Thank you. It is good to see you all of you. So many smiling faces, and hardly an empty chair, thank you for coming.

The number of people attending this event has increased each year. I am told today we have over one thousand, five-hundred-and-fifty. Which is fabulous.

How many have attended this event before?

How many from out of town? I know we have some executives from Southwest Airlines visiting from Dallas today…

Well, welcome to each of you. Welcome to this State of the City Address for 2016.

I want to thank the Thunder and Bank of Oklahoma for being our main sponsors today.

This is a Chamber of Commerce Event, which gives me the chance to thank them for all they do for us. 75 years ago, they helped secure Tinker Air Force Base. 15 years ago they helped pass MAPS for Kids. 10 years ago, they helped us get an NBA team. Our city is getting more and more national attention. Let’s not forget the business leaders of this community that have built one of the top chambers of commerce in the country. Would everyone who is on the Chamber’s board of directors, or on the staff of the Chamber, please stand. Quite a group. To all those standing. Thank you very much.

And we have members of the city council here today, who I will ask to stand as I mention your name. Eight individuals who give generously with their time and expertise.  Not all of them are here today, but if you are, would you please stand as I call your name. James Greiner, representing Ward One; Ed Shadid, Ward Two; Larry McAtee, Ward Three; Pete White, Ward Four; David Greenwell, Ward Five; Meg Salyer, representing Ward Six; John Pettis, Ward Seven; and Mark Stonecipher, Ward Eight. Ok, please remain standing.

And now I want to thank the rest of the people I work with at City Hall. Would all of our City employees that made it today also stand?  And now would anyone who serves on a City commission, or advisory board, or oversight board, or trust please stand?  Let’s give our Council, our City staff and our community volunteers a round of applause.

On a personal note, the table where my family sits looks a little different this year. My mother passed away last spring and I bring it up this afternoon because this was her favorite event. I would drive into the same neighborhood where I was born, pick her up, and she would have a big smile on her face and say “I get to go downtown and listen to the Mayor talk.” Seemingly oblivious to the fact that she taught the mayor how to talk. Teri and I miss her. But we do have a new addition to our family this year. We have another new granddaughter, that’s four if you are counting.

This is Penny.

I know she is proud of her city. And she should be. As far as she is concerned, we have always had a NBA team, that Devon Tower has always been downtown. And the river has always had water.

But for most of us, these still feel like new things. They are examples of change, positive change. I don’t think there is a city in the country that has changed more than us.

People are noticing that Oklahoma City is changing. And a lot of people like what they see. Since 2010, over 40,000 people have moved here.

As you know, the media loves to rank cities. Just last week, USA Today came out with a list: The 14 places you have to visit in 2016: Places like Hawaii, San Diego, Philadelphia, Las Vegas made the list. And so did we. That’s a great compliment to our tourism industry.

Other lists in the past year, New Geography Magazine named us as the top ranked city in the country for Veterans.

A website called Thumbtack named us the number one community for small businesses wanting to grow.

Entrepreneur Magazine agrees. They put together a list of the top 25 cities worth moving to if you want to launch a business. We were number one on their list.

CBRE looked to see which cities were growing their technology markets. No city has a faster rate of growth than Oklahoma City. Up 38 percent.

The University of Michigan conducted a study on commutes. In a lot of cities, commuters are spending hours in their cars. Oklahoma City ranked number one for the fastest commuting time in the country.

We have been noted for our low construction costs, low cost of living, and our manufacturing industry is strong. Stronger than any city west of the Mississippi.

Virtually any media organization that looks at jobs, puts us on their list. Millennials are encouraged to move here. Retirees are encouraged to move here. And if you don’t want to move here, Travel and Leisure Magazine says you should visit. They put us on their list as one of the friendliest travel destinations. In fact, they point out—we were number one in the category of “least rude” and “least snobby.”

So if the category is friendliness, we aren’t likely to thumb our nose at other cities, but we could if we wanted to.

Two other rankings I want to mention. We all know about our nation’s growing problem of income inequality. You should know, that according to Brookings, we have one of the lowest rates of income inequality in the country.

And this one may surprise you. We have long had a history of being an energy based economy. 20 years ago we started taking significant steps to diversify. We know the results: companies have grown, like Boeing, GE, Dell, Hertz, American Fidelity, Love’s, Hobby Lobby, Integris, Sonic, LSB, OU Medical, I could go on and on.  Well, a national look at the 350 largest metros economies in the country shows we are the 11th most diversified. 11th out of 350!

So, if you have been wondering, why, when oil prices are down, so much new construction is taking place, That’s part of the reason. Only 3 percent of our employee base is in the oil and gas sector. Now, it’s a much larger share of our greater economy than 3% because those are some of the higher paying jobs.  But the idea, that we can’t survive a reduction in energy prices is an outdated viewpoint.

