DENVER – Mayor Michael B. Hancock’s 2016 State of the City Address as prepared:

July 11, 2016
Denver International Airport

Thank you Council President Herndon. Thank you all for joining us here today at Denver International Airport. Thank you to Chief Executive Officer Kim Day and the entire team for hosting us. This is our gateway to the world, where 30,000 people come to work every day.

We thank the DIA employees and we thank all city employees for their committed work. Every year I am amazed at the fortitude, commitment and heart of the people who serve this city. Side-by-side with our businesses, residents and neighborhoods, we are making Denver the best place to live.

Speaking of the best. My beautiful wife Mary Louise and family are here today. Anyone up here will tell you we could not do this job without our families. They are our biggest supporters, our harshest critics, they ground us, and we love them for it. I love you all very much, thank you for staying with me on this wild ride.

I know District Attorney Mitch Morrissey understands the importance of family support. Mitch is in the home stretch of a 12-year run as DA. Two weeks ago, Mitch and I stood with Rose Andom to open Colorado’s first Family Justice Center for victims of domestic violence. Please help me in thanking Mitch and his amazing wife Maggie for their leadership and commitment to this project.

The world could use more of the compassion and tolerance like that which brought the Rose Andom Center to reality. There is no greater covenant than the one between our safety officers and the community. That covenant has been breached and a sickness has fallen on our country. All of us must commit to being the repairers of the breach.

I’m greatly concerned with the videos I’ve seen out of Louisiana and Minnesota and we all watched live as the events of Dallas unfolded. Violence only begets violence and we are a better country, we are a better people than that. I would like us to bow our heads and take a moment of silence to acknowledge the tragedies in Dallas, Orlando, here at home and across this country.
Council President Herndon, members of City Council, Auditor O’Brien, Clerk and Recorder Johnson, thank you for joining me on stage today. There also are more than 25 metro area mayors and other elected leaders here today, along with representatives of the legislature and Congress. We are also pleased to welcome our new Lieutenant Governor, Donna Lynne!

One City Council member is not with us today. Albus Brooks is recovering from surgery. Unfortunately, a great partner in Adams County, Commissioner Erik Hansen, also could not be with us because of a terrible accident. They are both in our prayers, and we ask you to keep them in yours, as well.

The city we are so proud of – our great city – is enjoying significant success. Historic success. First and foremost, we are Super Bowl Champions. Congratulations to our Denver Broncos!

Today, I am not just a proud Broncos fan, I am a proud Mayor. Denver employs more people than any other time in our city’s history. In five years, we’ve helped create nearly 60,000 jobs and lowered unemployment to 3.3 percent. We have restored the fiscal health of our city and our reserves are now at a solid 20 percent. This is all while the region is growing by more than 4,500 people a month.

We are driving improvements that will keep us uniquely Denver – active and vibrant – for generations to come. We have established new flights and stretched Denver’s wings across the world. This year, we are now boarding for Munich and Montreal with more prospects on the horizon. We have launched new plans for the Performing Arts Complex, Colorado Convention Center and National Western Center, all promising to strengthen Denver as a hub of education, culture and tourism. And we have become a national model for how to run a smart, efficient and customer-focused government through Peak Performance and Peak Academy.

Denver, I am thrilled to report that the state of our city is stronger than ever before. But our work is far from over. For too many residents, the benefits of a strong economy remain out of reach and too many neighborhoods remain overlooked and underserved.

President Franklin Roosevelt once said: “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have little.”

Everyone in Denver deserves the opportunity to share in this prosperity. This is our call to action.

Every day, I go to work as a person who cares deeply for the city where I grew up, as a father who is providing for his family, as a neighbor who wants to be happy, safe and successful. As I reflected on what I would say up here today – the faces and voices of our people ran through my mind. Every day as I go to work, I take with me the 12,000 people who do not have jobs. The hundreds of children who are homeless. The tens of thousands of residents who are one paycheck away from missing a rent or mortgage payment.

This city will not rest until Denver’s success is shared by everyone. This is my vision and my commitment. Each and every day, I am motivated to provide every resident with the opportunity to fulfill their God-given potential, to provide well for their families and to have a path forward even if they stumble. I am up here today to talk about one thing, our people.

Let’s start with Marsha Brown. Marsha’s life was turned upside down when her son was hurt in an accident. She was able to keep her family afloat for nine months, but with mounting medical bills, she eventually lost her home. With the support of financial coaching at one of the city’s 11 financial empowerment centers, Marsha was able to get back on her feet.
The city helped her improve her credit score, build her savings and get a job at Denver Human Services where she is now helping others do the same. I am so inspired when I think about Marsha and her son. She is proof that we can empower people to succeed. And to top it off, she’s on the verge of buying a home!

