



COLORADO

Governor Jared Polis

2020 State of the State
As Prepared For Delivery
Governor Jared S. Polis
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Denver, CO

Good morning everyone.

President Garcia,
Speaker Becker,
Leader Holbert,
Leader Neville,
Members of the General Assembly,
Lieutenant Governor Primavera,
Southern Ute Indian Tribe Chairman Christine Sage,
Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Chairman Manuel Heart,
Vice Chairman Selwyn Whiteskunk,-
Councilman Archie House Jr.,
Attorney General Weiser,
Secretary of State Griswold,
Treasurer Young,
Members of the State Board of Education,
Justices of the Colorado Supreme Court,
Aurora Mayor Coffman
Members of the Cabinet,
Our dedicated staff,
First Gentleman Marlon Reis

Thank you all for gathering here this morning.

Before we begin, let me offer my gratitude to the many people whose tireless dedication to our safety allows us to gather here today: the members of our military serving across Colorado and overseas, our law enforcement officers, our first responders, and their families. They deserve our deepest thanks.

I would also like to honor the memory of those brave Colorado service members and first responders who made the ultimate sacrifice to keep us safe this past year. Some of their families are in the audience today. If you would please stand.

I want to offer my condolences to the family of the late Representative Kimmi Lewis, who represented farmers, ranchers and all her Eastern Plains constituents with passionate resolve.

I would also like to offer my best wishes for a speedy recovery to Senator Lois Court. Her determination, her experience, and her quick wit will be sorely missed at the Capitol.

And finally, as she begins her last year as Speaker, I would like to give a special thank you to Speaker KC Becker for her steady leadership of this chamber and her passionate advocacy for the people of our great state.

We know that we are blessed to live in a place as special as Colorado.

Our state's breathtaking natural beauty, our strong economy, and our optimistic, forward-thinking society make Colorado the envy of the nation, and attract people from all over the globe who want to visit us, or move here to live the Colorado Way of Life.

That doesn't happen by accident.

It happens because for decades, Coloradans from across the continental divide and the political divide have worked together in good faith to find common ground, protect what keeps Colorado special, and build a better state.

I am grateful that we are continuing in this tradition.

Working together last year, we lowered health care costs, lowered taxes for small businesses, provided more affordable housing, made the largest ever state investment in transportation, and delivered universal free Full Day Kindergarten for all!

On issue after issue, the good-faith and thoughtful work of the members in this chamber helped to move our state forward.

We should be proud that 95% of the bills I signed into law last year were passed with Republican and Democratic votes!

We should not take this cooperative spirit for granted. Instead, we should strengthen it.

Because the notion that we're all in this together is a much better approach to solving problems than trying to go it alone.

When we realize that our fates are connected,

And that we are better together,

We can solve any problem we encounter.

And so we stand here today on the cusp of a new decade: the 2020s — Wow! The future! — with a renewed spirit to build on the progress we have made.

Colorado already does a lot of things well — and we need to keep doing them well.

After all, Mikaela Shiffrin didn't just hang up her skis after becoming the best women's skier of her generation!

And I don't think Mallory Pugh and Lindsay Horan stopped showing up to practice after the U.S. Women's National Team won the World Cup!

No — they continued to strive for greatness, which is what we all must do.

Our state has seen tremendous gains in jobs and economic growth, in population and tourism, and in national and international prestige.

And yet when I travel around our state and listen to our constituents, it's clear folks still feel like they're on an economic treadmill where paychecks just don't keep up with the cost of living.

From student loans to health care costs to unaffordable housing, Coloradans feel like they are running faster and faster, but not getting ahead.

Too many of our fellow Coloradans are anxious that one hardship — a job loss, a medical emergency, a recession, a natural disaster, or some other unforeseen challenge — will send them into a financial tailspin.

There is a generation of older Americans who wonder when or even if they will be able to retire with dignity.

