

Governor J. Kevin Stitt

State of the State Address 2023

Lieutenant Governor Matt Pinnell.

Mr. Speaker.

Mr. President Pro Tem.

Members of the 59th Legislature.

Members of the Judiciary.

Tribal leaders.

To Sarah and my family.

And my fellow Oklahomans.

It's such an honor to be with you today.

I stood at this podium to give my first State of the State address four years ago, after promising to deliver Oklahoma's turnaround –

And a turnaround we delivered.

We said that we would put a fresh set of eyes on state government, cut red tape, and create a more transparent government – and we delivered.

We said that we would eliminate our budget deficit and replenish our state savings – and we delivered.

We said that we would boost economic growth and bring more jobs to the state – and we delivered.

We said that we would support our brave law enforcement – and we delivered.

We said that we would cut taxes – and we delivered.

We said that we would invest in infrastructure and education – and we delivered.

We've done this by sticking to our conservative principles.

Smaller government,

Lower taxes,

Family,

Freedom,

And Faith.

My fellow Oklahomans: The state of our state is the strongest it's ever been.

I am proud to present my plan for the greatest legislative session we've had yet.

First, to drive excellence in education.

Second, to continue to make Oklahoma the most business-friendly state in the nation.

Third, to protect Oklahomans and promote freedoms.

Over the last four years, we have made changes together in education: removing zip code barriers, modernizing our funding formula, and raising teacher pay.

But our efforts can't stop there.

Parents spoke loud and clear at the ballot box last November in support of our vision to create more options for kids.

We know not every student learns the same way.

Every child deserves a quality education that fits their unique needs, regardless of economic status, or background.

Let's fund students, not systems.

Let's create more schools, not fewer schools.

In my executive budget, I am proposing the following initiatives:

Education Savings Accounts.

Performance-based pay raises for teachers,

The Innovation School Fund to help start more schools like the Aviation Academy in Norman.

The most expansive reading initiative in the nation to get students reading at grade level.

Expanding concurrent enrollment so that high schoolers can more easily earn college credits.

These strategic initiatives will bring Oklahoma's education system out of the bottom and into the Top Ten.

In south Oklahoma City, there's a charter school serving four thousand students, with another 700 on the waiting list.

On a recent visit to Santa Fe Sparrow Upper Elementary, I heard from their superintendent, Chris Brewster, teachers, parents, and their principal Meg Wheeler.

Meg got her start in New York City at a charter school through Teach for America.

She is a true pioneer who led her school to achieving what was a few years ago impossible: Today, Sparrow is the only "A" school in the neighborhood.

Here's what Meg had to say...

“Families are the experts. They should be the one to make the choice about where their kids should go to school.”

I couldn't agree with her more.

And for all those parents in Oklahoma whose child is stuck in a failing school – I am fighting for you!

Meg and Chris are here with us today.

Will you both please stand so we can acknowledge the great work you're doing at Santa Fe South?

Oklahoma governors have been advocating for more parental choice for over 30 years.

In 1989, Governor Henry Bellman proposed in his state of the state address, and I quote:

“That parents be given greater flexibility to determine which schools their children will attend.

“Thus providing access to educational excellence by allowing more parental choice.”

Those are Governor Bellman's words.

Other states like Iowa and Virginia and Florida and New Hampshire have already figured it out.

Providing more options for students leads to better outcomes.

Oklahoma cannot afford to be left behind.

Because our greatest asset isn't our oil and gas –

It's not our football teams –

It's not the aerospace and defense industry.

It's our kids.

Second in my proposal is to continue to make Oklahoma the most business-friendly state in the nation.

Since 2019, over 23,000 new jobs have been created and today, Oklahoma now has the third fastest-growing economy in the nation.

Companies from all over the country – and the world – are moving to our state to build and expand.

Google's second largest data center in the world is right here in Oklahoma -

USA Rare Earth, the nation's first critical mineral-to-magnet manufacturing facility, is right here in Oklahoma -

American Airlines,

Dell,

Amazon,

Boeing...

These companies could be located anywhere in the world, but they choose to be right here in Oklahoma.

This year, we must capitalize on the progress we've made.

That means continuing to focus on key areas: energy, infrastructure, workforce development, and tax policy.

Let's continue to diversify our energy grid and embrace our "More of Everything" approach.

We are proud that Oklahoma ranks fifth in the nation for natural gas production, and sixth for oil production.

And we're also ranked 10th in the nation for renewables.

My administration will continue to lead with efforts like becoming the nation's Hydrogen Hub.

Oklahoma's affordable and reliable grid is the envy of the world and an undeniable competitive advantage.

Let's continue to invest in our infrastructure,

From roads and bridges,

To rails and runways,

To broadband.

Oklahoma commute times are some of the shortest in the nation.

We must work fast to keep it that way.

As Americans turn to Oklahoma to build their future, let's learn from gridlock cities like Austin and Denver and get ahead.

Broadband and internet access are critical to Oklahoma's future.

