

**Mayor G.T. Bynum's State of the City Address
November 2, 2023**

Thank you for that introduction and to all of you for being here today.

We have a lot to talk about today. When I began my time as mayor, I told our team that we have four or maybe eight years to make the greatest impact on this city we love - and we will never have another opportunity like this again in our lives. Well I now have less than 400 days remaining as mayor, and I wake up every day - and often in the middle of the night! - with a sense of urgency to get as much done as I can in the time I have remaining to serve you.

So we are doing a lot! But I use that term intentionally: WE are doing a lot, because I speak on behalf of a broad team that is working hard every day to make these things happen.

Everything in my life starts with my family. I am thankful for the love, support, and inspiration I have received throughout my time in this job from my entire extended family, represented here today by my wife Susan, my daughter Annabel, my Mom, my sister Maggie, and my brother-in-law J.P.. (Pause)

I am also proud of the way we have changed the relationship with Oklahoma City during my time as mayor. The reality is that we are more competitive nationally and globally when Tulsa and OKC work together. That is a lot easier to do because one of my best friends happens to be the mayor of Oklahoma City, and he's here today. I want to thank Mayor David Holt for seeing what our two cities can accomplish when we work together, and for being a great partner with me in leading our two metro areas.

Near the end of his life, someone asked Steve Jobs which Apple product he was most proud of. His answer wasn't the Mac or the iPhone. He said it was the team of people at Apple. As the CEO of an organization with over 3,500 employees, I feel the same way. While we are going to talk about some exciting things today, they only happen because Tulsa is home to the best team of public servants you will find in any city in America at the City of Tulsa. They have been tested over and over again during the last several years, and through every crisis they shine. I am so grateful for them, and proud to work with them every day.

Their enthusiasm for our momentum in Tulsa led to a proposal to update the City of Tulsa logo and brand, which hasn't changed in 15 years. They even developed a video for me to show it to you. Take a look.

(video)

By the way, our brilliant graphic design team created the font you saw in that video, and it is called T-U-L-sans! So now we don't just have a flag to represent Tulsa - we have a font too.

The members of the Tulsa City Council are my partners in all we are going to talk about today. I loved my eight years of service on the Tulsa City Council because it is the only place where you take nine Tulsans from different parts of town, with different beliefs and life experiences - and you ask them to work through some of our community's biggest challenges together. It can be an incredibly hard job, and I want to thank them and our City Auditor for their devotion to Tulsa.

I also want to thank the team at the Tulsa Regional Chamber. The partnership we have forged between the City and the Chamber over the last six years - in which the Chamber brings prospects to the table and the City facilitates their investment in our community - has been a powerful combination. I am so grateful for this partnership. To Mike and the whole Chamber team, thank you. (Pause)

A big part of that partnership is attracting investment in Tulsa. We are living through the biggest period of investment in Tulsa history right now. When I visit with CEOs looking to invest in Tulsa, one of the most common things they tell me is that they are attracted to Tulsa because the community is investing in itself - they want to be part of that momentum. We had a big test of this in August with the Improve Our Tulsa vote. It was an opportunity for our community to decide if we are going to continue this momentum or not - and by a landslide Tulsans said YES! I want to thank everyone who played a part in yet another successful campaign.

Oh yeah, also 200,000 people lost power for a week following the Father's Day storm but our community pulled together and made it through! I want to thank the crews from PSO, the City of Tulsa, and the State of Oklahoma for their work to restore power quickly and then to do the months-long clean up the right way.

The City Council and I have set the goal of making Tulsa a globally competitive, world-class city. That's a pretty broad goal, so we've defined that along three main lines: we have to be a safe city; we have to be a city of opportunity for everyone; and we have to be a city where this generation of Tulsans is building the city they want to leave to the next.

When it comes to public safety, we have made a lot of advancements over the last year but I have one point I have to emphasize because I do not think people in Tulsa understand what a big deal it is. I want to talk about the Tulsa Police Department's homicide solve rate. That's the percentage of homicide cases in a given year that are solved by the local police department. Over the last 7 years, I've attended conference after conference and heard mayors and district attorneys rave about how they've done so much work to bring their homicide solve rate up into the 60 or 70 percent range. They talk about it in the context of showing how the local community trusts the police department - that if they can get to 60% of homicides solved in a year, people trust the police enough to work with them and put murderers behind bars.

