

Remarks of Gov. Bill Ritter
Gov. Ritter's inaugural address
January 9, 2007

I am profoundly humbled to stand before you today as Colorado's 41st governor. I thank each and every one of you - I thank all of Colorado - for granting me this honor. It is an honor heavy with responsibility. You have my word, and now you have my solemn oath: I will work every day to fulfill the Colorado Promise for all Coloradans.

Congratulations to Lieutenant Governor O'Brien, to Attorney General Suthers, to Treasurer Kennedy, to Secretary of State Coffman, to the CU Board of Regents and to the Colorado Board of Education. This is a momentous occasion for all of us. I look forward to working with each of you on behalf of the people of Colorado.

Let me take a moment to thank Governor Owens for his service and dedication over the past two and a half decades. Governor Owens was the last governor of the 20th Century and the first governor of the 21st Century. I want to personally thank you, governor, and your Cabinet and staff, for ensuring an orderly and smooth transfer from your administration to mine. You could not have been more accommodating or more gracious.

Jeannie and I also want to thank First Lady Frances Owens for her service, sacrifice and devotion to Colorado. And to your children, Monica, Mark and Brett, I would add a thank you for your own form of public service. It's not easy to grow up in the spotlight and to share your parents with an entire state. Thank you.

To my own family, thank you for the emotional support and strength you have provided over these past two years. My family is a big family. We can get 40 people out for a touch football game, so imagine how we turn out for an inauguration.

My mother, Ethel, is here with us today. So are my brothers and sisters - all 10 of them - my aunts, uncles, my nieces, nephews, cousins and in-laws. Thank you. And of course to Jeannie and our kids, August, Abe, Sam and Tally - thank you. Thank you for being such an important part of this wonderful journey.

One person who is not here today is my father, Bill Ritter Sr. He died two years ago, just two months before I filed my papers to run for governor. He was a colorful man who loved to tell stories. He loved to work hard, and he loved Colorado. I hope to do him proud.

It is a solemn duty to serve as an elected official. We hold a sacred trust with the people who elect us. It is sacred in every way. We must honor that trust through our hard work, and through our commitment to an open and honest relationship with the people of this state. Every day we must work to maintain the trust conferred upon us by the oaths we swear this morning.

The commitment to public service extends far beyond statewide elected officials. It includes elected leaders and government employees at every level. It includes school teachers, our troops in Iraq, our Colorado National Guard, our police, our firefighters, our paramedics, and certainly our snow plow drivers. They all deserve our deepest thanks.

Over the past few weeks, we've seen again and again their selfless call to action by innumerable

public servants, helping Coloradans and visitors affected by the recent snow storms. Even today they continue to help southeast Colorado and the Eastern Plains recover from the damage.

I stand before you here on the West Steps of the state Capitol, looking up at our majestic mountains. They have provided inspiration to so many Coloradans and so many Americans. The mountains symbolize what Colorado is all about -- hope and opportunity, taking risks and overcoming challenges. Colorado is about bold ideas and brave actions. We look up, not down. We look ahead, not back.

So I stand before you looking out at our future. I stand before you eager to fulfill the Colorado Promise, proud to say "I'm here for the people of Colorado."

I grew up on a small farm in Arapahoe County. There were 12 children in our family, and to put it mildly, we were people of modest means. We had wonderful influences in our lives, not the least of which is my mother, Ethel. We experienced some tough times, but we were people of faith. We were taught to believe - to believe in the promise of a better tomorrow. And, we were taught that we are all in this together, that each of us has a role to play in making tomorrow a better day. I look around me today, and I see, once again, the power of ordinary people like us believing, just believing in the possible.

My political awakening came when I was 11, and when two months apart, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were taken from us by assassins' bullets. They were bold, daring men, people with a vision. For me, they represented hope as well - a hope for all people. They saw the path to a better tomorrow. They had the strength of their convictions. They imagined, as we imagine today, a brighter future for all.

Kennedy once said, "The future is not a gift: it is an achievement. Every generation helps make its own future. This is the essential challenge of the present."

I speak often about the Colorado Promise. The Colorado Promise is simple: It's about making a better future. A better future for our children and our grandchildren. It's about hope. It's about finding the common ground for the common good. It's about finding the strength in all of us - rural and urban, Western Slope and Eastern Plains. It's a promise of hope for everyone in this diverse state of ours.

Think about Colorado's early settlers. Think about the frontier farmers who first tilled the soil. The prospectors who first dug for gold here. The ranch families who came together to build the first rural schools so their children could learn. They were ambitious and daring. They were all fulfilling their own version of the Colorado Promise.

I report back to you from the thousands of Coloradans I have spoken with over the past two years that we remain true to our legacy ' we are still a bold and daring people with a frontier spirit, hardy and well-meaning, brimming with hope about what lies ahead.

Our task now in the 21st Century is to seize that sense of hope we share and to fulfill a new Colorado Promise. Our task today is to build on our strengths and successes. Our task is to think big, to be bold and to take risks. To ask, "Why not?" I believe that Coloradans are up to the task.

We won't accomplish everything in a single year, or even four or eight years. This is a journey, a

journey where moving forward is vital to us and to the generations to follow.

So, where does this 21st Century journey of ours begin?

Let's start by being bolder than any other state when it comes to renewable energy. Let's commit right now to making Colorado a national leader - a world leader - in renewable energy. Let's create a New Energy Economy right here in Colorado.

Let's fulfill the Colorado Promise together by giving our children opportunities and our employers the best-educated workforce in the nation. Let's commit today, all of us, to reducing the high school drop-out rate and closing the achievement gap.

Let's fulfill the Colorado Promise by ending the crisis of the uninsured and enacting comprehensive health-care reform. Let's fulfill the Colorado Promise by creating good jobs and fixing our transportation system. And by being stubborn stewards of our land, our air, our water and our wildlife.

Let's fulfill the Colorado Promise by living up to our part of the social compact. Such an important part of who we are as a state, and really as a nation, is the social compact -- the covenant that says government exists for the people, for all people. It exists to provide legitimate public functions. It exists to ensure we take care of seniors, and the disabled, and for those who struggle mightily - whatever the reason. Government has a responsibility to intersect with their struggle, looking always for ways to improve the quality of their lives.

Finally, let's fulfill the Colorado Promise by setting aside the overheated rhetoric of partisan politics so we can move forward together. So we can build a more efficient, innovative government that is careful with your money, a government that serves the people and isn't self-serving.

We have a rare opportunity over the next four years to bridge the partisan divide and move all of Colorado forward. This is about hope and unity, not about Republican or Democrat. It's about possibilities and promises, not right versus left.

It's about Colorado leading the way, leading the nation.

To those who are cynical about the legitimate role of government and where it can intersect and improve people's lives - I promise a reason to hope. We will govern well. We will govern to solve problems. We will govern responsibly.

We will govern for the people of Colorado. We will govern to fulfill the Colorado Promise.

Thank you all, and God bless.