

71st General Assembly Opening Day Remarks

Republican Leader Patrick Neville

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Madam Speaker, Madam Majority Leader, esteemed colleagues and honored guests, welcome to the First Regular Session of the 71st General Assembly. I would like to congratulate our returning members and all of the newest members for winning the support of their district. Representatives Beckman, Benavidez, Bridges, Catlin, Coleman, Covarrubias, Exum, Gray, Hansen, Herod, Hooton, Jackson, Kennedy, Lewis, Liston, Mckean, McLachlan, Michaelson Jenet, Valdez, Weissman, and Williams. I remember my first day, and it will go fast, make sure you take a moment to look around and let this amazing experience *sink in*. Serving in the state legislature is a distinct honor, and I look forward to working with all of you.

I would like to thank Marilyn Eddins for her role in the continued renovation of this chamber and the state capitol. I would also like to thank the teams from Spectrum, GH Phipps, and Fransen and Pittman, and the members of the capitol complex who have worked around the clock to ensure this historic building was ready for this session. Thank you for your hard work, we all appreciate it.

I want to thank my wife Kristi and my family for their support, and think we should take a minute to acknowledge all the family members supporting the representatives in this room. While some of you may think we are crazy – *maybe some in this room are* – the truth is we would not be here without the support of friends and family. I think I can speak on behalf of all of us, thanks for your support.

To my fellow members, we have a lot of work to do this session. Many issues from prior sessions remain unresolved today. Our state roads continue to deteriorate, Coloradans are still struggling to purchase a home of their own, businesses continue to be inundated with new regulations and many school districts are being forced to do more with less. Yet while we may have philosophical differences about how to solve some of these problems, we are all here to accomplish the same goals. My commitment this session is to objectively evaluate every proposed solution to Colorado's most pressing problems and I hope everyone in this room makes that same commitment.

This election cycle was contentious, but now we can begin embracing our strengths to help solve Colorado's problems. It is important to remember that while *most of us* sit on our respective sides of this room, all of Colorado is represented here, and we all aim to make *Colorado the best it can be*.

When I decided to run for representative there was one central tenet that has guided me through this position – I will support government when it promotes freedom and justice, and I will oppose it when it stands in the way and makes the life of an individual, a family, or a business more difficult. Government serves very important roles, but it is inherently intrusive and consumptive. Every law, rule and regulation requires tax dollars to implement, enforce, and document. While well-intentioned, every program we create in this building requires more tax

dollars. We are all aware of the challenges we have in our budget – but members, every year we have to make difficult decisions. We will always have to prioritize how we spend peoples' tax dollars.

This year our budget will exceed \$28 billion dollars, potentially more than a billion dollars over last year's budget. Yet we are already hearing that we'll need to make deep cuts in order to balance the budget. How can we make deep cuts when we have \$1 billion more than last year? Members we do not have a revenue problem, we have a spending problem!

Every family must budget with a finite amount of money, simply getting more money is not a viable option. We are no different here. We have the funds to solve our top priorities, and yes, other programs may need to be reduced, but through greater fiscal responsibility in this building we can help revive stagnant economies in this state – and that will give us more budget flexibility in the future.

The bottom line is our general fund revenue continues to grow and we have the funds to address Colorado's most pressing needs. Members in this chamber and our colleagues in the Senate simply need to focus on our top priorities and commit to responsible spending.

We talk a lot about priorities in this building, but the truth is, if we have lots of top priorities we actually have none. Once again, Republicans' top priority will be transportation. No other issue in front of us impacts commerce, education, public safety and revenue more than transportation. Parents drive their kids to school on our roads, businesses depend on employees and customers travelling to their facilities, oil, gas and agricultural companies depend on roads to transport their product, and the state depends on tourism. There are countless more examples of why transportation must be our top priority, yet there are elected officials in this building that say funding transportation is only something we can do when we have extra money.

Members, if we treat transportation funding as an afterthought our roads will get worse. This legislature controls the General Fund and prioritizing that revenue for transportation is something we can control without asking taxpayers for more money and depending on an election. We have discussed bonding for new transportation projects in the past and members on both sides of the aisle have supported that proposal. This year let's finally give transportation the support it needs and prioritize general fund revenue to service a TRANS bond bill.

Many of you might remember one of Minority Leader Brian DeGrosso's most common phrases, 'the best way we can help the business community is to leave them alone, to do no harm.' For five years Republicans have raised concerns about excessive rules and regulations on the business community and tried to pass a meaningful regulatory reform bill. Let me put this in perspective, since the Republican's first attempt at reform in 2012, 2,592 rules have been adopted. That is over 77,000 pages of rules Colorado's business community must read and implement. Even the most well-intentioned rules still require business owners to review and implement changes to their businesses, which takes time and resources away from their normal operations. While there are ways for small businesses to be a part of the discussion, owners seldom have the time to stay current on the rule making process and engage in the discussion.