Do you know what the routine homicide solve rate is in Tulsa? If we don't hit 100% every year, Tulsa Police Department leadership is beside themselves. In fact, the Tulsa Police Department is so admired nationally for their homicide solve rate that the U.S. Department of Justice held a national crime conference in Tulsa this year so police departments from across America could learn from ours.

I wanted to bring this up because you often hear me say we have the best police department in America. That's not just mayoral pride. The men and women of the Tulsa Police Department are courageous - as we have seen many times over the last several years - but they also work at a level of professional excellence that is a model for other departments across the country.

And they're never self-satisfied. Chief Wendell Franklin told me they needed a Real Time Information Center to make the Tulsa Police Department even more effective, so the City Council and I funded it, and it went operational this year. Police officers have told me this is the biggest advancement in policing since they put radios in patrol cars.

To show you the capabilities of this new technology, I asked the Tulsa Police Department to provide two good examples of its work. Let's take a look...

(Show RTIC video)

And that's just two calls! In less than a year, the Real Time Information Center has assisted with over 1,800 calls and led to the recovery of nearly \$1 million in stolen property, including 88 vehicles. It has assisted in the solving of multiple homicide cases. With the Real Time Information Center in use, we will make Tulsa safer for our citizens and for our police officers.

Similarly, the Tulsa Fire Department continues to be independently rated as among the very best in America, achieving the highest possible rating that determines insurance rates for Tulsa homes and businesses. The Tulsa Fire Department has become a crucial first responder for medical emergencies, and is also leading some of the most innovative work we are doing related to mental health response. I will have more on that in a moment.

The top public safety concern I hear about from Tulsans is homelessness. Tulsans want our neighbors experiencing homelessness to be in a safe environment, which means off of the streets where they are subject to extreme weather and crime.

To address this, we are revolutionizing the role of the city government in addressing homelessness. Historically, the City mostly just served as a pass-through for federal funds to be allocated among service providers. It is clear that isn't enough any more.

Our work on this front largely falls into three main categories: building more housing, getting help for people who want it, and enforcing our laws equally on everyone regardless of their housing status.

The City Council and I convened a task force to learn from experts where we can be most helpful. We met every week for the better part of the last year, and from that comes many of the programs I am going to talk about today.

Everyone we spoke with said Tulsa needs more housing. An independent study funded by the Anne & Henry Zarrow Foundation revealed that Tulsa needs about 13,000 new units of housing over the next decade. Fortunately, the free market will take care of about 80% of that. But 20% of it is housing that the private sector is not incentivized to build: homeless shelter space, permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, etc. This is where government has to play a role to get the housing built.

In August, as part of Improve Our Tulsa, voters approved funds that combined with other sources allow us to establish a housing fund in excess of \$100 million. This is the largest public commitment to housing construction in Tulsa history. Now that we know what we have to work with, a separate study is currently being conducted under the leadership of the Tulsa Regional Chamber and the Tulsa Area United Way to identify how we can maximize every penny of that housing fund to get people off the streets and into a stable environment where they can receive the assistance they need.

As for that other 80%, we are off to a great start with the private sector. In this speech last year I challenged our community to spur and support half a billion dollars in total housing investment over the next two years. Well, we won't need two years. I'm proud to announce today that we have exceeded our goal for housing investment in Tulsa in less than one year!

To support our continued momentum in private sector housing development, I am today announcing that moving forward affordable housing project developers will receive concierge service from the City when it comes to building in Tulsa. This is a service usually reserved only for the very largest industrial projects, but building more affordable housing is our top real estate priority and we want to roll out the red carpet for private sector partners who can help us meet our goals.

So we are making great progress on housing, but we can't wait for all the housing to be built before we help our neighbors in need.

Most significantly, the City of Tulsa is seeking proposals from service providers right now to open a low barrier shelter. The idea behind a low barrier shelter is that there are some people who are not allowed in one of Tulsa's main homeless shelters. Maybe they show up intoxicated, or they have a history of unruly behavior, whatever it might be they can't enter a standard shelter so they need an alternative. The City of Tulsa will establish a low barrier shelter that operates on a referral basis from our community's other shelters. So if they have someone they can't admit, they can send them to our low barrier shelter.

