Text of Mayor Hancock’s State of the City Address

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

July 16, 2012
South Atrium, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Good morning, Denver. Today, I stand before you proud and humbled to be your mayor. It is truly an honor to serve this city, this city that raised and inspired me. This city I’ve called home my entire life.

Thank you for taking time to be here this morning. And thank you to the Denver Museum of Nature & Science for hosting us.

Would you also please join me in acknowledging my family: my wife, Mary Louise; my children, Alayna, Jordan, and Janae; my mother, Scharlyne; as well as my mother-in-law and my sisters and brothers who are here today.

I want to thank them for the sacrifices they make each and every day so that I am able to serve. Thank you for standing with me. We entered this public office as a family, and I couldn’t be more proud.

When I was a kid, Denver was a much different place. We were best-known as a cow town with never ending blizzards and a punishing Orange Crush defense.

Today, the state of our city is safe, fiscally stable and growing. We’re emerging from this recession as a vibrant, world-class city that is attracting new residents, businesses and visitors.

We’ve become a destination for our country’s young workers, consistently recognized for our healthy, progressive lifestyle. We are the finish line for the USA Pro Cycling Challenge and the host of this year’s first and most watched presidential debate.

Through hard work and determination, we have turned our home into the city it is today. That’s what makes Denver so great.

Some of us were born here, many were drawn here, but we all share that same pioneering,
entrepreneurial spirit. That never satisfied, always striving to realize new possibilities, attitude. That “Denver spirit.”

Our visionary leaders like former Mayors Federico Peña, Wellington Webb, John Hickenlooper and Bill Vidal delivered a better Denver with this same drive.

Today, we summon that Denver spirit again with a new group of leaders, including those on stage with me: Deputy Mayor Cary Kennedy, City Council President Chris Nevitt and the other members of Council, District Attorney Mitch Morrissey, Clerk and Recorder Debra Johnson and Auditor Dennis Gallagher.

I’d also like to recognize the members of our state legislature. We will continue to stand firmly by your side, fighting for the same basic rights for every Coloradan to live, love and better themselves through education – fighting for civil unions and in-state tuition rates for undocumented children.

It’s a privilege to serve with each and every one of you. Together, along with the residents of Denver, we’ve faced many challenges over the years – turning them into opportunities. But the tough times are not over yet.

What lies before us is an opportunity to reshape what it means to be a 21st century city. In short, a smart city.

By listening to our residents, our businesses and our city workers, hearing concerns and addressing them head on, over the past year we’ve begun to deliver that city. We’re delivering safer streets, improved housing, parks, libraries and a multi-modal transit system that connects them all.

We’re becoming a city government that provides the highest quality services at the lowest possible cost.

We’re focusing on our kids and families hit hardest by the recession, paving a way home for our most vulnerable populations. We’re expanding vital city services for the homeless and declaring that it is inhumane to leave anyone on the street.

We’re championing innovation. The newly announced U.S. Patent Office will keep us on the cutting edge of technology and help build an economy for the future.

And we’re partnering with businesses to create economic opportunities and good paying jobs. Our new international flights to Iceland and Tokyo will throw open the doors of opportunity to Europe and all of Asia. These flights are the trade routes of the 21st century, the foundation of a strong economy.

We’re doing what Denver has done since the transcontinental railroad passed us by in 1867. We are delivering our own future.
With boldness, leadership and determination, we are leveraging today’s successes into a brighter future, into a smart city for all of our residents.

And we are not done yet. We have to think smart, we have to plan smart, we have to use our resources wisely and we have to take advantage of smart 21st century tools.

Smart government works for its people by meeting them where they are, and people are more electronically connected than ever. That’s why Denver is leveraging its technology to lower costs and provide convenient customer service.

Today, I am proud to announce the launch of “e-Denver.” e-Denver is a new online initiative that will provide easy, 24-hour access to city services right from your office, your living room or wherever you are with your smart device.

Our new website goes up today, and in coming months bold new features will be added. If you need to get a permit or license, you’ll be able to do that online. If you need to pay your taxes, you’ll be able to do that online, too. Want to see how the city is spending your money? Check online.