And there is a generation of young people, saddled with student debt and threatened by the climate crisis, who fear for their future and the world they will inherit.

Coloradans wonder, in this demanding modern economy, how to get ahead financially while finding the time to enjoy the things that make life worth living: a day exploring our beautiful public lands, taking a family vacation, or making it home in time to go to your kids' soccer game. A chance to get off the treadmill for a while.

Well, with all due respect to the exercise equipment industry, we don't prefer treadmills in Colorado.

We prefer trails.

We enjoy the climb; striving to reach the peak, identifying the next one, and doing it all over again, always reaching to achieve more.

Stagnation just isn't in our DNA. When a challenge arises, we get moving.

Why do you think I wear my blue sneakers everywhere?

This is who we are. It's why we are so successful.

And so it is our job as public officials to build a state that will allow Coloradans to reach the mountaintop — by saving families money, protecting the natural wonders that grace every corner of our state, and widening the pathway to prosperity, instead of leaving folks feeling like they're running in place.

That pathway to prosperity often starts with a great education.

Last year at this podium, I asked you to take the bold step of providing free full-day kindergarten for every kid in Colorado.

And you delivered!

Thanks to parents, advocates, teachers, dedicated legislators like Representatives Jim Wilson and Barbara McLachlan, Senators Rhonda Fields and Jeff Bridges, members of the JBC, a unanimous vote in the Senate and a supermajority in the House, we took this major step to improve our kids' education, save families money, and boost our economy.

I want to introduce you to someone in the audience today.

Samantha Hosmer, a mother of two from Erie, left her job in 2014 to care for her newborn daughter Fiona and son Logan, who needed extra support for social and emotional challenges.

This past Fall, when it came time to enroll Fiona in Kindergarten, Samantha and her husband knew a full day at school was important, but simply couldn't afford the cost.

Thanks to free full-day kindergarten, Fiona is getting that full day of instruction, Samantha's family is saving over \$300 a month, and she was able to return to full-time work as a special ed paraprofessional, helping her family secure an even brighter future for their two children.

Now it's time to take the next step.

Studies show that preschool is every bit as critical for a child's development. As with kindergarten, it's not that parents don't want preschool — It's that they can't afford it.

Last year we were able to fund 5,100 additional slots for at-risk children in the Colorado Preschool Program.

And in my budget this year, we're proposing to help an additional 6,000 children attend preschool, which for the first time will bring coverage to half of all eligible kids in Colorado.

We should feel good about reaching this milestone. But it has taken more than three decades to get only half the job done. We can and we must do better, which is why I'm committed to achieving universal access to quality preschool for 4-year-olds by the end of my first term.

And early childhood education isn't just about giving our kids a great start in life. Every dollar invested in high-quality preschool produces a seven dollar return on investment due to higher earnings, lower special education needs, greater tax revenues, less dependency on public assistance, and lower crime rates.

This isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. And it's time to get it done.

In addition to making essential investments in early learning, we also improved other areas of K-12 education last year.

We expanded loan forgiveness for rural educators to address our rural teacher shortage, and expanded dropout prevention programs to end the school-to-prison pipeline.

Last year, we reduced the Budget Stabilization Factor — the debt owed to our schools — by \$100 million, and this year I'm calling for an additional \$52 million.

And while we're at it, our teachers, making up one of the most important professions in our society, shouldn't have to work a 2nd or 3rd job just to make ends meet.

We know that under Colorado's system of local control, individual districts set teacher salaries. When I speak with school leaders, they want to pay teachers better.

But because of our fiscal rules, the state spends far too much money backfilling some of the wealthiest districts not only in the state, but in the country.

That is truly at the root of our school funding issues. Together, we can fix this systemic problem and finally raise pay for our hardworking educators.

Our work on education is incredibly important. But we can't fulfill our promise of a better future for our kids if we don't do a better job of keeping them safe when they walk through the schoolhouse door.

