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Making Denver the Best City for Women

The Denver Women's Commission, whose vision statement is to "make Denver the best city for women," wanted to see just exactly where Denver women stand in relation to the rest of the nation and the state. This fact sheet will provide some basic information about Denver women in order that we may lead the way in setting policy with the interest of 49.2% of the population in mind¹. Perhaps it is time for Denver to take the lead in national policy debates, bearing in mind some of our nation's historic moves forward for women have been advanced right here.

While the Commission monitors policy regarding all women, it's also a fact that women-headed families with children represent a large portion of Denver's poor. Thus, much of the Denver Women's Commission's work is with poverty and its causes. Women bear an unequal burden of child and adult care². The pay gap, which makes a woman have to work that much harder to make ends meet, is another primary reason single moms are disproportionately poor.

It is the Commission's goal to make Denver a leading city on issues of special interest to women. One online study ranked Denver among the top 25 Cities for Women³. Here are some areas highlighting where Denver and Colorado does its best—and its worst.

Government Services in Colorado:

Sadly, Coloradans aren't even close to leading the way in many of areas that benefit all Coloradans. To be *average* in the nation would be a jump. As Colorado Center for Law and Policy puts it, Coloradans could "aim for the middle" as we rank so low in national averages in areas such as:

45th lowest in the nation for overall state spending per capita.

49th in state spending per capita on health care for the poor (adults *and* children)

48th in state spending per capita on higher education

48th in state spending per capita on highways

Colorado ranks in the bottom 10 states for: housing assistance, food stamp distribution, Medicaid disbursement, and unemployment benefits.⁴

Earnings:

In Colorado, the average weekly earnings of full time workers were \$693 for women and \$878 for men in 2008 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In Colorado, women made 78.9% of men on average. Nationally, women earned 79.9% of men, as of 2008 data⁵. Using different methodology, the pay gap statistics from the Census American Community Survey showed that full time year round female Colorado workers earned \$36,618 in 2008; male Colorado workers earned \$47,270 in 2008.⁶ Thus, Colorado women earned 77% of men.

¹ American Community Survey, 2008 www.census.gov

² A Picture of Poverty 2010 . Agency for Human Rights and Community Relations. www.denvergov.org/humanrights

³ Excelle.monster.com. Ranked on factors such as diversity, low crime, high salaries by "combing through other surveys, rankings, and best of lists" as of Nov. 2008.

⁴ The Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute --a project of the Colorado Center on Law and Policy. *What Kind of Colorado Do You Want?* www.cclponline.org

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics < <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2008.pdf>> pg 36-38.

⁶ American Community Survey, 2008 www.census.gov.



The median family income in Colorado was \$70,164. Median income for single woman, no children: \$46,282. Median income for single woman w/ children: \$29,097 (as compared to a male w/ children: \$41,855, man w/o children: \$51,001) ⁷

Business and Economy:

Unemployment in Colorado stands at 8.0% in June 2010 versus 9.5% in the U.S.

Ever since gold was first discovered along the Platte, politicians and entrepreneurs have fostered a business-friendly attitude to encourage businesses to make Denver their home. Coloradans pay the fifth lowest in the nation combined state and local taxes, according to a 2009 study by the nonpartisan state Legislative Council.

The Denver/Aurora area ranked #4 for best large metropolis for female entrepreneurs. A survey ranked things women see as particularly important factors to starting a business, including: low crime rates, high median income, affordable housing, strong economy, low property tax rate, rapid population growth, and pedestrian friendly business districts.⁸

Politics:

The first evidence of Colorado becoming a leading feminist community was granting women the vote in 1893 by popular vote—27 years before the 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote federally. The first three women in the nation elected as state legislators were from Colorado (in 1894).

In 2010, women made up 37% of the Colorado state legislators in 2010. The national average of women in state legislatures is 24.4%.⁹ These figures are promising, but with half of the population being women, the goal should be the same proportion of women in the legislature for a representational government. No woman has yet served as Governor. In Denver, 8 or 13 City Council members are women. No woman has ever been Mayor.

Health:

More than 16 percent of Colorado women had no health insurance in 2008¹⁰

The average annual cost of employment-based health insurance for single person coverage was 13th highest in the country in 2003.