“e-Denver” saves you time, it saves the city money. It’s simply smart business. And that’s just one example of the work we’ve been doing since my first day in office.

On Day One, we launched our Peak Performance effort, asking city employees to tell us where they saw inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement. We asked them how we could provide better service and get the most value from every dollar spent. Thanks to these employees’ efforts, the City of Denver will save $10 million annually by working to make each and every department operate at Peak Performance.

That means providing food assistance to families more quickly, getting more cops out from behind desks and out on patrol, and it means shorter wait times at the DMV. Now that’s smart. Please join me in giving a round of applause to all of our city employees.

We’re also helping our start-up and small local businesses because a smart city needs a diverse economy in order to thrive. Just as we promised in our JumpStart2012 plan, over the past year we’ve made strategic investments in Denver’s local businesses and neighborhoods. Helping to retain and create jobs even in these tough times.

There’s no better example than our partnership with Colorado Premium meatpacking to keep 185 jobs in the Elyria-Swansea neighborhood and help build their potential to double in size in the coming years. Please help me in acknowledging the executive team from Colorado Premium here today.

We’re going to enhance these kinds of public-private partnerships with Peak Enterprise, a new business toolkit to help small businesses and local companies compete and succeed.

I heard the business community loud and clear when they said they need access to more
startup capital. So we’re doing everything we can to bring more investment dollars to Denver’s innovators and entrepreneurs, including hosting a venture capital roundtable with some of the nation’s top investors later this summer.

We’re publishing a matrix that identifies over 100 lenders and investors that have provided capital to Denver businesses during the past five years.

And later this year, in partnership with local micro- and traditional lenders, we’re launching a multimillion dollar fund to support local businesses and community development projects.

This new Peak Enterprise toolkit will also offer an A-to-Z guide to help businesses navigate city paperwork and approvals, provide more workforce programs to our small businesses and improve customer service at our Business Assistance Center.

A smart city relies on a diverse economy, so in addition to better supporting small businesses, we are strengthening Denver’s large employers and major business districts.

We’re focusing on downtown Denver by expanding access to the heartbeat of our economy with city-changing projects like Denver Union Station. This project will transform our historic depot into a 21st century transportation hub.

We’re also tapping the boundless potential of our $22 billion-a-year international airport. Progress is well underway on the South Terminal hotel project and the FasTracks East Rail line, which will create a vital transportation link between DIA and Downtown Denver.

In addition to DIA’s new Tokyo and Iceland flights, we’re pursuing new routes and new global economies in Central and South America.

And together with our regional partners, we’re beginning to plan an Aerotropolis around the airport. If we do this right, and by right I mean smart, we will spur a new frontier of economic growth that will transform metro Denver. Developing the land inside the airport grounds will net us more than 30,000 additional jobs in the next 20 years. And the potential for new job growth outside those boundaries is staggering.

Union Station and DIA will drive job growth in booming sectors such as aerospace, health care and clean energy, creating an unprecedented corridor of opportunity spanning from downtown to the airport.

Being a smart city means being a connected city. FasTracks is making Denver a more livable city every day. In addition to working on the East Rail line, we will open the West Rail line’s new rail stations in early 2013.

Walk, bike or ride, Denver is providing our residents easier access to the resources they need to lead vibrant lives right in their own neighborhoods. In partnership with the Denver Housing Authority, we broke ground on the South Lincoln Redevelopment project in April. These state-of-the-art homes will provide new access to healthy food and large-scale
workforce training, with transportation right outside.

And with Denver’s new Office of Sustainability, we will take this work to the next level. We will enhance bold environmental programs that have made Denver a national leader in sustainable practices and broaden this mission to include economic and social sustainability.

Our Denver Seeds initiative is an outstanding example of this work. By strategically partnering with our neighborhood organizations and focusing on disenfranchised communities, we will grow jobs and improve access to healthy, safe and fresh food for all Denver residents. Now that is a smart city.

FasTracks is just one example of how Denver voters have always been smart investors. The Better Denver Bond projects are another. Bond proceeds have helped build new libraries, parks and recreation centers throughout Denver. Stapleton and Green Valley Ranch have new libraries thanks to the bonds and Denver voters. And, for the first time in 30 years, Westwood will get a new park in early 2013.

