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City and County of Denver

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Text of Mayor Hancock's 2014 State of the City Address

DENVER – Mayor Michael B. Hancock's 2014 State of the City Address as prepared:

July 14, 2014

Denver Art Museum

Good morning, Denver. Good morning to neighbors on South Pearl and Tennyson, on Santa Fe and Tamarac, those in Cherry Creek and all along Colfax and Monaco. Good morning to everyone who helps make this city great. Thank you to Christophe for welcoming us here today.

To my friends and colleagues on Denver's City Council, District Attorney Morrissey, and to all the other elected officials from around the region, thank you for being here.

I want to take a moment to salute those who will not be returning to these elected seats next year. Auditor Dennis Gallagher leaves a legacy of leadership and creative ideas. To council members Brown, Faatz, Lehman, Montero, Nevitt and Robb, I had the privilege of serving with you for eight of the most rewarding years of my career. On behalf of the people of this great city, thank you for your dedication and exemplary service!

I also want to acknowledge Clerk and Recorder Johnson, with whom we stood shoulder to shoulder on Civil Unions. We are proud to stand with you on marriage equality now!

To Gov. John Hickenlooper, Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia and members of our state delegation here with us today, thank you for your service. To all our veterans and active military, we salute you.

Our families serve alongside us in every capacity imaginable. There are no words to express the love and gratitude I have for my wife, Mary Louise Lee, my mother, Scharlyne, and my children for accompanying me on this journey. Thank you and I love you.

I also want to remember a true community champion we lost recently, Assistant City Attorney Vince DiCroce. He transformed the city's justice system by instilling compassion and humanity into victim response. But Vince was so much more than a legal giant, he taught us to expect and achieve more. With that, he leaves an inVINCEable legacy in our city. Linda Nickels, his wife, joins us today. She too serves our great city. Linda, our prayers are with you and your family.

I am so proud of Denver – of our city employees, of our residents, of all the neighborhood groups, nonprofits and businesses that define our great city.

Every day I marvel at our determination. We strive to be more, to thrive under any circumstance. Together we have created a prosperous city that the world recognizes as a community that does it right.

Over the past three years, we marched out of the recession. We eliminated the budget deficit, fostered a diverse economy and restored much needed services. Neighborhood by neighborhood, community by community, family by family we are emerging as a city of opportunity for all people.

With better access to education, healthy foods, parks and libraries, our children are prospering in one of the safest cities in the country. We are protecting our resources for the future, and wisely managing our treasured waterways, parkland and trails.

By delivering on projects such as Denver Union Station, FasTracks and DIA's new hotel and transit center, we are transforming this city right before our eyes and building for the future. With a quality of life that is second to none, I am pleased to report that the state of our city has never been more vibrant. People are proud to live here. Our city is thriving.

Since the beginning of my administration, we have had a basic mission to increase job opportunities, grow and attract new companies and prepare a skilled workforce for the 21st century.

The recession reminded us about the value of a diverse economic base. Small, medium and large companies spanning a wide range of industries, we need them all. I applaud Paul Washington and his team for firing up this economy.

In the past year, we attracted companies like Kinross Gold USA, a leading gold mining company; we brought in good manufacturing jobs with NAMJet; and we attracted Ardent Mills, the nation's largest flour milling company.

We look at each business, at each worker, and ask, "What do you need to be successful in Denver?" Because Denver succeeds when we all succeed.

Take for example, small business owner Muluye Hailemairm who immigrated from Ethiopia as a teenager in 1996. A few years ago she ran probably the only convenience store on East Colfax not selling cigarettes. Wanting the next generation to be healthy, she began selling fashion jewelry instead.

A chance meeting with DIA officials led her to take her business to the airport. And last year, she partnered in opening Wetzel's Pretzels, which is projected to see sales of \$715,000 in its first year. Congratulations, Muluye!

We are determined to help all small businesses take flight. In January, we took major steps to break down barriers for minority and women owned companies. Through two new ordinances and an executive order, we are paving the way for disadvantaged firms to do business with the city and setting a new standard for the private sector.

Our economic development strategy is working. This city of opportunity is open for business. With over 27,000 new jobs and 1,500 businesses added to the Denver economy since 2011, job growth in the region is among the nation's strongest. More importantly, unemployment has been cut nearly in half since the height of the recession.

Today, Denver's unemployment rate is 5.3 percent, well below the national average. While we should celebrate this progress, unemployment is still too high. We need to ensure that all of Denver can benefit from our progress.

Our Workforce Development office is reaching out to those companies in Denver that have good jobs sitting empty to connect them with folks who cannot find employment. Together, we are training the next generation of welders, machinists and electricians and putting them to work!