One of the most difficult days of my administration was responding to the STEM school shooting in Highlands Ranch. Eight students were injured, and Kendrick Castillo lost his life heroically preventing more bloodshed.

Kendrick's parents, John and Maria, are here with us today. I will never forget visiting with them shortly after the STEM tragedy. John told me that they would spend every weekend together hunting, building robotics, and creating memories. He told me Kendrick was more than just his only son — he was his best friend.

Like millions of parents across our state, I imagined myself in their shoes. The disbelief. The devastation. The anger. And the pain.

The despair of losing a child to senseless violence is a weight that too many parents have been forced to bear for far too long.

I want to commend the school safety interim committee for your bipartisan work on this important issue.

I look forward to working with you to do more to keep our kids safer, because no parent should have to go through what John and Maria went through.

Every child deserves a safe opportunity to learn, make friends, create memories, grow up, graduate, and move on to a successful life.

Most of the time, but not always, the path to success involves some higher education degree or credential — whether that's a four-year degree, a two-year associate's degree, or an industry-recognized certificate.

But rising costs are putting higher education out of reach for too many. And the burden of student debt is not only holding back an entire generation of young people struggling to afford a car or a home or to start a family — it's holding back our economy too.

So last year we took action by increasing the General Fund investment in higher education by 13%, an increase that we are building on in our new budget.

Together we expanded concurrent enrollment programs so that students can spend less time and money earning their degrees.

And thanks to new legislation enacted last year, we are putting \$100 into a college savings account for every single Colorado child born or adopted beginning January 1st of this year.

I want to take a moment to congratulate Jorge Esteban Herrera-Delgado, born at 12:07 a.m. on New Year's Day 2020 in Montrose County, and Cecily DiCerberio, born at 12:13 a.m. in Summit County. They will be the first beneficiaries of this new program!

I also want to congratulate the authors of that proposal — Senate Majority Leader Steve Fenberg, a new dad himself as of ten days ago, and Representative Leslie Herod — and I want to highlight the next affordability effort they are spearheading called the "Get On Your Feet" loan forgiveness plan. The program would provide debt relief to Coloradans who graduate from 2- or 4-year colleges on an income-based repayment program, helping them transition into the workforce.

This isn't just about helping student borrowers get out of the hole -- it's about growing the economy for everyone.

Because after graduation day, when the caps and gowns are hanging in the closet, and the diplomas are hanging on the wall, graduates deserve an economy brimming with opportunities to earn a good living.

We need to keep our economy strong, but more importantly — we need to make sure our economy works for everyone.

And when I say everyone, I mean everyone.

In Colorado, we believe your future should not be pre-determined by the color of your skin, your parents' income, your religion, your age, your disability status, where you live, where you were born, who you love, your gender identity. We believe in a Colorado For All.

That's why I was proud to sign an equal pay bill guaranteeing that men and women get paid the same wage for the same work.

That's why we are proud to support our minority-, women-, and veteran-owned businesses.

That's why we were excited to open the doors to our brand-new veterans One Source center in Grand Junction, and propose a pay increase for some of our brave National Guard service members.

That's why my administration expanded apprenticeships to support the next generation of workers.

That's why we passed bipartisan criminal justice reform measures that will expand opportunities while saving taxpayers money, and why I'm urging the legislature to pass a package of vital pre-trial reforms to build on that progress.

That's why we need to support our growing aerospace industry that bolsters our military and creates high-skill, good-paying jobs.

That's why we're working with tribal leadership to expand opportunities in our Native communities.

That's why we're investing in every corner of our state: enhancing rural economic development, helping our rural hospitals thrive, investing in rural broadband, supporting the next generation of farmers and ranchers, and keeping Colorado the number one state in the nation for industrial hemp.

That's why we're taking action to help folks retire with dignity, and I'm supporting the Colorado Secure Saving Plan Board recommendations, which State Treasurer Dave Young has been leading, to help more Coloradans save for retirement.

