

Thank you all for joining us today as we begin the 71st General Assembly.

I'd like start off by recognizing some of the former elected officials who are here with us, including

The Honorable Wellington and [Wilma Webb](#).

Former lieutenant governor [Gail Schoettler](#).

Former speakers [Mark Ferrandino](#), [Frank McNulty](#) and [Doug Dean](#).

I would especially like to recognize the first Latino speaker of the House.

Speaker [Ruben Valdez](#), I am honored to follow in your footsteps.

My immediate predecessor, whose record of service to this state over many years is tremendous. Speaker [Dickey Lee Hullinghorst](#), thank you for your hard work, your leadership, and your mentorship.

I also want to thank the employees who have put in the long hours to make today possible.

From painting the walls to installing new seating in the gallery to sweeping the marble floors, they have done a wonderful job. Please show your appreciation with your applause.

And now we turn our gaze forward, to our work this legislative session.

I want to express my deep appreciation to Majority Leader KC Becker, who will manage our calendar and help lead our caucus over the next 120 days. And I want to congratulate Minority Leader Patrick Neville. I look forward to working with both of you.

I'm also eager to get down to business with our large class of new members. We have nineteen new faces, and we are counting on you to provide new perspectives and fresh ideas. Please stand and remain standing when I call your name, and please hold your applause till the end.

From Arapahoe County: Susan Beckman. Jeff Bridges. Dominique Jackson. Mike Weissman.

From Adams County: Adrienne Benavidez. Phil Covarrubias. Dafna Michaelson Jenet.

From the city and county of Denver: James Coleman. Chris Hansen. Leslie Herod.

From El Paso County: [Dave Williams](#).

From Jefferson County: Chris Kennedy.

From Larimer County: Hugh McKean.

From Boulder County: Edie Hooton.

Representing Broomfield and Boulder counties: Matt Gray.

Representing Dolores, Montezuma, Montrose and San Miguel Counties: Marc Catlin.

Representing Archuleta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, La Plata, Ouray and San Juan counties: Barbara McLachlan.

Representing Alamosa, Costilla, Conejos, Huerfano, Mineral, Pueblo, Rio Grande and Saguache counties: Donald Valdez.

Representing Baca, Bent, Crowley, Elbert, Kiowa, Las Animas, Lincoln, Prowers and Washington counties: Kimmi Lewis.

Thank you all for your willingness to serve the people of Colorado!

And to Representatives Tony Exum Sr. and Larry Liston, both of El Paso County, welcome back!

And thanks to all members, old and new, for your energy and ideas. Many thanks for your patience and devotion, which will be tested over the 500-plus hours we will be working together here on the floor and in committee.

And to our family members, please know that you are always welcome to visit us during the long hours ahead. Your support is critical to our success; so to all of the family members here today — thank you.

We are here because we care about Colorado.

All of it.

My district and my house are in Denver. But my home extends across Colorado. I grew up in Arvada and Northglenn. And my family has a ranch that is just west of Trinidad.

I care deeply about the people of our state – the city dwellers of my district, the commuters of our fast-growing suburbs and the farmers and ranchers who, like my family, have Colorado roots going back many generations.

In my family, each generation worked to make life a little bit better for the next.

My grandmother on my mom's side could not read. She left school in the third grade to help care for her younger brothers and sisters.

My grandfather on my dad's side worked long hours at the CF&I steel mill in Pueblo for 38 years, and is here with us today.

But they pushed their children to aim higher.

My dad worked in a tire shop to put himself through college. My mom raised three kids and was the first in her family to go to college as well. With hard work and strong families to rely on, they built middle-class lives for themselves and for my brother, for my sister and for me.

My parents showed me the absolute value of hard work. They taught me the importance of integrity — that if you give your word, you must keep it. They showed me that with education and dedication I could reach my full potential.

My story is unique but at the same time not at all uncommon. And that is how it should be:

America should provide opportunity for people to succeed if they put in the hard work, regardless of their background.

If I asked the other 64 of you, many of you probably have variations of the very same story. Whether you're a first- or a sixth-generation American or have roots dating back to this country before it was one, many of you have shared in some way a similar path toward prosperity and opportunity.

It's the American story, but not one that we can take for granted.

Even today, eight years removed from America's last great economic downturn, too many Colorado families still face daunting challenges.

Some parents struggle with heavy debt and worry about being able to put their kids through college.

Other Coloradans are being priced out of their homes in the very communities that they grew up in.

Or they struggle with the high cost of childcare.

Some have a son or daughter who suffers from substance abuse, mental illness or disability.

Or they have a sick loved one at home or must take care of an elderly parent, but cannot afford to take a single day off work.