When it comes to developing a vibrant economy, the advantage goes to places like Denver, where the smartest, most innovative people want to live.

Why did the federal government open a new Patent Office in Downtown two weeks ago? Because of our culture of ingenuity and talented workforce.

Why are innovation centers such as Taxi, Galvanize and Industry thriving? Because these integrated business communities are magnets for the 21st century workforce.

And why is Denver recognized as one of the most competitive startup and small business capitals in the country? Because this city fosters our Ideas Economy every day by helping entrepreneurs turn concepts into reality.

We offer attractive financing to high-growth companies and help support and leverage venture capital. We develop workplaces, ecosystems, for the 21st century employee. I am pleased that the city, along with the Downtown Denver Partnership and Colorado Technology Association, will soon open a new center for innovation in downtown, a place for these 21st century thinkers to turn designs into profits.

Count that center among the many opportunities opening up in Denver's core. The new Union Station links the region with jobs, housing, transportation and educational opportunities. In 2016, we will extend those opportunities when the East Line to DIA will carry passengers between the airport and downtown in half an hour!

Already Union Station, with its Crawford Hotel and new retail, has spurred a \$1.8 billion wave of development in the area. Office buildings, housing and businesses are creating an entirely new neighborhood in the heart of downtown.

The transformative power of transit is undeniable. We have watched it grow across the region with FasTracks. We will help it continue with Transit Oriented Denver, a strategy to drive development at transit stations across the city. Housing or retail, sidewalks or bike lanes, we will deliver what those stations, and those neighborhoods, need to thrive.

We are already at work with our community partners in North Denver, where three transit stations will reenergize this cornerstone of our city. We will also deliver desperately needed infrastructure, and the Stock Show will realize its potential.

We expect the Corridor of Opportunity between DIA and downtown to have a \$2.6 billion impact on our economy and provide 40,000 new jobs over the next three decades.

At DIA, the windows are up on 12 of the 14 floors of the new hotel and transit center, reflecting not only the profile of the airport but the strides we are making toward expanding our gateway to the world. From Heathrow to Incheon, Schiphol to Durban, we have seen firsthand the challenges and opportunities of aviation's new frontier. DIA alone contributed more than \$26 billion to the state's economy in 2013, a record year.

Peer airports are spending billions to stay competitive, and Denver cannot afford to be left behind. In just three short years, we have opened Denver to new markets in Asia, Europe, and Central and South America that are generating global opportunities for the entire Rocky Mountain West.

We are developing business-to-business connections worldwide, and international passenger traffic is up 20 percent over last year, another record-breaker. We could not have done it without the partnership of Gov. John Hickenlooper and the State Office of Economic Development and International Trade. Thank you for your tireless efforts to make sure our state and our great city are globally competitive and globally connected.

People from around the world want to visit Denver. Tourists spent a record \$4.1 billion here last year because Denver is the place to be. Just ask our guests who decide to create their futures in this great city once they walk around Sloan's Lake, visit wonderful museums like this one or catch a game at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

This is a town for sports fans like me. To the Denver Broncos and Colorado Avalanche, thank you for a wild ride this season. You have raised the bar, and we expect both teams to go all the way next year!

I was blessed to grow up in Denver, where opportunities at city recreation centers, parks and a good public school system helped shape the person I am today. It is vital to me that our children, and our grandchildren, are provided at minimum those same kinds of opportunities, no matter what neighborhood they live in.

Our goal is to create livable communities. Healthy neighborhoods where we can walk, bike and play; where fresh foods are as accessible as jobs, healthcare and education.

For example, on the Welton Corridor, working closely with our neighbors, we are preserving the culture and elevating historic Five Points. Through nearly half a million dollars of public investment, we are igniting tens of millions of dollars worth of private development in this area.

Over in West Denver, we are making progress on \$60 million in infrastructure improvements to Federal Boulevard from Alameda to I-70. We have paved alleys and streets, and we are getting rid of dumpsters to stop illegal dumping.

The fact is, for too long, this part of town has been overlooked, but not anymore. I am excited to announce that we are going to create a town center on Morrison Road to bring food from farm to table, to create jobs and income that will lift up the Westwood community. To kick things off, next month we will open Cuatro Vientos, or Four Winds, the neighborhood's first new park in 30 years.

Our parks bring this city together, joining families and neighbors for barbecues, tournaments and even concerts at Ruby Hill's new Levitt Pavilion.

