



2014 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

[Home](#) > [Press Room](#) > [Speeches](#) > [2014 State of the State Address](#)

DENVER — Thursday, Jan. 9, 2014 — Gov. John Hickenlooper today delivered his fourth State of the State address and talked about jobs and the economic health of Colorado, as well as successful efforts to create a solid budget for the state, build reserves and eliminate bureaucracy.

He also spoke about the challenges faced by Coloradans in the past year, from fires to floods to shootings.

“We know there are people out there feeling the impact of the national economy’s downturns. And we are doing everything within our power to change that,” Hickenlooper said. “But make no mistake—the state of Colorado has not only endured, it also has thrived. My fellow Coloradans, despite every unforeseen test, despite everything that was thrown at us, the state of our state is strong.”

The governor talked about how most forecasts, trends and studies say the state Colorado is only growing stronger; how Colorado’s unemployment rate has not gone up -- it has gone down; how the state is in its fourth consecutive year of economic growth; how Colorado is ranked among the top five states in the entire country for business, careers and job growth; how the state has one of the very best environments in the country for small business; how Colorado hosted a record number of tourists this year and more hunters than last year; and, among other things, how Colorado agriculture exports increased by almost 80 percent between 2009 and 2013.

The governor used the annual address to also make 19 different “asks” of lawmakers. For example, the governor will support legislation and seek approval from the General Assembly this year to:

increase the state’s budget reserve;

- reduce wait times at Department of Motor Vehicle offices;
- reform the state’s telecommunications laws and expand internet access to rural communities;
- extend the job-creation tax credit from five years to seven, enabling more businesses to maintain employees and hire new ones;
- form a non-profit enterprise dedicated to fostering public-private partnerships to fund infrastructure projects such as transportation and water;
- fund a plan to make the budget of every public school transparent;
- ensure a more accurate assessment, by counting average-daily-membership in our schools;
- allocate an additional \$100 million for higher education, which would cap tuition increases at 6 percent and put college within reach of more families; and
- support Coloradans with developmental disabilities and their caregivers, including addressing the current waitlist, family support services, and transitional services;

Hickenlooper also called on lawmakers to “ignore the divisive politics.”

“No one needs to remind us we’re going into a political season” the governor said. “And I realize that if such a goal for a session ever seemed ambitious, it’s a time like this. But that’s precisely why we should set such a goal.”

Hickenlooper said senseless violence, fires and floods is not the Colorado story.

“Our story is about how we came together and have been getting it done,” he said. “Our story is that we have learned that we are at our best, that Colorado is at her best, when we are connected to one another, working together.”

Here is a full text of the governor’s speech, as prepared:

2014 State of the State address

Good morning.

It’s great to be back here, together, in the people’s state Capitol.

To the four new members stepping into your first legislative session—I offer you my sympathies. Kidding. Just kidding. Welcome.

Fortunately for you and for all of us, we will have the leadership of Senate President Morgan Carroll, House Speaker Mark Ferrandino, Senate Minority Leader Bill Cadman and House Minority Leader Brian DelGrosso.

Another veteran hand is Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia; our thanks to Joe and to his wife, Claire, for sharing him with the state.

We are honored to have the Vice Chairman of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, James (Ol-geen) Olguin, and the Vice Chairwoman of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Juanita PlentyHoles. Welcome.

I want to thank my cabinet and senior staff (seated to my right), along with all state employees who have worked so hard, especially, this year. Our thanks to everyone who has been so dedicated to the flood recovery efforts, especially the Colorado National Guard, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Public Safety—and our volunteer Chief Recovery Officer, Jerre Stead, and his team from IHS; we are indebted to everyone of you.

Our thanks as well to Attorney General John Suthers and Treasurer Walker Stapleton and to our Secretary of State—the dogged “honey badger”—Scott Gessler.

Thank you to the distinguished members of the Colorado Supreme Court and to the Colorado State Board of Education.

Denver Mayor Michael Hancock is here; thank you, mayor, for your partnership with the state of Colorado.

Also, I want to express my deep gratitude to Helen, not just for being here today, but for being there every day, for our son, Teddy.

On behalf of all Coloradans, I want to thank the Denver Broncos for giving us something to cheer about this season.