We are also working with service providers to establish an emergency temporary housing program that will get people off the street and into a hotel room temporarily while more permanent housing can be located for them. I want to thank the team at the Tulsa Housing Authority that is working with us to identify those longer-term housing options.

We have established the City of Tulsa's first-ever Chief Mental Health Officer, responsible for coordinating first responder assistance for those experiencing a mental health crisis. We have so many resources available to assist people in crisis, but an individual officer in the field should not be expected to diagnose them and know which service to call. The Chief Mental Health Officer will provide a one-stop resource for first responders to connect them with the agencies best positioned to be of help immediately.

The Tulsa Fire Department is piloting a new Alternative Response Team in Downtown Tulsa, sending firefighters and mental health caseworkers to assist people experiencing a non-violent mental health crisis. This is in addition to the Community Response Team, which we have expanded each year of my time as mayor by sending a police officer, firefighter, and mental health caseworker to assist those in mental crisis who may be violent.

The Tulsa Day Center told us a lack of kennels is a barrier for people using their shelter, so we are paying to build them.

Our Parks Department is now empowered to regulate open containers of alcohol in parks where this has become a problem.

We sought and received permission from the railroads to remove campsites from their property. We are seeking the same permission from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

We are using City Security crews to enforce our ordinance that bans camping on public rights of way, and we are contracting with the Center for Employment Opportunities to clean up sites where litter has

been left. To date, almost all the work of these crews has been in response to citizen calls for assistance. We've found that when these crews are able to proactively target particular hot spots daily, the camping and litter in those areas go away. I will be seeking additional funding from the Tulsa City Council to expand the work of these crews in the weeks ahead.

So we are doing a great deal to help our neighbors, and we are evaluating other programs to do more. But we also understand the City's responsibility to uphold our laws. We are a compassionate city, but we also are a city with standards.

To this end, I have issued an executive order to every Tulsa Police officer that they are to enforce our ordinances equally on everyone regardless of perceived housing status. It is already illegal to set up a tent on a sidewalk. It is already illegal to litter public places. It is illegal to trespass on private property, and to deal drugs in city parks. I expect our officers to enforce these ordinances if they see people violating them. That's not a judgment call for officers to have to make.

If people choose to violate our laws and they are homeless, the Tulsa Municipal Court offers a special services docket to work with them on getting the help they need. But it is up to the individual if they want to take advantage of that opportunity.

So please know you can report these violations of our laws and there are compassionate options for those who want them.

I have requested that the Tulsa City Council adopt two separate ordinances, one that strengthens the penalties for trespassing on private property and one that clarifies it is unlawful for someone to obstruct a sidewalk by laying on it. I am eager for my Council colleagues to pass these ordinances so the Tulsa Police Department has the tools they tell us they need to better protect Tulsa.

And I am announcing today an additional program which we will adopt in the months ahead, which will be a partnership between the Tulsa Police Department, the Day Center for the Homeless, the Tulsa Housing Authority, Family & Children's Services, and mental health clinicians. If we encounter someone in the field who is mentally unable to care for themselves - and both an officer and a mental health clinician agree on this - we will file an emergency order of detention to get that person into a treatment center to get them the help they need. Through our emergency temporary housing program, we will provide temporary places for them to stay upon release while remaining in contact with a mental health case worker. The Tulsa Housing Authority will then work with us to find permanent housing for them. We believe this new program is one of the most important things we can do to help homeless Tulsans experiencing psychotic episodes - getting them off the streets and into the care of trained professionals.

Housing, services, and enforcement of our laws. If you're keeping track, that is over 20 different initiatives that the City of Tulsa has under way to address homelessness in our community - and I haven't even touched on our American Rescue Plan Act or Community Development Block Grant funding for homelessness reduction strategies.

I know there are other ideas out there, and I welcome them. We will continue to pursue other strategies as our budget allows. We will use data to evaluate what is working and what isn't, and we will double down on those strategies that demonstrate success.

And while I mentioned our work to aid the mental health of Tulsans experiencing homelessness, it is important to recognize that the mental health crisis in Tulsa goes far beyond the homeless community. And we are working on a number of fronts to address it.

This year we broke ground on the new Oklahoma Psychiatric Care Center, which will be adjacent to the new VA Hospital right across the street from here. This new center will dramatically advance the availability of care for Tulsans experiencing a mental health emergency.