Home ownership gives families a foundation to build equity, build wealth and frankly, to build a life. At the beginning of a hot housing market, in 2013, I issued a challenge to the community to create 3,000 affordable homes in five years. More than 1,800 homes have been built and 1,000 more are on the way in neighborhoods like Downtown, Hale and Montbello. Denver, I’m proud to report we are going to realize the 3x5 goal one year early!

I want to thank the many local developers who are stepping up, including the Burgwyn Company. Not only did they open a new affordable apartment complex for military veterans, but they modified their plans to make the complex more kid-friendly when they saw an influx of families moving in. We also need to thank key public-sector partners like the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, Colorado Division of Housing, Denver Urban Renewal Authority and the Denver Housing Authority.

Through investments, loans, mortgage assistance and a new construction defects ordinance, we are all working overtime to keep Denver accessible and affordable. Even still, we can’t build housing fast enough. As soon as the doors open, apartments are rented and houses are sold.

When I became Mayor five years ago, I told you that at times we would need to make tough decisions to move our city forward. Wednesday will be another one of those times. My administration will be presenting City Council with a plan to create Denver’s first permanent, dedicated fund for affordable housing.

With at least $150 million to be leveraged in the first ten years, we expect to deliver 6,000 more affordable homes. This is a fair, balanced and modest approach to address one of the most pressing problems facing Denver today. A great many thanks to Denver City Council members Robin Kniech and Albus Brooks who have worked long and hard with us on this proposal.

There are few issues as complex as homelessness. Each individual who experiences homelessness has a unique story and situation. A city’s approach to helping them must be just as diverse. For 10 years, Denver’s Road Home has coordinated the work of more than 20 homeless service providers. Today, the city invests nearly $50 million to address homelessness each year, and we have been able to help thousands of people stabilize their lives. I want to thank all of the many partners who work with us day in and day out, including non-profits, faith community and so many others.

Together, we’re delivering more solutions than ever before. Two-hundred and fifty chronically homeless people will soon be living in new housing that offers addiction recovery and mental health support through an innovative financing strategy. Last fall, we partnered with the Denver Rescue Mission to open a new facility in Ballpark called the Lawrence Street Community Center that is serving more than 1,000 people a day with hot meals and a safe place to shower, do laundry and connect with other help. Our outreach is improving with a new co-responder program that teams mental health professionals with patrol officers to help connect the homeless with treatment and services. This fall, we will pilot a day work program to hire at least 12 homeless individuals every week. Our goal is to help them develop workforce skills, and ultimately, connect them with stable jobs.

And in the months ahead, we’ll be taking another bold step forward by establishing a new office, the Office of HOPE – Housing and Opportunities for People Everywhere. We will bring a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the policies, programs and projects along the full homeless to housing spectrum.
We will knock down silos, refocus our city agencies and create a unified and forceful effort to help those who need a home, find a home. This is some of the hardest work we do, and we can do better. This new office will harness and marshal our resources, our talent and our determination. It will help us identify those experiencing homelessness, get them into housing, and keep them there. We must seize this opportunity now, with a renewed sense of urgency and with all of you as partners.

Like affordable housing, accessible mobility choices can help each and every one of us live better, easier lives. Camille Lewis knows this well. Camille is a single mom of two boys, she found new affordable housing at 40th Ave. and Colorado Blvd. The housing is great, but just as good, she has easy access to the new University of Colorado A Line train that takes her to work. This train does not just provide a new connection between downtown and this beautiful international airport, it connects people to housing, jobs and education.

I hope many of you took the train here this morning. RTD is delivering on its biggest year yet of FasTracks, opening four new rail lines in 2016. By the end of the year, Denver Union Station will see 100,000 commuters passing through its turnstiles every single day. Rail is just one mobility option now serving our region. Uber and Lyft offer carpool options, BCycle has added more stations, and in February we launched the Go Denver smartphone app to put the fastest, cheapest and greenest options right at your fingertips. The goal is mobility freedom, providing everyone with safe, reliable, sustainable and affordable options to get around town.

Let me tell you, I am so proud of the work done by our Smart City Challenge team. Even though we were not selected by the U.S. Department of Transportation for grant funding, we have a solid plan moving forward. We will be unrelenting in our pursuit of other funding opportunities and in making this a priority in the City’s 2017 budget and beyond.

