honor it is to be joined today at the State of the City by Japanese Consul General Hideo Fukushima. Thank you, sir.

The reality is, we're doing so much on so many fronts that there is no way I can cover it all today. I encourage you to follow me on Facebook at Mayor G.T. Bynum if you want to keep up to date on everything we are doing.

I also want to thank all of you, and especially the Tulsa Regional Chamber, for your support of the Improve Our Tulsa vote on Tuesday. When you love a city as much as I love Tulsa, it is incredibly moving to see your community rise up in support when improvements need to be made. And the citizens of Tulsa did just that. We have established such a strong working partnership between the City of Tulsa and the Tulsa Regional Chamber, which impacts much of what I am going to talk about today, but you saw it on display in that historic margin of victory for Improve Our Tulsa on Tuesday.

Our work at the City of Tulsa is focused on one over-arching mission: to make Tulsa a globally-competitive, world class city. We seek to accomplish this through a focus on three main areas: making Tulsa a safe city, making Tulsa a city of opportunity, and empowering this generation of Tulsans to build the city they want to leave to the next generation.

When it comes to making Tulsa a safer city, the City Council and I have prioritized Police Department staffing.

In my first month as mayor, we had 735 police officers in our department. The City Council and I funded record-sized academies in each of the last three budgets. This has been the greatest surge in staffing for the Police Department in Tulsa history, and today we stand at 842 police officers - a 14.5 percent increase that represents 107 net additional officers keeping Tulsa safer.

I'll tell you one of my favorite things to attend as mayor are our academy graduations for the Tulsa Police Department and the Tulsa Fire Department. When you see young people, who have chosen a career dedicated to saving lives, it is inspiring to see them start it - and to see their proud families cheering them on. My face hurts from smiling at the end of those ceremonies every single time.

And yet in our history as a city, we've been too fast and loose with their job stability. We're the second largest city in the nation that is forced to rely on sales tax for operations. Sales tax is a volatile revenue source, and time and again in Tulsa we've seen an economic downturn, people spend less money, and then we're forced to cut back on our largest expense – public safety staffing.

Those are the worst meetings I ever attended as a city councilor – seeing the spouses and children of dedicated public servants pleading for their loved one not to be laid off, and we simply had no money saved to prevent it. That is why our Rainy Day Fund is so important, and why I am so grateful – to my colleagues on the City Council, who allowed us to use budgetary savings over the last two years to triple the size of our Rainy Day Fund, and to the citizens of Tulsa who on Tuesday made our city one of the first in the nation to have a dedicated funding source for its Rainy Day Fund. It will make our city safer and it will make an unpredictable job a little less unpredictable for every one of the men and women who work to keep us safe.

We recognize we need to be smart on crime too. That has led to a number of groundbreaking public safety initiatives under way.

One of the most exciting is the Tulsa Sobering Center, which we operate in partnership with 12&12. One of the areas where the City of Tulsa is leading the nation is in the use of data to address problems. In my first year as mayor, we identified that the number one thing we arrest people for on municipal charges is public intoxication. What most cities find is that the people they arrest for public intoxication either have a serious drug or alcohol problem, or they've made a once in a lifetime mistake. Yet in Tulsa we always threw them in jail with violent criminals, receiving no treatment for the root cause of the problem.

We knew there had to be a better approach. So instead, when an officer identifies someone who is publicly intoxicated they now offer them two options: they can arrest them and take them to jail, OR they can take them to the Tulsa Sobering Center where they will sleep it off for 10 hours. At the end of those 10 hours, they are offered drug and alcohol treatment. If they want it, they get it. If they don't, they are put in a cab and sent on their way. In our first year of operation we found that, even when intoxicated, most people select Door Number Two when given that option.

So far, over 1,100 people have utilized this facility - giving them an opportunity for treatment rather than punishment. This approach saves our officers time and it saves the taxpayers money because going to the Sobering Center is less expensive than going to jail. Better treatment, better use of officer time, better use of taxpayer dollars. The Tulsa Sobering Center has been an innovative success in its first year of operation.

Our community policing program continues to develop as we increase manpower levels. Over 75 different initiatives are being implemented by the Tulsa Police Department through this program. And I want to take a moment to say how proud I am of the men and women of the Tulsa Police Department. I think we have the best police department in the nation, and it is because they are always seeking out continuing education and new training they can pursue to better serve Tulsans in an increasingly complex job. They have initiated training to identify and assist people

suffering a mental health crisis, they are going through implicit bias training, and just last week we celebrated the fact that over 700 officers have gone through the Dementia Friendly Tulsa training curriculum which will help them better serve our neighbors with dementia. They are also very focused on young Tulsans, in particular through two great programs called Project Trust and the Police Activities League – each of which focuses on engaging students from across the community and building bonds between them and police officers at an early age.