These investments have kept our city on the cutting edge by enhancing world-class facilities like the one we stand in today and like Denver’s new 60,000 square foot Crime Lab, which is helping us deliver swifter justice for victims of crime.

Because we have never been afraid to make innovative and financially sound investments for our city, we have prospered even through the worst of times. We have repeatedly conjured our Denver spirit and forged ahead.

Denver, we are currently facing another one of those pivotal moments. Throughout this recession, we have aggressively eliminated waste and reduced costs. We’ve worked to sustain our rainy day fund, maintain the highest possible bond rating and keep the City's budget balanced, closing gaps of nearly $450 million over the past four years.

But with another nearly $100 million shortfall looming next year, we must face reality. The time has come to deliver for our citizens a long-term, sustainable and smart solution. I will soon submit to the City Council and the people of Denver a balanced plan to fix our budget and get back on track. It’s not smart to rebate money while cutting basic services. We must remove the fiscal handcuffs of TABOR.

By retaining revenue we already collect, just like hundreds of other communities and school districts in Colorado, we can make smart investments in our city. We can hire police officers for the first time in four years. We can repave the quarter of our streets that have not been fixed in two decades. We can restore library hours and create jobs by better supporting Denver businesses.

As President Abraham Lincoln once said, “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.” Denver, I ask you to join me in delivering a smart, sustainable and livable city for future generations we may never meet. A city that is built on a solid financial foundation with good jobs, healthy children, thriving libraries, convenient transportation and
There is no greater mission for a mayor than keeping the people of Denver safe, than fostering a strong relationship between our residents and our police department. And we are doing that. We are changing the culture at the Denver Police Department.

By moving police officers out of the office and into neighborhoods, Chief White is working to get more than 60 percent of our officers back into our districts. Such moves will make the best use of DPD’s resources by assuring that our highly trained personnel improve safety by building relationships within our communities and understanding their needs.

We have also flattened DPD’s leadership structure, eliminating the rank of division chief and empowering district commanders to make decisions that used to get handed down from headquarters.

The commanders who are making decisions in their own communities are invested in their districts. Commanders like Paul Pazen, who grew up in District 1, Lisa Fair, who comes from District 4, and Tony Lopez, our District 6 commander and a Thomas Jefferson High School graduate. That’s just smart policing. Please join me in recognizing our commanders here today.

Denver’s Manager of Safety Alex Martinez assumed his new post expecting to tackle tough issues. And he has met those challenges head on. The long and complicated process for resolving internal affairs cases has been cut in half. We’ve removed layers to help us achieve quicker resolution and accountability, and clarified the disciplinary code to help support appropriate outcomes.

And we are not done yet. I want to thank the Civil Service Commission for coming to the table to help us make even smarter improvements in these processes.

A smart city is one that strives to prevent crime. It’s personal to me to assure that as a city we have the best tools for our crime fighters and the victims of crime. Some of you may know that I lost my dear sister Karen to domestic violence in 2002. Today, in her memory and in the memory of far too many others, I am pleased to announce the creation of the Rose Andom Domestic Violence Center.

We can and we must do a better job supporting victims of domestic violence by providing efficient and comprehensive services under one roof, including legal, protective and counseling services, options for shelter, resources for children and pets and medical care.

I want to thank those who made this critical resource a reality. Generous benefactor Rose Andom, the CEO of Rosmik and a local entrepreneur, made it all possible with a $1 million kick-off grant. I also want to recognize Mitch Morrissey, Margaret Abrams, Steve Siegel and the whole team at the District Attorney’s office, former City Attorney Cole Finegan, the Denver Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, Director of Development Services Kelly Leid and Denver Public Schools for their work on the center.
When the caring citizens of this community set out to make a difference, they accomplish amazing things. That’s our Denver spirit at work. Please join me in giving them all a big thank you.

That same spirit was exemplified recently when DPD lost one of its finest officers, Celena Hollis. The support and care our communities displayed was inspiring.

While we continue to mourn the loss of Officer Hollis, we cannot and will not allow the actions of a few to intimidate the citizens of this great city, to keep us from enjoying our parks and our public events, to tarnish our image as a world-class city. We will not surrender to violence.

