

## **Speaker Mark Ferrandino Opening Day Speech**

Good morning, and welcome to the second session of the 69th Colorado General Assembly. This will be my last legislative session, and once again I thank the members for giving me the great honor of leading this chamber.

Let me start by welcoming our newest member - the Honorable KC Becker, representing Clear Creek, Gilpin, Grand and Jackson counties and part of Boulder County.

I also want to acknowledge Representative Brian DelGrosso on his election as minority leader. I congratulate you on your new and challenging post and look forward working with you in a productive partnership. And with your new baby on the way, I'll be interested in comparing notes, father to father, about sleep deprivation.

I welcome the other 62 representatives who are returning for the second session. I'm glad to see every one of you. We've been through a lot together, but we've maintained the decorum and civility that are key ingredients of our proceedings. I know you will continue to treat one another, and this institution, with the utmost respect.

I also want to recognize the members who like me are term-limited and are entering their final session in the House of Representatives.

Randy Fischer, our water expert and advocate and able chairman of the Agriculture, Livestock and Natural Resources Committee;

Bob Gardner, who has been a strong advocate for people with developmental disabilities, and whose performances in the well will not be missed - I mean will be missed.

Jeanne Labuda, who's spoken out on juvenile justice issues and is a strong voice for the people of Denver;

Former Speaker Frank McNulty, who was a tough act to follow and one of the strongest advocates for this institution;

Cherylin Peniston, a steadfast friend of education, especially early childhood and gifted-and-talented programs;

Jerry Sonnenberg, a champion of our farmers and ranchers;

Amy Stephens, an advocate on healthcare issues who had the political courage to work across the aisle to create Colorado's healthcare exchange;

and Spencer Swalm, with his laser-like focus on the national, state, local and household debts.

Please join me in thanking them for their dedicated service to the people and state of Colorado.

We have with us a number of special guests.

The first needs no introduction to our members. In seven years in this chamber she was a powerful advocate on a wide range of issues, including criminal justice and environmental policy. Please welcome former Speaker Pro Tem Claire Levy.

I also want to welcome

Former Speaker Ruben Valdez

Denver Mayor Michael Hancock

Deputy Denver Mayor Cary Kennedy

Former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb and former Representative Wilma Webb

Earlier I mentioned sleep deprivation - the cause of mine is just over there.

Members, now that the adoption is final, it's my pleasure to formally introduce my daughter, Lila.

She's with her other dad, Greg Wertsch. I am so lucky to have him in my life. Greg and I were among the thousands of Colorado couples who entered into a civil union after the new law went into effect last year.

My twin sister, Nicole, who has been my biggest supporter literally from Day One.

And let me take a moment to recognize the Arapahoe High School community. The students, educators, first responders, and families involved in that terrible day have shown unbelievable strength and courage. I especially want to recognize the family of Claire Davis, who are in our thoughts and prayers.

## OUR GOALS

As Colorado emerges from the Great Recession, we are well positioned to prosper in the years ahead.

We've seen unemployment begin to recede. People are seeking new job opportunities in a range of fields - jobs with descriptions that didn't even exist just ten years ago.

Dynamic, talented people are flocking here from across the country. It's an exciting time to be a Coloradan.

And yet, challenges remain. Too many Coloradans still struggle to keep their families afloat.

As Speaker I will continue to do everything in my power to guide this chamber in the direction of putting people ahead of politics and building a brighter future for all of Colorado.

Now is NOT the time to take a step backward, to relitigate the fights of the past, to descend into Washington-style impasse and dysfunction. Now is the time to continue moving Colorado forward, and to build for Colorado's future.

We are committed to a legislative agenda that focuses on three goals:

enhancing the economic security of all Coloradans;

strengthening our education system to prepare our students and make college more affordable; and

helping Coloradans recover from the floods and wildfires we suffered in 2013.

## THE FLOODS

When it rains in Colorado, it is usually ten or fifteen minutes until the sun breaks through again. But on September 9 along the northern Front Range, ten or fifteen minutes became all day. September 9 became September 10, and still it rained. And it kept raining on the 11th and the 12th. And the 13th and 14th and 15th.

The National Weather Service, which tries to avoid hype, called these storms "biblical."

When the sun finally did return a week after the rains began, Coloradans were confronted with epic ruin.

Numbers hardly express the full scope of the damage, yet the numbers are startling.

Ten people lost their lives in and because of the Great Flood of September 2013; four hundred and eighty-five miles of state roadways were closed; more than one hundred bridges were damaged; eighteen thousand people were displaced from their homes; more than seventeen thousand structures were damaged or destroyed. The total economic damage from the floods was estimated as high as two billion dollars. It was the costliest disaster in our state's history.

Entire communities, like Lyons and Estes Park, were cut off from the rest of the state. Areas in and around Longmont, Fort Collins, Boulder and Greeley suffered heavy damage.

Our state agencies mobilized to rescue, stabilize and rebuild. And those folks haven't stopped yet. Because Colorado is a state full of good neighbors, of people willing to lend a hand.