In preparing for this address, one of the most difficult aspects is trying to reflect the importance and success of the non-profit sector. We try to keep government small in Oklahoma. And we do a pretty good job. But that means that we rely more and more on non-profits to help our community create the type of city where we want to live. I can’t possibly name all of the non-profits that do great work but let me mention just a few of our success stories. The homeless alliance and their individual agencies are dealing with our most vulnerable citizens. The alliance deals with so many different people, in so many different situations, that it is tough to categorize but let me just put in a pitch to continue to help them with your chartable dollars. They have a tough job. Their success in dealing with Veterans who are homeless is something you should be proud of.

In 2014, the Homeless Alliance began a program called “Journey Home OKC.”  We identified 373 veterans who fit the definition of chronically homeless.  Of that 373, 262 now have a place to live. We anticipate that by the end of this year, we may have all 373 into a place they can call home.

There is no one cure for homelessness in America, but we are moving in the right direction.

We also work closely with the Humane Society. They were organized back in 2007 and since that time, they have helped us find homes for over 20,000 dogs and cats. They have also spayed or neutered over 78,000 animals. We have still have work to do in this area, but, again, we are headed in the right direction.

Food distribution is still a big issue in our city. How do we address hunger and obesity at the same time by making sure everyone in our city has access to fresh fruits and vegetables.  Our local food bank is doing a wonderful job helping us to distribute food to people in need.

In health, our local city-county health department has become a national model. And again, we have a long way to go and so many health issues are the result of behavior, it’s very hard for a community to improve its health statistics.  It’s tough to change behavior. But no

community in the country is doing more than we are doing. From building health facilities in income-challenged neighborhoods, to increasing health education in the schools, to building sidewalks and bike trails and senior wellness centers. We are changing the culture of health in this community.

We are also not going to become the community we want to be without a commitment to the arts. And the amount of money going to the Arts is also up. Allied Arts is celebrating its 45th anniversary this year. They help fund so many arts organizations in our community. They broke their fund raising record again in 2015. Over 3.4 million dollars to be distributed to arts and education organizations around the metro. They have just launched their 2016 campaign. We need them to have another record year.

The Oklahoma City Art Museum is preparing for an incredible exhibit of art from Matisse and Picasso. This collection of modernism is coming to us straight from Paris. Many of these paintings and sculptures have never left Europe before. Oklahoma City is the only stop in North America. You will be able to see it here this summer.

We are also about to enter a golden age for live music. On NW 23rd, the remodeled Tower Theater will open this spring. Meanwhile, in Bricktown, the Criterion Theater is under construction. The 21C Hotel is under construction on the western edge of downtown, and it too, will have a live music component.

In public safety, the crime rate is down 10 percent . However, our homicide rate, which had dropped significantly in 2013 and 2014 has followed the national trend and is back up again, though it’s still lower than it was in 2012.

Many of our homicides are the result of domestic violence. In the past two years, we have made significant changes in the way we deal with these situations. We are handling the calls differently. We are handling the investigations differently. We are learning more and more about which cases are likely to escalate. As part of that effort, this year, the YWCA opened up the Thelma Gaylord Emergency Shelter. It more than doubles our ability to get people out of a dangerous situation. Our new efforts on domestic violence are drawing national attention as a best practice. This is not an issue that just affects a few people. It affects all of us, directly or indirectly. And we all have to be part of the solution. We have to be less tolerant about violence in the home. We need to speak up and take action. The idea, that a domestic violence situation will improve if we do nothing, is part of the reason we have such a problem. We have more resources to deal with mental illness, anger management, and family crisis prevention than ever before.

We are moving forward with the concept of a Family Justice Center: a comprehensive facility where victims of domestic violence can access much-needed resources in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Let’s use these services and let’s stop the cycle of domestic violence that keeps up from being the community we want to be.

As you know, our number one priority at City Hall is public safety. It’s where most of your local tax dollars are spent. The last bond issue that we passed including several capital projects for the police and fire departments. As a result of that commitment we opened up a new police station this past fall. It replaces a building that had served us for over 60 years.  And, as you may know, we are always looking for new police officers. If you know of a young person that might make a quality police officer, especially if they can add to the diversity of our force, please encourage them to apply.

As for construction projects, they are seemingly everywhere you look. We are investing in new schools. We have plans to build new fire stations. We are repairing bridges. Improving parks. Addressing drainage systems. Replacing busses. We are updating libraries. When you put more money into streets and police and schools you are building stronger neighborhoods.

Of course many of these construction projects are part of MAPS 3. And 2016 will be the biggest year yet for this initiative that you passed in 2009. This spring, we will open the Riversport Rapids, a man-made, white water rafting experience that will allow you and your family to enjoy a kayaking adventure. First up, though, the United States Olympic team will get a chance to experience the facility when the Olympic Trials are held here in May.

Also scheduled to open this summer is the Expo Center at the Fairgrounds. It’s a 290 thousand square foot building that will become the centerpiece of our exhibit space. MAPS 3 is a significant part of the improvements that are taking place at the fairgrounds. New and better parking, new access, and this Expo building should be a big economic development driver for decades to come.