Last year, I spoke about the statistics regarding youth mental health crises in Tulsa - most heartbreakingly framed by the fact that 4,000 kids in Tulsa County attempted suicide last year. That's more than 10 kids every day. As I said last year, we must do better. And today I am here to tell you we are.

We recently announced a \$13 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that is the largest federal grant for mental health services in Tulsa history. The City of Tulsa and Tulsa Public Schools applied for and won this grant together, and it will be used to connect families with the supports they need for children's mental health needs to be addressed early. I am very grateful for Tulsa Public Schools Interim Superintendent Dr. Ebony Johnson and her team's partnership on this, and for the leadership of the Healthy Minds Policy Initiative in successfully securing this game-changing grant.

Similarly, I told you last year that we have an opportunity to fund a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week juvenile psychiatric crisis center - something we did not have in Tulsa. Just last night, the Tulsa City Council approved my request for a \$1 million allocation to that project which will help fund its construction. I appreciate our partners at Tulsa County who are working with us to build this facility, which will be operated with state and federal funds once it is open. This will be another resource to provide Tulsa children with the supports they need.

And while homelessness and mental health are top of mind for many of us lately, there is a major epidemic facing Tulsa that we must confront. I am talking about domestic violence.

The Urban Institute, a nonprofit research organization recently spent 11 months studying domestic violence in Tulsa. Among their findings was that in 2021 Tulsa County had nearly 6,400 domestic abuse crimes - the highest of any county in the state. In 2022, the Tulsa Police Department reported over 17,000 9-1-1 calls related to domestic violence and over 1,200 arrests.

Today I am announcing that in partnership with Domestic Violence Intervention Services, I will issue an executive order to form the Tulsa Commission on Domestic Violence. This Commission will bring together service providers, law enforcement, educators, and leaders from city, county, state, and tribal government to decrease domestic violence homicides, strengthen cross-sector partnerships, and elevate community awareness around domestic violence so every Tulsan can play a part in preventing it.

I know I've spent a lot of time on safety today, but it is the highest responsibility of local government and we cannot build a safer Tulsa if we aren't candid about the dangers our community faces. I am grateful for all the people who are working in so many areas to make our city safer for everyone.

Our second pillar in becoming a globally competitive world-class city is that we have to be a city of opportunity for everyone.

I ran for mayor because I wanted to bring the full resources of the City behind addressing the 11-year life expectancy gap between North Tulsa and the rest of the city. Much progress was made in the preceding decade by focusing on public health initiatives, but economic opportunity is one of the major contributors to health outcomes. If we want kids in North Tulsa to have the same opportunity for a long, happy life as kids in other parts of the city, we have to grow the economy and build wealth in that part of the city.

We've made great strides in this over the last 6 years, attracting over a billion dollars of private investment into North Tulsa and attracting major employers into the area. But we aren't stopping there.

Thanks to a partnership with Tulsa County and TEDC Creative Capital, we broke ground this year on a new entrepreneurship incubator that will be housed in the historic Moton Hospital on Pine. The Greenwood Entrepreneurship Incubator at Moton represents our community's collective impact approach to building the next generation of great businesses in North Tulsa.

We are also making progress on one of the most significant real estate projects in the city's history: the Kirkpatrick Heights and Greenwood Area Master Plan. The goal of this project is to transform vacant Urban Renewal land immediately North of the Inner Dispersal Loop into a vibrant mixed-use development. My message to North Tulsa community leaders was simple: the City and City authorities own the land, but we want whatever happens there to reflect the aspirations North Tulsans have for the site - so whatever North Tulsans decide is what we're going to do.

The plan was developed over the course of a year utilizing rigorous community engagement paired with national expert consultants. The end result is the Kirkpatrick Heights and Greenwood Area Master Plan, which has been approved by the Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council. The City Council and I have allocated \$7 million toward public infrastructure to begin implementation.

Our next step is governance. We want the benefits derived from developing this site to go to North Tulsans. A working group of community leaders is currently evaluating best practices from around the world, and we hope to have that structure in place in the next year. Again, our goal is to build wealth in North Tulsa which we know will lead to better health outcomes and will close the life expectancy gap between North Tulsa and the rest of our city.

