

Mayor John W. Hickenlooper STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS 2007

Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce “State of the City” Luncheon
Tuesday, July 24, 2007

Denver is coming up on its 150th birthday. Many of us find turning 50 quite a challenge, but in a city, reaching an advanced age provides more good news than bad. A century-and-a-half of history offers a rich set of lessons for Denverites today. For the residents of this town in 1858, the scramble and struggle to create all the pieces and the parts of what historians have called “an instant city” were monumental and demanding beyond our imagination.

When Denver was young, remoteness from the eastern United States was its defining characteristic. Just getting here was a major production. One participant in the Colorado Gold Rush, Libeus Barney, captured the situation: Denver, he wrote, is “a settlement less than a year old, situated hundreds of miles from the advantages of civilized life, shut out from communication with the States, save by the tardy locomotion of mules, and the slower oxen.”

The difficulty of travel offered one great advantage: People were very, very glad when their journeys came to an end, and they arrived safely in Denver. A young woman, Mollie Dorsey Sanford, spoke for hundreds, when she arrived in Denver in June of 1860, and wrote in her diary, “The Promised Land is gain’d and we are in Denver tonight.” We are a little short on rituals and ceremonies in our rushed 21st century lifestyles, and it probably wouldn’t be the worst treatment program for our collective souls and spirits, if we finished every day, or maybe began every city council and planning board meeting, by repeating Mollie Sanford’s wonderful statement, “The Promised Land is gain’d and we are in Denver tonight.”

* * *

Born out of prospector’s gold nugget dreams, Denver has evolved from the offspring of opportunity to its proud parent. Oil wildcatters, cable visionaries, brewpub pioneers – *you name it* – our history is one of people seeking opportunity on new frontiers.

Over the past four years, we have worked together to ensure that Metro Denver continues to grow as a hub of opportunity...and to extend that opportunity to all parts of our community.

Job seekers today benefit from the expanded capacity and strategic focus of our **regional workforce development** approach. Small businesses enjoy increased contracting opportunities thanks to our **Construction Empowerment Initiative**, providing a competitive pathway for small-, minority- and women-owned businesses in the Denver construction market to grow.

Our **Denver Business Assistance Center** provides vital information and referral services to thousands of entrepreneurs. The **Metro Mortgage Assistance Program** fulfills the dream of home ownership for hundreds of families throughout the region. Increased investment capital is available to underserved communities through our **New Markets Tax Credits** and the creation of a new

Community Development Financial Institution.

Going forward, Denver's must evolve into an **entrepreneurial hothouse**. With dozens of organizations dedicated to growing businesses and one of the most highly educated workforces in the country, many of the ingredients are already here. We will continue working to increase access to capital, expand mentoring opportunities, and ensure that local government does not get in the way.

In the coming years, we will implement a **"Grow Our Own" initiative** – strategically supporting business efforts to buy, hire and expand locally. We will expand our **asset building initiatives** – helping low-income families build stable financial foundations that foster self-sufficiency.

We will launch a new **Denver housing plan**, providing a blueprint for diverse, market-responsive affordable housing options for residents of all incomes. It will complement our **neighborhood revitalization strategy**, which seeks to improve opportunities in targeted neighborhoods. We will ensure that the redevelopment of high-impact **infill projects** transforms the civic life of Denver.

Yesterday's gold prospectors and oil wildcatters have become today's bioscientists, technology innovators, and aviation pioneers.

In that last category, **Denver International Airport** stands as a monument to our historic belief in the impossible...and our future in the global economy. The results are dramatic – increased domestic and international carriers and flights beyond any expectation; tremendous passenger and revenue growth; bond rating upgrades; completion of the longest commercial runway in North America, and the recently-opened new regional jet facility. DIA's first decade has been one of incredible success.

The coming years will see DIA's first major expansion including 10 new gates, a commuter facility and a luxury hotel within the terminal complex. We are thrilled with our new nonstop flight to Munich and will not rest until we land – *no pun intended* – nonstop service to Asia.

Competing in the global economy requires a local education system and a skilled workforce that are second to none.

In order to be a great city we have to grow our children into great adults. This means making every effort and seizing every opportunity to provide them with educational activities. Our children deserve our support from the time they leave their doors at home until they return at night. We have already begun this, with investments in **early childhood education, before- and after-school programs, youth cultural enrichment, mentoring and expanded college access and scholarship programs.**

But more is needed. We must create options for kids that are more attractive than those they find on the streets.

