

# **GOVERNOR BILL RITTER, JR.**

## **STATE OF THE STATE SPEECH**

Joint Session of the 66<sup>th</sup> Colorado General Assembly  
House Chambers, State Capitol  
11 a.m. January 10, 2008

### **INTRODUCTION**

To all Coloradans outside this chamber, good morning.

To Lieutenant Governor O'Brien, President Groff, Speaker Romanoff, Mayor Hickenlooper, Executive Directors, Board of Education members, Supreme Court justices, Treasurer Kennedy, Attorney General Suthers, Secretary of State Coffman, Honorable Representatives and Senators, thank you for being here today.

We are blessed with several other special guests as well: Representative Perlmutter, local government leaders, and Ute Mountain Ute Chairman Ernest House Sr. Thank you all for everything you do for Colorado.

Colorado's First Lady, Jeannie, two of our children -- Tally and Sam -- and my mother, Ethel, are here as well. Jeannie: thank you for everything you do for the people of our state, particularly your focus on mental-health issues.

President Groff, I am proud to serve with you as you make history. Speaker Romanoff, as you serve your final year in the House, be proud of the history you have made.

To all who will be leaving the General Assembly after this session, it has been an honor to serve with you.

Congratulations to the newest members -- Representatives Christine Scanlan, Mark Ferrandino and Doug Bruce. I look forward to working with each of you as we move forward.

Let's also acknowledge Senator Steve Ward and Representative Joe Rice, who are in Iraq. I saw them a few weeks ago. They are among the many brave men and women from Colorado serving in harm's way. It was one of my greatest honors as Governor to meet with so many of them on my visit. We owe them all a tremendous debt of gratitude for their service.

It's inspiring to stand here with you at the start of a new legislative session. Actually, it's a little like fly fishing. Fly fishing is about hope and possibilities. Every time you cast a line, drop a fly onto the water or move to a new spot, there's a new opportunity for a promising return. It is my hope that each of us approaches this session with a sense of hope, of promise, of the immense possibilities. My hope for the next 120 days is that we strengthen what is great about Colorado and build on the work we started in 2007:

- The New Energy Economy has made our entire economy stronger, especially in rural areas. We're creating new jobs by building wind farms in wheat fields, and we're getting international recognition because of it.
- We took critical steps to protect Coloradans against mortgage fraud and foreclosure -- progress that is now considered a national model for other states to follow.
- We began to address the high rate at which criminals are returning to prison, thus preventing innocent people from becoming victims and keeping communities safe.
- We forged ahead on health care reform, education reform and funding for higher-ed, and laid the groundwork for future action.

Let's celebrate those successes, but let's not be satisfied. There is much more to be done for the people of Colorado. Fulfilling the Colorado Promise is a long journey. Over the past 12 months we put key building blocks in place. Over the next 120 days, we must:

- Make real progress on education reform, because too many of our students are unprepared for college or the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.
- Strengthen our robust economic climate for new and existing businesses by investing in higher education and transportation, because the global economy is getting more competitive every day.
- Move ahead on health-care reform, because escalating health-care costs impact every family and every business.
- Ensure that our election and voting systems work and are fair.
- And continue to secure Colorado's energy future, protect Coloradans from fraud and violent crime, and keep the pressure on Washington to enact meaningful immigration reform as we enforce our own laws in this area.

We must do this, always with an eye toward making government work more effectively, and being fiscally responsible with every taxpayer dollar.

We must overcome some big challenges if our vision for Colorado is to become a reality. Over the last year, scores of dedicated Coloradans have helped us sort through the issues and potential solutions to some of the toughest challenges we face: how to fund a 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system; how to make sure all Coloradans have access to affordable, quality health care; how our schools and colleges can accomplish their missions.

These are all high-priority issues, as is continuing broad-based discussions on how best to address conflicting provisions in our state's Constitution. But we aren't going to come up with big fixes in all of those areas all at once. It would be a fool's errand to even try. We must make steady progress across the board, doing what we know is right and what we can afford.

This will take discipline, focus, leadership and courage. It will mean, for all of us, making strategic, sometimes difficult, choices as we move ahead for the people of Colorado.

I will return to each of these issues, but I want to talk for a moment about why I am so optimistic about Colorado's future and about why I know we can keep achieving great things.