We also continue to make progress in righting one of our city's most shameful wrongs. I mentioned the Tulsa Police Department's nationally-leading homicide solve rate earlier. Yet we waited 98 years to try to find the victims of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. We know that, at the very least, there are 18 victims of the Race Massacre buried somewhere in Oaklawn Cemetery. We have the invoice from Tulsa County which paid for their burial without identifying them.

This generation of Tulsans has gone to great lengths to find them, partnering with the Oklahoma Archaeological Survey and some of the best forensic anthropologists in America. This year, we had a significant breakthrough. DNA has been recovered from the remains of seven individuals who fit the profile of Race Massacre victims. DNA experts have combined this with genealogical data that ties them to DNA descendants with specific names living today in several states around the country. We believe this is the first time connections of this kind have ever been made before. We will continue to pursue

this investigation where it leads us, with the ultimate goal of reuniting the remains of victims with their families.

In addition to eliminating racial disparities in Tulsa, we are focused on assisting individual Tulsans when it comes to wealth creation. Last year I established the Office of Financial Empowerment with a goal of increasing financial literacy and reducing debt. Our Financial Empowerment Center provided free individual counseling to Tulsans in the last year increased collective savings among clients by over \$220,000 and reduced their debt by nearly \$800,000.

Our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance free tax preparation program helped almost 4,700 Tulsans file their returns for free. We want to more than double this number to over 10,000 next year. The free tax preparation program is made possible through IRS-trained and certified volunteers. To reach more Tulsans, we need to recruit 250 volunteers to train and certify before the tax season opens in February. If you are interested or your organization can recruit volunteers to help us expand this valuable service to our community, please join the effort.

We also continue to focus on making sure Tulsa is a city where people get equal work for equal pay. I want to thank all of the employers who have signed the Mayor's Pay Equity Pledge. If you see an employer on this list, you can have confidence they are committed to a workplace where you get the same pay for the same work. If your organization hasn't signed this pledge, you still can! Please reach out to me and we will be happy to add your organization to this list of leaders.

But that's not enough. Our community must reframe our view of childcare. Though the burdens of securing childcare often fall to women, childcare is not a women's issue. Childcare is an economic development issue, and our community's lack of childcare is holding Tulsa's economy back.

The Tulsa Women's Commission is studying this issue and will be issuing a comprehensive assessment in 2024. In the meantime, they have identified some quick wins for employers. You can perform a survey within your organization to determine what would be most helpful to parents. You may be surprised to find easy adjustments, like avoiding meeting times which coincide with childcare drop off or pick up - or providing your employees who are expecting parents with childcare resources. If you would like to be a part of the Tulsa Women's Commission's work on this important issue, please shoot me an email at mayor@cityoftulsa.org.

When it comes to creating a city of opportunity, I have even more to share but we will come back to that in a minute.

Our third pillar is that we are building the city we want to leave to the next generation of Tulsans.

Right now, 95% of everything Tulsans throw away at their homes is either recycled or converted to electricity. We are one of the greenest cities in America when it comes to household solid waste disposal. This year we negotiated a 15-year contract with our trash-to-energy plant that will keep us in this leadership position.

This year we signed one of the most important agreements in Tulsa history, forging a partnership with the Muscogee Creek Nation and the City of Jenks to build a lake in South Tulsa - running from roughly 71st Street to 103rd Street. This lake will be transformative for our region, harnessing our greatest natural feature - the Arkansas River - for recreational opportunities and economic development. But

more important than the lake - in my opinion - is how it will come about, through collaboration between a tribal nation and Oklahoma municipalities. I am hopeful our three governments will establish a model for future cooperation that benefits the whole region. I especially want to thank Chief David Hill, Speaker William Low, and Jenks Mayor Cory Box for working with us to make this happen. The lake is now in the design phase, with construction to follow in the years ahead.

We also have completed some exciting parks projects over the course of the last year. Two of my favorites would be the BMX track at McCullough Park on East Tulsa - possibly the best public BMX track in the state - and the new Hope Playground at Whiteside Park, which is specially designed so it can be enjoyed by kids of all abilities side by side.

And when it comes to building things, we recognize that the City had room for improvement. So this year I reorganized City departments in one of the most wide-reaching reorgs in the history of the City, all aimed at improving citizen engagement, project design, and seamless execution. Our goal when a street project is finished should not be relief - it should be delight with the finished project. By better integrating the teams responsible for our work, I believe we are better positioned to achieve that.