We are committed to continue meaningful investment into new parks, trails, sports fields and better playgrounds. I am proud that my administration is making unprecedented efforts to preserve our parkland and open space, and I thank our park advocates for their partnership. We will have designated more than 700 acres by year's end to ensure that more than 5,000 acres are available for future generations.

I am also proud to announce that the city is restoring and preserving nearly 200 acres of habitat between the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and Peña Boulevard near DIA. Adjacent to the 61st and Peña transit station, we envision an accessible open space area of native grasses and

waterways where people can walk with their kids and take in awe-inspiring views. They might even see bison and bald eagles.

I want to thank our partners at the Refuge as we launch this project. I hope we will ultimately be able to restore more than 650 acres of open space in this corridor in collaboration with our neighbors in Commerce City and Adams County.

From its inception, the lifeblood of Denver has been the South Platte River. We are investing \$25 million to restore natural areas and redesign four parks along the river banks. Imagine fishing, playgrounds and kayaking, as well as better trails all the way from Overland Park to Globeville, Elyria and Swansea.

In Sun Valley, Weir Gulch is being completely transformed into a beautiful river park opening next month. We are doing so much more to enhance the livability of our neighborhoods. We are adding new grocery stores in underserved areas. We are delivering on promises including building the Central Denver Recreation Center and Westerly Creek Park. We are enlivening our neighborhoods with arts, culture and creativity. We are expanding the city's composting program to deliver a more sustainable city.

In fact, Denver is becoming one of the most bikeable cities in the nation, with 100 miles of bike lanes and one of the most successful bike share programs in the country. This year we were also excited to deliver the city's first protected bike lane on 15th Street. For the safety of our multimodal neighbors, whether you are driving, biking or walking, please keep your heads up and share the road.

To deliver a livable city, safety is paramount. When I came into office, the relationship between the community and Denver Police was challenged. So we restructured the department.

Today, crime rates are falling, response times are improving, and police officer productivity is up an impressive 81 percent. We have also hired 110 new officers and will add another 100 by year's end.

What does that mean to you? It means more patrols are focused on crime prevention. It means more officers in high-need areas. It means officers spending more time getting to know you and your neighborhood.

Officers like Sgt. Bobby Waidler, who worked so successfully with the Orthodox Jewish community in District 1 that its leaders are sharing his cultural sensitivity training. They hope it will help police in other places better understand the needs of diverse communities.

I am very proud of the progress we have made, and grateful to Chief White and the men and women who put their lives on the line each day to keep Denver safe.

I am also well aware of how a few bad actors reflect on the entire force. Make no mistake, we are holding police officers and sheriff's deputies accountable. We have and we will address the few who would tarnish the badge that hundreds of others wear proudly as they serve and protect the people of this great city.

In January, Colorado made history as the first community in the world to legalize retail marijuana. Numerous city agencies worked with the industry to develop and implement the responsible regulations we have today. I want to thank all parties for their hard work, knowing that getting this right will take time.

We will continue to push for a banking option that will be fair to business owners. To protect our neighborhoods, we are pursuing new enforcement around THC extraction.

I thank City Council for their partnership and for recently approving our responsible spending plan to regulate, enforce and educate the public on this law as well as prevent marijuana use among our young people. I commit that we will ensure this new industry is making a safe contribution to our city, not a harmful one.

When I came into office in 2011, I knew we had to run this city with a heightened level of efficiency. So I launched Peak Performance, which trains employees to streamline city processes.

Peak has exceeded all expectations, being recognized nationwide for taking an employee-led approach to delivering the highest quality services at the lowest possible cost. For example, without increasing staff, we cut average wait times at the DMV in half, and we are planning more innovations to lower wait times again this year.

I know you do not want to stand in line at the city. I don't either. So we are also making government more accessible through your laptop and smart phone. A small business owner told me recently that the most impressive efficiency my administration has implemented was allowing him to pay his bills to the city online using a credit card, with no transaction fees, saving him time and money. A government that works smarter is a government that moves at the speed of you.

Denver, we cannot move quickly enough when it comes to housing. Access to a safe, affordable place to live has never been more important, so we are taking comprehensive action to address the full range of housing challenges.

While our city's population has spiked in recent years, our housing stock has not kept pace. This gap is exacerbated by rising home prices, which are good news for homeowners and our local economy, but a challenge for many residents and families. Thirty-eight percent of Denver's renters don't earn enough to cover rising housing costs and need some kind of assistance.

I was only 23 when I bought my first home. Coming from a family of 10 children, it was the first time I was able to claim a space of my own. That tiny home shaped me with responsibility and pride. I want that same opportunity, that same sense of security, for my children, and for all our children.

