

House Minority Leader Brian DelGrosso - Opening Day remarks
January 13, 2016

Madam Speaker, Madam Majority Leader, esteemed colleagues and honored guests, welcome to the Second Regular Session of the 70th General Assembly.

Before I start, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome my family for joining me here today.

First off, I would like to welcome our newest member, Representative Cole Wist, welcome to the General Assembly and I sure hope you know what you're in for. I look forward to working with you this session. I would also like to welcome

Representative Janet Buckner - my sincerest condolences for your loss, your husband John was an honorable man and honorable public servant and I am grateful for the time I was able to spend working with him in this chamber.

I especially enjoyed our talks about basketball and other sports during our down time. Contrary to what most people believe we don't talk politics here all the time. Your husband will truly be missed.

I also would like to echo Speaker Hullinghorst's praise for how remarkable this chamber looks and ask for one more round of applause for Marilyn for her role in restoring the look of this room.

I would like recognize Speaker McNulty for beginning this restoration project and Speaker Ferrandino for his leadership to ensure this project stayed on track. You all did a great job and this chamber reflects your efforts.

Even with the later start this year, it's hard to believe we are already back for another session; it doesn't seem that long ago we were all celebrating the conclusion of last session. One hundred and twenty days starts today, and I am looking forward to a constructive session. From my experience, a looming election can sometimes dampen the respect we are accustomed to in this body. As we begin this session, let us remember that while we may not always share the same political philosophies, we all share the same goal of improving Colorado and making a positive difference in our communities.



Members, we may differ on our approach to solving the problems before us, and on the most appropriate use of taxpayer dollars, but reasonable people can differ. Our differences will help frame our upcoming debates and give us greater perspective to understand the issues facing Colorado. I encourage all of you to welcome our differences and look beyond party affiliation as you consider the merits of legislation this session.

In the last two sessions, I have used this time to discuss many of the legislative priorities facing our state; priorities that are not simply important to one party, but to the people and communities across Colorado. This session, Republicans will introduce legislation to increase government transparency and improve efficiency in our processes. We will focus on education and removing unnecessary burdens on our small businesses. However, it is disappointing that we must revisit many of the same priorities discussed in the last two years. Coloradans still need safe and accessible transportation, an affordable place for their families to call home, greater protections of their property, and more fiscal responsibility with their tax dollars - these are priorities we cannot afford to ignore any longer.

Members, I do not have to tell you that our transportation system is woefully underfunded. Today, everyone in this room navigated potholes, crossed bridges in various states of disrepair and probably spent more time in traffic than you wanted. This problem doesn't just affect Republicans or Democrats, it affects everyone in Colorado – and impacts not just our safety, but our commerce and industry as well. The Colorado Department of Transportation has indicated it needs an additional \$1 billion dollars per year to meet Colorado's transportation needs, and there are studies that suggest that if we continue to fund transportation at the current level we can expect an increase in travel times of more than 150 percent over the next 20 years. The math is simple, if we don't prioritize more funding for transportation, Colorado's transportation needs will continue to outpace the resources available to address them.

Nearly ten years ago, our Department of Transportation completed a significant highway expansion by issuing bonds rather than asking voters for a tax increase. We tried a similar vehicle last session that would have directed more than \$3 billion dollars into our transportation system, money that would have gone to projects in nearly

every county in this state. While that attempt last session was unsuccessful, this session Republicans will again try to jump start transportation construction, prioritizing the safety and health of our roadways.

Seven years ago this body changed how we funded transportation. Legislation passed to give the Colorado Department of Transportation five years of general fund transfers. As five years was the intent, Republicans will again attempt to guarantee transportation will receive five years of full funding.

Last session we made some great strides to reduce testing and give our state more control over our children's education. This session, Republicans will again prioritize education with an agenda that establishes more equitable funding for all public school students and most importantly directs more funding into classrooms. The governor has indicated we may have to cut funding for K-12 and higher education, but in tough times we have to look for creative alternatives to cutting one of our most important investments – the investment in the leaders of tomorrow. This session Republicans will introduce legislation to do that. We are determined to create opportunities to ensure our schools will not be forced to lose teachers or textbooks. Quality education is a priority for all of us and I hope we can continue to work together to give Colorado students every opportunity to be successful in school.

As I segue into our business and economic priorities, I want to share what I hear from business owners more than anything else; the best way the legislature can help them is not by telling them what they can and cannot do, but to stay out of their way. New regulations, even with the best of intentions, can take an enormous amount of time and resources to navigate – time that ultimately detracts from growth. This session, the Republicans' agenda is focused on removing burdens hampering growth, while also standing firm against more unnecessary regulations on Colorado businesses.

