

**JOHN
HICKENLOOPER**

MAYOR



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Temple Hoyne Buell Theatre

INAUGURAL ADDRESS 2007

Good morning. Thank you to all of our partners: members of the City Council, the District Attorney, the City Auditor and the newly elected Clerk and Recorder. Thanks to the hard-working employees of our city, to our civic leadership, and to you – the people of Denver – for a second term. And as always, to my wife Helen – thank you for your love and guidance.

We especially want to thank and recognize Governor Bill Ritter. Four years ago, we said we needed to bring the City and County Building closer to the State Capitol. That effort began with Governor Owens and continues under the leadership of Governor Ritter, as we keep moving a Greek revival building and gold dome closer to each other without cracking a window. We thank you, Governor Ritter, for your commitment to the State of Colorado...and your partnership with the City and County of Denver. We are foot soldiers in your army.

On occasions such as this, the conventional thing is to list our accomplishments and look to the challenges ahead. But as it is pretty apparent by now, it is my nature not always to do the conventional thing. We're proud of what the City has done and we want the people of Denver to know how we've tried to carry out our mandate. Next week, I will give a more detailed summation of our efforts thus far...and our goals for the years ahead at the Chamber of Commerce's State of the City Luncheon.

Instead of a traditional Inaugural speech, I'd like to use these few minutes to think about what it means to live in a community in the 21st century in a city like Denver.

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Our family recently moved to an older house in Park Hill, one of Denver's many great neighborhoods. In the front hall of our family home hangs a frame with our marriage vows. Helen and I signed that paper. So did every guest at our wedding. Seeing it each day is a reminder and a renewal of the vows we pledged to each other...and the witness and support that our friends and family have given us over the years.

Similarly, we have, hanging in the halls of our memory – our conscience, if you will – the vows that this administration made to you at our inauguration four years ago. One could look at marital vows and civic vows as closely related cousins... In both cases, I wind up being responsible for the trash.

That is partly a joke, and partly serious. No relationship, civic or marital, can afford to take lightly the features and dimensions of our lives which may lack drama and glory, but on which

our well-being resides. Good stewardship of those features and dimensions underpins all the other vows. Yes, unlike many Americans, my heart still soars in response to the words “efficient pothole repair,” since I know how every dream rests on the attention to detail embodied in that phrase.

We pledged to create a diverse city government - transparent and accountable - that would work with all of our partners collaboratively...that would conduct its business so that our success would not come at the expense of others. As every good restaurateur learns, there is no margin in having enemies. We pledged to wrestle with a severe fiscal crisis; we wanted a safe city. We pledged to work together to grow intelligently, and we aimed to ensure that every school in every neighborhood was a place that any of us would be proud to send our children.

As we worked to fulfill these pledges, we’ve invested significant time and effort in strategic planning. No well-managed business operates without a long-range plan. This administration believes in long-range plans. "When you don't know to which port you're sailing," the saying goes, "no wind is a good one." “Look before you leap...an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure...a stitch in time saves nine.” Our society has provided us with many reminders that foresight is always a preferable alternative to hindsight, and strategic planning is, while not the most pulse-stirring term, actually an ongoing celebration of the human mind and its powers.

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Immediately after we took office, more than 300 people participated in an 18-month process to create Denver’s Road Home, our 10-year-plan to end homelessness. We looked to every sector, every neighborhood and every congregation to help us implement it. In just two years, the number of chronically homeless individuals in Denver decreased by 36 percent...and panhandling on the 16th Street Mall decreased by 92 percent.

We are on track to meet our 5-year goal of a 75 percent reduction in chronic homelessness.

We integrated several planning processes to reduce crime. More officers, new technology, expanded training and new data-driven, community-based strategies have yielded results. Almost invariably, neighborhoods with the greatest public involvement see some of the greatest decreases in crime. Due to these efforts – and especially the dedication of our police officers and command staff – according to the FBI’s national data – Denver's crime rate dropped more in 2006 than any other major city in the United States.

We are implementing a similar community-based approach to continuing challenges like graffiti and gangs.

Almost from the beginning of our administration, we worked across every City agency to reduce our consumption of energy. Greenprint Denver has integrated the planning efforts of several hundred employees and citizens. In the plan’s first year, Denver International Airport reduced energy use nearly eight percent per passenger. Denver’s recycling increased by 63%. And we are happy to announce that: In the last 12 months, our community planted more than 65-THOUSAND trees – one of the largest, if not the largest, single-year expansions of an urban forest in the history of this country.

These fledgling investments will provide lofty returns over the decades ahead. Perhaps we won't need the anticipated 20 years in our plan to plant one million new trees in the region.

From the 30-month community-based planning process to create Preschool Matters to the ambitious Denver Plan, created by Denver Public Schools, hundreds and hundreds of people have contributed to what is taking shape as perhaps the most concerted effort on behalf of our children in the history of this city. Fifteen of our largest youth mentoring organizations are – for the first time – collaborating to magnify their impact. All of our 4-year-olds will soon have access to quality preschool. The Denver Scholarship Foundation has dramatically increased college access for our high school students.

Each of these efforts reflects the community's commitment to long-term strategic planning and investments. They provide immediate benefit, but like our trees, the rewards they create will continue to grow and expand over time.

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Within city government, perhaps our greatest planning effort over the last four years has addressed our infrastructure needs. For decades, Denver has endured chronic problems of deferred maintenance and haphazard funding strategies. We've reacted to infrastructure crises rather than anticipated and prevented them long-term.