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

In my first year as Governor, I spent time with thousands of Coloradans outside this building and outside of Denver. Nearly 100 venues in all, plus hundreds of events within the metro area. It's important to meet people where they live and work, where partisanship doesn't matter. We celebrated their successes, we shared their struggles, and we listened.

By listening, we found the inspiration and direction that should guide us here in the Capitol. Wherever we went in 2007, we found people fulfilling the Colorado Promise, ordinary people doing extraordinary things, Coloradans making Colorado proud:

- I personally congratulated the 42 Colorado scientists who were part of the Nobel Prize-winning team on climate change. They're perfect examples of why we must make investments in our research universities.
- We celebrated with Principal Sandra Lundt and the students at Poudre High School in Fort Collins after they won the National Science Bowl. There were other high schools across Colorado that competed nationally and represented our state in an exemplary fashion as well. We need look no further than those students to understand why a rigorous K-12 education is so important.
- We joined people in Peetz, Twin Buttes, Dove Creek, Grover, Alamosa and Windsor to celebrate wind farms, solar plants, a blade manufacturing plant and a biodiesel plant -- the pioneering businesses of our New Energy Economy.
- In Del Norte, we applauded doctors, nurses and health professionals who are providing care in the San Luis Valley, where 25 percent of the population lacks health insurance.
- In Rifle, I celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the State Veterans Nursing Home with heroes like Joe Kaspar, a World War II gunner who flew 48 missions defending our flag and our country.

It's people like these who make it an honor and a privilege to serve as governor. Their experiences are uplifting, optimistic and hopeful, full of possibility and opportunity. They are real-life examples of how good policy can help people reach their full potential.

It's a lot harder to feel pain and loss, but we did that too, and wherever we could, we found legitimate ways for government to intersect with where people struggle.

- We went to La Junta to help farmers and ranchers who were devastated by last year's blizzards. And we secured a federal disaster declaration and state and federal funding.
- We comforted families who lost loved ones in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- We stood with Holly Town Administrator Marsha Willhite and all of the people of Holly after that deadly tornado ripped through town. And we did more than stand -- we provided logistical support, financial aid and housing assistance.
- We mourned the loss of several state employees, including Trooper Zach Templeton.
- And, like all of you, we still struggle to understand the deadly violence that erupted inside New Life Church and the Youth with a Mission dormitory last month.
- We lost too many friends in 2007. We should all pray for the families of Sam Williams, Phil Figa, Elizabeth Blake, John Parr, Sandy Widener and Chase Parr - people who contributed so much to Colorado. Let's remember their voices, their lessons and their gifts.

## **II. Listening, Learning and Taking Action**

As much as anyone, John Parr taught me that the way we do business is just as important as what we do. Over the past year, we have listened to and involved a wide spectrum of people in some of the most serious policy challenges we face in Colorado. And we involved them because as a state we are blessed with amazingly smart and talented people.

A collaborative decision-making process that reaches for common ground is vital. The only way to find creative, forward-looking solutions is by involving the community, reaching across traditional divides and setting aside partisan politics.

We can all be proud of the unconventional partnerships we forged in 2007. Utilities, consumers and environmentalists united behind our new renewable energy standard. Hospitals and nurses came together around staffing and patient-safety issues. Sportsmen, conservationists, farmers and the business community helped produce Colorado's first Climate Action Plan.

The people elected us to solve problems, to get results and to make a difference. They did not elect us to wage partisan warfare or to lock down and refuse to engage in productive dialogue. We must never mistake sound bites for sound public policy. Collaboration doesn't mean shying away from healthy debate or making hard decisions. I take comfort in the diversity of views and beliefs represented in this chamber, in the fact that different people see the same subject in different lights, to borrow a phrase from Patrick Henry.

Collaboration is about hope and possibility. A year after my inaugural address, I believe more than ever that hope wins out over cynicism. I believe that if we govern well, we can build a public trust in the institutions of government. I believe in the Colorado Promise, doing all we can to fulfill the God-given potential inside every one of us.