Also currently under construction is the first of our four senior wellness centers. This facility will open at NW 112th and Rockwell. Like every community in the country, we are growing older as a population, this facility reflects our commitment to helping seniors lead healthy, active lives.

This past year we opened up the first of the MAPS 3 Trails. It connects the Oklahoma River trail to Lake Overholser. This trail is getting lots of use. (AD LIB) The second MAPS 3 trail is now in the planning stages.

And as you know, MAPS 3 includes sidewalks. How many in here have seen the sidewalk construction that is taking place? The feedback I get is overwhelmingly positive. We are connecting neighborhoods with parks and schools and shopping centers. Every once in a while, I get into a conversation with someone who is not thrilled. It usually goes like this: “Mayor, you are building a sidewalk in my neighborhood.” At this point, I sense they are not thanking me. If I say nothing, they will continue, “We don’t need sidewalks, no one walks in our neighborhood.” And then the reply seems so obvious. “Maybe no one walks in your neighborhood because you don’t have sidewalks.”

Most people like sidewalks. And the sidewalks we are constructing are being used.  Yesterday I tweeted that I needed some pictures of people using our sidewalks. Let’s see what we got (AD LIB). You will be pleased to know that there are more on the way.

The three highest profile MAPS 3 projects are about ready to come out of the ground: The Park is already under construction. The streetcar, and the convention center are not far behind. That’s over $500 million dollars of planning and construction that will be introduced into our economy over the next few years.

In education – although success is a little inconsistent – we are sensing real improvement in the classrooms. For the past several years, we have seen poor results at the middle school level in the Oklahoma City Public School system.  Attendance was dropping off, test scores continued to slip. Things are changing. This year, the math scores in our middle schools rose 18 points. Enrollment in the district is up to 46,000.

I want to thank the Chamber for taking the lead on the Oklahoma City Schools Compact. You will hear more about this, but it’s a new effort to help the District deal with a variety of issues.

The demographics in the district are changing rapidly. 15 years ago, 19% of the district was Hispanic. Today, it’s over half. And a look to the suburbs illustrates a similar story. The Putnam City School District is now 21% Hispanic.

As you know, we have had over 75 construction projects involved in K-12 Education over the last few years, mostly from MAPS for Kids. But these projects are taking place all over the city. During the construction at Emerson School, we discovered something quite extraordinary.  Last summer we removed a wall and uncovered some blackboards that had been perfectly preserved for nearly 100 years. And then a few weeks ago, we found some more. I want to show them to you. These are dated from December of 1917. So the teachers and the boys and girls involved in this work are all long gone. But I feel compelled to show you these images because it seems to me like they purposely left these blackboards for us to see at a later date. The penmanship, the colors. A reminder that the school construction projects we complete today must stand the test of time.

At the Higher Ed level, I want to take a moment to mention our ever-growing relationship with UCO. President Betz and his staff are continuing their commitment to Oklahoma City. You probably know about ACM, the School of Rock that they offer downtown. You may be less aware of their new Boathouse and Jazz Lab on the river and their new downtown MBA program. We are also working together with the Brookings Institute on improving our Innovation District. None of these are small endeavors.

Elsewhere, higher Ed also got a boost in Oklahoma City with the opening of the new OCU Law School downtown. The Stephenson Cancer Clinic on the OU

Health Sciences Campus is growing and will be applying for NCI Designation later this year.

And there is new construction on OSU’s campus in Oklahoma City as well as at OCCC. Enrollment at our Career Techs is up.  Nothing contributes more to adding to our workforce than investments in Education. I can’t imagine there is another city in the country that has more education and research projects underway than us.

2016 figures to have its share of landmark events. We still have some work to do but it appears the American Indian Cultural Center is back on track. I hope we can soon reach an agreement between the city, the state and the Chickasaw Nation to get construction going again.

In the Innovation District, the new GE Oil and Gas Technology Center will open this year.

As for sports, In March, we will be hosting the Big 12 Women’s Basketball Tournament and the first and second round of the NCAA Men’s basketball Tournament.

In April, we expect over 20,000 participants in the Oklahoma Memorial Marathon, In May, we expect the Thunder to be in the NBA Playoffs, and we will once again be hosting the Big 12 Baseball Tournament. In June, the Women’s College World Series returns to Hall of Fame Stadium.

So, add in the Olympic Trials for Kayak and it’s going to be a busy year.

Let’s sum this up. I know there is a sense of caution in the air. But remind yourself of the many ways Oklahoma City has prepared for times like this. This is a different city. A more diversified economy. A community that is built on bold ideas. Believe me, there’s a lot of cities out there that want to be us. A city where income is rising, unemployment is low, housing prices are affordable, and traffic congestion is an occasional inconvenience instead of a daily nightmare.

If there are young people in your life, read to them. If there are older people in your neighborhood, check on them occasionally to see how they are doing. Support your local merchants. And volunteer at your kid’s school, or your church, or at a non-profit that is helping this city move forward. Thank you for all you do to make this such a great city.  And thanks for coming.