

# GOVERNOR BILL RITTER

## STATE OF THE STATE SPEECH

Joint Session of the Colorado General Assembly  
House Chambers, State Capitol  
11 a.m. January 11, 2007

### INTRODUCTION

Lieutenant Governor O'Brien, President Fitz-Gerald, Speaker Romanoff, Mayor Hickenlooper, members of the Cabinet, the state Board of Education, Supreme Court justices, Treasurer Kennedy, Attorney General Suthers, Secretary of State Coffman, Honorable Representatives and Senators, all Coloradans.

Thank you for being here today. You are all great leaders.

Before we begin, I want to acknowledge the *every day* leaders who are not here. Over the past few weeks, several Coloradans have been killed in action in Iraq. Over the past year, we have lost firefighters, police officers and other state employees. Let us take a moment of silence to honor their sacrifice.

Up in the gallery today are dozens of elected leaders from around the state, new mayors and new county commissioners. Thank you for coming. As governor, I will do everything possible to communicate and partner with local government. I'm a product of local government. I understand your challenges. I look forward to building new partnerships and working together on health care, transportation, human services and many other areas. These issues will only be resolved if all levels of government are working together.

Let me also take a minute to thank the previous legislature, former Governor Owens and former Lieutenant Governor Norton for their significant accomplishments. I hope we can keep moving forward.

Two short days ago I was sworn in as your new governor, and the 66<sup>th</sup> General Assembly convened just yesterday. You have less than 120 days to conduct the business of the people. There's much work to do and not very much time.

Over the past 130 years, there has been no shortage of encouragement from the Governor to the General Assembly. John L. Routt was Colorado's very first governor after statehood. In 1876 he told the legislature:

"The people, by their choice, have signified their faith in your wisdom, integrity and patriotism, and I feel assured that their confidence will not have been misplaced."

I share that same sense of hope and confidence. I call it the Colorado Promise – the promise of creating a better Colorado for our children and our grandchildren. The promise of a brighter tomorrow, a new direction.

## **I. State of the People**

Since I'm your new governor, this won't be as much a "State of State Government" speech as it will be a "State of the People" speech. I campaigned across this great state for almost two years. I visited all 64 counties, many of them many times. I talked to thousands of people and listened to their hopes, their dreams and their struggles.

What struck me most is that the people of Colorado are optimistic. With good reason. We are home to unmatched natural beauty. We have some of the best skiing, best mountain climbing, best hunting – and speaking from experience – best fly fishing in the country. We grow some of the best crops: Palisade peaches, Olathe sweet corn, Rocky Ford cantaloupe. We know how to build things. We know how to be inventive and self-reliant. We have a frontier spirit, an entrepreneurial spirit.

I've listened to the people of Colorado, and I've learned that Coloradans know how to solve problems.

I listened to Ruth Ann Woods, the community college president in Trinidad who adjusted her curriculum so she could provide local natural-gas employers with better-trained welders, auto mechanics and heavy-equipment operators.

I listened to the farmers who saw an economic opportunity to build wind farms in wheat fields.

I listened to health-care leaders like Arnold and Marguerite Salazar in the San Luis Valley who are working on ways to provide health care to all.

I listened to the light-rail riders who are getting out of their cars and making alternative transportation a reality in the metro area.

I listened to people with disabilities who are raising awareness and educating us all about overcoming obstacles.

Let us celebrate these and the many other successes that occur every day across Colorado. But let us do so with the knowledge that we face many other challenges.

I listened to the people of Crowley County, where there are no doctors.

I listened to working people everywhere who don't have health insurance.

I listened to the people of Grand Junction who are trying to protect their watershed from the effects of oil-and-gas drilling, and I listened to the people of the Arkansas and San Luis valleys who are trying to protect their water ... *period*.

I listened to teachers at tiny Manzanola Elementary School, who struggle every day because most of their students are Spanish-speaking children of migrant workers.