Last year, we set a goal to create, rehabilitate or preserve 600 affordable housing units annually over five years. I am happy to announce that in our first year we exceeded that goal, helping to deliver more than 700 affordable housing units. We are on track to beat it again this year.

Soon, we will release a Denver Housing Plan that will provide a comprehensive path forward for the city's housing policies and resource allocations over the next five years. By being crystal clear in communicating our intentions to keep Denver affordable, we are taking a proactive approach to making substantive change.

With the extraordinary opportunities that lie ahead for our region, including TODs, it is my sincere hope that the 2015 State Legislature will recognize the chilling effect the construction defects law has on the for sale condo market. I encourage lawmakers to modify the law so that we can experience the full potential of housing in metro Denver. Thank you to the Metro Mayors Caucus and my counterparts Lakewood Mayor Bob Murphy and Lone Tree Mayor Jim Gunning for your leadership on this issue.

Denver, we must also look to provide stable housing and support services to the city's most vulnerable. Last year, 300 individuals who suffer from mental illness and addiction and make their homes on Denver's streets experienced 14,000 days in jail, 2,400 visits to detox, 1,000 arrests and 600 emergency room visits.

The cost to taxpayers was over \$11 million dollars. And what are we fixing? It is time to break the cycle from streets, to emergency rooms, to jails and back to the streets. I have committed to a new program that will allow the city to pay only for outcomes and to transition away from costly, ineffective remedial services to proven preventive programs.

We also must open a rest and resource center offering a full range of coordinated health, employment and housing services. Additionally, I am pleased that the Denver Rescue Mission will soon break ground on the Lawrence Street Community Center and Courtyard Project, which will provide a safe, substance-free area with bathrooms and showers for those awaiting shelter and a hot meal.

I have said this from Day One, Denver will not be able to solve the issue of homelessness alone. We have initiated a partnership with our neighboring communities to reduce homelessness and hunger across the metro area, and I want to again thank the Metro Mayors Caucus, especially Aurora Mayor Steve Hogan, for responding to the call.

Denver, I take tremendous pride in the accomplishments of my administration. While our investment in the future is never complete, I am most proud of the work we have done and will continue to do for our children.

We must deliver to them a city of opportunity. We must give them the opportunity for a great education, for libraries and parks, for healthy foods and inspiring activities, and for the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential.

We began by asking our partners, such as Denver Public Schools and Denver Public Library, to join us in better aligning our time and money to make a real difference for our kids. Together, we are working to ensure that 90 percent of our third-graders are reading at grade level by 2017, childhood obesity rates decrease and that more kids finish high school and pursue continued training or education.

Denver is fast becoming a role model and winning recognition nationwide for its work to address our children's basic needs. Today, more than 100,000 children have free access to Denver's recreation centers and pools through the MY Denver Card. I am happy to report that some 57,000 kids have a card in their pocket right now.

I will never forget Mikey, who pulled his MY Denver Card right out of his swim trunks at the Argo Park pool and offered it to me with a grin. The MY Denver card is getting children into our recreation centers like never before, giving them safe, productive options to keep their minds and bodies engaged after school and during summer months.

To get the rest of our kids signed up, we are making it even easier by taking applications online soon. I am also excited to announce that later this year the MY Denver Card will provide access to some of our art and science museums, the zoo and other cultural institutions.

Denver, the city's investments in our children have been deliberate, they have been data-driven, and they will have a lasting impact on our families.

In this city of opportunity, we must remain focused on eliminating the achievement gap. That is why we are committed to boosting the number of kids receiving Early Childhood Education. Today, almost 70 percent of Denver's four-year-olds are enrolled in the Denver Preschool Program, one of the best participation rates in the United States. Those students are outperforming their peers.

It is now time to reauthorize and expand the Denver Preschool Program, and I will be among those asking you to once again demonstrate your commitment to Denver's youngest students and to our future come November.

Denver, when we summon the will, there is nothing we cannot do. We are forging toward tomorrow with a renewed energy.

Right now, an entrepreneur with a MacBook and a dream is sitting in a coffee shop on Brighton Boulevard coding the next great app. Right now, in downtown, new towers are rising from the ground that will transform our skyline. Right now, the New West is dawning in Denver, and it is creating a city of opportunity.

However, challenges remain. Right now, somewhere in Denver, a child is struggling to read. Right now, a family is living paycheck to paycheck. Right now, someone is wondering where they will sleep tonight.

We are all Denver. In this great city, our great city, everyone matters. We will not rest until the city of opportunity extends to everyone.

Together, we can do better, we must do better. The best is yet to come. Now, let's get to work!

Thank you all for being here. God bless you and God bless the City and County of Denver.

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