When I came into office, Oklahoma was ranked in the bottom ten for broadband access.

Today, we've jumped 23 spots to 26th in the nation for fastest coverage.

Last year, thanks to the leadership of House Speaker Charles McCall, we formed the Oklahoma Broadband Office and set a vision to deliver high-speed internet access to 95% of the state by 2028.

As companies flood to Oklahoma, workforce is the number one challenge facing businesses.

Let's make sure our universities and higher education are partnering with companies to train the workforce of tomorrow.

I want to challenge OU and OSU to grow and deliver a quality education to 40,000 students by 2030.

We need our universities to meet the nursing needs of our hospitals,

The engineering needs of our growing aerospace industry,

The teaching needs of our secondary schools,

The software developer needs for tech companies.

Because when we send our kids to college, we expect our tuition to pay for their education, not their indoctrination!

I want our universities to have less DEI officers and more career placement counselors.

I want to challenge our high schools and CareerTechs to be more responsive to our workforce.

Because Oklahoma needs more truck drivers, more electricians, plumbers, and aviation mechanics.

I want us to rethink our Career Tech funding model.

We created this model over 60 years ago.

Let's reimagine our approach.

Instead of just building new buildings, let's invest in high school freshman so they graduate ready to start a career in cybersecurity or diesel mechanics.

For Oklahoma to keep up with the jobs of tomorrow, we must transform our state economy into an innovation economy.

Because in Oklahoma we are not afraid of the future.

We lean into it, and we embrace it.

Let's continue to promulgate our budding reputation as the regional hub for Advanced Mobility and unmanned aircraft.

Let's continue to make investments in our fastest growing industry: aerospace and defense.

Let's continue to protect and enhance our world-class military bases like Tinker, Altus, and Vance Air Force Bases -

The McAlester Army Ammunition Base and Lawton/Fort Still,

Which is home to two of the U.S. Army's Futures Commands.

Oklahoma is home to over 340,000 veterans.

That's about 9% of our total population.

With help from our veteran members in the Legislature, we enacted new laws last year to help Oklahoma veterans across the state.

It's my goal to make Oklahoma the best state in the nation for those who fought for our freedoms.

Members of the Legislature,

We have accumulated a \$4 billion savings account

And we're going into this session with a \$1.8 billion surplus.

With our fiscal discipline, economic growth, and record savings, let's make a significant statement that Oklahoma is here to stay on the national stage.

The time is now.

We need to keep the momentum...

Let's cut taxes!

In my executive budget I am proposing to eliminate Oklahoma's state grocery tax and reduce our personal income tax rate to 3.99%.

These cuts will save each family in Oklahoma hundreds of dollars each year.

And it will continue to make Oklahoma one of the best states to live, work, and raise your family.

When our economy is booming everyone wins.

Your personal income goes up, opportunities expand, and the entire tax base grows.

But we must also remember there are families still struggling to keep up with record inflation.

Before the pandemic, a gallon of milk cost \$2.90.

Today, it's \$4.21.

A dozen eggs were about \$1.50.

Today, they're \$5.50.

We can provide families with immediate relief at the store and with bigger paychecks.

Last year Georgia, Idaho, South Carolina, and even New York cut taxes!

Let's listen to the people we serve.

Because Oklahomans sent a clear message last November when they overwhelmingly voted for our vision: to shrink the size of government, to cut taxes, and to let the free market flourish.

We need to return excess revenue to the people, not grow government.

We also have an obligation to think about how we protect the next generation.

Senate Pro Tem Greg Treat has already filed legislation to create an Oklahoma Legacy Fund – an initiative I fully support.

Because of our record savings, we are in a strong financial position to invest into this fund and produce earnings for a permanent revenue stream.

We have done the hard work to be fiscally prudent.

We can now dream big.

We can be bold without passing the risk onto Oklahomans and the taxpayers.

Third, we're going to protect Oklahomans and promote freedoms.

Since I became governor, we have invested over a billion dollars into our health care system.

At the same time, we demanded better for Oklahomans and implemented reforms to focus on improving health outcomes, not just billing for procedures.

As a result, another \$700 million is on the way to improve rural hospitals and expand primary care across Oklahoma.

Protecting Oklahomans means that we continue to prioritize highway safety, especially for our rural highways.

So far, we have secured millions in federal funding to add shoulders to rural highways.

And just last week, Oklahoma secured the largest transportation grant in state history - \$85 million for improving I-44 and the US-75 interchange, a major win for Oklahoma.

Protecting Oklahomans means protecting the integrity of our elections.

I'm calling for stronger transparency laws.

Because Oklahomans deserve to know exactly who is funding political campaigns.

A democracy is doomed when special interests can spread lies and leverage blank checks to buy elections.

Protecting Oklahomans means standing up for our values and our way of life.

Whether it's the preposterous vaccine mandate for our National Guard,

The ESG attack on affordable domestic energy delivered by our oil and gas industry,

Or protecting Oklahomans Second Amendment rights,

We will always fight back against the federal overreach from Washington!