And we've also seen great success in the first year of our innovative program for reducing panhandling – the Better Way program. Tulsa was one of the first cities in America to try this approach. The general idea is that our partner, the Mental Health Association of Oklahoma, actively seeks out panhandlers. When they find them, they offer them an honest days' pay for an honest days' work - cleaning up litter, doing maintenance work in parks, beautifying public spaces. The key to the program, though, is not day labor. That's just to get them in the door. The key for the program is that lunch is provided and during lunch social service agencies come out to interview the participants and find out what they need.

To date, the Better Way program has assisted over 1,300 people who have cleaned up over 48,000 pounds of trash. One third of the participants enrolled in services and over 200 have found employment through the program thanks to a job counselor funded by the Tulsa Area United Way. The most exciting aspect of our first year, though, is that in testing out this approach we had nearly identical results to those found in Albuquerque – the first city to try this out. So, we've been able to show what can be done for people in different cities in different parts of the country. Those results have encouraged other cities around the country to try this too, and so because Tulsans were willing to try something different there are people around the nation who will receive the help they need to get off the street and lead more rewarding lives.

But the Better Way program is not a one-size-fits all solution. We recognize we need to do a better job of addressing homelessness in Tulsa, so this year – thanks to a partnership with the Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation – we hired the City of Tulsa's first-ever Housing Policy Director. She will draw on the expertise of so many in our community who are engaged with this work and will draw together the resources of the City government to address homelessness and other issues around housing in Tulsa in a comprehensive way.

Tulsa has also received international attention this year because we opened the search for graves from the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. I am grateful for the community leaders who are assisting in that work, and for the expertise of the many historians and technical experts who are guiding it. If we expect this to be a city where every Tulsan feels safe, then we have to be a city that works to solve every homicide - whether it happened yesterday or 98 years ago.

The greatest threat to public safety that we faced in the last year was in May. That's when we were hit by an earthquake. Then we were struck by tornados. Then our rivers began to flood, and we were struck by more tornados while we were flooding.

Throughout the response, involving people from Sand Springs to Bixby, from unincorporated Tulsa County to Jenks, you never heard anyone say, "that's not my job". You never heard

anyone say, “I’m in charge here”. We worked as a region, and we handled everything thrown at us as it came - day by day until the waters began to recede.

This is what the Tulsa Metro can do when we set aside our gripes and work as a team in the best interest of our neighbors.

The embodiment of that spirit of collaboration were the first responders and field crews who worked around the clock to protect our neighbors. On behalf of the hundreds who worked tirelessly throughout the event, I’ve asked representatives of just a few of the various organizations to join us today, but there are people across this room who represent organizations – from PSO to the Red Cross – that helped in this historic effort. If you represent one of those organizations, if you represent a local community that pulled together, if you represent a member of our Congressional delegation that made sure DC heard what we needed loud and clear, if your name is Karen Keith – I would ask that you please stand so this room can show you our appreciation for your service and your leadership.

And that’s just the people in this room! It was a true communitywide effort and one of the Tulsa Metro’s “finest hours”.

The second area of focus for us in making Tulsa a globally competitive world class city is in making Tulsa a city of opportunity for everyone. And you can’t talk about opportunity without talking about education. I was honored recently to take over as the Leadership Council Chair for Impact Tulsa - a group that works with each of our major school districts, using data to help them improve student performance.

The data analytics work of Impact Tulsa has convinced me there are many other things the City of Tulsa can be doing to improve student performance outcomes. We’re just in the early stages of analyzing that, but I am excited for us to be a better partner with local educators.

The City of Tulsa is deploying a range of programs to assist our local schools. Thanks to Vision Tulsa, we are working to create safer routes to schools with improvements to crosswalks and lighting at schools across the city. We are also funding a teacher recruitment and retention program that Tulsa Public Schools, Union, and Jenks are deploying to bring the best teachers to Tulsa and give them a rewarding environment that keeps them here.

On a different note, I think one of the great tragedies in America today is that every time we try to have a conversation about immigration in the public arena, a lot of people automatically jump to debating illegal immigration. But I will tell you one of the most inspiring things I get to do as mayor is attend citizenship ceremonies. When you see people, who have risked everything they have and left their homeland and come from all around the world because they view Tulsa and Oklahoma and the United States as this beacon of freedom and opportunity, it just fills your heart with pride for our country.

But earlier this year, we discovered that so many people from around the world are becoming American citizens in Tulsa that there weren’t enough ceremonies to hold them. So, people were having to go to Oklahoma City for the ceremony. They had crossed oceans and continents to

become Tulsans, and then they were having to go down the turnpike to become naturalized citizens.

Well I love Mayor Holt and I love the growing partnership between Tulsa and Oklahoma City, but that is unacceptable. So, this year, we started hosting those ceremonies in the City Council Chambers at City Hall. When we started doing this we were informed that Tulsa was the first municipality in the state of Oklahoma to host naturalization ceremonies. And if, over the coming election year, you're feeling down about the divisiveness in America today I encourage you to attend one. It will cure what ails you.