Our goals are ambitious. Achieving them will only happen over the course of time, with patience and prudence and reason. We made enormous progress in 2007, and we will continue to push ahead in 2008. Here, now, is both a look back at our successes, and a look ahead at some of the areas where we need to focus over the next 120 days:

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

### **I. Voting and Democracy**

First and foremost, we must -- and we will -- fix the problems we face because of decertified electronic voting machines for the 2008 elections. Our democracy depends not only on the people's ability to vote, but also on their confidence that every vote counts. I want the people of Colorado to know that we in this building, working alongside Secretary of State Coffman and our county clerks, will promptly deliver for the 2008 elections a system we can all be proud of.

### **II. New Energy Economy**

We can certainly be proud of the New Energy Economy. It's a perfect example of how we work best together. Last year, I stood before you and said the New Energy Economy would become our calling card to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And it has. It serves as a hallmark for what responsible and forward-thinking public policy can achieve. It's more than just a collection of laws. It's a new direction for the entire state.

Every day, the New Energy Economy means new opportunities and new jobs in every corner of Colorado, from the energy-rich Western Slope to the wind-swept Eastern Plains, from fast-growing Northern Colorado to the sun-drenched San Luis Valley. It means Colorado is being recognized nationally and internationally. We enacted 20 pieces of clean-energy legislation, and our commitment is bearing immediate fruit:

- In 2007, we saw nearly 650 megawatts of wind farms built on Colorado's Eastern Plains -- enough energy to power nearly 250,000 homes.
- Vestas Blades picked Colorado for its first North American wind blade manufacturing plant. This means hundreds of new jobs for Colorado. Thanks to companies like Vestas, Ascent Solar and Abengoa, thanks to world-class research institutions, the next generation of new-energy technology is being developed right here in Colorado.
- Just the other day, I helped open Stone Mountain Elementary School in Douglas County. This is a school that's powered in part by the sun, is a model of energy efficiency and conservation, and will itself be used to teach students about renewable energy.

We're going to carry those 2007 accomplishments straight into 2008. This year, we will be launching Phase 2 of the New Energy Economy, called "Bringing the New Energy Economy Home." This will include opportunities for every individual and every business in Colorado to take part. We are developing all of the following:

- A Colorado Carbon Fund, a voluntary carbon offset program that will support new, clean-energy and greenhouse-gas-reduction projects to be built right here in Colorado;
- A "Go Solar" incentive program to put clean solar power within reach for all Coloradans;
- An "Insulate Colorado Program" to make home heating more affordable and efficient.

We also will be working with Representative Solano and Senator Shaffer on a net-metering, or home-grown energy, program. If you have solar panels on your roof and your electric meter runs backwards as you put energy back onto the grid, you should get credit for that.

In last year's speech, I announced the creation of an annual Governor's Excellence in Renewable Energy Award. Today, I'm pleased to announce our first winners. They are: Craig Cox from IntraWest Energy Alliance; New Belgium Brewery in Fort Collins; the Fort Carson Army Post; the Northeast Denver Housing Center; and the Smiley Building in Durango. There are representatives from each of the award winners with us today up in the gallery. Congratulations to all of you for bringing Colorado's New Energy Economy to life, for helping us give new meaning to "bold and ambitious" and for helping to establish Colorado as an international leader.

The New Energy Economy is every bit about energy security, economic security and environmental security. It also provides a valuable lesson -- we need to bring the same level of energy we are bringing to the New Energy Economy to everything else we do. If we do that, there's no limit on how far we can go in tackling every other challenge in front of us, from education to transportation to health care.

### **III. Natural Resources and the Environment**

The New Energy Economy is not just about renewable energy. The only way we will ever secure Colorado's energy future is through responsible and balanced development of Colorado's other God-given resources, including natural gas, coal and oil.

Here in Colorado, we're doing our part to supply the nation's energy needs. But we must be stubborn about protecting our air, land, water and wildlife. We must build sustainable prosperity, and it's got to be about more than just economic prosperity. Our elk and deer herds, our clean air and water, our unique communities -- those are all special things that deserve special protections.

We took steps last year by expanding and diversifying the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission. This year, we're crafting rules to implement House Bills 1298 and 1341, and we're doing it the Colorado way -- through an open process that brings together industry, community leaders, environmentalists, sportsmen, local government and other stakeholders.