And finally, in the face of unprecedented hostility from this White House toward our immigrant communities, we say loudly and proudly that we stand with DREAMers and refugees.

I was proud to appoint Marissa Molina, the first DREAMer in Colorado history to serve on a state board or commission, to the board of Metro State University, and I'd like to take a moment to recognize Marissa, who is here today. Marissa, please stand up.

We still need the federal government to pass comprehensive immigration reform, and I urge the Supreme Court to do the right thing and protect DREAMers.

But in the meantime, let's acknowledge how aspiring Americans like Marissa are working to make Colorado better today.

We don't build walls of exclusion in Colorado — we build ladders of opportunity.

But of course, opportunity is only one side of the coin.

The other side is affordability. As our state has grown, so has the cost of living.

The common thread in the work of my administration is to save Coloradans money -- on education, on health care, on utility bills, on housing — and we should save Coloradans more money on taxes too.

This year, due to our strong economy and a bipartisan deal from 2005, every Coloradan will receive real tax relief as our state income taxes go down to a historic low of 4.5%. This tax cut applies to all taxpayers, including individuals, corporations, and every small business.

In addition, we delivered a tax cut for 144,000 small businesses in Colorado by cutting wasteful subsidies to big box retailers, and we still had money left over to invest in affordable housing and improving health care.

I am enthusiastic about working to deliver permanent income tax relief, and we should continue down the path of eliminating tax breaks for special interests so that we can lower rates for everyone without reducing state revenue.

A broader base taxed at a lower rate will boost economic growth with the ancillary benefit of preventing the corrosive influence of crony capitalism.

In the 1960s, President Kennedy delivered a historic tax cut, saying the tax system, "exerts too heavy a drag on growth... siphons out... too large a share of personal and business purchasing power...[and] reduces the financial incentives for personal effort, investment, and risk-taking."

And in 2010, President Obama directed his economic team towards, "closing loopholes and simplifying income taxes for corporations and individuals... to rid the code of its complex buildup of deductions, credits and exemptions, thereby broadening the base of taxes collected and allowing for lower rates."

And we know that it's not just Democrats like JFK and Obama who want to save you money on taxes. I may have heard a little bit about it from my Republican friends too.

So in the spirit of collaboration, I am proud to announce today we will be creating a bipartisan study group to make our tax code more fair by looking at ways to broaden the base and lower the rate by the end of my first term, which will lead to more jobs, higher wages, and make balancing the family budget that much easier.

In the meantime, I also look forward to working with you on other creative ways to provide tax relief and invest in schools and roads.

And as we work to broaden our tax base and lower the rate, we must start today on saving more for a rainy day.

Last year I asked the legislature to put away an additional \$180 million into savings to replenish what was spent in the Great Recession, but only an additional \$40 million was placed in reserve. So this year I urge you to replenish our reserves and recessionary tools with an additional \$118 million to bring us in line with the national average and prepare us for a future downturn, whenever it happens.

I want to commend my cabinet and Budget Director for taking the lead on this by finding \$73 million in General Fund savings this year and \$238 million in total savings to help give taxpayers the biggest bang for their bucks.

My administration is also working with Treasurer Young on a legislative package that will provide future Legislatures and Governors tools to rebuild and replenish our coffers as a recovery is happening.

With so many pressing needs today, putting money in reserves is always a hard sell, but we have an obligation to save during prosperous times like these so we can weather the next storm whenever it comes.

At the end of the day, however, there is one issue that continues to reign over all when it comes to affordability: the high cost of health care.

Americans still pay twice as much for health care than those living in other developed nations, and for most of us it's our biggest expense after rent or mortgage.

Nearly one in five Coloradans forego needed health care because of the cost.

One in three Coloradans can't afford their prescription drugs.

And 13% of Americans — 1 out of every 8 people who live in this country — said they knew someone who died because they could not afford treatment.

This must change.

