

*"We, the people of Colorado, with profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, in order to form a more independent and perfect government; establish justice; insure tranquillity; provide for the common defense; promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the 'State of Colorado.'"*

*The preamble to the Constitution of the State of Colorado. Those words were penned by our State Founding Fathers just a little over 140 years ago. Those words laid the foundation for a Bill of Rights and Constitution that has governed this state ever since. While the document itself has undergone numerous changes and additions, these words remain untouched and untainted over that span of time.*

*Good words. Words that stand the test of time. And why wouldn't they? After all they closely resemble the preamble of our US Constitution, which also continues to stand the test of time.*

*On this day, prayers have been lifted, songs have been sung, pledges have been recited, and oaths have been uttered to honor the nation, the state, and the documents in which these words are found.*

*On this day, we also honor those among us without whom none of us could be here. For my part, I would first like to recognize and thank my wife, Caroline. Thank you for all of your tireless support of me all these years! Please welcome her and my children and grandchildren.*

*I would also like to recognize my parents, and all of my brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces who could make it here for this day.*

*Let's also show our appreciation for our guests who made the ceremonies this morning very special for all of us: The Colorado National Guard Color Guard, my pastor, David Almanzar, Carl Nelson, and The Legacy Quartet with those stirring renditions of our National Anthem, Battle Hymn, and God Bless America. Thank you all.*

*Thank you also to President Cadman and Majority Leader Scheffel for your leadership, guidance, mentorship, and so much else. You both leave big shoes to fill and this institution is truly worse off in your absence. You will be sorely missed and we thank you both for your service to this great State.*

*And to you, Senator Guzman, and your entire leadership team, thank you for stepping up to take on the difficult task of leadership in this chamber. Your gentle spirit and smile are always a welcome respite from the partisan storms that we often encounter. Thank you, Senator.*

*Thank you, and welcome, to all of the Senators of the 71st General Assembly, all of the holdovers, the crossovers, the do-overs, our re-elected members and our two new members: Senators Fenberg and Smallwood.*

*And last but not least, will all of the spouses or significant others of our Senators please stand and remain standing. Thank you to each and every one of you for the sacrifices you make every day so that we can be here to serve this state and the people of Colorado. Thank you!*

*We the people!*

*Words that still ring with authority! That we still say with reverence! That still ring with the truth of what they represent! Words that acknowledge those who truly represent the power of this*

*government. We the people. Not this legislature. Not the executive or judicial branches, but we the people.*

*The very first section and many of the subsequent sections of our Colorado Bill of Rights lays out this principle very plainly, that it is we the people.*

*'Section 1. Vestment of political power. All political power is vested in and derived from the people; all government, of right, originates from the people, is founded upon their will only, and is instituted solely for the good of the whole.'*

*Section 2 says 'the people of this state have the sole and exclusive right of governing themselves, as a free, sovereign, and independent state...'*

*Section 3 guarantees 'All persons have certain natural, essential and inalienable rights...' including the right of 'defending their lives and liberties; of acquiring, possessing and protecting property...'*

*Section 4 guarantees the people the right to 'The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination, shall forever hereafter be guaranteed; and no person shall be denied any civil or political right, privilege or capacity, on account of his opinions concerning religion.'*

*Section 13 guarantees our right 'to keep and bear arms in defense of home, person and property'*

*These and so many of the other sections of our Bill of Rights pay homage to the truths for which the Founders of our state and our nation fought, but that we sometimes take for granted. Self-evident truths, the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

*Rights of the people, by the people, for the people. Rights that preserve and protect the dignity and the supremacy of the individual in our uniquely wonderful system: this constitutional, representative, republican form of government. A government which derives its power from the people. It is that elevation of the uniqueness and dignity of the individual that results in foundational principles such as due process and the rule of law, private property rights, self-defense, freedom in the home and workplace, freedom from a government that must inject itself into the most minute recesses of our lives thru abusive rules and regulation.*

*It is to this end that we strive: to preserve and protect the God-given rights of the individual, the we in we the people, not to grant them, but to fight to ensure them. To fight on their behalf for things like:*

- Relief from burdensome, complex taxes*
- Relief from the oppressive regulatory burdens placed on the people and businesses of all sizes*
- Working towards greater accountability for state agencies in their rule creation process*
- Creating more opportunities for parental choice in education*
- Equality in school funding*
- Reprioritizing state budget obligations into truly core governmental functions*
- Reaffirming our commitment to protect the taxpayer...the People... from the heavy hand of government reaching into their pockets for more money without their direct permission.*

*For many of these we may find common ground across the aisle. For others we may not. But that's okay. There will be discussion. There will be dialogue.*

*We have already shown over the last two years that working together is not an impossibility. In 2015, we all came together--Republicans and Democrats, Senate and House--to send 367 pieces of legislation to the governor. In 2016, we again came together to send 387 bills to the governor for his signature. Not all bills will make it there, but the discussion continues, the dialogue goes on, and the republic survives.*

*We have demonstrated in a remarkable fashion our ability to work together on all those areas where we share common interests and goals. We can do it again!*

*Perhaps one of the most ominous issues facing us today that resonates with both sides of the aisle and to our constituents in all 35 Senate Districts is the problem of the deteriorating condition of our transportation infrastructure and funding to significantly address the problem. The problem is recognized by all. The need to address it is agreed to by all. How to address it remains a topic of discussion and debate. But that discussion is happening and continues to happen.*

*Our current road and highway infrastructure needs exceed \$9 Billion including \$3.5 Billion in shovel ready projects on the priority list awaiting funding. With such a significant number of projects waiting for us to act and with such a steep initial price tag to get them started, some creative solutions may be called for...but solutions that respect the priorities on both sides of the aisle and most importantly, the wishes and will of the Colorado taxpayer and voter.*