It is expensive for small businesses to comply with regulations, and too often businesses are not consulted about rules that cost them money. This session Republicans will once again try to help Colorado businesses with legislation that places more responsibility on state agencies to study the potential impacts of new rules ahead of promulgation, and look for ways to help businesses understand new rules rather than to fine and penalize them. Rules and regulations serve an important role, but they have become excessive and changes are necessary to keep Colorado welcome to small business.

As Speaker Duran mentioned, helping people purchase a home is a critical issue. We have had many conversations about attainable for-sale housing in past sessions, but we have failed to enact any meaningful solutions. I want to be very clear, homeowners should absolutely have recourse to remedy poor construction, but we cannot let a dysfunctional system that only benefits lawyers continue to prevent people from attaining a home of their own. Home ownership is the cornerstone of every sound financial plan. This session Republicans are pushing for policies that will get builders building for-sale attainable housing. While there are other issues contributing to this problem, the lack of for-sale attainable homes is the primary cause, and if we don't address it, Colorado's housing crisis will get worse.

We have strong bipartisan support for this legislation, and people are counting on us to solve this problem. Let's make this the year we pass comprehensive construction litigation reform.

Over 240 years ago our Declaration of Independence conveyed this message to Great Britain – “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” This message forged a nation and we have a duty to uphold these founding principles.

Out of all the individual rights, the right to life is the most sacred, without it, there can be no liberty or the chance to pursue happiness. All life is sacred and deserving of the unalienable rights that define our nation.

This session, Republicans will defend life and push for more individual rights. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. That is the First Amendment of our Constitution. *Prohibiting the free exercise thereof.* Members no individual should be forced to participate in a service that conflicts with their religion and this session Republicans will again seek to give Coloradans religious freedom.

A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed. That is the second amendment of our Constitution. *Right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.* Members, the second amendment is about security of people and their property from the ill intent of those who seek to do them harm. I take my right to keep and bear arms very seriously and so in a safe way, as do millions of other law-abiding gun owners. Sadly, criminals do not, and stripping rights from law abiding citizens has done and will continue to do nothing to change that. Law abiding citizens should have the right to carry firearms at any time in any place. They should have the right to protect our kids at schools and other public places, and use their discretion to determine the type

of firearm that best suits their needs. Republicans will once again stand up for the Second Amendment and the defense of one of our most sacred Constitutional rights.

We need to protect a parent's role in their child's life and realize that parents know better than we in this room do. Parents should have the right to make decisions about their children's education and their health. The ability of parents to pursue the best education for their children should not be an option solely for the rich, but should be an option for all parents. We need to fund every school option equally and give parents the choice of what school best suits their children's needs. School funding should follow students through their educational path, and we need to focus on trade schools and ensure today's curriculum aligns with today's workforce.

Our Constitution was created to ensure freedom remains the foundation of our society, it is what every service member swears to protect and what so many have paid the ultimate sacrifice to defend. Freedom is the defining quality of this nation and we as elected officials have an obligation to legislate for freedom, not against it. I hope my support for more freedom is shared by everyone in this room and can be something that unites rather than divides us.

We have seen the result when the government gets involved in the private sector, the Affordable Care Act is a perfect example. Obamacare continues to fall short on goals and projections and has been an unmitigated disaster leading to skyrocketing healthcare costs. I am hopeful our healthcare system can find new life with purposeful free market reforms that help lower the costs of premiums and address the impact Medicaid has on our budget.

While Colorado's economy is *slowly* improving, but wages are not keeping up with the cost of living, and many regions of this state are struggling. We need to make Colorado a business friendly place again, give the private sector the space it needs to innovate, add good-paying jobs and feel confident to invest in this state - *that is the only way to get every part of Colorado's economy on track.*

The government picking winners and losers is a failed strategy and Colorado should be the leader in energy production. It's time to revitalize Colorado's energy economy. When it comes to oil, gas, and coal we need to be open for business. This is why I'm calling on the Governor and his party to remove the regulatory noose around the necks of oil, gas, and coal immediately.

Members, it *is* possible for us govern without resorting to more rules and regulations. It's been almost a century since the Colorado Revised Statutes was one book. Today, it takes 25 volumes to document our current laws. We cannot attempt to solve every societal problem with a new statute in this book. I can tell you that strategy will require far more money from taxpayers' pockets and result in far less individual freedom. We have to let common-sense prevail, not every issue is black and white and not every problem requires a statutory or regulatory fix.

Let's begin this session focused on prioritizing transportation, empowering small business and looking for ways to get government out of the private sector's way. Let's help lower the cost of doing business in Colorado, and help incentivize more growth. Let's let the free market inspire more innovation. Let's support personal freedoms and individual liberty.

I have worked with many of you and know our existing and new members bring tremendous talent, intellect and devotion to this body. We can respect our differences while still uniting our strengths. Let's work together to make this a successful year for the people of Colorado.

Thank you and God bless.