This is the same way we put together Colorado's first comprehensive Climate Action Plan, which will make Colorado a leader in agricultural carbon offsets, cleaner power plants and the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions.

It's the same way we are working on land-management issues for the Roan Plateau. I believe we can reach most of the natural gas resources beneath the Roan, and we can do it through state-of-the-art drilling technology and phased leasing and paced development. And, we can do it while dramatically expanding the acreage that will be off-limits to drilling. This is a uniquely Colorado solution that strikes an important balance -- a balance that will protect our environment and benefit our economy, our local communities and our energy industry.

On other important natural resource issues:

- I look forward to continuing our forest-health efforts this year, working with Senator Gibbs and Representatives White and Scanlan on the pine beetle, and collaborating with local, state and federal stakeholders on a number of forest health issues.
- On water issues, Colorado continues to wrestle with the always difficult challenges of quality, supply and infrastructure. As we grow, we must work harder than ever to reach consensus, to forge new agreements, and to make the most of conservation, efficiency and reuse practices. I am confident that our state's new leadership team, working alongside local officials, legislators, farmers, ranchers, recreational users and consumers, will develop new approaches to these challenges.
- I appreciate the good work Representative Madden and the Departments of Revenue and Regulatory Agencies have done to address abuses of the state's conservation easement program. Last year I signed House Bill 1361, and this year I look forward to additional legislation that will stem fraud and protect this important conservation tool.
- I also commend Representative Buescher and Senator Schwartz for their leadership on a revision of the Federal Mineral Lease formula. As we move forward, my top priority will be to protect impacted communities, and then look at whether other capital needs in the state can be met with increasing FML dollars. We have a unique opportunity to build for the future, one we cannot miss.

#### **IV. Economic and Business Development**

Keeping Colorado's economy healthy, making sure businesses are able to stay competitive in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global marketplace, and creating job opportunities in every part of Colorado are important goals for me and my administration.

2007 was a year of great success -- with United Launch Alliance, Vestas Blades and AVA Solar at the top of the list. We've created specific strategies to target four of our most-promising economic sectors: aerospace, energy, tourism and the biosciences. 2008 holds just as much promise, and I'm pleased to work with you and the business

community on an economic-development package that will make it easier to attract, retain and expand businesses in Colorado.

This package will simplify how businesses calculate taxes -- the single-sales factor approach. It will exempt 30,000 companies from the Business Personal Property Tax over time, and it will increase state investments in bioscience and clean energy projects. Together, we will ease the tax burden for thousands of businesses. We also will cut red tape and simplify filing processes, and we will help rural small businesses grow and stay competitive.

Representatives Jahn, Riesberg, Rice, Hodge and Buescher, and Senators Bacon, Shaffer, Ward and Williams -- thank you for sponsoring this important package of reforms. These bills are good for our economy, good for our small businesses and good for our communities.

We all know the best economic-development strategy is an education strategy. If we're going to create a more robust business environment and provide businesses with the best workforce in the world, if we're going to train Coloradans for Colorado jobs, we have to do better. And we can't do it by putting the cost of a college education out of reach for working families.

From 2001 to 2006, no other state cut funding to higher education more than Colorado. We rank 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation in higher-ed funding per-student, and dead last in total funding per student.

The good news is we're making progress. In the budget request I submitted to you in November, I proposed a \$59.5 million, 8 percent increase to higher-ed funding. And that follows a \$52 million, 7.5 percent increase the year before. As a result, we're closing the funding gap that separates our colleges from our national peers.

The Department of Higher Education is working closely with college presidents on a long-term funding strategy. This is no easy task, getting all of the college and university presidents onto the same page. As someone who graduated from a public university in Colorado 30 years ago, as someone who worked his way through college and law school, as someone whose education has opened door after door, this is a priority for me.

But this is not just about funding. It's also about quality workforce development, which is why today I'm pleased to announce the three co-chairs of our new Jobs Cabinet: Ruth Ann Woods from Trinidad State Junior College, Qwest vice president Teresa Taylor, and long-time civic leader Jim Lyons. They've joined us today in the gallery. Thank you for taking on such a crucial mission for the people of this state.