Many Small businesses are struggling, and it's disappointing that we are forced to repeat priorities that failed to make it into law last session. But the reality is, helping small business navigate the mounting regulations and protecting property rights are as important today as it has ever been. Yes, it's true, this session Republicans will once again introduce, for a fifth year in a row, the regulatory reform bill – don't they always say the fifth time's the charm. Some of you might be thinking a bill in its fifth version is funny, but members every year we introduce

a bill that will help small businesses in this state, and I can tell you for many business owners who already sacrifice a great deal of time away from their family, wasting time sifting through more government paperwork isn't funny. This bill has no fiscal impact, is widely supported by industry, and was unopposed by the departments – if you understand the contribution small business makes in Colorado then show them your support and let's finally pass this important legislation.

By that same token, we will again introduce legislation that ensures all private property is protected from government intrusion regardless of where it lies in this state. The location of a person's property and the political environment around it should not impact its accessibility. Some people seem to be unclear about property rights – we do not have a right to property value, but we do have a right to access and use our property.

A mineral right is property, just like intellectual property or personal property, and if any government entity elects to restrict access or enjoyment of that property, the owner should be duly compensated. Politics should never infringe on a person's constitutional rights, and I hope the people in this room think carefully about the dangerous precedent that would be set if we allow a government entity to deny access or use of a person's property without fair compensation. This type of action is unjust and this session Republicans will once again stand up for the rights of Coloradans.

Members, for many people in our state, the lack of affordable housing remains a daily concern. Our economy is dependent on accessible and affordable housing. Yet today, many middle class, working families are forced to pay exorbitant rents because they cannot afford to buy a home. Last session we assembled one of the broadest coalitions of support for legislation which would have encouraged the construction industry to build more affordable housing while at the same time ensuring homeowners' property rights were not compromised.

Since the defeat of last year's bill, many municipalities across our state, including the one we are all in right now, have passed similar legislation. Today, two million people are covered by some form of construction defect legislation. However, a patchwork of municipal ordinances will not resolve this issue for every Coloradan struggling to keep a roof over their family's heads. That is why I hope everyone in this room will support a statewide solution to ensure all Coloradans have the opportunity to purchase a home.

Members, we will not solve the affordable housing problem by throwing money at it, we will solve it by working to fix the actual cause of the problem, and applying the law of supply and demand.

Finally, as we talk about prioritization, I believe there should be no greater priority than protecting the rule of law. Over the past year, we heard a lot of talk about reclassifying the Hospital Provider Fee as an enterprise; a change that would effectively allow the state to retain revenue that would otherwise be refunded to the taxpayers. While I agree that funding for education and transportation are critical to our state, under no circumstances should the need for revenue justify violating our state Constitution. The General Assembly's legal counsel said reclassifying the hospital provider fee as an enterprise would be unconstitutional.

Our Constitution guides us, it protects us, in many ways our Constitution defines us. This session, as in every session, Republicans will categorically support Colorado's constitution and will not compromise its integrity under any circumstance.

Members this session we will have to make some difficult decisions about our budget, but in order for us to best solve the problems we face, we must look back at how we got here. There is no denying the impacts of the recession on Colorado, but since 2009, our General Fund has increased by nearly \$3 billion dollars, an increase of more than 43 percent. The math is simple, and if we don't prioritize our dollars we will continue to have this same conversation year in and year out.

The reality is many of the problems we face are not the result of insufficient revenue, but rather a lack of prioritization. With nearly \$3 billion dollars, the General Assembly could have increased funding for transportation and directed more funding into the classroom, but past assemblies chose to spend that money on expanding programs, with no regard on how future legislatures could pay for them. For those of you saying we still need more revenue, I ask you if \$3 billion is not enough, how much is?

We may have to make cuts this year, and while some members in this room will look for ways to take more money out the pockets of our taxpayers, I say, more revenue should come from money made from economic growth, from industry expansion and increased salaries throughout our state, not from higher taxes. We simply

need to prioritize how we spend, focus on making government more efficient and let our small business community drive our economy forward.

This session, I hope we can agree on solutions to many of the priorities facing our state, and focus our efforts on our existing obligations rather than creating new ones. I look forward to civil and constructive discourse on keeping our economic recovery on track and ensuring all of Colorado is prosperous. I have said in the past that the opportunity to listen to people and learn about all the different issues facing them is the true spoils of this position and that could not be more true today.

Serving in the legislature has been one of my proudest accomplishments, and standing in this well, addressing this distinguished body has been a true privilege and an honor. As I begin my final session, I would like to express my gratitude for this experience. I am humbled by the confidence my district has placed in me to represent them, and by the support of my colleagues to serve in this role.

Once more, I look forward to working alongside you Madam Speaker, Madam Majority Leader and with my friends on both sides of this aisle.

Members, may the next 120 days be of great service to the people of Colorado, thank you and God bless us all.

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