We will take a major step forward when we launch the **Denver Preschool Program** this fall, making quality preschool programs available to every four-year-old in our city. And we will continue moving forward as we develop our **Child/Youth Friendly City Initiative.**

With the support and cooperation of our partners at DPS, as well as others, we will be launching a comprehensive **doorbell-to-school bell approach** for our children. This means that city services will be coordinated and drive specific outcomes for young people including after school and recreational activities. The City will work even more cooperatively with our local nonprofit agencies and businesses to wrap our children with activities that enhance their safety and educational experiences. Our goal is to enhance school performance, but we will not achieve that goal unless everyone in this room - everyone in this community - is willing to commit themselves, their time and their treasure, to this goal.

In all of this we suffer no illusions as to the challenges we face, but as the writer William Faulkner said, “Those who would remove mountains must begin by carrying away small stones.”

Denver’s founders built a city in one of the most isolated places in the country, flanked on one side by vast plains and on the other by high mountains...and with – *how shall I say it?* – an *occasionally* vexing climate. Yet – thanks to its people – the Mile High City has evolved into one of the most desirable places to live in the country.

A livable city is defined not just by its monuments of brick and steel, but by the emphasis it places on its people – and the opportunities it provides to thrive, engage and connect.

Over the past four years, we have worked to create a sense of community ownership around **public safety** – built on trust, partnerships and results. Expanded **civilian oversight** and training have strengthened the relationship between our police officers and the community they serve. **New officers, new technology and new strategies** have resulted in the largest crime reduction in 2006 of any major city in the United States.

Just as we are equipping police with **real-time information** to help them be more effective, we will continue to expand **public access to safety data**, so residents can be true partners in working with us to improve the safety of their neighborhoods. Whether we are aiming for new safety benchmarks or tackling continuing challenges like graffiti and gangs, we will build new and innovative **public safety partnerships** at the neighborhood level.

Over the past four years, we have worked to strengthen our sense of place – enhancing our parks, expanding our cultural amenities and preserving the neighborhoods that define us.

From Civic Center to Auraria...from 14th Street and the new Theatre District...to Union Station, we have an opportunity – and an obligation – to enhance our centers of civic life. The new **Downtown Area Plan** provides a blueprint for ongoing public and private investments in our urban core, which, over the last 20 years, has become more than just a center of commerce – it has become a thriving residential, retail and cultural hub.

Our coordinated investments around **transit** will better connect downtown to our neighborhoods, our city and our region. Just like density and energy efficiency, mobility is vital to our sustainability

efforts.

With our new **Greenprint Denver** initiative, recycling increased by 63% in the past year. In the past 12 months, our region planted more than 65,000 trees – one of the largest, if not the largest, single-year expansions of an urban forest in the history of America.

In the months ahead, we will debate and eventually implement new community initiatives to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and save energy, helping our air quality, our water quality and our bottom line.

Denver's Road Home, our 10-year plan to end homelessness, has made a great start. Thanks to the support of so many who are here today - in just two years, the number of chronically homeless individuals in Denver decreased by 36 percent...and panhandling on the 16th Street Mall dropped by 92 percent.

As we implement our strategic plan with widespread community support, we are ahead of schedule to meet our 5-year goal of a 75 percent reduction in chronic homelessness.

In 1908, back before the age of radio and television and even the Internet, the nation's attention was focused on Denver, as we hosted the Democratic National Convention.

Events like the Pope's visit in 1993, the 1997 Summit of the Eight and last year's **PeaceJam** gathering of Nobel Peace Laureates – and even MTV's *Real World* – have also introduced the modern Mile High City to the international stage.

The **Ellie Caulkins Opera House**, the **Denver Art Museum's Frederic C. Hamilton Building** and the soon-to-be-completed **Museum of Contemporary Art** are the newest cultural and architectural gems in Denver's crown – drawing international praise and attention.

In the coming years, the **Clyfford Still Museum** will elicit international interest in Denver's latest cultural conquest – securing our position as the Creative Capital of the West. And the creation of a **Biennial of the Americas**, an exposition of the best art and ideas in the Western Hemisphere will raise Denver's cultural prominence as a vital link between North, Central and South America – from the Arctic Circle all the way to the southern coast of Chile.

And our international standing extends beyond culture.