I listened to them all, and they sounded a common refrain. They want us to solve problems. They want affordable health care, better schools and good jobs. They want us to protect Colorado's land, air, water and wildlife. They want us to keep Colorado's special places special. They want us to fix their roads and highways and build a transportation system for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

They also want a government that is careful with the people's money, a government that works, a government that is smart, a government that is modern. They want a government that serves all the people, not a government that serves only narrow interests. They want a government that intersects with where they struggle – and then eases those struggles.

They also want us to work together. So do I. This will be fundamental to how we build a public trust with the people of this great state every day.

## **II. Challenge to lawmakers**

As I approach this job, I start with a simple promise to all of you: I will always listen. I will always seek your cooperation and a thoughtful commitment to meaningful solutions. We won't always see eye to eye. But from me you will always get responsible debate, not partisan rhetoric. I ask you for the same, regardless of whether there's a D or an R after your name.

We are here to solve problems. We all have jobs to do. You have districts to represent and constituents who want their voices heard. I respect that.

As governor, my district is rural and urban. It's agricultural and industrial. It is Republican, Democrat and unaffiliated. It is small business, big business and working families. It is wealthy, and it is poor. It stretches from Springfield to Cortez to Dinosaur to Julesburg and includes every community in between.

What we need from each other is an appreciation of the individual threads that make up Colorado's diverse fabric. A fabric that ultimately weaves us all together. For us to make progress here beneath the gold dome, we need to respect those varied perspectives. Because ultimately, our work is on behalf of the entire state, on behalf of *all* Coloradans.

Referendum C is a perfect example of how you as lawmakers, how our former governor, how the people of Colorado can set aside differences and work together for the betterment of the state.

It's no secret that one party holds the majority here at the Capitol. But we didn't win just for the sake of winning. For this to work, we must all govern well on behalf of the entire state, regardless of political persuasion, economic station or geographic location.

I will appoint people who take a sensible approach, people who represent a balanced diversity of Colorado faces and interests, to our boards and commissions. I will always seek the common ground for the common good.

I'm not big on litmus tests. But I will have one litmus test for every bill that comes to my desk, one challenge for you: "How does this create a better future for our children and our children's children?" It won't matter whether the bill originated from a Democrat or a Republican.

This century requires a creativity that most people have never experienced. It will require us to think differently about everything we do – how we power our cars, heat our homes and educate our kids. The good news is -- we in Colorado are ideally suited to succeed -- if we work at this together. We know how to solve tough problems.

And we know how to do it within the constraints of scarce financial resources. Our fiscal reality forces us to be innovative and creative. It requires careful deliberation and broad coalition-building. Because the scope of our challenges demand it. You'll hear more from me in a minute about energy, health care, transportation, economic development, education and public safety.

But we must be more thoughtful about many other areas as well. Illegal immigration remains a problem. Homeland security must also remain a priority. And we know from the recent winter storms that we need to keep our emergency rescue and road maintenance crews at the top of their game.

Fulfilling the Colorado Promise is not something we can do overnight. Not something we can do in a single legislative session. Not even something we can do in a four-year term.

It's a journey, and we can start our leg of that journey right here today by setting goals and measuring progress one legislative session at a time.

Let me now share with you my priorities for this session, for my first year and for the years to come.

## **LEGISLATIVE, POLICY AND BUDGET AGENDA**

### **I. New Energy Economy**

Our calling card to the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be the New Energy Economy. People all across Colorado are excited about the possibility of creating jobs, adding economic value to the state and establishing Colorado as a national leader in renewable energy. This is our chance to build a New Energy Economy in Colorado.

Fossil fuels will continue to be a major part of our energy economy. But with our abundant supplies of wind, sun and crops, renewable energy plays an important role. It's how we create new jobs and stimulate the ailing economies of the Eastern Plains and San Luis Valley. It's how we breathe new economic life into our farms. It's one way to give new economic relevance to our colleges and universities. It's how we prepare our workforce for 21<sup>st</sup> century industries.

All around the country, states are already making great headway. This means competition and urgency. Energy is today's version of the space race of the '60s and the technology race of the '80s and '90s. We have a head start because of our natural resources, our intellectual resources and our entrepreneurial spirit.

