



Kathy Taylor
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

**Mayor Kathy Taylor
Oklahoma City Rotary Speech
April 22, 2008 – 12:30 p.m.**

Thank you, Paul for the introduction and thanks to the Oklahoma City Rotary for the invitation to speak. I miss my many friends that I see here today in the audience, but I hope you can see why I love being Mayor of Tulsa and get a feel of what is going on in our great City (through our video presentation).

Of course, congratulations are in order for the extraordinary way Oklahoma City has been developing, especially with your latest achievement – becoming a major league city! Mayor Cornett is taking Oklahoma City to the next level.

Last week marked my second year in office and I can tell you, it flew by! I am happy to be back in Oklahoma City where I spent three years on Governor Henry's team as secretary of commerce and tourism. We made great progress during those three years, including working with Oklahoma City to land Dell.

Thanks to that experience at the state, I had an opportunity to see Oklahoma City and Tulsa growth, as well as other communities growing across our state. It enabled me to hit the ground running when I was elected, which was a good thing!

I was elected on April 4, took office six days later and delivered a budget 20 days later! And it hasn't stopped since. As you saw from the video, Tulsa does have a *new kind of energy* these days and things are changing at a rapid pace.

Downtown is the heartbeat of a city and we have put significant efforts in bringing life and commerce back downtown...and it is working. The BOK events center will be open in a scant four months, and shortly thereafter our Convention Center will be remodeled and become home to the largest ballroom in the state. The new 18,000 seat arena, designed by international architect Cesar Pelli, is a spectacular new point of pride on Tulsa's landscape.

And, to make sure we put our best foot forward when it opens, we spent the past two years overhauling 50 blocks of downtown streets, as well as adding a downtown police substation for our new bike patrol. Two years ago, I asked our public works director to be sure downtown street construction was complete by the time the BOK Center opened. So, if you have been to downtown Tulsa in the last two years, you might have thought you were driving through a warzone, but in fact, in just a few more months, it will be ready for smooth-flowing traffic again.

You may have heard that we booked Kenny Chesney, Celine Dion and many more talented artists. Like the Ford Center, our BOK event center is managed by SMG and they are doing an excellent job.



With the shiny new BOK Center opening, in comparison, our City Hall was looking a bit sad, with nearly \$25 million of deferred maintenance in city facilities. And, as government had grown since the 1960s when our City Hall was built, our team was spread out across the City. So, we turned **lemons into lemonade** and purchased One Technology Center, our **new** City Hall.

We will move into a spectacular high tech building, formerly the home of WilTel Communications Group (most of these jobs were moved to Colorado when Leucadia purchased the company). The former WilTel building stood substantially empty and with an original building and furnishing cost of nearly \$250 million, we were able to purchase the building and furniture for around a quarter of that cost. And, we used third party lease revenues to pay for it. So, we will now have a new City Hall at One Technology Center, **without raising taxes**.

We are consolidating employees from five city facilities that will enable us to bring efficiency to government, as well as remarket the properties we are vacating for commercial development, a true win-win situation.

And, we are working on a plan to build a new ballpark for the Tulsa Drillers that's within walking distance of City Hall. Downtown residences are increasing as are restaurant and entertainment venues. Downtown is definitely coming alive.

But the real story of how Tulsa's new kind of energy is happening is the message I want to deliver—**it is about building partnerships**.

I have a deeply held belief, forged through my years in business and reinforced during my tenure as secretary of commerce that government and business must work together for success. The more partners we have at the table, the better the chance for success.

Growing government is not the answer, but making the private sector part of the solution is. So my focus in Tulsa has been on building strong partnerships and great things are happening.

The first partnership is with the City Council. We have nine councilors elected by district and the council relationship is the most challenging. It is a constant source of communication and juggling to develop a city wide view.

We have built a partnership with education. I restructured our management team, and, for the first time in a Tulsa Mayor's office, I set education as a primary goal of our City government, naming former City Councilor Susan Neal as head of community and education initiatives. I convened our partners in education with a Mayor's Call to Action: to bring public school leaders in our region together with higher education experts, to develop best practices, and help align curriculum for the long term workforce development for our region.



And of course, I am proud to have the Tulsa Achieves Scholarship program, **the first of its kind in the state**, which allows any high school graduate in Tulsa County to receive a two-year degree at TCC tuition free. Also, Tulsa's Career Tech System has followed with Tulsa Pathways, providing tuition-free pathways for career-tech training.

We know we are leading the state in these programs and that it will change the workforce landscape of our city. I hope every community in our state finds a way to implement our higher education and career-tech programs. If we educate our children, we educate our workforce and **provide a true competitive advantage for attracting and retaining good jobs.**

Our partnership with the private sector and education allows us to lead the nation in early childhood education with Educare. The mission of Educare is to help break the cycle of generational poverty by intervening at the Pre-K level.

And our community schools' initiative brings programs together to help make our schools the center of our neighborhoods as they once were. They can do so by partnering with other service providers to bring parents and other family members to our schools. A great example is the school-based Bedlam clinics that OU and OSU partner (**now that is a partnership to be proud of!**) to provide medical clinics for kids and their families in many of our high poverty and high-dropout-rate schools.