To date, more than eighteen hundred people have contributed to recovery efforts, including civil servants from the Colorado Office of Emergency Management, CDOT, FEMA, the Colorado, Kansas, Montana and Utah National Guards, and dozens of county and municipal governments. Nearly seven hundred people are still on the job.

More than twenty-eight thousand Coloradans and more than fifty national, state and local volunteer organizations have contributed their own time and money to help those hurt by the floods. Just another example of Coloradans being good neighbors and standing stronger together.

People like Pastor Dan Scates and the congregants of Lifebridge Christian Church in Longmont. Pastor Scates' church served as an evacuation shelter and staging site during the first days of the flood. In the weeks after the disaster, the congregation shifted their focus to recovery, and to date have provided some 2,000 volunteer hours.

Please welcome Pastor Scates and thank him and his congregation for their efforts.

From Weld and Larimer counties, we're joined by the leaders of the Community Foundation Serving Greeley and Weld County, the United Way of Weld County and the Northern Colorado chapter of the Red Cross. Please thank Judy Knapp, Jeannine Truswell and Erin Mounsey and their staffers and volunteers.

The rapid response has produced extraordinary results.

Every one of the displaced families has moved into temporary housing or found a rental. Businesses throughout the flood zone are receiving assistance. Lyons and Estes Park are not only reachable again, but very much open for business, and all the state roadways closed by the floods have reopened.

I confess that when Governor John Hickenlooper announced a December First road reopening deadline, I thought it was perhaps too bold.

I should have known better than to underestimate Governor Hickenlooper and CDOT. The job was done on November 26.

Please join me in thanking the governor and welcoming three CDOT employees who spearheaded the road rebuilding process: Dan Marcucci, Ken [pronounced shafer] Sheaffer and Robin Stoneman.

And please thank Dale Rademacher, Longmont's manager of natural resources, who is with us today representing all the LOCAL officials who worked day and night to coordinate the disaster response.

And of course, we all owe a debt of gratitude to our first responders, who showed unbelievable poise and MacGyver-esque creativity and skill in responding to this disaster.

On September 12th Erin Brazzil was driving across Longmont to pick up her young daughter when a wall of water engulfed her Nissan Altima. It lost power and began to fill with water. She called 9-1-1.

When several rescuers, including Lieutenant Mike Becker and his crew from the Longmont Fire Department, were finally able to locate the car, it was barely visible, nearly submerged. Erin's breathing space had been reduced to a few inches at the roof of the car.

Three members of the Mountain View Fire Rescue-- Captain Chad Rademacher, Steve Knoll and Sean Tallman - struggled through the rising waters to reach the car.

The responders had to pry off the windshield and lift Ms. Brazzil out of the car, and Mountain View fire medic Jamie Wood, riding a personal watercraft - that's right, a Jetski - took her to safety.

Erin and her rescuers are with us today. Please join me in thanking all the first responders who showed such ingenuity and bravery during the storms. Without them, it's unimaginable how much worse it could have been.

Despite all the recovery work that's already happened, there's much still to do. And we must see it through to completion. Because nothing less than the fullest possible recovery is acceptable to me, to the other 99 lawmakers in the General Assembly, to the people of the 24 impacted counties and, indeed, to the entire state of Colorado.

In the weeks after the floods, I worked with leadership in both parties and both chambers to establish the Flood Disaster Study Committee.

We made the committee strictly bipartisan - six Democrats, six Republicans, with a co-chair from each party. The floodwaters didn't care about the party affiliation of the family whose house was destroyed. Neither do we.

Working under tight deadlines, committee members travelled to the impacted communities to hear first-hand from those who suffered the greatest losses about what they needed most.

I thank Representative Dave Young and Senator Scott Renfroe, the co-chairs of the flood committee, and the other committee members for their efforts to help our state recover. Their bipartisan work will also help Manitou Springs and Colorado Springs with the flood damage they suffered in August.

I'm proud that bills considered by the flood committee will be the first measures I introduce this year.

## THE WILDFIRES

Members, three months before we had the most damaging flood in state history, we had the most damaging wildfire in state history.

Two lives were lost in the Black Forest Fire, which raged from June 11 to June 20. It destroyed or damaged four hundred eighty-six homes, a record-setter for a Colorado wildfire.

Once again we saw a remarkable outpouring of assistance. More than five hundred firefighters from Colorado and neighboring states responded to the blaze, and help poured in to assist the forty thousand people from three counties who fled the flames.

Today, with the assistance of state, county and local authorities, families are resettling and rebuilding where they can.

Unfortunately, it's clear that we will face this kind of challenge again and again.

Members, Colorado is visited by devastating tornadoes, battering hailstorms, ferocious winds and biblical floods. But make no mistake: wildfire is an ongoing and annual danger.

Unlike what some are calling a thousand-year flood, the Black Forest fire broke a record that had been set only one year earlier, in the Waldo Canyon blaze.