And it is starting to change for the better, thanks to your bipartisan work -- and the work of our tremendous Lieutenant Governor Dianne Primavera who is heading up our Office of Saving People Money on Health Care.

Last session, we passed bipartisan legislation to tackle surprise out-of-network billing, enact new transparency requirements for hospitals, and allow for the importation of cheaper prescription drugs from Canada.

Perhaps the biggest accomplishment in health care last year was our reinsurance program — a bipartisan effort led by Representatives Julie McCluskie and Janice Rich and Senators Kerry Donovan and Bob Rankin.

Thanks to reinsurance, health care rates on the individual market are going down by an average of 20%!

And the savings are even greater in the Eastern Plains, Southern Colorado, and the Western Slope!

We should be proud of this work. But most of the time, the best ideas don't come from inside this building — they come directly from our communities.

I'll give you an example. In Summit County, the Peak Health Alliance pools individuals and employers together, and uses their combined purchasing power to negotiate prices with hospitals and doctors directly to save consumers money. Our Division of Insurance is already working with the Colorado Business Group on Health to help replicate this successful consumer purchasing alliance model in Grand, Eagle, Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Juan counties.

I want to introduce you to some folks in the audience today who have seen first hand how broken our system is and how the decisions we make in this building can help fix it.

Glenn Brady is a small business owner in Summit County. Glenn's wife Kelly tragically passed away from cancer in 2018, leaving a hole in their family. As if the loss of a loved one were not enough, the Bradys were hit with hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical debt.

Glenn was also frustrated by the high cost of insurance for himself and his three daughters, Luci, Adelaide, and Ava. But thanks to the bipartisan reinsurance program that we passed last year, and the Peak Health Alliance, Glenn is now saving \$7,000 a year on the same health insurance plan he had last year.

Before she passed, Kelly made Glenn promise that their daughters would have the best dental, health care, education and tutoring that he could find, and that her death would not interrupt their childrens' activities and sports. The savings Glenn has realized are helping to pay for braces, tutors, and fulfilling all the promises he made to Kelly and her final wishes.

Reinsurance is delivering real savings, but the peace of mind of having health coverage is truly priceless. So I'm asking the legislature for a modest \$18 million investment in the reinsurance program to protect these savings for Glenn and for hundreds of thousands of Coloradans like him.

We know that health care costs won't magically go down on their own. We need to keep working at it.

Which is why this year I'm supporting legislation to require prescription drug price transparency, and a proposal to provide Coloradans a public option to increase freedom and choice in the health care marketplace.

I want to thank Senator Donovan and Representatives Dylan Roberts and Marc Catlin for their leadership on launching this important concept.

It's simple market economics. When you have more choices as a consumer, insurance companies have to compete for your business, which means lower prices.

We estimate that a public option will ultimately save Coloradans an additional 9-18% on their individual premiums.

Furthermore, the public option will empower folks in the 22 rural Colorado counties where there is currently only one insurer, and no choice.

We know there are powerful special interests who have a financial stake in preserving the current system.

Colorado has the 2nd highest hospital profit margin in the country.

And Front Range hospitals with over \$2 billion dollars in profits in 2018 are already using those profits from overcharging patients to run ads against legislation that could save families money.

Just this year, we're seeing pharmaceutical drugs coming to market with a price tag of over \$2 million for a single dose.

Of course those special interests are going to fight legislation that will bring some sanity to the pricing.

But we don't represent the special interests — we represent the people. And the people are crying out for relief from high health care costs.

Another way that we can reduce health costs and ensure a healthier population is by standing up to Big Tobacco to reduce smoking and vaping and address our highest-in-the-nation teen vaping rate.

Reducing costs in our health care system will also help us tackle one of our most pressing problems — our state's mental health and addiction crisis.

Last year, I appointed a Behavioral Health Task Force to conduct a top-to-bottom review of Colorado's behavioral health system and author a strategic plan for reform by June of this year.

Our state already spends \$1.4 billion on mental and behavioral health we need to make our system more efficient so we can help more people get the care they need.