We have built a partnership with our Chamber and Conventions and Visitors Bureau where we jointly discuss priorities and work hand-in-hand to implement them. Our new tourism brand "I AM" has taken off and is already showing great promise. This fall we will host the National Historic Trust's annual conference in Tulsa. We are partnering with the philanthropic community through the Tulsa Community Foundation, and they are helping us in so many ways, including beautifying our City, adding bike trails, and helping us meet our goal of planting 20,000 new trees by 2010.

Those partnerships have made a difference in our city.

Tulsa's per capita income is 16 percent above the national average, while the state of Oklahoma is 14 percent below. Our unemployment is 3.5 percent lower than the state and nation.

In 2007, we added 6,100 new jobs and in 2008 our job growth is projected to outpace the state and the nation. In fact, Forbes has rated Tulsa the sixth best metro area for jobs among the 100 largest metros in the country. Tulsa's energy and aerospace industries are still the heartbeat of our economy with our aerospace jobs paying over 83 percent higher than the state average.

Tourism is growing as well, hosting events such as the PGA and LPGA tournaments and bringing people to Tulsa for the first time. But even in the year before the PGA, Tulsa hosted 9-1/2 million visitors to our city.



And we have built a partnership with the most important group—our citizens. We will be launching PLANiTULSA in mid-May, which is a complete revamp of our City’s comprehensive plan and the first time this has been done in 30 years. It will be a plan written by the citizens of Tulsa. I hope you can tell, I am very excited about the future of Tulsa and the impact Tulsa’s future makes on the state.

Looking forward, Tulsa is moving to reach its potential. It is a city that has gone through a difficult time with somewhat of an unclear direction, however it is an exciting challenge. It requires you to get deep in the weeds of government processes and budgets to make systemic change.

We have partnered with the University of Tulsa, which will be managing and expanding one of Tulsa’s greatest assets—the Gilcrease Museum. The museum houses one of the world’s greatest collections of western art, however, it was limited by the municipal budget. TU has a great collection of western documents in the McFarlin Library, so when I called President Upham and asked him to consider the idea, he agreed it was worth exploring. After nearly 12 months of work (with a number of hurdles to overcome), I learned that with the right partnership anything is possible. Gilcrease’s future has never been brighter.

Another challenge was with our city golf courses, as they were losing rounds and not being well maintained. Maintaining a golf course and a right of way are much different. So we looked across the nation for best practices. Our golf courses are still public courses but now they are privately managed by the Billy Casper Company, a national leader in golf course management.

We partnered with the U.S. Attorney to hold one of the largest national conferences, called “Building a Safer Tulsa” with more than 250 Tulsans spending two days with national experts on reducing gang activity. The two-year anniversary of that conference is coming in September. It has enabled us to tackle crime with a community wide approach.

Our support of entrepreneurship was made possible by our volunteer economic development commission board and Spirit Bank. In 2007, we held the first-ever Mayor’s Entrepreneurial Spirit Award, an American Idol type contest where more than 60 business plans were reviewed and mentored by local business judges. The winning company, SeekingSitters® received a cash award and consultation for expansion. SeekingSitters® is now operating in 13 states and was named one of the top female-owned companies by Working Mother Magazine! Our second year announcement of the Award program drew a packed crowd at our former downtown Union Depot, now the Tulsa Jazz Hall of Fame!

I think one of the most important partnerships we are developing is the partnership with Oklahoma City. Tulsa and Oklahoma City are the twin engines of economic development in providing around 60 percent of the state’s population, 65 percent of the states’ total personal



income and 70 percent of the state's gross product. **And as urban environments we face the same challenges.**

I am excited that Mayor Cornett and I both serve in leadership capacities at the U.S. Conference of Mayors. We put together a joint legislative agenda, as did the Oklahoma City and Tulsa Chambers. I was proud to be here to see and show my support for the phenomenal work Oklahoma City did in capturing the Sonics!

And, as Mayor Cornett is asking Oklahoma City to lose a million pounds, I will be asking Tulsans to walk, run, bike, or swim a million miles this year. Just as he took the leadership in losing weight, I am taking leadership by training for the 15k Tulsa Run and riding in Tulsa's greatest new event, Tulsa Tough, an international bike race on the streets of downtown Tulsa.

And all this has happened in just 24 short months! I am confident the BEST is yet to come.

Just like any OU graduate, I love a rivalry, however, I think the rivalry should never be within our state. The entire population of Oklahoma is about equal to the metro Houston area. So if we want to make progress, we must make it by supporting each other.

I challenge each of you in Oklahoma City and each Tulsan to continue to find ways we can tackle problems together, to move these twin economic engines of our state to an even faster speed, which will benefit all the citizens of our state. We should collaborate on the unique problems facing our urban environments, such as urban education, aging infrastructure, mass transit, and municipal finance to ensure we train, attract, and retain the workforce of tomorrow.

I am proud of our great State and the amazing City of Tulsa and my great birthplace—Oklahoma City.

So, let's take it to the next level and work towards a major-league-type of partnership for our urban centers.

Let's make 2008 the year of building greater partnerships between Oklahoma City and Tulsa!

Thank you.