And it's astonishing that in the year 2017 too many women and too many Latinos and African Americans still aren't paid equal pay for equal work.

Our work here for the next 120 days is to serve everyone in our state by making it easier to succeed.

Government is not intended to work only for those at the top, or for those with the lowest incomes. Government is intended to work for everyone.

Too often, those in the middle feel left out.

Let's strive to level the playing field for all and reward those who accept their personal responsibility to work hard —

by valuing their work with fair pay —

By giving employees access to retirement savings accounts, so that middle-class Coloradans can actually retire after years in the workforce —

Let's listen to the people who elected us by focusing on the issues they deal with every day — and working together to provide solutions.

Let's start this session by making housing more available to middle-class Coloradans without jeopardizing the rights of consumers.

Before opening day, President Grantham and I said this may be the year when we can make progress on construction defects reform.

Well today is the day. Today, progress has come.

President Grantham and I, with Assistant Minority Leader Wist and Senator Williams, are introducing a bill that will address high insurance rates, one of the root causes making it harder to build more new condos.

This bipartisan problem-solving is not new to Colorado.

Together, Republicans and Democrats, we've done things to improve the lives of many – like when we passed bipartisan legislation to open a pipeline between young Coloradans just entering the workforce and the careers that await them in Colorado's fast-growing advanced industries and technology sector.

The law created an internship program allowing Colorado high school and college students to gain on-the-job experience in high-tech industries.

Relius Medical, a manufacturer of specialized medical devices in Colorado Springs, won a spot in the program, hired three interns through Pikes Peak Community College and recently promoted two of those interns to be full-time employees.

Emerson Hauptli, one of those former interns, is with us today, along with Eric Knutson, the CFO of Relius. On behalf of more than 200 interns and more than 100 Colorado companies that have benefited from this program, gentlemen, please stand to be recognized.

We also recognize that a good job may not be enough to be able to afford a decent place to live, which is why we passed, with bipartisan support, tax-free savings accounts for first-time homebuyers and a tax credit for developers to build or redevelop affordable housing. Today we have with us Stan Strelecki, a Navy veteran whose home was developed with the assistance of a credit from the program.

Mr. Strelecki, I'm glad that together we could assist you, along with thousands of others across Colorado, to have a safe and affordable place to live. Please stand so we can thank you for your service to our country.

Lastly, I want to recognize the bipartisan work that went into helping Coloradans who otherwise would have had no chance at a college education reach their American Dream.

In 2013 we passed a law called ASSET. The bill made in-state tuition available to students who had grown up in Colorado and graduated from a Colorado high school, regardless of their immigration status.

Now more than a thousand students – students who were brought to this country as young children and are Coloradans in every way except for a piece of paper — have a chance to do what would otherwise be nearly impossible: earn a college degree.

One of those students is Daniela Murillo, a Denver resident since the age of 4 and now a student at CU Denver. The state of Colorado invested in Daniela's K-12 education, and now, under ASSET, we are helping her reach her potential by earning a college degree and making a bigger contribution to Colorado's prosperity.

Daniela, thank you for joining us here today.

Emerson, Eric, Stan and Daniela are symbols of the progress we've made in Colorado.

They are real-life examples of what is possible when we put partisanship aside and put people first.

For them and many thousands more, we have made Colorado's celebrated quality of life more accessible.

This is Colorado's promise. Let's build on it by solving real problems.

Let's make the road to prosperity a little easier. Literally.

Let's reach bipartisan consensus on a statewide transportation plan – a plan that overhauls our fast-decaying infrastructure and meets the needs of our rapidly growing state.

We need a plan that focuses not just on moving cars down the road, but on moving people. We need to accommodate our state's increasing productivity and population, which is growing by 250 people per day.

Anyone who's been on I-25 at rush hour, anywhere from Fort Collins to Pueblo, knows the need is real.

With a statewide transportation plan that infuses new resources into our state's most critical needs, we put more Coloradans to work. We improve our state's quality of life. And we increase the productivity of our Colorado businesses.

Almost half of our bridges need preventive maintenance. Almost eighty percent of our highways will need repairs or major reconstruction in the next ten years.

We all know that potholes and rough roads are causing damage to our tires and cars.

Additional funding will allow us to improve our roads and bridges, to maintain our existing infrastructure and avoid costly repairs, and to create more transportation options for more people, including bus and rail service and flexible transportation options for elderly Coloradans and those with disabilities.

I am pleased to say members of all four caucuses are engaged in promising discussions to create a bipartisan proposal to send to Colorado voters that is comprehensive, that will provide new resources, and that will benefit our entire state – from the rural eastern plains and Western Slope to our busy urban corridor.

