

Mayor G.T. Bynum
2017 State of the City
Nov. 2, 2017

Thank you for that introduction and for the chance to speak today. As any of us who work in public service know, you don't do it alone. I am incredibly thankful for the love and support of my family, and I want to acknowledge some of them in attendance today: My wife, Susan; my Mom, Suzie; and my grandfather – the Dean of the Former Mayors of Tulsa – Bob LaFortune.

We have so many transformative initiatives under way in Tulsa. But before I go any further, I have to share some really exciting news with everyone here about Amazon...

On Amazon's website today, Legendary Tulsa author Michael Wallis's new book is on sale for only \$19!

That is a GREAT price! I hope everyone here will check it out. In fact, I think each person in this room should buy 100 copies. Whatever it takes...

But back to the City, we are thinking big and moving fast on a number of fronts. I want you to know how lucky I feel to work with the members of this City Council every day. Councilors Vanessa Hall-Harper, Jeannie Cue, David Patrick, Blake Ewing, Karen Gilbert, Connie Dodson, Anna America, Phil Lakin, and Ben Kimbro are my partners in everything we do and everything I am going to talk about today. This is an outstanding City Council and I'm proud of the working relationship we've established.

I am thankful to deliver the State of the City to this audience because so much of the inspiration we've taken at the City over the last year has come from the business and philanthropic communities.

In December, the City Council and I adopted a new vision statement for the City of Tulsa: **To build a globally competitive, world-class city.**

We're setting aside regional fights to work with our neighbors in competing on the real playing field of the 21st Century: National and international competition.

To do that, we're pursuing a broad range of initiatives – and our models for excellence are great Tulsa businesses.

Now, a politician saying we need to run government more like a business is one of the oldest clichés around. It is usually a hollow throwaway line, intended to get applause. And if there's any further detail than that, it is lines like, "We need someone who knows how to add up a payroll," or "We need to make more than we spend," or "We need to cut wasteful employees". To be fair, all of these are true. But is that how low we've set the bar for government? Knowing how to add, not going bankrupt, and proficiency in firing people are the standards of excellence? In Tulsa, we are renewing a spirit of high expectations and that starts with the City itself. Our goal is not to run the City just like any business – our goal is to run the City like a GREAT business.

Running the City like a great business starts with our team.

During the transition period last year between the election and being sworn in, I took advantage of the time given to reach out to some of the great organizational leaders in our city. I wanted

their advice and guidance on how best to go about leading a large organization like the City of Tulsa.

One of those people was the incoming chairman of the chamber, BOK CEO Steve Bradshaw. Steve gave me a lot of great advice, but one idea has proven particularly useful. Steve routinely meets with small groups of employees chosen at random so he can hear firsthand from them how to make BOK a great place to work.

I loved the idea and started doing it immediately after taking office. Every month, six City employees are selected from a random generator and we go to lunch. This is one of the most valuable meetings I have every month. We discuss the joys and challenges of working at the City, and they give me practical ideas for making our workplace better.

Best of all, it has helped me get to know our 3,600 employees as people – and here's what I've found:

Your employees at the City of Tulsa are incredible public servants. After years of budget cuts, the people who work at the City do it because they love to serve. They aren't doing it for the great pay.

These are the police officers who selflessly sprint toward danger to keep you safe. These are the firefighters who rescue your neighbor from a fire or resuscitate your dad after a heart attack. These are the street crews that are out in the ice and snow to clear your way to work, or out cleaning up debris from the first August tornado to strike our city since the 1950s. These are the people delivering the water you mix with baby formula for your newborn and who design the streets your teenager learns to drive on.

They do all this because they love to serve you. And I am so honored to serve them, and to be a part of their team.

This month's random employee lunch is today, and my teammates from the City are joining me at this table for the State of the City. Please join me in thanking these public servants and the thousands they represent.

But we've done more than just have lunch every month.

Chet Cadieux and his team at QuikTrip were very generous in teaching us about their employee feedback process – a system that empowers every employee at QuikTrip to make it a better place to work. We've installed the same system at the City as part of our long-term process of building the best possible workplace for our employees.

Paula Marshall and her team at Bama taught us about their approach to employee health, and we used that to overhaul not just our insurance program, but our fundamental approach to employee wellness.

In a flat budget, we prioritized the stabilization of our pension system for the long-term and budgeted pay increases for those employees whose performance merits them.

At the City of Tulsa, all of us are a team.

Running the City like a great business also means your products are excellent. And for us, no service is more important than public safety.

The reality is that after years of declining manpower, our Police Department has not been staffed appropriately and you see that in the unacceptably high homicide and violent crime rate. We are addressing this with great urgency along two lines:

First, we are presently undergoing the largest single-year hiring of new Police officers in Tulsa history. While our average annual academy size in this century is 31 officers, this year we are hiring 90. We're doing in one year what would normally take us almost three years to accomplish.