And how could we not congratulate the Colorado State University Rams?

That fourth-quarter win over Washington State—scoring 18 points in the final three minutes to come from behind—THAT was nothing short of amazing.

That victory was a reminder that when Coloradans are faced with challenging circumstances, there is no “quit.” Giving up—that’s not going to happen.

In trying times, Coloradans do what we always have done: pull together and get it done.

Colorado has always been a good place to find what you’re made of.

Earning your keep, making your own way, looking out for your neighbor—that comes with the territory.

In Colorado, we know there will be times when we will be tested.

Times when we will take action that shows who we really are and what we stand for.

And, along the way, shows the world what it means to be a Coloradan.

Lately, we’ve had more than our fair share of those times.

When we gathered for our last State of the State address, in the wake of the Waldo Canyon Fire and the Aurora massacre, many of us thought we would never again experience a year like 2012.

That was not the case. Every season of 2013 presented another unthinkable test.

During the spring, our executive director of the Department of Corrections, Tom Clements, was gunned down in his home.

Throughout the summer, wildfires burned: the Black Forest, Royal Gorge, West Fork, and Red Canyon.

In the fall, we got the flood—against the backdrop of the politicians in D.C. who couldn’t get along well enough to keep the federal government’s doors open.

In the winter, came the reports of a shooter in Arapahoe High School and the heart-wrenching reality that 17-year-old Claire Davis had been fatally shot.

This past year, Colorado has been scorched.

Colorado has been flooded.

Colorado—once again—endured senseless, inexplicable violence.

Yet, despite all of it, we did not let that define us. That is not our story.

Our story—and what we showed the world is:

Colorado does not shutdown.

Colorado does not quit.

Colorado does not break.

We know there are folks out there still grieving, still recovering.

We know there are people out there feeling the impact of the national economy's downturns. And we are doing everything within our power to change that.

But make no mistake—the state of Colorado has not only endured, it also has thrived.

My fellow Coloradans, despite every unforeseen test, despite everything that was thrown at us...

... the state of our state is strong.

And according to just about every forecast, trend and study, the state of the state of Colorado is only growing stronger.

While the national economy around us remains sluggish ...

Colorado's unemployment rate has not gone up. It has gone down.

To the lowest levels since 2008.

This is our fourth consecutive year of economic growth.

According to a study from the University of Colorado's Leeds School of Business, we can expect robust job growth in virtually every sector of the economy this year.

Colorado is ranked among the top five states in the entire country for business, careers and job growth.

Four of the top ten—and five of the top 20 communities in the country for startups—are here in Colorado: Boulder, Fort Collins, Denver, Colorado Springs, and Grand Junction.

We are also one of the very best environments in the country for small business.

According to the Kauffman Foundation, when it comes to creating a small-business climate, this year Colorado earned a grade of "A." That's up from a "B+" in 2012.

And people like what's happening here.

Colorado hosted a record number of tourists this year. We gratefully welcomed even more hunters than last year.

Agriculture—employing 173,000 people—keeps our economy strong, last year contributing \$41 billion to the state economy.

Between 2009 and 2013, Colorado agricultural exports increased by almost 80 percent.

The fact that the state is strong and growing stronger is no accident.

... In Colorado, we work for our luck.

Shortly after we took office three years ago we launched a strategy to be a thoughtful and supportive partner with the business community. We reached out and built relationships with people in 14 regions from around the state, and based on what we heard, we designed a Colorado Blueprint that focused on six core objectives:

Build a business friendly environment / Increase access to capital / Educate and train the workforce of tomorrow / Retain, grow, recruit companies / Cultivate innovation & technology / Create a stronger Colorado brand.

Because we know the economic hard times have been especially hard in some rural communities, this past year we launched the Rural Economic Development Grant Program, and are in the process of awarding \$3 million to our rural communities.

One of the recipients is here with us today. Keith (Ber-Dorf) Buhrdorf. With \$350,000 in grants awarded to TK Mining in Delta County, Keith's company will be able to add 5 to 10 employees, which is almost doubling the workforce of TK Mining's Delta office.

Together, we launched the Advanced Industries Accelerator Program making seed capital available to start-up companies in aerospace, engineering, advance manufacturing, biosciences, electronics, energy and tech.