The Jobs Cabinet will work to align Colorado's economic-development strategies, education programs and regional workforce needs to make sure we are producing the highest-quality, 21<sup>st</sup> century labor force for Colorado businesses.

Another pillar of Colorado's economic infrastructure is our transportation system. We all know what we face: Demand and costs are soaring. We need to focus on safety and

efficiency. We must build our capacity, including alternative-transit systems to cut down on pollution and give travelers more options. So, last year, I appointed a bi-partisan transportation panel to identify sustainable funding sources to replace today's dwindling revenues.

My deepest thanks to everyone who served on the panel. They did extraordinary work, and are providing us with real options. Now we must work together to find common ground. We can continue to make steady progress this year. But how we go forward depends largely on whether we can build a bi-partisan consensus around contentious funding issues.

## **V. Better Government**

As you know, we launched the Government Efficiency and Management review last year. The GEM review is just one example of how we are making state government more effective by streamlining processes, cutting waste and serving as responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars. The GEM review already has identified \$145 million in potential savings and benefits over the next five years, and we should have more good news to report this spring.

As part of the GEM review, we solicited ideas from the dedicated men and women who work for the state -- and a stunning 12,000 workers filled out online surveys. Ideas ranged from eliminating duplicate signatures and extra paper forms to using high-tech tools to fight Medicaid fraud. Employees like Susan Hunt in the Division of Youth Corrections and Kyle Shelton at the State Patrol have been invaluable contributors. We're engaging employees differently than ever before, and the people of Colorado will benefit from more efficient and responsive services.

We've also opened up the government efficiency process to the public so that all people in Colorado can submit their ideas via e-mail or a toll-free phone number. In addition, we're making the entire budget process more transparent to the public by posting every department's budget online, and by launching the taxpayer accountability report with Treasurer Kennedy.

The Governor's Office of Information Technology is bringing the state's splintered IT operations together under one roof. An IT Consolidation Bill will be introduced by Representatives Andy Kerr and Buescher and Senators Cadman and Morse to enact these reforms. Thank you for carrying this important legislation.

As we modernize our own Information Technology structure, we also are making more services available on-line to the people and businesses of Colorado. On-line driver's license and vehicle registration renewal are available in more and more counties. This year, we expect all Colorado taxpayers will be able to file income taxes on-line if they choose. We're also working toward an easy on-line tool to help new businesses obtain and file necessary forms and paperwork.

Our efforts to make government more efficient also extend to the issue of wait times at Driver's License Offices. With the help of Senator Johnson, we are opening three new driver's license offices in Denver, Jefferson and Larimer Counties. We also are hiring 53

new employees to staff those offices, to help reduce travel and wait times, and to enhance services in rural Colorado.

## **VI. Protecting People**

One of the most important functions of government is protecting people from violent crime, fraud and other offenses. As a former prosecutor, I take that role seriously, and we made great strides in 2007. I'm looking forward to even greater gains this year.

Our Departments of Public Safety and Corrections are doing impressive work addressing Colorado's high rate of prison re-offenders. We're focusing on education, job-training, drug-treatment, mental-health treatment and more. Every time we keep a released inmate from re-offending, we keep an innocent person from becoming a victim, *and* we save taxpayer dollars.

Thanks to your leadership, we now have some of the strongest mortgage-fraud and foreclosure-prevention laws in the country. We're cracking down on mortgage scams and dishonest brokers, and providing consumers threatened with foreclosure with options to keep their homes.

This year, the Department of Regulatory Agencies will continue transforming itself into a consumer protection department. The Department and its Division of Insurance saved Colorado insurance consumers almost \$80 million last year. Most of those savings are in the form of reduced workers' comp insurance rates -- good news for Colorado businesses.

I'm very excited about the new School Safety Resource Center we are launching this year. The Department of Public Safety will be identifying sites around Colorado to conduct vulnerability assessments, train faculty and students, and provide additional violence-prevention measures to keep students and teachers safe. We will be working with local educators and prevention groups to create individually tailored safety plans. Thank you, Senator Morse and Representative Stephens for sponsoring this school-safety legislation, which will be designated Senate Bill 1.

We must do a better job protecting those who can't protect themselves -- including foster children and those with severe developmental disabilities. I have requested nearly \$500,000 to increase the number of employees who monitor county foster care programs, from just one -- for the entire state -- to seven. In addition, we have requested \$10.6 million for staffing, facilities and services for people with developmental disabilities.