With the most ambitious transit build-out in American history, the largest assemblage of **transit-oriented development** opportunities in the country, and a growing track record of innovative **urban infill redevelopment** – Denver is rapidly becoming recognized as a model of 21st century urban planning.

The world is watching Denver – and the world is coming to Denver.

2006 was the best year ever for Denver **tourism** with 11.7 million overnight visitors – an increase of 13 percent over 2005, the largest single one-year tourism increase in Denver's history. And next

August – for the first time in a hundred years - we will host the national convention of one of our political parties.

From the building of the railroads to the Eisenhower Tunnel to Denver International Airport, we have always undertaken monumental efforts to connect ourselves to the rest of the world. While these external connections are crucial, so is our connectivity to each other.

Over the past four years, we've created **new vehicles for increased public input** through series like *Denver Listens*, *Partnership Denver* and annual neighborhood conferences. We've heightened **civic engagement** through community-based efforts around public safety, homelessness, zoning reform, sustainability, election reform, graffiti and infrastructure needs. We don't do it because it sounds good; we do it because it creates results.

We've expanded opportunities for **volunteerism** through our efforts around youth, homelessness and sustainability. We've provided **new opportunities for civic ties** through citywide experiences like *One Book, One Denver* and *Doors Open Denver*.

We've opened new channels for **regional dialogue and collaboration** through cooperative public safety endeavors, economic development partnerships, joint purchasing agreements with our neighbors and regional approaches to transit and water.

And in its first year of operation, **3-1-1** handled nearly half a million citizen inquiries – providing better access and information to our customers, while enabling us to track and improve our internal business processes. And all at a cost per call that is lower than private sector call centers and in the bottom third of cities nationwide.

In the coming years, we will continue seeking new ways to engage our residents and neighborhoods in making the decisions and creating the vision that shapes our city. We will continue to embrace the ideals of transparency, accessibility, inclusiveness, and cooperation. We will continue asking all of you to give back to the community – whether in terms of ideas, volunteer hours, philanthropic dollars or investments.

We hope to give Denver voters an opportunity to invest together in the common good with the **infrastructure bond package** that we are asking City Council to put before voters this fall. We are grateful to all who participated in the extensive community process that created it.

The proposal sends a message about who we are as a community, and who we are to become. It sends a message about what we value.

It says that we value our children. We do that by expanding the role of libraries as centers of productive inquiry and creation, and by expanding recreation centers' ability to serve our youth.

It says that we value our open spaces, our neighborhoods and our centers of civic life. We do that by enhancing our parks and cultural assets, investing in the promise of transit-oriented development, and

delivering a more equitable distribution of services throughout the entire city.

It says to our business community and future economic partners that we are willing to invest in our city – and so should they.

It also says that that we must be better stewards of our infrastructure, by following long-term plans that enable us to better maintain our assets and save taxpayer money by dealing with maintenance issues now, so we prevent costly expenditures in the future.

In all of these ways, the infrastructure bond initiative says that Denver is a place that wisely invests in its future.

As we approach our 150th birthday, we must reflect on our city's past and, at the same time, plan for our region's future.

When Mollie Sanford arrived in Denver in 1860 and declared she was in the Promised Land, she had the common experience of looking at the mountains and thinking they were very close to the city. "I thought I could easily walk to the mountains," she wrote. "The atmosphere is so dry and clear it brings distant objects nearer."

The western advantage has always been the view. Our eyes, our imaginations, our minds and our hopes have been well exercised by the reach of the view, "bringing distant objects nearer." In my years of living in Denver, and most recently in my years as Mayor, I have seen "distant objects" draw nearer, and not as a matter of optical illusion. I have seen the citizens of this city, and their leaders choose goals, and pursue them doggedly. The distance separating us from those goals has dissolved as we have designed and practiced innovative ways to reach them.

We have come to a recognition of our wealth of natural resources and recognize our obligation to preserve them. We know this is a desirable place to live, a magnet for people from all over the country, and we have worked hard on strategies to welcome new residents without sacrificing the attractions that brought them here in the first place. We have acknowledged and acted on the wisdom of investing in that most precious of our resources: our people.

In all of our endeavors, let us be guided by Mollie Sanford's exuberant declaration nearly 150 years ago: "The Promised Land is gain'd...and we are...in Denver tonight."

Ladies and gentleman, we have arrived in Denver. But our journey together – *our city's journey* - is still just beginning!

###