*Getting most of these projects underway in a timely manner will require the ability to leverage our revenue streams through Revenue Anticipation Notes, or Bonds. These will require consistent future revenue streams that can be committed to the repayment of the bonds. With the help of our Transportation Committee Chair, Senator Baumgardner (R-Hot Sulphur Springs), we are dedicated to working with the leadership and members of the House of Representatives to arrive at solutions that we can present to the voters of Colorado – solutions that will hold faith with the taxpayers of Colorado and their desire for accountability for their dollars. We must demonstrate to them that, if we are going to ask them for permission to go into debt to fund these projects, and if we are going to ask them for more out of their own pockets to fund these bond payments, then we must also demonstrate the commitment to reprioritize the dollars they've already entrusted to us by dedicating existing general fund money...if this is truly a priority. There are yet many details to work out but the potential is great this session for a truly bi-partisan solution to our roads and highway infrastructure funding.*

*This is not the only area in which we can find bipartisan solutions to a significant problem here in this state: the other is the problem of construction litigation reform and attainable housing.*

*Years ago, Colorado officials passed a law that makes it nearly impossible to afford new condos, townhomes, and other multi-family housing units. We in this 71st General Assembly have inherited this problem – and we must solve it.*

*Coloradans agree we must fix this problem and put petty politics behind us to do it. 14 local communities have already passed laws to fix this policy. These are democrats and republicans agreeing to make homeownership easier for our citizens. Speaker of the House Duran and I agree that the General Assembly needs to take the lead with a diverse group who all realize that home ownership is the path to the American dream, and we believe that the few, unreasonable, special interests who oppose the necessary changes will not be able to continue standing in the way of Coloradans who want to own their future by owning their home.*

*To this end, a diverse and bipartisan group of lawmakers – Senators Scott, Tate, Smallwood, Hill, and Williams, along with Representatives Wist and Garnett -- have taken upon themselves the great*

*task of solving this problem. Again, through this bipartisan collaboration we will be able to solve a problem for all of Colorado.*

*In addition to these efforts we will also remain committed to reducing the regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles that inhibit business startups, expansions, and relocations. We will continue to work to slow the relentless production of new rules, which average 530 per year, 15,000 pages per year, over the last decade, rules that hamstring our small businesses across this state.*

*With this in mind, comes Senator Neville's (R-Littleton) Senate Bill 1, The Regulatory Relief Act of 2017 where we will seek to alleviate the fiscal impact of burdensome regulations on small business. Small businesses will be given a window of time to cure minor operational or administrative violations instead of being immediately issued a fine. The bill will further require the current stakeholder process for rulemaking to solicit input for small businesses on those proposed rules that have potential negative impact on them.*

*Also to this end, Senator Martinez-Humenik (R-Arvada) is introducing Senate Bill 2. This bill will simplify the rule review process for state agencies by eliminating DORA's scheduling authority and placing reviews on the standardized 3-year timeline. Ultimately, this legislation will simplify the bureaucracy and ensure timely review of the rules that beleaguer small businesses in all four corners of our state.*

*Other potential efficiencies in government are available to us in some of our larger agencies. In particular it is time for us to shed some of the dead weight of failed government policy. Senator Smallwood (R-Parker) will introduce Senate Bill 3 which will repeal the Colorado Health Care Exchange. This is long overdue.*

*To help improve access of our Medicaid recipients to their healthcare providers Senator Tate (R-Evergreen) will introduce Senate Bill 4. Current law prohibits Medicaid enrollees from seeing a provider of their choice because a provider cannot bill a Medicaid enrollee for services provided. This bill expands access to health care by permitting individuals enrolled in Medicaid to seek care at a provider that does not accept Medicaid. This enables individuals to bypass waiting periods, receive better quality care, and access specialty care providers.*

*In regard to the intersection of public safety, education, and our second amendment rights, Majority Leader Holbert (R-Parker) will be introducing Senate Bill 5. Rather than simply arm teachers and other staff, his bill will ask 'how much training is required?' Currently, POST certified law enforcement and private security personnel under contract with a school district or charter school may be armed. POST certification is extensive training, while no training is required for private security. How much training might our county sheriff's provide before district personnel may be armed on a school campus to protect our kids?*

*That's the question that Senator Holbert seeks to answer with Senate Bill 5.*

*And with Senator Cooke's (R-Greeley) Senate Bill 6 we will no longer have to tell our 18-20 year old veterans that even though we trust them enough to send them to war to defend us and possibly die for us, that we don't trust them enough to conceal carry in this state. Senate Bill 6 will fix this egregious error.*

*All of these ideas, all of these bills are concepts that we can come together on. All of these are problems that we can face together and offer the people of Colorado real solutions. Solutions that both sides of the aisle can share in. Solutions in which both sides can participate. Not for ourselves certainly, but for our bosses, our constituents, the citizens of Colorado, '...the People'.*

*We the people!*

*This is for whom we work. This is what brings all 35 of us together, all 100 of us together in this 71st General Assembly. We won't always agree, to pretend on this day that we are living that fairy tale does all of us here in this room, and outside of this room, a disservice. But we do agree on some things. Occasionally, we agree on many things! This year, maybe it will only be a few things, but my hope, is that those things that we can and will come together on are of such great import and significance that they will truly benefit all Coloradans. We the people.*

*These are attainable goals – together. If past performance is indicative of future success, then we already know what great things we can accomplish together. This is my reason for optimism, for hope, in the successes that lie before us in these 120 days.*

*'We the people' are counting on it! Now it's just time to roll up our sleeves and do it.*

*Thank you all and God Bless!"*