Regarding homeland security, we are fortunate to have General Mason Whitney's leadership in this area. With his new team, with new controls and a new vision, we have begun to make significant changes, and you'll see more over the coming months. We're taking a hard and different look at how we protect Coloradans, how we ensure accountability for federal grant dollars, and how we structure the lines of authority.

I also know we will see a number of new ideas from groups looking at our criminal and juvenile justice systems. It's important that as a nation of laws, we constantly scrutinize

laws that pertain the justice system to ensure they are fair, relevant and make a meaningful difference.

## **VII. Health Care**

Let's turn to two areas where we must make substantial progress this session: health care and education. On health care, my goal remains the same -- that all Coloradans have access to some basic level of health care. I know that's ambitious. Nearly 800,000 Coloradans, 17 percent of our population, lack insurance. 180,000 of them are children. Every uninsured Coloradan means higher costs for every family, every person living on a fixed income, and every business.

We spend \$30 billion a year on health care in Colorado, but we don't get \$30 billion worth of value. We have to continue addressing that, and we have to keep doing it in a way that acknowledges the fiscal constraints of this state. We have to do it with a shared sense of responsibility, from individuals to employers to insurers to providers to government.

And we have to take a realistic, building-block, steady approach to progress. We need to be strategic, disciplined and focused, and restraining costs must be at the heart of our reforms.

In just a few weeks, you will receive the final report from the 208 Commission on Health Care Reform. Chairman Bill Lindsay, all commission members and everyone who participated in that process did groundbreaking work. They know better than anyone that there's no magic bullet to fix a system that is so fundamentally broken.

But we began repairing that system in 2007, improving access for the uninsured, especially vulnerable populations -- low-income children, fragile senior citizens and others who live at the margins and need immediate assistance. Last year, we enrolled 10,000 more kids into Children's Health Plan Plus. 10,000 children -- that is significant.

We also addressed the cost issue in a number of substantive ways. We launched a "medical home" program for Medicaid children that focuses on prevention to reduce expensive emergency room visits. The GEM review also identified ways to save millions of dollars by eliminating waste and preventing Medicaid fraud. As we find efficiencies, cut waste and bring more transparency to the system, we can reinvest those savings back into the system.

This year, we'll continue to aggressively work on cost and access issues. My Fiscal Year 08-09 budget request calls for enrolling 17,000 more eligible children into CHP+, and we'll be undertaking major efforts to enroll more eligible families in Medicaid by simplifying, streamlining and modernizing the application and administrative processes.

On cost control, we'll be launching five new disease-management programs and fully funding the Childhood Immunization Information System, two steps that will yield significant savings over the long run. I'm also directing my health care team to spearhead a collaborative effort that will address cost and quality. We will bring all stakeholders -- including insurance companies, hospitals and physicians -- to the table.

Many of them have personally committed to me they will stay at the table for the long haul, for what I like to call a little corporate introspection.

Some of these ideas are born from the 208 Commission, and they are an acknowledgment that we must take a staged and thoughtful approach to systemic reform.

In all of my travels across Colorado, I hear anger and frustration from people about cost, quality and access. People with insurance have no confidence they'll have it tomorrow. Employees and employers alike are frustrated at double-digit cost increases year after year after year. And people are frustrated that Washington has failed to craft a national solution. Maybe a new president will change that.

But in Colorado, we won't wait for reforms to come from Washington. Instead, we will make smart changes to the system and do what we can afford as we work toward our long-term goals.

### **VIII. P-20 Education**

One year ago, I told you I wasn't big on litmus tests, but that we should gauge all of our actions and decisions against one question: Is it good for Colorado's children, for Colorado's future?

Education is the cornerstone of our economy and it dictates how we will move Colorado forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So much of what I've just talked about comes back to education. If ever there was a place to be bold and ambitious, to push hard and fast against the status quo, this is it.

To keep Colorado great, today's students -- and tomorrow's leaders -- will have to meet global challenges around energy, transportation and technology. For that to happen, we have to think bigger about revitalizing our education systems than ever before, or the world will pass us by.