And this has been a historic couple of years for Tulsa's emergence as a national leader in the advanced aerial mobility industry. Aviation & aerospace are undergoing the greatest period of innovation since the invention of the jet engine in the 1940s, driven by new advances in autonomy, connectivity, and electrification. There is currently no clear market leader in this industry, with more than 65% of aerospace companies headquartered outside of large tech hubs. Tulsa's legacy aerospace expertise, nationally recognized research at TU and OSU, and the appetite of local energy, healthcare, agriculture, and logistics corporations make Tulsa the perfect fit for the UAS + AAM markets. Tulsa is an ideal place to test, manufacture, and deploy this technology.

Tulsa's expertise in this space is also being recognized by investors. Tulsa Innovation Labs, backed by GKFF, has unlocked over \$215 million in investment to grow Tulsa's tech economy, with a commitment to Advanced Aerial Mobility. Tulsa beat out hundreds of other cities across the country to receive a Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce that - combined with additional local dollars - is funding \$70 million to establish a research center of excellence at OSU-Tulsa, manufacturing facilities at the Port of Inola, and a drone testing corridor in partnership with the Osage Nation. And earlier this month Tulsa was designated by the U.S Economic Development Administration as a Tech Hub following our application which centered around drone technology.

So much is happening very quickly to position the Tulsa region as the national leader in advanced aerial mobility. If we are all pulling in the same direction, I am confident we can do it. So I am announcing today the establishment of a Blue Ribbon Commission to make Tulsa the Drone Capital of the World. This commission will study ways in which the City of Tulsa can support this industry and make recommendations for how we will establish Tulsa as the world's leader in Advanced Aerial Mobility.

While I have talked about many things we are doing today, I want to highlight three specific things I look forward to in the year ahead.

First, we will finish construction on not one but two once-in-a-century projects for Tulsa. First, the lake in the Arkansas River that people have been talking about since 1964 will open. I have been working on this for 15 years, and I believe the activation of the Arkansas River Corridor will be one of the most transformative things our generation does for Tulsa. Instead of everyone getting excited for that one

day a year we have the raft race, we will have a lake open for canoeing, kayaking, paddle boating and recreational amenities along the shoreline that make it a regional recreational destination.

We will also finish construction of the new Gilcrease Museum. When finished, it will not just house the greatest collection of American art and history outside of the federal government's, it will be the only museum in Oklahoma capable of housing major traveling exhibits. It will take in an amazing view of Downtown Tulsa to the East and the majesty Osage Hills to the West. It will be a point of pride for all Tulsans, and I hope somewhere Mr. Gilcrease is proud of the way our community is taking care of his tremendous gift to our city.

Each of these projects is a landmark achievement for our city, representing years of planning and comprehensive community support to make a reality.

Now don't take this next one the wrong way, but I'm excited for us to elect a new mayor in the year ahead! (Pause and smile) During the Father's Day storm when we had 200,000 people without power, my friend Councilor Jeannie Cue came up to me and said "You know I think the 8 years you were mayor might go down as the worst 8 years Tulsa ever had!" I have teased her about that repeatedly and she swears it was a compliment!

We have no doubt faced a lot of challenges during my time as mayor, but we have also proven our resilience and enjoyed a historic run of achievement. I LOVE being mayor, but I also believe it is important to have someone new in this job every 8 years or so, with different ideas and new energy. That is what is best for Tulsa. I am grateful to see several outstanding Tulsans pursuing what I think is the best job in public service. I will not be endorsing anyone in the campaign. I want to be a resource for the candidates, and have already hosted several of them for meetings in my office with department directors so they can ask them any questions they want. My goal is to position our next mayor to be as successful as possible.

The last thing that I am fixated on in the year ahead is trying to establish a long-term framework for governance with the tribal nations whose reservations intersect in Tulsa. This is a challenge because the city is the least empowered to do this, but Congress has failed to do anything and our state government is fixated on litigation. I have spent three years waiting for them to do something, and they haven't. So we are going to do as much as we can on our own.

This has been tied up in litigation for years, and if no one does anything different that's how it will continue. I normally don't talk about stuff that's being litigated, but this is of historic importance for our city so I'm going to be more open with you today than I have been before.