Working from a 2005 comprehensive two-year study done by the City's budget office, 115 citizens volunteered significant amounts of time, experience, and creativity to serve on the Infrastructure Priorities Task Force. More than 15-hundred citizens attended 40 neighborhood and civic presentations between last November and this April. Based on their strategic funding plan, we will present to City Council this week a request for a November ballot initiative which will finally address the inadequate funding for our infrastructure.

When this request is approved by City Council and enacted by Denver voters – *probably with some changes* – our property taxes will remain among the lowest in the metropolitan region. This initiative will send a message about who we are, about who we want to become, and about how deeply committed we are to the well-being of this great city.

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Next year will be Denver's sesquicentennial – our 150th birthday. For the first time in a hundred years, we will host the convention of one of our national political parties. And in 2010, we will host the world's first Biennial of the Americas – to celebrate the contemporary arts, cultures and emerging creative thoughts of the Western Hemisphere.

As our minds travel back in history, to the city's founding in 1858, we are given a profound opportunity to think seriously about the future of this city in 2058, and even 2158. The challenge for all of us is to plan not only for Denver's next four years, but for the 146 years that follow.

If Denver is America's most progressive and enlightened city - as some observers have suggested - then there must be some basis for that judgment. We believe there is.

Review the dramatic changes of recent years, – the building of DIA, three new downtown sports facilities, light rail, doubling of the convention center, the Denver Art Museum’s Frederic C. Hamilton building, the Ellie Caulkins Opera House, and our new central library, a stunning three-dimensional tribute to Denver’s love affairs with books. Now weigh these accomplishments against those of any other American city – and you may reasonably conclude Denver is indeed in a league of its own.

It’s not a matter of believing that Denver is better than other cities, for nothing is gained by vain pride, but rather an understanding - based upon impressive evidence - that our achievements rank at the top of urban undertakings in this nation.

Serving as Mayor of Denver offers constant reminders that no single individual can claim credit for this city’s remarkable achievements – certainly not me, nor even my most worthy predecessors, Wellington Webb and Federico Peña. Great achievements are plural, not singular. In the final accounting the credit belongs to the citizens of Denver – those who love our city and have demonstrated by their civic involvement a deep and abiding commitment to its future.

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Denver’s success offers up a model on a larger stage. As this country is faced with uniquely contemporary challenges, our federal government is too often locked in a paralysis of partisan politics. Hope, meanwhile, is finding a better home and habitat in local settings. Cities offer many of the most spirit-raising examples of clear-eyed analysis of problems and active pursuit of solutions. Change and innovation are far more rapid than in larger units of governance. When we achieve success it spreads rapidly to other cities, and then percolates up through state and ultimately to federal government...creating lasting impact far beyond our own municipal borders.

Cities, including great cities like Denver, grow and change and evolve just like people, and trees, and all human institutions. Denver today is different from what it was even a few years ago, and if it is to continue to thrive, it must continue to change and evolve. Flexibility and resilience – not an unexamined loyalty to habit and the status quo – will always be this city’s competitive advantage.

Cities start out as small communities and gradually become collections of neighborhoods. Those neighborhoods become cities through the determination of their citizens to provide for themselves centralized transportation, schools, and service systems to fight fires, maintain safety, supply water, and, yes, deal with trash. As residents share common concerns and goals, pretty soon they find they have more in common than they have differences.

At that point, a collection of people has cohered and emerged as a true city with a distinct culture and identity. Metamorphic, we call it in geology – a process where some characteristics stay and some change, and the whole is layered and structured in ways that intrigue and instruct the observer. The city becomes one big neighborhood. Out of this interdependence of shared concerns and shared goals...a sense of the common good emerges.

What we’re really talking about -- more important, what we are playing a leading role in – is a new urban renaissance: the restoration of the local republic, the empowerment of all of our citizens to rise to the challenges we face together in our neighborhoods. A quarter century after

the founding of the American Republic, Thomas Jefferson wrote that he and his fellow Founders had not done enough to encourage the establishment of local or neighborhood republics.

For 2,500 years, since ancient Athens, republics have all employed a central notion: the belief in – and commitment to - the common good. Too many in our mass democracy of 300 million people have surrendered and walked away from that sense of the common good. With that unfortunate choice, people become isolated and self-interested, indifferent to the greater good of their city and their nation. Even within their neighborhoods, their focus becomes narrow and too self-interested.

The great City of Denver offers a new model, one with roots back in the Greek city-state and in the fertile mind of Jefferson – a model of the local republic based on the noble ideal of the common good. The best way to ensure that Denver remains a great city is to ensure that its neighborhoods, its local republics, are great...and dynamically committed to the well-being of the communities that join them in composing the grand political and social experiment known as the Mile High City of Denver.

This requires citizen participation. To put this more accurately, it gives citizens a glorious opportunity to play a consequential role in history. It invites Denver residents into the privilege - and satisfaction and fun - of creating new ideas and new opportunities to make our neighborhoods vibrant, safe, and healthy. It requires ongoing and new investments in infrastructure, in human capital, and in our centers of civic life. It requires continued cooperation and collaboration with our regional neighbors. And it means continuing to position Denver as a model and example of a national urban renaissance.

If we succeed in these endeavors – we succeed in the ultimate goal of creating a city to which our children and grandchildren want to live. A safe, vibrant, and diverse city. A city of equity, opportunity, and soul-satisfying quality of life that will enrich and deepen the meaning of our lives on earth, prepare our children to succeed in the world – and inspire them to settle here to raise their families, fulfill their ambitions, and make their own vows to our city.

If we succeed in these endeavors...and we will...we just might find that in creating a great city – we are changing the world.

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