Through our New Tulsans Initiative, we also partnered with the YWCA of Greater Tulsa and received a grant that is allowing us to address barriers to American citizenship. In the Tulsa Metro we have over 10,000 people who are eligible to become American citizens but face some barrier to going through the process. A lot of the time it is the legal cost of all the paperwork. So, this grant will allow us to cover those legal expenses and break down those barriers.

When it comes to opportunity, I am also excited that Tulsa is one of six cities from around the country selected for an economic mobility study grant. This initiative is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Ballmer Group, and it is part of work being led out of Harvard University.

Researchers at Harvard have been studying the reality of the American Dream over the last 50 years. For statistical purposes, they define it as the percentage of children who go on to earn more than their parents. What they found is that this percentage has been in steady decline since the 1940's.

Children born in the 1940s had over a 90 percent chance of going on to make more than their parents. Today, it's a 50/50 chance.

Thanks to our participation in this research grant, we are able to analyze this in Tulsa and test different approaches for impacting it. Many of you will recall that one of the main reasons I ran for mayor was because a kid born in North Tulsa is expected to live 11 years less than a kid elsewhere in the city. I know that Susan and I love our two kids more than anyone in the world, and I know that my neighbors in North Tulsa feel the same way about their kids. So, if we are really the community we want Tulsa to be, we need to be working with all we have to address the fact that thousands of kids in our city are being robbed of a decade of life just because of the area where they are growing up.

Now remember that statistic when I show you this next image.

This map is produced by the same group of researchers and shows household income for people tracked back to the neighborhood they grew up in. The bluer it gets, the higher the household income for kids who grew up in that neighborhood. The redder it gets, the lower the household income for kids who grew up in that neighborhood.

What you see here is the statistical manifestation of North Tulsa taking a back seat to the rest of the city for decades when it comes to economic prosperity - and that has a direct impact on the life expectancy disparity that compelled me to run for mayor.

So, we are changing that. We have recruited the two largest new employers in the history of our city to Tulsa, and Amazon and Greenheck Group are building campuses in North Tulsa. We have incentivized the relocation of Muncie Power Products to the Peoria-Mohawk Business Park. WPX, Vast Bank, and USA BMX are all building new headquarters facilities in the historic Greenwood District.

But we will have failed if we built all these new facilities and North Tulsans just stand on the sidelines and watch the progress. So to make sure everyone has the opportunity to benefit from this investment, the City is partnering with Tulsa Community Work Advance to initiate two programs - Due North, which is focused on equipping North Tulsa residents with additional skills they may need to compete for jobs at these employers, and NextUp, which is focused on equipping young Tulsans with the skills they need to compete for 21st Century jobs.

This leads me to the third area where we are focused on becoming a globally-competitive world class city and that is in the area of building the city we want to leave to the next generation.

I want to revisit an issue we discussed last year. We've heard for years that the City of Tulsa is a difficult place to invest, that people wanting to invest in our city have to wait extended periods of time to get plans reviewed and when time equals money this scares away a lot of investment that would otherwise occur. One of the culture shifts we've instilled at the City of Tulsa is to always follow the data, and so I asked what the average time was for our team to review a permit application the first time. My worst fears were confirmed when the answer came back: 25 working days, or 5 weeks.

So, we went to work. With the support of the City Council and the development community, we made the changes necessary to staff our plan review team properly. The staff in our Development Services Department worked hard to educate new team members and adopt new processes like third party plan reviews. And today, I am proud to say our team has hit their mark for the first time - as of last Friday, 100% of projects in our work log were at a 5-day review time for the initial review.

And what I love is that our Development Services team isn't satisfied! In notifying me of this achievement, they assured me they are working to ensure the current time becomes an extended average for all components of the review process. It is this spirit of continuous improvement and commitment that led Amazon's development team to tell me we were one of the best cities they've ever worked with on a project.

Now, I want to set the historical context for what we're all living through in Tulsa right now.

There have been three great waves of investment in Tulsa's history. The first was in the 1920s and 30s, when we became a true city. That is when we built one of the first airports in the world (before most Americans had even seen an airplane), when we built the Spavinaw water line that

was such a marvel of engineering that the President of the United States came here to open it. That was when we built the Art Deco masterpieces and skyscrapers that compose downtown's historic core.

The second era was in the 1960s and 70s, when we become a regional city. This was when the Port of Catoosa was completed, when we built the highway network that connected us with our suburban neighbors in a way we never had been before. This was when we created a City-County Library system and City-County Health Department, and when the great Tulsa businessman John Williams saved downtown by building the Williams Center right in the middle of Boston Avenue.