Over the coming year, you will see new projects that will make Denver more walkable and bike-able. Projects that will reduce congestion and improve safety through our commitment to Vision Zero. This means deploying new technologies to not only improve traffic flow, but to break down digital divides. It means converting public and private vehicle fleets to electric cars and trucks, and installing new charging stations around town. It means installing new BCycle stations and encouraging more car and ride sharing. And it means expanding the Go Denver app into a one-stop mobility marketplace where you can shop and pay for any transportation service, including RTD bus and rail, on your smartphone or with a smart card.

While mobility freedom is Denver’s future, we must also address barriers of the past. I-70 has cut Globeville, Elyria and Swansea in half for decades. Denver has been at the table with CDOT for 13 years to improve this stretch of I-70 and to represent residents, businesses and adjacent neighborhoods. We have gotten CDOT to agree to unprecedented steps to mitigate climate and health impacts, to improve Swansea Elementary School, to knit these neighborhoods back together. And we offer our congratulations to CDOT for winning a federal grant to train local residents for the local jobs that this project will create.

Great projects, and great cities, don’t happen by accident. They are the result of intentional planning, strong partnerships, committed communities and smart voters. That is how we get projects like FasTracks, this airport and this beautiful new Westin Hotel. That is how we get projects like Denver Union Station, the upcoming Convention Center expansion, a reimagined Performing Arts Complex and the 300-acre National Western Center. When you stand here, at one end of the Corridor of Opportunity, and look downtown with the mountains as a backdrop, the possibilities seem endless.

That’s why we’ve launched Denveright, an unprecedented effort to coordinate four citywide plans that will chart the course of the Mile High City for the next 20 years. And in the coming months, Denver
neighborhoods will also have an opportunity to tell the city what improvements they would like included in the 2017 General Obligation Bond. We have growing needs in this city we love, and these bonds will help us maintain infrastructure, create local jobs and strengthen neighborhoods.

We are laser focused on neighborhood preservation and keeping residents from being displaced by growth and development. We can have development without displacement, it does not have to be either-or. We have taken a deep dive into the challenges stemming from gentrification in recent months. We know where, and how, it is occurring, and we are working hard to address it.

We are focused particularly in West, North and Northeast Denver with partners like Mile High United Way, Mile High Connects and the Denver Housing Authority. Together, we are devising short and long-term plans and seeking funding to lift up Sun Valley, Westwood, Villa Park and other West Denver neighborhoods. We are doing the same in Globeville, Elyria, Swansea and Montbello. In the months ahead, we will be deploying teams into these neighborhoods with resources to help people stay in their homes and apartments and help local businesses keep their doors open.

To kick-start this work, we will be establishing two economic opportunity zones in west-central and northeast Denver. Businesses that start or move into these zones will receive a bonus from the city if they invest in their new communities by hiring local residents, paying a good wage or investing in local schools. These two zones, one focused on manufacturing and the other on global business, will strengthen our 21st century economy while providing local jobs for local residents.

When Reed Silberman opened Ink Monstr in Sun Valley, he did not just want to create spectacular graphic designs, he wanted his new neighborhood to thrive as much as his company. So Ink Monster has partnered with local organizations like Sun Valley Community Collaboration and Youth Center and DHA’s Youth Academy, and even hired three youth from the neighborhood.

Let me say it again: Local jobs for local residents. A good job can lead to a career, and with a career comes dignity, purpose and opportunity.

If the city is going to play a critical role in training professionals, we need to get professional about how we train people. That is why we have redesigned our workforce system. We will no longer train for the sake of training. By addressing the needs of employers, our training programs will do a much better job helping people compete for real work and real opportunities.

A job is just a job unless people have an opportunity to grow. Stagnant wages and concentration of wealth threaten the future of our great country. While we are seeing wages begin to rise in Denver, we need to do more to close the wealth gap. It is time for Colorado to stand up for our employees and raise the minimum wage so that workers can support their families.

There are two other measures headed to the November ballot that I would encourage voters to support. The reauthorization of the Science and Cultural Facilities District and Colorado Priorities, a measure that would allow the State to retain revenue it already collects.

There is no greater lag on the pursuit of happiness than a lack of hope. I have spoken with many who say that even though they have turned their lives around, they cannot get a job because of their criminal record. For those who have made mistakes, served their time and paid their debt, we need to provide them a path to succeed as well. Instead of building more obstacles, we should be supporting second chances.

The City and County of Denver has decided to lead by example. I am proud to announce that starting in August, we are “banning the box.” By removing a small check box on city job applications, we can create
big opportunities for those seeking a positive future. I encourage our local businesses to follow that lead and eliminate this barrier.

Moreover, the time is ripe for change in America’s criminal justice system. Colorado has recognized the necessity for change and has taken some steps to address it, but we must extend our reform efforts to criminal justice policies that have had disastrous effects on our communities of color. And we need to do it across this country.