Tulsa exists in the Muscogee Creek, Cherokee, and Osage reservations. The Supreme Court has settled this not once but twice in recent years. I respect the decision, and honestly am excited that we can be part of those reservations. I have the greatest respect for Chief Hill, Chief Hoskin, and Chief Standing Bear. They are fine leaders, and honorable men.

The challenge we face is that the recent court rulings have thrown all of the systems of governmental interaction which were developed since statehood into confusion.

Now my dream for the year ahead is that Chief Hill and Chief Hoskin and Chief Standing Bear and I can go out and tell the world that we've identified a path forward, and that Tulsa will become the center of

Native American excellence for the whole world in the 21st Century. We are now the largest city in a reservation in America, so let's celebrate that. Let's make it a benefit rather than acting like it is a problem.

I believe our main challenge as a city on this front is that we are only incorporated under the State of Oklahoma - our laws and governance are not recognized by the tribal nations, even though their citizens vote in municipal elections just like anyone else.

This creates short-term roadblocks. None of the tribal nations have a zoning code for Tulsa or a building code or electrical code. If we didn't have these in place - or if they only applied to some people and not to others - it would be dangerous. I believe all of this can be resolved with collaboration.

The larger issue is that the City of Tulsa has a municipal code developed through democratic processes over 125 years of trial and error. This should be an asset to the tribal nations, as it is to the State of Oklahoma.

I believe the best way for us to resolve all of this is for the tribal nations to recognize the City of Tulsa as part of their nations - the same way the State of Oklahoma recognizes us. The State of Oklahoma delegates self-government to the City of Tulsa on any issue they don't claim for themselves. If the tribal nations would be willing to do the same, we could move beyond the litigation that has been a source of antagonism for the last three years and shift our focus to building that international center of Native American excellence right here.

I am committed to meeting with my colleagues in the tribal governments as long and as often as I need to in order to bring this framework about. And I want to be crystal clear today: if we can implement a framework for tribal recognition of our municipal government, Tulsa will be out of the business of litigating the reach of tribal sovereignty altogether. Then we could be completely focused on our collaborative efforts, and Tulsans will benefit for centuries to come.

To reflect our pride in Tulsa's Native American heritage, I have directed our team at the City to change the official City seal. Tulsa was founded in 1836 by the Muscogee Creek Nation, yet our seal only recognizes the date when the city government was incorporated in 1898.

Our new seal has a revised arrowhead, which incorporates the date of 1836 into the design. I want to thank our talented graphics team at the City of Tulsa for their work in developing this. And I want to thank Chief David Hill of the Muscogee Creek Nation, who reviewed and approved this revision to our city seal. I will be sending this revised seal that better reflects our Native American heritage to the City Council for approval in the weeks ahead. Moving forward, both our seal and all City letterhead will incorporate both the date of our founding by the Muscogee Creek Nation and our incorporation as the City of Tulsa.

I want to close where I began, with our goal of making Tulsa a globally competitive world-class city. Much of what I've discussed today speaks to the excellence we are pursuing in building Tulsa up, but I think it is important to recognize that we are truly becoming a global city. Tulsa is a destination for people from all around the world.

Much of our work to be the best city in American for immigrants comes from the New Tulsans Initiative, a program I launched early in my administration. Through the New Tulsans Initiative, we have hosted

citizenship ceremonies for over 1100 of our newest fellow Americans! We are partnering with philanthropic foundations and nonprofits like the Tulsa YWCA to break down legal barriers to citizenship and translate degrees and certifications that allow immigrants to compete for jobs with true qualifications they have earned.

We have become a national model for refugee assistance. When Afghans loyal to the United States were forced to leave their homeland, we believe more of them came to Tulsa than any city in America. The work of Catholic Charities, the YWCA, BNai Emunah Synagogue and so many others led President Biden's top aide for refugee resettlement to come to Tulsa to see how we were handling it because he wanted to use us as a model for other cities.

Susan and I had dinner at the home of one young Afghan couple. He was a translator for the U.S. government in Afghanistan and his wife was a doctor there. Their young son was born right before they came to America. He told me how there are so many Afghans in Tulsa who were professionals in Afghanistan, who worked in government jobs and in law enforcement. But many of them are having a hard time finding similar jobs here. His statement struck me. Here are people who served their government, but had to leave because of their loyalty to America. And I happen to be the CEO of a major government employer where they live. And we often have a hard time filling jobs at the City of Tulsa with quality applicants.