I want to thank CDHS Director Michele Barnes, and Representatives Lois Landgraf, Tracy Kraft-Tharp, and Dafna Michaelson Jenet for their work on the Behavioral Health Task Force, and Senator Brittany Pettersen and Rep. Chris Kennedy and the members of the Opioid Study Committee for their work. I look forward to collaborating with you all on desperately-needed reforms.

And finally, we need to find a way to enact paid family and medical leave for more Coloradans. The Federal Family and Medical Leave Act allows for unpaid leave, but that still forces families to choose between getting a paycheck and caring for a newborn child, an aging parent, or themselves.

I'm hopeful we can construct a unique Colorado solution that provides paid time off to many more Coloradans as soon as possible, without straining state resources or forcing taxpayers to bear the financial risk.

This is no easy task. It's going to take negotiation and compromise to get it done.

But I am committed to putting in the hard work, and in fact, let's lead by example in the next fiscal year by extending this benefit to our exceptional state employees who make Colorado run.

We need to plan not just for our own health and wellbeing, but for our state's.

True leadership is planting trees knowing that we may not live long enough to enjoy their shade.

Previous generations were wise enough to understand that there are some things that you cannot replace. That once they are gone, they are gone forever.

Of course, I'm talking about protecting our iconic public lands — the ground under our feet, the water we drink, the air we breathe — the most essential parts of our Colorado Way of Life.

Our majestic lands define our state and power our economy by making us an international destination for tourism and outdoor recreation.

But like many things in our state, growth threatens our enjoyment of these natural treasures.

In a very real sense, we are loving our public lands to death.

Admissions to state parks have skyrocketed, and the need for upgraded trails, bathrooms, parking and facilities is urgent.

So we are asking the Legislature for a one-time infusion from the General Fund to make important capacity improvements across our State parks system.

This money will also go towards opening our newest state park Fishers Peak!

I was delighted to stand with Senate President Leroy Garcia, Senator Larry Crowder, and JBC Chair Daneya Esgar as we announced this new, spectacular state park that will run from Trinidad all the way to the New Mexico border, and will benefit our economy and Southern Colorado residents.

We know our state's growth also affects our ever-scarce water supply.

I was glad to see Prop DD — led by House Majority Leader Alec Garnett, House Minority Leader Patrick Neville and Senators Kerry Donovan and John Cooke — pass at the ballot box.

In addition to the future revenues that we'll derive from DD, I've called for another \$10 million investment in the Colorado Water Plan.

Our growth isn't just impacting our public lands and our water — it's also making our roads and bridges more congested and less safe. We're spending more and more time sitting in traffic, which means less and less time with our loved ones.

Thanks to good-faith bipartisan legislative work, the state was able to make a historic multi-year investment in transportation infrastructure.

We held listening sessions across our state to hear directly from Coloradans about their priorities, and we developed a plan to use these precious resources in the most effective ways: relieving congestion on key choke points on I-25 and I-70, making busy streets in our cities move quicker, and making the biggest investment in rural roads in modern Colorado history.

But the General Fund alone cannot meet our state's needs, and voters rejected three straight ballot initiatives in the last two years to fund roads, even while our existing revenue source — the fuel tax — is bringing in less and less at a time when our needs are growing. Thus Coloradans look to us in this building to think big and do more to fund our roads.

As we look towards a future where new users and changing technologies will need to pay their fair share into the system, we should also give local jurisdictions and CDOT more flexibility to work together on funding regional projects.

But we cannot create a system that excludes rural Colorado. We must deliver for everyone in our state, and it's going to take all of us in this room working together to get it done. By investing in our infrastructure and providing more affordable and convenient transportation options, we will be relieving traffic congestion while also reducing the harmful emissions that blacken our skies and contribute to the climate emergency that remains the challenge of our generation.

This is an issue that impacts every single one of us in this chamber, every single one of our constituents, and every single person on this earth.