We created a unified brand logo, which is almost universally loved. Two hundred companies have requested to use the brand. 117 of Colorado's companies are already using it.

We launched COIN—the Colorado Innovation Network—which brings together innovative thinkers and entrepreneurs from around the state.

We expanded the Biennial of the Americas, which is rapidly growing into something like a Colorado's World's Fair.

We created the Pedal the Plains tour to promote all of the beauty and opportunity of some of Colorado's most gorgeous rural communities.

With labor and business working together, we passed legislation that made the state contracting process more transparent, while also making it easier for Colorado firms and Colorado workers to secure state contracts.

When there's work to be done in Colorado, for Colorado, we should look to skilled Coloradans first.

My friends, in 2010, when it came to job growth, this state was ranked 40th in the nation.

Now—three years later, in that same ranking, Colorado is the 4th fastest job growth state in the country.

40th to 4th.

... Since January 2010, we have added 170,000 jobs.

In 2010, companies were leaving Colorado. Today, they are moving here.

While we are disappointed whenever a company leaves this state, Colorado is gaining employers and jobs.

Three Fortune 500 companies have decided to call Colorado home along with 26 additional companies.

Your budget decisions played a significant role in this success.

One of the most recent companies to establish headquarters in Colorado is Ardent Mills.

While we were Pedaling the Plains we got to talking with our friend, Darrell Hanavan, of the Wheat Growers.

Darrell told us that two of the nation's leading flour milling companies—ConAgra Mills and Horizon Milling—were forming a joint venture, Ardent Mills. They were six months into a search for a new headquarters and Colorado hadn't made the final cut.

Undeterred, Darrell requested that I call the executives of this new company. In roughly a month, Darrell and his team helped us persuade Ardent Mills to locate their company here in Colorado. We pointed out that Colorado is a place defined more by its future than its past. Which was clearly the case with Ardent Mills.

Landing Ardent Mills is a little like winning the Super Bowl—or at least the Flour Bowl—especially for rural communities. It all began with the Colorado Blueprint relationships we forged across the state.

We have Bill Stoufer, who will be the Chief Operating Officer of Ardent Mills, is here with us, along with Brad Berentson, who will be the Chief Financial Officer.

Bill and Brad, you have the support of everyone in this room to help make Ardent Mills the most innovative and successful milling operation on earth.

The economic infusion and energy of Colorado's new companies, along with the hard work of Colorado's entire business community, has gone a long way to take Colorado past pre-recession job numbers.

The unemployment rate in Colorado has dropped from 9 percent in 2010 to 6.5 percent, outpacing the national rate.

Unemployment in both Grand Junction and Greeley has dropped by even more, by more than 30 percent.

But let's be clear, the unemployment rate is not low enough, and all of us share a commitment to keep a statewide focus on this issue.

More jobs all over Colorado is our highest priority.

As some of you know, I took what you might call an unconventional path into running for office. I started out here in Colorado as a geologist. During a downturn, everyone in our company got laid off.

Next thing I knew I was making beer and starting a brewpub business. It turned out pretty well. But as every small business person knows, it's not easy out there, especially when bureaucracy gets in the way.

I didn't run for public office until I was 50. Before that, I'd never run for anything. Not even in high school.

I ran for public office as a small businessman.

I thought government needed to operate with more common sense and less nonsense.

So while we have been doing all we can to make it as easy as possible for business to succeed in Colorado we also have been streamlining the state government, making it more efficient.

Three years ago, we started with a budget that was facing staggering shortfalls.

Balancing the books is not the sexy stuff, but if the budget is wrong, nothing else can be right. Just ask Congress.

When it comes to this nitty-gritty of governing, you could say we have borrowed the motto: "Be Prepared."

We have funded core priorities while preparing for future needs—and unforeseen events.

Because, together, we have made hard choices, been disciplined, not spent more than we have—we've put ourselves in the position to save more money for rainy days. And as we've seen, when we get rain, it can be "biblical" and all at once.

The single most critical factor in Colorado being able to stay open for business throughout hellfires and high waters has been reserves.

Three years ago, Colorado was setting aside only about 2 percent of its General Fund money for reserves. That 2 percent gave the state only a seven-day cushion.