We are hiring 90 new officers this year – the maximum we are capable of recruiting and training in one year – and we plan to do it again next year.

We are also implementing one of the most comprehensive community policing initiatives in the nation. In my first month as mayor, we convened the Tulsa Commission on Community Policing. The goal of community policing is for everyday citizens to work with police in making a community safer.

Some cities have done this by implementing the use of body cameras or by appointing citizen advisory boards or by improving the training officers receive. We are doing all of those, and much more. In total, the Commission made 77 different recommendations for community policing in Tulsa and we are committed to publicly tracking our implementation of every single one of them.

When it comes to Fire protection, we have manpower needs too.

Thanks to the help of our Congressional delegation, the City received a grant to hire 60 new firefighters this year – something that would have taken us years to accomplish on our own. And with a fleet of firetrucks that until last month counted a 10-year-old truck as its newest, we've expedited the replacement of broken-down trucks after years of delay.

Beyond public safety, we have focused on major infrastructure initiatives. Our medians and rights-of-way are now being mowed at the correct frequency. We have expedited the re-wiring of every single highway light in town after they were stripped by a ring of thieves – and we've arrested the thieves. We've hired additional street maintenance workers and traffic signal repair crews. Our goal is to deserve the title of America's Most Beautiful City.

Running the City like a great business also means we are focused on growth.

As I mentioned earlier, we have shifted our focus away from the old parochial skirmishes over shopping malls and reoriented our focus toward national and international competition. Our partnership with the Tulsa Regional Chamber has been incredibly successful along these lines. We had more corporate relocation site visits in the first quarter of this year alone than we had in all of last year combined. We've landed major new employers like the Greenheck Group, and we've harnessed broad community support behind major targets like Amazon.

We've expedited the construction timeline for the largest economic development capital improvements program in city history – Vision Tulsa – so that 80 percent of the projects will be funded in the first five years. That means in the next five years you will see a lake in the Arkansas River, USA BMX conducting their Olympic training and trials in the Greenwood District of North Tulsa, bus rapid transit lines transforming the use of public transportation, and pilots from around the world training at the Oklahoma Air National Guard's new simulator facility.

You will see a facility worthy of the greatest collection of Western art in the world under construction at Gilcrease Museum and you'll see Tulsa kids having their horizons broadened at the new Tulsa Children's Museum.

All of that, and I didn't even mention the greatest public park gift in the history of the United States of America – The Gathering Place – which will attract visitors from around the world. I love that my kids will grow up with the expectation that of course the best park in the world is in their hometown.

We are making Tulsa a more welcoming place for its newest citizens through the New Tulsans Initiative, which will connect our growing immigrant community with opportunities for education, employment, and leadership.

And, we are partnering with one of the world's great philanthropic foundations, the Rockefeller Foundation, to develop a plan for comprehensively addressing issues of racial disparity that have divided our city for far too long.

We are making long-term investments based on data. Analysis by Tulsa Data Science confirms that the strongest correlation to per capita income is a high school diploma, and one of the greatest indicators of high school graduation rates is third-grade reading proficiency. Yet in Tulsa Public Schools only around 50 percent of third graders are reading at grade level. But there is a solution and it is called Reading Partners.

The premise is simple: An adult spends an hour a week practicing reading with a kid who needs a little help. For kids who participate in the program, they have over a 90 percent success rate. We could go from 50 percent of third graders reading on grade level to over 95 percent – IF we have enough volunteers. I am proud to tell you this year the City of Tulsa became the largest employer partner in the nation with Reading Partners. And at the end of the year we will be able to show you the improvements made, thanks to your City employees who gave up their lunch break for one day a week to change a kid's life.

If you would like to join us in changing the lives of Tulsa kids, all you have to do – and you can do it right now, I won't take it personally – is pull out your phone and text READING to 444999. You'll receive a prompt-in response for more information, and Reading Partners will take it from there.

We have also changed the way the City works with our schools. On my first day as mayor, we convened the Mayor's Education Cabinet, which consists of the three K-12 superintendents, presidents of our higher education and career tech institutions, and pre-K leaders. The purpose of this group is to advise me on ways the City can be more helpful to local educators.

One of the best initiatives to spring from this was the federal financial aid application drive we co-sponsored with the Tulsa Regional Chamber, which resulted in a significant increase in high school seniors applying for financial aid – opening opportunities to higher education those students may not have otherwise had.

We are doing all of this because we believe a unified, diverse, and educated community with tremendous quality of life will fuel economic growth in the years ahead.

Running the City like a great business also means we are laser focused on outcomes.