I want recognize Officer Hollis’ daughter Amyre and her family here with us today. I want to thank you for your sacrifice. We will never forget Celena’s love and commitment to our city.

Denver stands united with you and your family Amyre. We will stand united against violence. And we will hold true to safeguarding our streets, neighborhoods and residents. And maintain the highest level of safety throughout Denver.

We owe a great debt to our safety officers – to our police officers, sheriffs and firefighters – who embody that Denver spirit and put their lives on the line every day. Thank you to all of you.

Denver, I believe there is nothing smarter than giving our children a strong start with healthy food to nourish their bodies, academic challenges to broaden their minds and strong families, neighborhoods and faith communities to feed their souls.

There is nothing smarter than investing in our children from the day they are born to the day they are employed. And there is nothing smarter than delivering a world-class city filled with abundant opportunities so that all our children, all our children, can live up to their God-given potential.

That is why my administration has focused so much attention on turning the former Mayor’s Office for Education and Children into a modern, focused, strategic and, yes, smart new Office for Children and Youth Affairs.

To support the new office’s work, I am announcing a new Denver Children’s Cabinet to bring together senior leaders from all city departments to align and streamline city services for our kids.

Cynics may claim that government reorganization and renaming of offices is all smoke and mirrors. To those cynics, I respond simply and forcefully with examples of our progress to date.

This revitalized office is already getting tens of thousands of nutritious meals to Denver’s
hungry children every day this summer. We are installing about 200 new computers in our public libraries, giving more of our kids the Internet access they need to compete in a global economy.

And this fall, I am so excited to announce that we will pilot a new, enhanced student ID card. These cards will serve as a student ID, a library card and will provide free access to our city’s recreation centers. We will pilot the enhanced cards with 34,000 Denver Public Schools 6th-through 12th-graders this coming school year.

We also launched the Denver Education Compact. The Compact has convened Denver’s top business, higher education and nonprofit leaders with the City and school district, bringing new resources to address long-standing problems that need to be fixed now.

With more than half of Denver’s students not reading at grade level by fourth grade, the Compact is working to ensure that we eliminate the achievement gap before it begins.

The chances of a child reading at grade level by fourth grade are greatly improved when that child enters kindergarten prepared to learn.

The Compact’s first goal is for at least 90 percent of DPS third-graders to be reading at grade level by 2020.

We will achieve this goal by focusing on School Readiness, rallying resources for children ages zero to five to give all Denver’s children a smart start.

Thanks to DPS Superintendent Tom Boasberg and Donna Lynne, CEO of Kaiser Permanente Colorado, for their leadership and partnership as co-chairs of the Compact.

I also want to thank Theresa Peña for the direction and inspiration she brought to the Compact.

While much of the responsibility for educating our children lies with Denver Public Schools, as a city, we must take action together, to support all of their success from cradle to career.

To that end, in partnership with Colorado Youth for Change, we are also launching Drop-in Denver, a web-based resource to provide at-risk youth with options and support to finish school.

We are also thrilled to announce a partnership with the Community College of Denver in which certain libraries and recreation centers will host CCD classes in the community, improving access to job training and skills right in our neighborhoods.

And I am so proud to recognize the First Lady’s initiative to “Bring Back the Arts” for Denver’s kids. This effort is working to boost access to art, music, dance and theater as well as to bring exciting activities to the City’s recreation centers very soon. The arts are critical to a well-rounded education. And bringing some fun and creativity to our children helps keep
them engaged and coming back for more.

We all know our future depends on our smart kids. And Denver, this is about our future. It’s about building a brighter tomorrow for all our residents. And we’re not waiting. With determination and collaboration, and with your help, we’re going to deliver a better, smarter Denver.

We are building a strong foundation on which to deliver our future success. The region’s job growth, out of this recession, is one of the strongest in the nation. Our real estate market is rebounding. And we’re one of the top cities in which to build your business and career.

But it’s not enough. Our great city always strives to be better. We never give up. Join me in delivering more opportunity for our kids, better jobs, stronger neighborhoods and safer streets. We can do this, Denver.

We can create a smart city, a world-class city where every single one of us is valued, where everyone matters. The time is now. Thank you. And God Bless the City and County of Denver.

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