Here in Denver, Executive Director of Safety Stephanie O’Malley and I know that a public safety department is only as strong as its relationship with the community it serves. Denver Fire has been building that relationship now for 150 years. Denver Health has been working right alongside Denver Fire all these years, serving our people most in need and saving lives. Happy Birthday Denver Fire and congratulations to Denver Health for their new center serving southwest residents.

The reform of our police and sheriff departments is real because it is happening in partnership with our community and the rank-and-file officers who serve them, like Tony Lopez Jr. and Sr. Tony Jr.

Tony Jr., who is here today with his wife and new baby, continues to improve after being shot six times back in December during a routine traffic stop. For six years, his father, Tony Sr., has served as Commander of Police District 6, serving Denver’s busiest and most demanding of police districts.

The Denver Police Department, under Chief Robert White, has become a model for criminal justice reform across America. Over the last two years, the Denver Police Department has ramped up efforts to positively engage youth and improve their relationships with the public. The Department continues to assess and reassess its policies and procedures and train and retrain officers. By the end of the year, all patrol officers will be issued body cameras to increase accountability.

Our reform of the Sheriff Department continues unabated. Sheriff Patrick Firman is going full steam ahead revamping the department by bringing on more deputies, restructuring the command staff, and instituting a new use of force policy. In certain situations, force may be necessary, but excessive force is never acceptable. There is a difference, and it is our job to ensure our deputies have the right training, policies and procedures so that everyone knows the difference.

When an inmate at the Downtown Detention Center became violent, destroying a dayroom with a makeshift weapon, Deputy Robin Mazotti did not hesitate to defuse the situation. Deputy Mazotti used her years of experience to calm the inmate and convince him to give himself up. Her only weapons that day were words and compassion. By the end of the year, all deputies will have received Crisis Intervention Training to help them de-escalate potentially dangerous situations. The new policy we announced last month, along with Crisis Intervention Training, puts de-escalation at the forefront of our public safety program, and instills in our deputies that it is not what you can do in these situations, but what you should do.

As we all know, most people in our jails and prisons are people of color. Tragically incarceration rates are not the only challenge impacting communities of color. Truth is, African Americans and Latinos make up the majority of those who are struggling even while our economy is so strong. We are on the losing end of every type of equity gap you can think of: wages, education, and housing.

That is why, for as long as I am Mayor, I will remain undaunted in my effort to support and uplift communities of color. Our great city is much stronger with all of us together, than apart. If we ever hope to achieve the true greatness of Denver, a city of opportunity for everyone, then we must never waver in our efforts to root out the last vestiges of racism, bias and inequality. There is no better example of our intentional work than the My Brother’s Keeper initiative.
Through better education, juvenile justice, workforce development and social support, we are helping youth and young men of color fight against the odds, that the color of their skin does not predetermine the likelihood of failure or success. Through this work, we have created mentorships that are helping young boys and men establish a career path. I do not think I can underscore enough the power that mentorships can have on the lives of boys and young men of color. I have seen how it can transform lives first hand, and today I urge all of you to become a mentor and be a positive force in the life of a child or young man.

I remember the positive mentors in my life: my Uncle Gene, Reverend Kelly, Michael Simmons, Federico Pena, and John Parr. Every door of opportunity that I entered was because someone helped me open it.

My administration is working hard to be that positive, empowering force for Denver’s families and youth. This past year, we helped provide summer and afterschool programs to over 5,000 youth through 100 different programs in neighborhoods where we know parents need a helping hand. We were in 27 neighborhoods serving free, healthy meals to 150,000 kids who may not get them at home because their parents are working one, two or even three jobs. The MY Denver Card has given all of our kids, over 100,000 school age kids, free access to recreation centers and healthy programming for three years now.

We are working closer than ever with Denver Public Schools. More DPS students are taking college classes while still in high school, taking rigorous Advanced Placement classes, and graduating without the need for remedial training when they get to college. This is great progress, but it is not enough. We will never rest until every child graduates ready to go to college or start a career.

We live in a truly great city. The challenges we face today are not insurmountable. I know this city, I know you, and, together, we will continue to succeed. We must reach higher and dream bigger. We must aspire to help everyone, to knock down barriers and create pathways where today there are only roadblocks. That is the kind of city we must be. It is the kind of city I know we can be.

Opportunity is the right of everyone. Progress doesn’t have to leave anyone behind, it should bring everyone along. And this I commit to you, we will take action to make this vision a reality. Your city will be with you every step of the way. We will show up. We will lean in. We will never give up. And we will succeed. All of us, together.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the City and County of Denver.

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