Speaker Romanoff, President Groff and Treasurer Kennedy have confidently pushed against the status quo with their Building Excellent Schools Today, or "BEST," capital funding plan. I congratulate them for making safe and modern schools a priority.

Last year, I set a 10-year goal of cutting the dropout rate and achievement gap in half, and doubling the number of college degrees and certificates. This year, we have specific proposals to help achieve those goals, thanks in large part to the P-20 Education Council co-chaired by Lt. Gov. O'Brien, business leader Bruce Benson and CSU-Pueblo President Joe Garcia. Mr. Benson and Mr. Garcia are also here with us today.

These proposals include eliminating the current wait-list for the Colorado Preschool Program and extending full-day kindergarten to 22,000 more children statewide. I also am proposing the creation of a Colorado Counselor Corps, which will send 70 counselors into targeted middle and high schools with a specific mission: make the dream of college a reality for more kids.

We're able to do these things because last year we listened and finally gave voice to voters in 98 percent of our school districts who repeatedly said, "Invest local revenues in local schools. Make smarter investments with our limited resources."

After just a few months of work, the P-20 Council shows us very clearly that Colorado does not lack talent. Rather, we lack an overarching educational vision, a vision that aligns standards from pre-school to college and puts an emphasis on proficiency and learning.

Many people are working hard to change that, including our partners at the Department of Education and the Department of Higher Education. Therefore, today, I am announcing the "Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids," and it will be co-sponsored by Senators Romer and Penry and Representatives Witwer and Scanlan.

This will be the most revolutionary shift in education policy this state has seen in years. For too long, our education systems and policies have been focused on "seat time" and course titles, assuming that measuring the number of years in a particular class is somehow more important than measuring whether students actually learned anything. But when nearly one-third of college freshmen in Colorado require remedial training, something is wrong.

Therefore, I am proposing that we put our education emphasis where it belongs: on helping kids learn, on measuring knowledge and skills, on connecting what is taught in high school with exactly what is expected in college.

I am proposing that we establish policies that assume all students have the potential to succeed in college, and that we prepare them accordingly. I am proposing a seamless system of expectations, policies and tools that thread their way from pre-school to college. We must ensure that every classroom in Colorado is providing a rigorous and relevant education, and that students are learning skills that effectively prepare them for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Imagine a day when all curriculums are better designed to prepare students for college and good-paying jobs. When admission to college is based not just on a transcript, but also on the demonstration of skills. When cross-system policies and content standards are transparent and coordinated so that educators understand how to help students succeed.

Where will this lead? To dramatically expanded opportunities for post-secondary education and training. To dramatically expanded opportunities for better jobs and better pay. To a stronger economy, to stronger communities and to stronger families everywhere in Colorado.

The P-20 Council, the Department of Education and the Department of Higher Education, local stakeholders and lawmakers are beginning to work hard on this. As this moves forward, let there be no doubt that this is a bold and ambitious path to a revitalized education system. It will be meaningful reform now, and it will lay a solid foundation for the work we must continue to do in the future.

## **CONCLUSION**

Finally, let me close by thanking you to the people of Colorado and to those of you in this chamber for your service to the people of this state. As public servants, you all have made sacrifices, but they are far outweighed by the good we can do for the people of Colorado.

The work we do for the people of Colorado in this 66<sup>th</sup> General Assembly can, and must, be forward-looking and fruitful. It must be worthy of your sacrifices, and those made by other Coloradans -- in Iraq and Afghanistan, on our streets, in everyday life. Our vision is clear, and we must make steady, even historic, progress toward our goals.

One hundred and one years ago, former Governor Henry Augustus Buchtel delivered opening remarks to the 16<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. His words still resonate: "Give these precious days to making wise laws which will be a blessing to the millions of future citizens of Colorado. That is what we are here for: to make the State."

This year or next, for the first time in Colorado, our population will reach 5 million people. When Buchtel was governor, the population was about 700,000.

Colorado is a special place, unmatched as a place to live, work and raise a family. Working in collaboration, we have a unique chance to ensure that in 10, 20 or 50 years Colorado remains a special place, a place full of hope and possibility and opportunity. We have our chance "to make the State," to fulfill the Colorado Promise.

God bless you all ... and God bless Colorado.