Last year, the legislature and governor wisely created the "Collaboratory," linking some of our finest research facilities – NREL, CU, CSU and Mines – to harness the tremendous intellectual power here in Colorado.

Now we must do everything possible to ensure that the futuristic technology coming from the labs and the classrooms is transferred to the marketplace. And it's already happening. Private companies are knocking on our door wanting to build the biggest wind farms and solar parks in the country right here in Colorado.

All we're missing is a state government to lead, to inspire and to invest. If we miss this opportunity, we miss the opportunity of a lifetime. We cannot fail, so I am proposing several immediate initiatives.

- By executive order, I will adopt the Western Governor's Association's recent resolution calling for a 20 percent improvement in the efficiency of electricity use statewide by 2020.
- I look forward to seeing legislation co-sponsored by Senator Fitz-Gerald, Representative Cory Gardner and Representative McFadyen that will solve one of the biggest challenges when it comes to clean energy – loading it onto the grid. Getting wind energy on the wires will be one of my highest priorities.
- I'm eager to see the bill from Senator Schwartz and Representative Pommer that will double the renewable energy requirements of Amendment 37.

- I'm excited about the possible creation of a Colorado Clean Energy Fund that will help with the technology transfer of research to the marketplace and finally into our communities, homes and businesses.
- State government also will lead by example. We must convert our vehicle fleets to hybrid or flex-fuels as they are replaced. We must increase the use of bio-fuels which are produced right here in Colorado. All new and renovated state buildings must comply with higher energy-efficiency standards and become High Performance Buildings.
- Finally, each year, I will recognize the remarkable people, businesses, institutions and nonprofits who work in the renewable energy field. Today, I am happy to announce the creation of the Governor's Excellence in Renewable Energy Award.

## **II. Health Care**

Let's turn now to health care, one of the biggest issues facing the people of Colorado. 770,000 Coloradans lack health insurance. 180,000 are children. It's unacceptable that many of our businesses can no longer afford to offer health insurance. It's morally unacceptable and it's economically unacceptable.

Fortunately, we can do something about it.

My long-term vision is to establish a Colorado Health Plan that provides every Coloradan with access to some basic form of health insurance and health care by 2010. I look forward to solving this crisis with the legislature and the new "208" Health Commission.

In the short term, we can make immediate progress by joining a multi-state drug-purchasing pool, and we can do it while still protecting vulnerable populations. This will be one of my first executive orders.

I applaud Senator Fitz-Gerald and Representative Madden for proposing legislation to make significant health-care investments using the remaining tobacco settlement dollars. Their bill will:

- Help improve health care for thousands of Colorado children.
- Improve mental-health services for people in jail and prison to reduce recidivism.
- Revitalize Colorado's commitment to investing in nurses, doctors and other health professionals.
- Help our local health departments protect the safety of our food, water and air.

Another immediate step: I intend to restore the eligibility requirements for state funding for pregnancy-prevention and family planning programs.

I pledge to work with the Department of Public Health and Environment, local health departments and pediatric healthcare providers to increase childhood immunization rates. I have asked Lieutenant Governor O'Brien to lead the effort to meet or exceed the federal benchmark of having 80 percent of our children immunized by 2008.

We must remain mindful of the unique health-care needs of our disabled, senior-citizen and veteran communities as we move forward with health-care reform. The same goes for those with mental-health needs: They cannot be forgotten or left behind.

### **III. Transportation**

Like health care, on the topic of transportation we can make some immediate progress and lay the groundwork for future achievements. It is vital to the people of this state, the economy of Colorado, that we create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century transportation system.

But our transportation revenues are declining. We need to engage the people of Colorado in a very serious conversation about what sort of 21<sup>st</sup> Century transportation system they want, and how they want to pay for it.

Over the next 90 days, I will be appointing a Colorado Transportation Finance and Implementation Panel to get that conversation underway. The panel will work with CDOT and the Colorado Transportation Commission. Everything will be on the table when it comes to examining our current challenges and possible solutions. The panel's work will begin with a statewide Transportation Summit.