In December, we established the Office of Performance Strategy & Innovation with the goal of delivering better outcomes in a more transparent way. We are implementing what is known as Moneyball For Government, based on the book and movie about Billy Bean of the Oakland Athletics.

The idea is to use data to test what strategies are delivering results and which are not. You take funding away from those strategies that don't demonstrate success and you put it toward the strategies that do. When I explain this to business people, they generally find it adorable that government has just caught on to this idea because business has been doing it as long as business has existed.

In Tulsa, we are already a global leader on this front. I've been asked to speak around the country regarding the approach we've developed to break down silos and work together on achieving better outcomes, and just last week addressed an international convening of city leaders in Paris. At a time of such great division, nationally and internationally, there is tremendous admiration out there for the way we are pulling together in Tulsa to solve our greatest challenges.

A great example of this is the City's active involvement in the *Birth through Eight Strategy for Tulsa* – or BEST – which is helping make Tulsa the best place in the United States to be a new baby. Tulsa is a community that will support all parents and children so that each newborn child shares in the core American promise of equal opportunity to all. The BEST plan, when fully implemented, will provide integrated support and services to 32,000 children each year, from Birth through Age Eight, across all of Tulsa. Dozens of organizations are coming together for our children to make this vision a reality.

We are harnessing data to improve our effectiveness, but we are also making it more transparent by putting data online in formats usable for everyday citizens. We have implemented biweekly stat meetings with our operational departments to keep them focused on results.

We are replacing our quarter-century-old computer systems at the City with new technology that will improve performance dramatically. To put this in perspective, the records management system our Police Department relies on is older than I am. Tomorrow, Apple will release the iPhone 10 – one of the most advanced pieces of technology ever placed in consumer hands. Here's a photo of the Apple Computer that was issued the same year as our Police Records Management System:

That computer is literally made out of wood!

Our advancements in technology aren't just for City employees. We released the Tulsa 3-1-1 app, which any of you can download at the app store for your phone. If you see a pothole, or a light that is out, or a sign that needs to be replaced, you can just pull out the app and report it. It will identify where you are and send City crews to fix the problem.

A focus on outcomes also means you sometimes don't use the strategy you originally expected. That is certainly the case in our discussions with the County over the jail. My goal was to end the fight, and after decades of fighting we did end it. Is the strategy we are deploying to end that fight perfect? No. But we are not going to allow the relationship between the City and the County to be defined by a fight over the jail any longer. We have too many big things to accomplish together.

I hope you see, we have accomplished a great deal this year to make the City of Tulsa more like the great businesses represented in this room today.

I didn't come here today for us to rest on our laurels. In a city with high expectations, we are always focused on the road ahead and the big goals to be accomplished. **Today, I want to share five major announcements with you.**

The first is around real estate development. For years, the City of Tulsa has relied upon a Frankenstein regulatory monster to manage real estate development within the city limits. It's not literally a Frankenstein monster. That would be amazing, but it's a metaphor. Our development process is overly cumbersome, and it has unquestionably hurt our ability to grow.

When it comes to development, we are not competitive enough in Tulsa County – let alone in the region. So, we've decided that managing the problem isn't good enough. We are blowing up the process and starting from scratch with a new approach.

We are shifting to what is known as self-certification. Basically, the City will authorize architects and engineers to certify building code compliance on behalf of their clients instead of running them through the City bureaucracy. The City will audit a percentage of the projects and if a particular architect or engineer isn't doing it correctly they can have their certification privilege removed. The City doesn't allow high-risk projects, like high-rise buildings, to be self-certified but for the vast majority of construction projects they move swiftly along. Phoenix in particular has enjoyed great success with this approach.

The days of development in Tulsa being cumbersome and time-consuming are drawing to a close. Instead, we will have one of the most innovative development processes in the country.

Our second major announcement is about Tulsa's streets. First, it is important to understand what a positive difference our street program has made over the last decade. If we hadn't passed those initiatives, our overall street quality in Tulsa would be a Pavement Condition Index rating of 42 out of 100. Instead, thanks to Tulsa voters, we've carried out a record amount of street work and have an overall Pavement Condition Index rating of 69 out of 100 (a 64 percent improvement to the overall PCI score vs. where we would have been with no investment).

In case you haven't noticed any street construction lately, we are working all over the City to rehabilitate our 4,500 lane miles of streets from streets that look like this....

...to streets that look like this....

We still have a lot of work to do in the years ahead to get where we need to be. We need to improve the speed with which we carry out these projects.

To that end, I am pleased to announce the establishment of a blue ribbon task force, which will reform our street work process. It will be chaired by one of the most respected transportation experts in the country, former Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Gary Ridley. Secretary Ridley is here today, and I want to thank him for finding yet another way to help our city.