In the western United States, we see firsthand how a changing climate is already impacting our water supply, our outdoor recreation industry, our farming and ranching communities, and taxpayers.

It is causing more frequent, more devastating, and more expensive natural disasters.

13 of the largest fires in Colorado's recorded history have occurred since 2010.

All 20 have occurred since 2000.

I want to commend the brave Colorado firefighters who are heading to Australia to do their part in helping contain one of the worst wildfires in the history of civilization.

This is a global crisis. And we are never going to solve it if everyone looks at the person next to them and says, “you do something about the climate.”

If we want to preserve our way of life for future generations, then we all need to lead on clean air and climate.

And in fact, the states and countries that embrace the renewable energy future will reap the economic rewards.

That’s why we have taken bold action to put us on the path to achieving 100% renewable energy by 2040.

But the truth is that due to price reductions and technological advances, the shift toward renewable energy is already happening, and it’s being driven by the private sector that sees a profitable future in renewables.

Just this morning, Tri-State and its members announced that they will be replacing their remaining coal power in the state with thousands of megawatts of cheaper and cleaner renewable energy sources by 2030, resulting in a 90% reduction in the utilities’ in-state greenhouse gas emissions.

This transition includes expanded energy efficiency programs and a significant investment in electric vehicle charging stations across rural Colorado.

We’re also excited to work with Tri-State to allow its 17 member co-ops across the state to generate more renewable energy locally. We want communities to have the option of reaping the benefits of more clean, low-cost local energy generation, and with talks underway, we’re hopeful that significantly more local flexibility will be finalized by April of this year.

This transition will mean lower energy costs, more renewable energy jobs, and reduced air pollution. It is a bold step to protect the future of the planet we all must inhabit.

But we need to recognize the disruption caused to workers, families, and communities that are impacted by the private sector’s turn away from coal. That’s why I intend to work with utilities including Tri-State and our new Office of Just Transition to expand opportunities in renewable energy and help ensure that no worker and no community is left behind.

We’re confident that this transition works because it’s happening right now in Pueblo.

The EVRAZ steel plant uses a lot of energy, and EVRAZ had to find a cheaper power source to stay competitive and stay in Pueblo.

So, working with Xcel Energy, they are building the largest behind-the-meter solar project in American history to power the steel plant, creating hundreds of solar jobs, keeping thousands of steel manufacturing jobs in Pueblo, reducing costs, and literally saving our way of life — all at the same time.

This is what the renewable energy future looks like: innovating, growing jobs, growing opportunity, saving people money, and doing our part to reduce the harmful effects of climate change and local air pollution in the process.

And we don't have any time to waste.

Those of you who know me well know I'm a big science fiction fan.

Last year we had a Spiderman quote. This year, it's not Star Wars — it's Lord of the Rings.

In the first part of the trilogy, Frodo, the protagonist, laments that he must carry the awesome burden of saving the world from a growing darkness.

Gandalf, his guide, responds with a charge that applies to us here in this chamber today:

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.”

Every lawmaker here — myself included — is term-limited.

What do we want our legacy to be?

When our great-grandchildren open their history books, what do we want them to read about us?

Will it say that we were too scared to tackle the big issues?

That we were too timid to act on evidence right under our noses?

That we were too cynical to even try?

Or will we be remembered as the generation that rose to the challenge of our time?

That looked beyond the next news cycle or the next election and worked together to forge a better future, and that lived up to the expectations of our children and our grandchildren, whose future we hold in our hands.

We have the power to do the right thing. All we need is the courage to use it.

Colorado has always been a state of trailblazers. Ours is a state of can-do people.

We don't back down from a challenge, and we don't quit when the going gets tough.

The state of our state is strong. It is forward-thinking. It is dynamic. It is bold. And it is courageous.

Now let's get to work and show the world what we can accomplish together.

God bless you all, God bless the great state of Colorado, and God bless the United States of America.