In the long term, I am committed to solving congestion problems on I-70. I want to see more regional projects, such as FasTracks and Go 1A in Colorado Springs. I want to see our regional airports thrive.

We must pay attention to our rural roads and highways, because something as simple as a well-paved road or a four-lane highway can be a big economic-development tool in places like La Junta and Lamar.

### **IV. Economic Development**

Fixing our transportation system is key to our overall economic development strategy.

And I intend to serve as a very active chief marketing officer for Colorado. I plan to spend a quarter of my time improving economic opportunities for Colorado. One thing the Office of Economic Development and International Trade will do is market Colorado as *the best* state in the country to do business.

Last year, the legislature and the governor earmarked \$19 million for tourism. It's a great example of how, when we make strategic investments, the return will be multi-fold.

We need to be strategic about how we go forward. I want to see us create an economic-development plan that speaks to the different parts of the state and builds on regional partnerships.

And we need to make sure that all of our economic-development strategies are aligned with our educational programs. That will be one of the main goals of my new Colorado Jobs Cabinet.

This will be a group of senior business and leaders, along with representatives from education, economic development and workforce development agencies from around Colorado.

Their task: to make sure our economic development strategies, our educational goals and our funding mechanisms are all aligned and all geared toward preparing a modern labor force for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **V. Education**

The best economic-development tool is a well-educated workforce. But too many of our kids are dropping out of high school. Our achievement gap is too wide, and we aren't doing enough to partner with teachers to help them improve student learning.

My goal: to start us down a 10-year path of progress. Right now, about 30 percent of Colorado high school students don't graduate. Less than half of the black, Latino and American Indian students who start high school in Colorado actually finish. *Less than half.*

Our goal: cut the drop-out rate in half within 10 years.

Right now, the achievement gap separating poor and minority students from more affluent and white students is about 30 percentage points on the CSAP tests. In 10 years, I want that cut in half. I also want to keep the emerging technology gap from widening so we don't leave poor and rural kids behind.

These are bold and ambitious goals, and here's how we're going to get there. We're going to align our educational programs with today's competitive global marketplace. We're going to prepare our students for 21<sup>st</sup> century industries – 21<sup>st</sup> century opportunities – like renewable energy, aerospace and biomedicine.

Too many of Colorado's children aren't prepared for these jobs. The maintenance director of the state's biggest wind farm told me his Number 1 challenge is a lack of tech-savvy workers. Contractors will tell you it's not uncommon to teach young employees remedial math at construction sites because they didn't learn enough in school.

These are not isolated examples. But this is a state where opportunities abound. And it's our job to make sure our teachers, our schools and our kids can seize these opportunities. That's the Colorado Promise.

We're going to realize these opportunities by partnering with teachers, school boards, parents and students. We're going to listen to our teachers. We're going to give them the tools they need to succeed. We're going to put their good ideas to work creating rigorous and relevant study programs.

Colorado has made great progress in the area of accountability. But now we need to strengthen and streamline our different accountability programs. We need one system that provides meaningful data in a timely fashion so we can improve student learning. I look forward to working with the state Board of Education on this issue.

Our overall education efforts must start at the pre-school level and continue through college. Coloradans want to see more slots opened up for pre-school programs. And so do I. I look forward to working with Speaker Romanoff to decide exactly how we do that.

I want our colleges and universities to double the production of technical certificates and college degrees over the next 10 years. To do that, we need our higher ed systems pulling in the same direction, not competing against each other.

We also need to acknowledge that higher education's portion of the state budget has dropped from about 14½ percent in 1997 to 10 percent a decade later. Colorado ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the country in per capita dollars directed to higher education.

Our higher-education system, particularly our community colleges, is vital to rural Colorado. And for many young people across Colorado, affordable colleges and universities are the only lifeline to a better future.

We need to keep those institutions accessible to everyone and protect that lifeline, while also improving quality, or we risk losing everything.

## **VI. Public Safety**

Public safety. Let's talk for a minute about public safety. I spent a career being tough on crime, trying to be smart on crime. Now we have to be smarter than ever. Our social compact and our responsibility as government leaders to keep people safe demands it. And so does our budget.