As we anticipate the continuation of the City's decade-long focus on street repairs with a general obligation bond renewal in 2018, I am eager for this group to lend their expertise in improving the efficiency of our street projects citywide.

Our third announcement is an exciting partnership. *We want Tulsa to be a national leader.* The pioneering work of our philanthropic community led the New York Times to dub us "Beta City" because this is the place where new ideas in the not-for-profit world are tested. I want us to live up to that in all we do.

One of the most important ways we can improve as a community is to better understand what people hope for and expect from living in our city, what they think of the opportunities and services being provided – what they do and don't like, what they want to see blossom and what they want to see go away. To this end, the City of Tulsa is partnering with the world's preeminent opinion research organization, Gallup, to establish the Gallup-Tulsa Citivoice Index.

The Gallup-Tulsa Citivoice Index will measure the most important outcomes for city residents and provide local leaders with insights we can use in building the best city possible – as that ideal is defined by Tulsans. Not only will it be incredibly useful for us in delivering a better city for Tulsans, we believe it will instruct discussions around civic issues nationally.

Our fourth announcement involves Tulsa County. One hundred years ago, Tulsa was a rural county. Tulsa had a few thousand people and was separated from neighbors like Broken Arrow by miles of agricultural land. In the subsequent 100 years, those cities flourished. *Today Tulsa is an urban county of vibrant cities.* Yet we are still relying on the same governmental arrangement as we did 100 years ago, with overlapping responsibilities and duplication.

For years, people have talked about a merger of city and county government. Often, it is couched in terms of a wholesale merger. Yet recent studies have shown that such mergers are remarkably rare and attempts to pull them off usually prevent meaningful improvements. Much greater success has been attained by merging particular functions.

To that end, I want to announce that the *Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, Ron Peters, and I are forming a City-County Parks Realignment Commission.* The Commission will be composed of several committed parks supporters. We have seen how City-County authorities work when it comes to our Health Department, our Library System, and the River Parks Authority. Now, we want to have a public and transparent review of a potential merger of aspects of our parks systems into one healthy, accessible, well-maintained system that can endure for future generations of Tulsans.

Our final announcement today is the most urgent.

In my first year on the City Council in 2008, the most pressing issue facing our community was the unfunded street repair backlog. We spent months researching how to address the problem and how much it would cost, engaged Tulsans in the discussion every step of the way, and

when it appeared on the ballot, *Tulsans approved the largest streets improvement program in Tulsa history.*

Five years later, in 2013, we knew the job wasn't finished. So again we spent months researching what needed to be done and how much it would cost. We engaged Tulsans in the discussion every step of the way, and when it appeared on the ballot, *Tulsans approved a 50 percent increase over what was previously the largest streets improvement program in city history.*

Then the most pressing issue was that we didn't have enough Police officers. But no one could tell us how many we needed. The philanthropic community brought in one of the top policing experts in the nation and she spent months studying our department. We then took her findings and determined how to pay for them. We engaged Tulsans in the discussion every step of the way, and when it appeared on the ballot, *Tulsans approved the hiring of 160 new Police officers by a 2:1 margin.*

Then we didn't feel we were competitive enough when it came to recruiting and retaining quality talent. So we spent three years studying different economic development projects and how much they would cost. We engaged Tulsans in the discussion every step of the way, and when it appeared on the ballot last year, *Tulsans approved Vision Tulsa – the largest economic development program in our city's history.*

What is the lesson in Tulsa over the last decade? Through all that time we had different mayors and a rotating cast of city councilors – so it isn't specific to a person. My takeaway is that if we all pull together, study our greatest challenges thoroughly, and present voters with a means of fixing them, then *Tulsans will fix any problem facing our community no matter how big it may be.*

The quality of our educational system in Tulsa is the greatest economic development challenge we face today. It is the greatest quality of life challenge we face today. It is the greatest criminal justice challenge we face today. And I believe with every ounce of my being that if Tulsans could fix it, we would.

But we can't. Right now, we can pass property-tax initiatives to build football stadiums and fix up buildings and buy iPads for kids – but if we pass a property tax to pay our teachers the kind of wage that will keep them from fleeing to Arkansas or Texas, the state will reduce our allocation by an equivalent amount. They will punish us for trying to help.

This upcoming legislative session, we are going to try to change the dynamic. We're going to quit waiting for someone else to save us, and try to empower Tulsans to take our destiny into our own hands.

I am so thankful this is part of the Tulsa Regional Chamber's One Voice agenda, but that is not enough. We need every family, every business owner, every employee, every voter to let your legislators know **WE WANT TO HELP**. We need their permission to help. I believe if they will let us, we can address this challenge in the same way we've addressed those that came before us.

Thank you for this opportunity today. It is an exciting time in Tulsa, and our best days are ahead.

Thank you.