Let's send the voters a plan with dedicated transportation projects that are transparent and accountable to taxpayers and won't take money from our schools. Let's make sure that promises made are promises kept.

While transportation will be a big topic this year, there's another we cannot lose focus on. Education remains one of our state's greatest challenges.

While some of our schools are thriving, others are struggling mightily.

The state simply doesn't have the money right now to make sure every boy and girl in Colorado has the tools to succeed and reach their full potential.

Some students are being left behind. We're missing an opportunity to teach thousands of young Coloradans who need vital 21st-century skills in computer science and digital literacy.

The system is not serving all of the people of Colorado.

We've been getting by with band-aids for a while, but it is not enough.

I say let's have a real discussion about ways to actually solve our education issues for the long term. Let's make a case to Coloradans that something needs to be done, and offer some ideas to do it.

I have heard from many of you some very interesting ideas – some that are new, some from years past – for how we begin to untangle our budget mess, which is the root cause of our education struggles. These ideas are coming from both sides of the aisle.

Let me be clear: if we do nothing, our state's continued prosperity is at risk. If we cannot fund our schools, if we cannot provide families an affordable college education, then we are not delivering what the people of Colorado need.

My door is always open to anyone with a constructive concept to move us forward. I don't care what it is or who it comes from.

Here's what I most definitely will not be receptive to: As speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives I will stand firm against divisive language and divisive policies that are sure to destroy Colorado communities and undermine our economy.

We cannot tolerate attacks on women and people of color. We must stand up for those who might otherwise be shoved down or pushed aside.

Our continued success as a state and a nation are not guaranteed. There is a dangerous movement afoot that threatens to rip our social fabric and unwind decades of good work by members of both political parties.

It goes beyond mere partisan jockeying.

It is an elevation of hate and fear.

If we let it catch hold –

if we normalize language and behavior that is simply not normal —

if we do not call out hate and racism when we see it —

if we do not defend our foundational values —

Well then our democracy itself is at risk.

But it doesn't have to be.

I ask all of you in this room to join me in defending the ideal of an inclusive Colorado. Of one that does not permit bullying of people because of their gender, race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation.

Inclusiveness cannot be dismissed as political correctness. It is a fundamental tenet of our state and of our nation.

Inclusiveness is part of who I am. My parents named me Crisanta believing that in an inclusive America it would not be a wall to my success.

Inclusiveness is not some recently discovered virtue. The leaders of our state celebrated it in stained glass when they commissioned the portrait above us,



commemorating Barney Ford, a former slave who became a prominent Colorado businessman and a civil rights leader.

Down the hall in the Old Supreme Court chamber are stained glass images of Native Americans and African-Americans, as well as immigrants from Mexico and Asia. All contributed to the development of our state.

Colorado's people and leaders have recognized throughout our history that inclusiveness makes our state stronger.

It is why in 1893 Colorado was the first state to pass a referendum by popular vote extending suffrage to women.

It is why during World War Two our former Governor Ralph Carr stood up – at great political expense – when Japanese residents, many of them citizens of this nation, were interned at a camp near Granada, Colorado.

And it's why in 2014 our current governor, John Hickenlooper, formally offered a brave, belated apology to the descendants of the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, saying at the ceremony, "We should not be afraid to criticize and condemn that which is inexcusable."

Members, none of us should be afraid to condemn that which is inexcusable. Let's elevate inclusiveness, not tear it down.

We must rise above ugly politics to forge a new path forward.

The people of Colorado are depending on us to make a difference beyond the talking points, the Twitter feeds and the headlines.

It is our time to govern — together. It's our time to deliver results on the issues that Coloradans care about most.

We must challenge ourselves to sit down with people who may have a different view than our own and find common ground.

Anything is possible when everyone has a seat at the table and we pledge to work together.

I know there's a lot of cynicism about government today. About legislative bodies like this one. About the dark money spent on political campaigns.

I get it. People feel frustrated and at times even angry. They feel their concerns are ignored and their families are getting left behind.

And it's true: there can be a disconnect between the issues people deal with daily and the issues they hear about on the evening news.

That's on all of us to try to fix. And the way to do that is to keep Washington-style politics outside of this room.

This is not Washington DC. This is Colorado – and in my opinion, it's the best place in the world.

People want to come here, to live here, to share all the things that make Colorado a very special place to live, where we enjoy clean air, clean water, and our beautiful mountain views.

Our task is not only to preserve what makes Colorado so great, but to make it even better.

While I am speaker, I will always try to steer this body, and our state, toward the same goal as my parents had for me — making it better for the next generation.

Our goal must be a Colorado where no one is taken for granted and no one is left behind.

Thank you.