The Denver metro air quality is ranked 21 out of 100—relatively poor for the nation,¹¹ though Denver is ranked fifth best in the nation for women's health, taking in to consideration women's cancer rates and gym memberships.¹² Colorado also consistently has ranked as one of the states with the lowest obesity rate.

Poverty:

Denver's Charity Organization Society was founded here by Frances Wisebart Jacobs—and was the nation's first successful, federated charitable organization. It eventually become United Way,

Colorado residents are, on average, 10th in the nation in per-capita income in 2007 at \$41,042.

As of now, Coloradans earn 7% more than the average American, but give 9% less to charitable organizations.¹³

In Denver, 18.4 % of the total population lived in poverty in 2008. Among Denver women, 19.5% lived in poverty in 2008.

Women-maintained Denver households with children have a poverty rate of 35%.¹⁴ In Denver, 27% of children live in poverty. The number of children living in poverty in Colorado is on the increase here more than any other state. Despite this increase, Colorado (at 15%) still

⁷ Colorado Center on Law and Policy, Fiscal Policy Institute, *State of Working Colorado* Report, 2010.

<<http://www.cclponline.org/pubfiles/2009%20State%20of%20Working%20Colorado.pdf>> pg 38.

⁸ National survey conducted by Allbusiness.com

⁹ <<http://www.ncsl.org/LegislaturesElections/WomensNetwork/WomeninStateLegislatures2010/tabid/19481/Default.aspx>>,<

<<http://www.thewhitehouseproject.org/culture/facts/>>

¹⁰ Kaiser Family Foundation. www.statehealthfacts.org

¹¹ Sperlinger's www.bestplaces.com

¹² Women's Health. MedicalNewsToday.com/articles/134031

¹³ *The State of Giving 2008*, Colorado Nonprofit Assn. www.coloradononprofits.org

remains below the national average of 18% for total percent of kids in poverty.¹⁵ New Mexico and Wyoming decreased their percentage of children living in poverty, while the number of Colorado's children living in poverty went up from 2000 to 2007.

Family and Children:

Forbes rated Denver the 6th top city for working moms.¹⁶ Among their criteria were lower violent crimes, lower unemployment, higher income, number of pediatricians, living costs and spending per pupil. Colorado ranked 22nd in the nation in overall child well-being, according to the Annie E Casey foundation.

Colorado is among the top 10 states with growing child populations, but has a higher percentage of uninsured children than the national average- 13% in Colorado versus 10% in the U.S.¹⁷

The cost of child care in Colorado (both centers and family-based care) is among the highest in the nation.¹⁸ Only about 1 in 6 low income families with children get the subsidized child care they need.

Education:

Recognizing the importance of education, especially for the immigrant population, Emily Griffith opens one of nation's first schools for adult education in 1914 in Denver. Taking the lead in education is something Coloradans have not done since, though.

As a share of personal income, Colorado was 48th in funding higher education and 47th in funding K-12 schools.¹⁹ The already dire state of public education funding in Colorado will grow worse in 2011, as "Amendment 23 and Referendum C sunset, and the federal stimulus dollars that are currently propping up education funding will dry up."²⁰

Summary:

Colorado women have blazed trails in the past to become some of the first women to do what they did in the nation, whether it be in education, charity, or running for office. Have we continued to follow a path of progress? The general state of business and economy in Colorado would say women have great opportunity here. The working poor, on the other hand, may have less to count on if they live in Colorado. And with Coloradans failing to take action on issues that will affect the state's viability in the long run—ie, K-12 and higher education funding—Colorado may, indeed, be simply striving for the middle.

¹⁴ *A Picture of Poverty 2010* by Agency for Human Rights and Community Relations; www.denvergov.org/humanrights

¹⁵ *Kids Count* Report, Colorado Children Campaign. www.coloradokids.org

¹⁶ www.forbes.com July, 26, 2010

¹⁷ Kaiser Family Foundation. www.statehealthfacts.org

¹⁸ *Kids Count* Report, Colorado Children's Campaign

¹⁹ Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, *What Kind of Colorado Do You Want?* www.cclponline.org

²⁰ <<http://www.greateducation.org/2009/10/%E2%80%99Cit%E2%80%99s-not-just-about-money-it%E2%80%99s-about-our-investments%E2%80%99D/>>