Last year, we more than doubled that rate, to 5 percent. Our budget request is to grow the fund this year to 6.5 percent.

At the same time we have also shored up our Tabor Reserves to \$48 million and are requesting that they be increased to \$78 million.

This money in reserve is what has enabled us to respond quickly to the disasters and get assistance to local partners. It's what enabled us to get roads rebuilt and open—ahead of schedule.

If you were to have asked anyone in Jamestown, Estes Park or Milliken, if they thought we had a snowball's chance of getting those roads open by Dec. 1, they would have laughed out loud — some did laugh out loud.

It is because of the cooperation of the bipartisan Joint Budget Committee, that we have been able to build this budgetary bedrock. D.C. should be looking at our J.B.C. to see how collaboration gets done.

To ensure that we are maximizing state resources and providing as responsive customer service as possible, we have gotten LEAN.

LEAN, as many of you know, is a type of business audit that scours operations looking for ways to make processes run more efficiently.

We have re-evaluated how EVERY state agency does business.

And we have initiated more than 100 new LEAN processes, more than any state in America.

Colorado's Department of Transportation recently reported a 19 percent decrease in contracting timelines. Combined with other improvements their efforts are saving more than \$2 million.

In 2008, only 33 percent of property assessment appeals were resolved within one year. Now, 79 percent are.

The Division of Real Estate reduced the average time it takes to complete an investigation of a mortgage loan by 44 percent.

These are only a few examples of our LEANer customer service, where we are doing what we can and should be doing: responding quickly and effectively when needed, and then getting out of the way.

We're LEAN, but we're only getting started.

One of the places where just about all Coloradans frequently become aggravated is the Department of Motor Vehicles. Our DMV has made great strides. But they have done so with a computer system that is nearly three decades old.

While many of us play around on our iPhones while waiting in line at the DMV, the employees are struggling to update the files in MS-DOS. Our budget aims to change that. This will reduce the average wait time in DMV offices throughout the state from 60 minutes to 15.

Through a statewide effort called Pits and Peeves, we have also reviewed, modified or repealed nearly 11,000 state rules -- many of which were redundant and flat-out dumb.

And we launched the Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships program—RAMP—a more nimble CDOT operation that is on its way to freeing up \$300 million annually for five years for accelerated construction.

This smarter way of doing business is what enabled us to deliver on our promise to complete the eastbound Twin Tunnels project, the first capacity increase on this stretch of I-70 since it was built in 1961.

Just about everyone of us has sat in a car on the way to or from the mountains, frustrated, or even worse, stuck in traffic with a kid needing a restroom.

This project will reduce travel times significantly during peak Sunday hours, and decrease the number of crashes in the area by more than a third.

The second Twin Tunnel project—the westbound lanes—will be completed by the end of this year.

And then there's Kathy Nesbitt.

Two years ago, a full third of state workers were approaching retirement, and the state's hiring system was 92 years old and loaded with countless hurdles to hiring the best people.

Kathy is the executive director of the Department of Personnel and Administration. She and her team successfully created a Talent Agenda and worked to pass a bipartisan bill to reform the personnel system.

Supervisors can now focus on finding the best talent. Merit-pay is now based not only on an employee's seniority, but also on performance. Hiring times, which previously had taken three months, already have been cut in half.

Just weeks ago Kathy was recognized as one of only nine recipients of Governing Magazine's Public Officials of the Year Award, which is something akin to an Oscar for best starring role in cutting red tape.

Thank you, Kathy.

Moving forward, our priorities are clear: We are going to remain focused on jobs, education; and ensuring that we have a state that is as healthy as it is fiscally sound.

We are going to continue to improve Colorado's customer service and efficiency; and support our military families.

Fourteen years into the 21st century is well past time to reform our telecommunications laws.

This session, we ask you to pass legislation that will accomplish this, but at the same time rural and other unserved parts of our state should have the same broadband internet access as urban areas.

With your help, this year, we will extend the job-creation tax credit from five years to seven, enabling more businesses to maintain employees and hire new ones.

Economic development demands infrastructure. We will propose the formation of a non-profit enterprise dedicated to fostering public-private partnerships to fund infrastructure projects such as transportation and water. This will not only bolster economic development, it also will lighten the burden on taxpayers, and harness minds and resources outside of government to address unmet needs and keep Colorado competitive.