As our state's population grows, it's inevitable that more people will live in areas prone to wildfire. Decades of fire suppression only mean that there's a lot more forest to burn. Toss in more than a million acres of beetle-kill forest, and the situation grows more explosive with each passing year.

We'll need to stand together to confront the annual danger posed by fire. We can do more to promote fire safety and responsible development.

Our interim wildfire committee met again last year, and crafted legislation to provide additional equipment and training for our dedicated firefighters and to establish a Wildfire Information and Resource Center for homeowners and educators.

Those are just two of the common-sense proposals that the interim committee sent to us for consideration, and I thank them for their creativity and good work.

## BUDGET AND EDUCATION

Our ability to recover from shocks like the floods and fires last year is due in part to the fiscally prudent budgets Democrats and Republicans passed during the Great Recession. We not only boosted our emergency reserve while balancing our finances, we also created some room to invest in critical priorities, like public education.

Make no mistake: the work we do this year in the General Assembly cannot make our schools entirely whole from the hits they took during the recession. But with revenues continuing to recover, we can continue to crawl back.

Our goal is to make our education system stronger, more accountable, and better for all Colorado students. And that means working together to target more resources where they're needed most: in the classroom.

Over the last several years we have passed bipartisan landmark legislation to improve student performance, enhance accountability and ensure that our students, regardless of circumstance, can become effective learners and competitive job-seekers after they graduate.

I'm glad to see bipartisan support for many of the provisions contained in last year's school finance measure. So I'm hopeful that we can work together to find ways to implement various common-sense enhancements to our schools.

Measures like flexible student count days, professional development for teachers and expanded programs for English language learners.

But while some have argued for reform before resources, let me say this: reforms will not work and our schools will not get better if they are not adequately funded. Period.

It is a priority for me and my caucus to provide an excellent education to every Coloradan enrolled in a public school. And I hope every person in this room joins us in that endeavor.

We'll also look at making substantial investments in our system of higher education and making sure a college degree is affordable to students coming out of high school.

We'll consider proposals capping annual tuition increases at our public colleges and universities at six percent and looking at a model for scholarships that ensures more students can access a college education without crippling debt.

## JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Colorado's economy ranks as one of the strongest in the nation. We are fourth in job creation. Our unemployment rate has dropped by a full percentage point since Opening Day 2013. And we are one of only a handful of states to surpass our pre-recession job numbers.

Our focus on advanced industries, job training and spending Colorado dollars on Colorado businesses and workers is bringing real results that will continue to pay off for years to come.

Coloradois making progress. But an unemployment rate of 6.5 percent isn't good enough. We must not reduce our efforts to facilitate a broader, more sustainable recovery.

We'll be looking at ways to expand our economic recovery to help the middle class. Like expanding the already-popular advanced industries grant program to develop more exciting new technologies and companies in Colorado, creating more good-paying jobs that are less prone to the boom-and-bust rollercoaster.

Enhancing our skills training programs so the Colorado workforce matches up with the highlyskilled jobs that our emerging economy is producing.

And giving business owners a break on their business personal property taxes.

And while increasing opportunity remains of critical importance, so too does protecting that newfound prosperity once it's achieved.

Economic security - ensuring that Coloradans not only have a shot at climbing the ladder, but have a foundation in place to stay on those higher rungs, is just as critical to fostering economic opportunity during a recovery.

That means ensuring that a single mother without a high school diploma can access the training she needs to land a new, good-paying job, andthat she also has access to affordable childcare for her daughter, and that her daughter later has a shot at graduating from college without a mountain of debt.

That means we're creating opportunities not only to welcome more Colorado families to the middle class, but also giving them a secure foundation for continued economic growth.



The vast majority of decisions we make as a legislature demonstrate shared values and mutual problem-solving by Coloradans. We take a little from over here, a little from over there, and we implement something that's well suited to this state.

Ninety-four percent of the legislation that passed last year went to the governor's desk with bipartisan support.

This type of collaborative policy-making is not the type of hyperpartisan rhetoric and high-octane fighting that make headlines. But it is the truth.

I can cite one example after another from the work we've done these past few years to show that the pundits and partisans who say Colorado is a fractured state, split between left and right, rural and urban, are simply wrong.

But legislative examples pale in comparison to the hard work of our state and local agencies and elected officials in flood- and fire-ravaged areas, and they don't speak to the generosity of spirit of Coloradans, regardless of political stripe or geography.

It wasn't lost on me that when a few counties were voting on whether to separate from Colorado, our state and local governments and charitable organizations were performing one of our most daunting disaster cleanups in some of those same counties.

Guess what: politics didn't matter. What did matter was making sure people were taken care of.

We were - we are in this thing together. It is our great charge to build a better, stronger Colorado - together.

Whether it's recovering from disaster, or making our education system better and more equitable, or increasing economic security for all, we will stand stronger together. That's the Colorado way of building for the future.

Thank you.