Protecting Oklahomans means fully funding our law enforcement.

When we back the blue, we are creating safer communities, safer schools, and a safer Oklahoma.

This also extends to combating drug and human trafficking and cracking down on illegal marijuana operations in our state.

We have deactivated over 800 illegal marijuana farms, completed 165 arrests, and seized over 600,000 pounds of illegal marijuana.

Let me be very clear on this point:

As long as I am governor, we will protect Oklahoma from the Communist Party of China and we will not allow foreign nationals to purchase farmland in the state of Oklahoma.

Protecting Oklahomans means engaging in smart and meaningful criminal justice reform.

Oklahomans elected me to protect public safety.

Over the last four years, we've closed four prisons, safely reduced the number of inmates by over 5,000, reduced crime, and saved the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

Today, Oklahoma is leading the nation in helping those with non-violent records return to work and get second chances.

It's why we also lead the nation in the lowest recidivism rate.

First Lady Sarah Stitt is with us today.

Sarah inspires me every day by her passion for helping Oklahomans.

Specifically, Oklahomans who come from a disadvantaged community, a broken family, or have been stuck in a cycle of poverty.

In 2021, through her vision and your collaboration, I signed the Sarah Stitt Act into law codifying her hard work.

Its success has been widespread not just in our state, but across the nation in states like Arizona and Louisiana, and even caught the attention of the White House.

This year, I'm looking forward to enacting the next step - the Sarah Stitt Act 2.0.

Sarah, on behalf of all Oklahomans, thank you for your hard work.

Protecting Oklahomans means making sure our foster care system prioritizes kids and making families whole.

We've been taking great strides to reunite families over the years.

In fact, the number of children in "out-of-home" care, including those in foster care, has decreased from 11,300 to 6,500 over the last 8 years.

Over the next four years I want Oklahoma to have a conversation about how we can become the most pro-family state.

How we can build a pro-family culture.

In my view, fatherhood is an important piece of that puzzle.

This is something that I am always trying to balance – time at work and time with my six kids.

I want to recognize my Dad, who is here with us today, for pouring into me and my two brothers.

Dad, I love you.

Sadly, there has been a movement in our nation that Dads are dispensable.

Right now, the United States is a world leader in fatherless families.

One out of every four kids in America is living without a father in the home.

And even those with a father are being let down.

In the U.S., the average school-age boy only spends about 30 minutes per week in one-on-one conversations with his father.

For comparison, the same boy, on average, will spend about 44 hours per week watching television, playing video games, and searching the internet.

Let's expand and increase fatherhood programs in our communities.

Let's continue to foster the importance of healthy homes with two involved parents.

And let's not leave out other members of the family, like grandparents' and their rights.

Let's become the most pro-family state in which every member of the family is respected, loved, supported, and included.

With me today is Marquess Dennis.

Marquess was a product of these statistics and spent 5 years in prison.

But he turned his experience into something amazing.

Marquess is the founder and director of Birthright Living Legacy, which helps fathers take a more active role in their family.

So far, they've helped over 200 fathers and their families.

Marquess, would you please stand so we can thank you for the work you're doing?

We must protect our most vulnerable - our children.

After all minors can't vote, can't purchase alcohol, can't purchase cigarettes...

We shouldn't allow a minor to get a permanent gender altering surgery in Oklahoma.

That's why I am calling on the Legislature to send me a bill that bans all gender transition surgeries and hormone therapies on minors in the state!

As governor, I will never shy away from calling out right from wrong.

I will not be intimidated by partisan interest groups or make decisions based on groupthink.

I will continue my responsibility to lead, not follow.

I ran for this office five years ago because I was tired of seeing other states succeed while ours got left behind.

I saw other parts of the country have confidence in their states and their states' futures.

But people just didn't see the American Dream in Oklahoma.

They saw it in other, bigger, so-called "better," states –

They saw it in Texas, or in California, or in Florida.

But they didn't seem to see it here.

But today,

We've all noticed something is different.

Today, families and businesses from New York and Chicago and L.A. pack up their little apartments and come to the open plains of Oklahoma,

Ready to enjoy a safe community,

A government that doesn't get in their way,

And the opportunity to chase their American Dream.

Because that's what we've done.

We have brought the American Dream back to Oklahoma.

Some people don't believe that.

They say, "Well we're really not Top Ten."

But the truth is:

We are Top Ten in best states to start a business.

We are Top Ten in the rate of new entrepreneurs.

We are Top Ten in affordability and cost of living.

We are Top Ten in energy production and renewable energy production.

We are Top Ten in net domestic migration into our state.

We are Top Ten in pre-K enrollment.

The truth is: Oklahoma feeds the world, fuels the world, and protects freedoms around the world.

The truth is: Everything is possible, right here from Oklahoma.

The future doesn't belong to the timid, or those who protect the status quo.

The future belongs to the brave, the pioneers, the go-getters, the can-doers,

The future belongs to Oklahoma.

God Bless you.

And may God continue to bless the great state of Oklahoma!