Such partnerships offer a path toward financing solutions to existing challenges, such as traffic congestion, in places like Fort Collins and Colorado Springs.

In the wake of the floods, we proved our ability and commitment to rebuild bridges and roads. We've seen what can happen when we lose that infrastructure. But the single most important investment we can make in infrastructure is in our bridges to tomorrow—our children.

We must support effective teachers, students and parents.

We must find a way to address key reforms that have made Colorado a national model.

Colorado voters made clear they will not make new investments in education until they are convinced that current resources are being prudently managed.

We are going to request that the General Assembly fund a plan to make the budget of every public school transparent. Let's put the numbers on the internet and make the web a window.

Under the current statewide public education funding system, a school's funding is based on an enrollment which is counted on a single day, early in the school year.

We are going ask the General Assembly to pass legislation that will ensure a more accurate assessment, by counting average-daily-membership in our schools.

It is nonsense not to have a powerful economic incentive for student retention.

While we are choosing to adhere to the prudent budgetary strategy that has been the cornerstone of our policy, this year we are seeking an increase in per-pupil funding of \$223, for a total of \$400 per pupil in the last two years.

We are also requesting a significant investment in higher education.

In recent years, college tuition has been steadily increasing by a rate of double-digits.

Please join me in supporting our request for an additional \$100 million for higher education, which would cap tuition increases at 6 percent and put college within the reach of more families.

Another priority for Colorado families and for us, is supporting the energy industry while protecting the environment.

The viability of the sage grouse has bedeviled Western states for a decade. As chair of the Western Governors' Association, I believe we can protect the sage grouse while at the same time allowing ranches, farms and other economic activity to flourish. At our invitation, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell has agreed to visit Colorado and observe mitigation efforts firsthand.

Colorado's oil and gas industry contributes \$29 billion to our economy. Critical to the success of the oil and gas industry is that operators recognize their moral and legal obligation to protect our air and water.

Fortunately, we have been able to bring many in the industry together with the environmental community to work toward solutions.

As a result, Colorado is now a national leader in developing a strong regulatory environment. We brokered the nation's strongest frack fluid disclosure rule in 2011.

We are proposing the nation's first-ever methane capture rule, making Colorado the leader in the nation for controlling emissions.

We've said before that we're committed to holding the oil companies to the highest standards to protect Coloradans and our air and water.

To that end, we are working with legislators, industry and the conservation community to ensure we pass a bill this year that will strengthen penalties for violations of permits and rules.

If words were water the state would never run dry. Our budget is requesting a second year of funding to help create cleaner water for Colorado. This year we will complete the Colorado Water Plan, which will emphasize conservation, address incremental storage, and address drought mitigation. We must create alternative choices to buy-and-dry. No matter where we live, we cannot afford to let our farm and ranch land dry up.

Part of what has gotten overlooked in the debate about guns is our work on mental health.

When you look at the massacres at Columbine High School and the Aurora movie theater; and the tragedies of Platte Canyon High School, and most recently at Arapahoe High School, guns are only a piece of the puzzle.

Another clear piece is mental health: Trying to identify and assist those who are feeling isolated, bullied, the mentally ill; and trite as this may sound, those who are feeling abandoned and unloved.

We allocated more than \$34 million to create and bolster programs such as school-based mental health services, behavioral health community centers, and to train and staff round-the-clock mental health crisis centers.

We repurposed Fort Lyon, where right now there are some 80 people with addictions who are getting clean, learning a skill, and turning their life around. People who otherwise would have been on the street.

Just as we must implement the voters' wishes on marijuana, we are obligated to make sure that children and parents understand brain development and the risks of underage use. We are committed to a securing a safe, regulated and responsible environment.

This will be one of the great social experiments of this century, and while not all of us chose it, being first means we all share a responsibility to do it properly.

Part of being the healthiest state, means we continue to prioritize services for the most vulnerable. We ask for your support for Coloradans with developmental disabilities and their caregivers, including addressing the current waitlist, family support services, and transitional services.

In that vein, the General Assembly, with bipartisan support, created Connect for Health Colorado. While other states have struggled with enrollment and implementation, Colorado has outperformed the national exchange and most states. More than 139,000 residents now have health insurance who didn't have it before.