Judge Weir and Ari Zavaras, my nominees for the Public Safety and Corrections departments, understand this. They share my vision, and I have directed them to examine how we can control prison costs by:

- Preventing crimes before they occur. Looking at drug courts and other intervention programs, because a significant majority of prison inmates are substance abusers.
- Developing programs that allow inmates to successfully re-enter society.
- Making recidivism-reduction a top priority of these two departments. If we can prevent someone from re-offending, that's one fewer victim.

More than half of DOC inmates wind up back in prison within three years. That's simply an unacceptable number. The costs are spiraling out of control and eating into our ability to fund education and health care. We can do better here in Colorado, and we're going to.

## **VII. The G.E.M Performance Review**

One of the most exciting things about the last two months has been putting together a new Cabinet. For these Cabinet members to succeed, they will need as many tools as we can give them, which is why we will quickly embark on a top-to-bottom performance review. We're calling it the Colorado G.E.M. Performance Review – Government Efficiency and Management Performance Review.

This won't be another line-item hunt for a few dollars here and a few dollars there. This isn't a put-down of state employees. Just the opposite.

Our state employees are *really* smart people. They understand how government works. And they know better than anyone how it can work better. We need their good ideas, and then we need to put them into action.

I am inviting all state employees to partner with me in this endeavor. Our first step will be to establish an e-mail address for employees to submit cost-saving and efficiency ideas. Their participation is vital to our success.

I want a government that delivers the services that Coloradans need as efficiently as possible. I want a government that is open for business, a government that serves the people and not itself, and a government that treats every tax dollar with the greatest of care.

As your governor, I will ensure that we take advantage of improvements in technology, purchasing and business processes. I will find areas that can be streamlined, made more efficient and when appropriate, eliminated.

We can do a better job of drawing down on all available federal grants and matching funds. We can make better investments today in everything from health care to education to criminal justice in order to recoup even more savings in the long run.

My budget proposals to you will reflect a shared vision for Colorado. A budget is a moral document. It should set high goals and reflect the best policy and business practices of any state in the nation.

That means transparency – including posting every department’s budget online -- and cooperation. Together, we can improve service delivery, achieve measurable outcomes and yes, even save money through efficiencies.

I look forward to working with all of you on this, especially the JBC, led by Senator Abel Tapia.

## **CONCLUSION**

Colorado is what it is today because of God’s gift, because our parents and grandparents were wise enough to protect it and to invest in it.

Now it’s our turn to keep the Colorado Promise. It falls to us, in this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and our 131<sup>st</sup> year of statehood, to renew the promise and update it to the realities and challenges of our time.

The voters have entrusted us to serve them well. Not to be placeholders, but to be leaders. Not to tinker around the edges, but to find real solutions to real problems. Not to advance narrow agendas, but to be ambitious and courageous.

Fifty years from now, another governor will stand at this podium and another group of 100 legislators will occupy this chamber. They will be confronted with challenges we can’t even imagine.

My hope is that those future leaders are able to look back at us for inspiration.

Inspiration because we pioneered the New Energy Economy.

Because we created the Colorado Health Plan.

Because we reduced the drop-out rate and closed the achievement gap.

Because we kept college affordable and built the best transportation network in the nation.

Because we were stubborn stewards of our environment.

Because we fulfilled the Colorado Promise for our children and our families.

Let me close by going back to something I mentioned two months ago on Election Night. I talked about two little babies who were born earlier that day: Keller Kuna and Trey Thomas. Keller’s parents are here with us today up in the gallery.

I said the election was about those two babies, about every baby born in Colorado on November 7<sup>th</sup>. The election was about our future and how we as a state go forward in fulfilling the Colorado Promise.

At the end of this legislative session, at the end of the year, at the end of four years, I hope we can report back to Keller's parents, to Trey's parents, to all Coloradans, that we made progress. That we solved problems.

That we are in fact fulfilling the Colorado Promise – together.

Thank you, and God bless Colorado.