The third historic wave of investment in Tulsa is happening right now, and it is happening across all sectors.

As I mentioned a moment ago, WPX is building its headquarters facility in the historic Greenwood District - a beautiful building that will connect both Greenwood and the Tulsa Arts District.

Vast Bank is building its headquarters in the Greenwood District - another beautiful building that will have a rooftop area overlooking ONEOK Field.

Amazon has completed construction of its massive fulfillment center in North Tulsa and plans to begin hiring in 2020.

Greenheck Group is building a remarkable campus in North Tulsa, is already employing people and will be ramping up employment over the next several years.

American Airlines has announced over 550 new jobs here in Tulsa this year alone! Their leadership told me they advertised their first round of 400 jobs and there was such a strong response from people all around the country who want to work in the aerospace industry in Tulsa that they realized they had even more capacity to grow here.

Spirit AeroSystems announced an investment of over \$80 million in their Tulsa facility, and they are adding 250 jobs to their facility here.

New construction is moving quickly, and historic renovations are happening too. This year, the Tulsa Club was saved and has been restored to its historic beauty.

And while this large-scale investment in Tulsa is exciting, we also want to be mindful of supporting small and growing Tulsa companies. That is why we recently created a position in my office that is solely focused on small business and entrepreneurship.

But when it comes to investment, the citizens of Tulsa aren't just watching all of this happen. They're holding their own.

After 50 years of steady land accumulation, we broke ground last month on the Gilcrease Expressway which will open up West Tulsa for investment in a way it hasn't been before.

We broke ground on the Oklahoma Museum of Popular Culture – OKPOP – which will honor our artists while inspiring Oklahoma's next generation of creators.

We opened the Oklahoma Air National Guard's Mission Training Center, which will bring fighter pilots from all around the country to Tulsa for simulator-based training and will improve our ability to compete for the next round of F35s being deployed by the U.S. Department of Defense.

We opened the TCC Student Success Center, funded through Vision Tulsa, which will connect students with rewarding jobs and further educational opportunities.

In the next few weeks alone, we will launch the state's first bus rapid transit line here in Tulsa, running along the Peoria Corridor from 56th Street North down to 81st Street. This will open up access to jobs for people living along that line that they have not had before - and we believe it will change the way Tulsans use public transit.

We will also break ground on USA BMX's Olympic Training and Trials facility in the Greenwood District, which will bring over 100,000 people to Tulsa in its first 5 years alone.

And we expect to advertise for construction in the first half of 2020 the low water dam that will create a lake averaging 8-10 feet in depth and running from 29th Street and North past downtown.

And as always, the philanthropic community is doing remarkable work in Tulsa.

Mother Road Market, built by the Lobeck-Taylor Family Foundation, has not just created a space for food entrepreneurship in our city, it has also anchored the revitalization of Route 66 through Tulsa.

And the Gathering Place exceeded even its own lofty expectations by attracting nearly 3 million visitors in its first year alone.

In closing, I want to explain the higher purpose of all this. The best way for me to explain it is with this photo.

This is what I saw as I was sworn in as mayor. Those of you who know me know that I've wanted to be mayor since I was about 8. I've dreamt about the chance to serve the city I love for most of my life. And I remember the feeling I had when this photo was taken because it was overwhelming. The only other times when I've felt that were when Susan walked down the aisle on the day we were married and when I saw our two children for the first time. It is the moment when you realize this dream you've had for so long is actually happening. When the moment meets your greatest hopes.

One of the most rewarding parts of being mayor is that I get to see people in increasing numbers have that same experience. The dreams that people have for themselves and for Tulsa are coming to life all across our city.

I've seen it in the face of our newest fellow Americans when they go through a naturalization ceremony at City Hall.

I've seen it in the face of a woman who got the help she needed thanks to the Better Way program and turned her life around.

I've seen it in the face of a former educator who decided to become an entrepreneur and open her own business, helping to lead a new generation of Black Wall Street entrepreneurs in the Greenwood District. That's where I got these sweet Nikes I'm wearing today: Silhouette Sneakers & Art. And take it from me: if you're middle-aged and you want your kids to think you're cool, go buy a pair of shoes at Silhouette Sneakers & Art.

And seeing that has given me a new appreciation for Tulsa. We talk a lot about the way Tulsans pull together in tough times, but I don't think we give ourselves enough credit on the joyful side.

The reality that I see throughout our city - in all the things we've talked about today - is that Tulsa is a city where we help one another achieve our dreams. Whether your dream is owning your own business or improving yourself or seeing your family succeed - or all of those things - in Tulsa, when we know one of our neighbors has a dream we help them reach it.

So, I want to thank all of you for making Tulsa that kind of city. We are seeing the creativity and full potential of Tulsa unleashed across our region. And when we can be that kind of city - one in which we work together to reach our highest aspirations - then the state of our city is strong.

Thank you.