In addition to being the healthiest state, we have consistently worked to be the most military friendly state.

We must continue to honor military veterans.

Not so long ago I received a letter from Silvia [Bonna-con-tee] Buoniconti. It was about her son, Frank.

Frank was a Chief Warrant Officer 3rd Class United States Army. A helicopter pilot. Among the many honors Frank received was the Distinguished Flying Cross—one of the highest awards an aviator can receive for heroism in combat. Frank saved the lives of two special operations teams.

He died in a helicopter crash in 2011, while training in Washington state. But because he did not die while in a Combat Zone—according to current state law, Silvia and her husband, Frank, are not eligible to receive a Colorado Fallen Service Member License Plate.

Silvia is not the only Gold Star Mother waiting for this recognition.

For families of veterans like Frank, this law must change.

Silvia is here with her husband, Frank, (note where they are sitting). We are deeply grateful for your son's service, and commend you for your commitment to having it recognized.

As I wrap up here and we begin this session, I have one more Ask of you—of us, really.

You don't need a poll to know that regardless of political leanings—the typical American, the average Coloradan—doesn't think much of politics or politicians.

And who can blame them?

Shutdowns. Debt ceiling duels. Parties locked down, unwilling to compromise.

So much negativity.

The public sees politicians as operators who put their own self-interest or their party's agenda above the people; and who are obsessed with petty pursuits and ignore the public service part of being a public servant.

The widely held perception today is that politicians divide and selfishly scheme in the moment, whereas public servants unite and plan for the greater good.

Over the course of the last year, everyone in this room has been tested.

Time and again, you chose to put your communities and your fellow Coloradans first. You chose to be public servants, before politicians.

We must continue to rebuild better than we were before. But our work is about much more than recovery.

Whether we live in a mountain community or in a city; whether we are surrounded by cows or concrete, we all want the same things: the chance to earn a good wage, give our children a decent education; clean air and clean water.

Vigorous debate is our ally. Partisanship is not.

Skepticism is productive. Corrosive cynicism is not.

So, as we begin this session, my Ask is we ignore the divisive politics.

No one needs to remind us we're going into a political season. And I realize that if such a goal for a session ever seemed ambitious, it's a time like this. But that's precisely why we should set such a goal.

Tom Clements was someone who set such ambitious goals.

It's been not quite a year since Tom's death. A few months ago, I spoke at a convention of the International Association of Corrections that was held in Colorado Springs.

I described that when Tom was murdered he was in the midst of major overhauls to the department of corrections. He was reforming administrative segregation, which most of us recognize as solitary confinement, and he was about to re-engineer the parole system.

Tom saw the entrenched problems. But he never gave up. He saw what could and what should be. His philosophies and strategies were never about locking people up, but rather, everything Tom did—really his whole life—was about striving to unlock humanity.

It is a tragic, awful irony that an inmate put on parole directly from administrative segregation showed up at his door and killed him. But that is not what defines Tom.

Part of Tom's legacy is everything that was discussed at that convention. These were directors of correctional facilities, people who worked in worlds of barbed wire filled with violent criminals.

Yet the topics of discussion were things like "Alternatives for Mentally Disordered Offenders," "Giving Up Crime," and "Faith Based Programming." In other words, it was about unlocking humanity. And it wasn't a coincidence. The theme of the convention was inspired by Tom and was very much in his honor.

The other part of Tom's legacy is his family, his wife, Lisa, and daughters, Sarah and Rachel, who are with us today.

Tom's story and life is not defined by what happened to him but by the immense good he achieved and his legacy of love and compassion and reform. His legacy of public service.

Tom was a public servant.

He walked the walk of public service every day.

Inexplicable, senseless violence. Fires. Floods. No, that is not our story.

Our story is about how we came together and have been getting it done. Our story is that we have learned that we are at our best, that Colorado is at her best, when we are connected to one another, working together.

Our story is us.

That is what it means to be a Coloradan. That is what we have and will continue to show the world.

I'm all in.

To keep Colorado Strong and to keep Colorado United, all of us in here, and all of our fellow Coloradans out there—every one of us needs to be all in, together.

Thank you, and God bless Colorado.