So today, I'm proud to announce that man - Saber Ahmadi - is joining the team at the City of Tulsa as our new Immigrant Services Liaison, helping us connect immigrants with quality jobs available at the City of Tulsa. He's here today as my guest, and I want to thank him for his service to our country and his future service to our city. (Pause)

One of the things you see at our monthly citizenship ceremonies is the great diversity of immigrants coming to Tulsa. One of the fastest growing immigrant communities in our city is from Asia. Originating in the work of our faith-based institutions in countries like Vietnam and Malaysia, Tulsa has become known in Asia as a welcoming city of opportunity. And as our Asian community grows, we want to make sure they have a voice to shape the future of Tulsa. This year we announced the formation of an Asian Affairs Commission to do just that.

We have implemented a language access policy at the City to make sure people can access City services regardless of the language they speak.

All of this adds up to a city that strives to be worthy of the hope that immigrants have placed in Tulsa when they left their homeland for greater opportunity here. This work is being nationally recognized, and I am proud to announce today that Tulsa has become the first certified Welcoming City in the State of Oklahoma. I want to thank all our community partners who are working to make us the best city possible for immigrants from around the world, and look forward to Welcoming America's official presentation of this recognition on December 6.

But being a global city isn't just about how it benefits us. Tulsa is America's Most Generous City - famous for being a people motivated by what we can do for others.

I just returned about 72 hours ago from Tanzania, where we are working to establish our first sister city on the continent of Africa in Mwanza. The potential I saw there is a great example of this.

About two decades ago our fellow Tulsan, Chris Gates, founded a home and school in rural Tanzania for girls who were wards of the state. He called it Mainsprings. The purpose of the school was to create a safe place for these girls who had lost their families so they would not fall victim to violence or human trafficking. Since then, Mainsprings has expanded its work to provide high quality education for impoverished children in a region where the public school classroom student to teacher ratio averages 200 to 1. Mainsprings works to break the cycle of poverty and create a sustainable future for every child who goes there.

The kids at Mainsprings are incredible people. They speak at least two languages - Swahili and English - and the work they are doing in applied science and math in particular is advanced. In a country with a strong ag economy, every student becomes an expert in sustainable agriculture.

But the kids in the home for girls will always have a special place in my heart. They have experienced things in their lives which we would not want to imagine. Yet they are joyful, smart, funny, and inspiring. Every member of our group was moved by our time with them. They have great hopes for their future, and are doing the work today that will make them leaders as adults. They have plans to be lawyers and doctors and one is on a path to play Olympic basketball. Her dream is to play in the WNBA here in the United States. I told her my dream is for her to play for the Golden Hurricane or the Golden Eagles on her way there!

Chris Gates keeps the U.S. office for Mainsprings right here in Tulsa. I really wanted to single him out today for our city's thanks, but he is in Tanzania doing the work he loves. Over the last two decades, hundreds of Tulsans have traveled to Mainsprings to volunteer. Over time this built a special relationship between our community and the major city for the metro area where Mainsprings resides: Mwanza.

And so as a natural outgrowth of that relationship, we are establishing a sister city partnership with Mwanza, Tanzania - our first in the continent of Africa.

I have so many takeaways from my time in Tanzania, but the biggest one was a reminder of how much people have in common around the world. Within the first ten minutes of meeting Mwanza's Lord Mayor Sima - who quickly became a great friend - we were talking about infrastructure, economic development, and opportunities for young people in our cities. I see great opportunities for Tulsa and Mwanza to work together on economic development, health care, tourism, and higher education.

The world can seem pretty divided right now. Opportunities like this give us a chance to work with people from very different countries at a human level. And when we do that, we tend to find that most folks just want the same things - things like security for their family, opportunity for the next generation, and a hometown they can be proud of.

This is one story, in one country, where the work of a Tulsan grew into something much greater. The reality is that there are dozens of stories like that - each unique in its own country and focus - but the spirit of this city is making the world a better place.

We have covered a lot today because there is so much under way. It is an exciting time. I want to thank all of you for the parts you are playing to build the best city we can for future generations of Tulsans.

Today, the state of our city is strong - and it is making the world a better place.

Thank you.