

Let's observe a Moment of silence for Representative Kimmi Lewis of Kim, Colorado and House District 64. Her family is grateful and our caucus is grateful for the kind and classy way all of you, on both sides of this aisle, honored her life.

Thank you Madam Speaker and Mr. Majority Leader. I'm grateful as well to be able to welcome our new Chief House Clerk, Robin Jones. **Robin**, I know you've worked hard these past months, and we'll do everything we can to ... keep you on your toes and to totally befuddle you. Just kiddin'.

We make a lot of decisions down here, sometimes we get it right sometimes we get it wrong. One thing I am absolutely certain about, is I made the right decision when I asked my stunningly beautiful wife to marry me. Honey, I couldn't do this job without your gentle loving spirit by my side.

Madam Speaker, this is the fourth Opening Day speech I've given. It's been an honor to serve as Minority Leader, and I'd like to take a moment to thank my colleagues.

You and your predecessors are a remarkable group of people. From entrepreneurs to engineers, from ranchers and civil servants to lawyers and pilots, from servicemen and women to businessmen and women, I'm proud to have served alongside you. You are accomplished people, and your constituents are fortunate to have had you, as you are they. You represent Colorado from Grand Junction to Burlington, from Fort Collins to Trinidad. You are the voice of so many people, and I appreciate you.

Like it or not, here in this room we are all professionals – professional politicians, at least for now. And sometimes I hear the explanation, "it's not personal, it's politics". Let me confide in you: it's **all** personal to me. It's personal because I'm blessed to be a husband, and a father of three daughters. I wouldn't be here but for them. Colorado is

our home. Many of you have a similar story. And so what we do in this room over the next 120 days matters a lot. It's **personal**.

In this room we'll forge political fortunes, but more importantly, the future of our children. In this room, politics matter – but so does principle.

Government exists to **protect** life, **preserve** freedom, and **promote** justice. People must be free to pursue not just happiness and prosperity, but also wholeness and dignity. In many respects, our laws are the ground rules for this.

This role of “protecting life” and “preserving freedom” was laid down by our founders. They understood the time would come when life, liberty and other rights would be threatened because our founders understood human nature.

That also means they recognized the inherent dignity of all persons: the wise, the wellborn and the rich alongside the ones regarded as ‘nobodies’ by the world. Republicans understand this dignity extends to the “most-able” among us; it also extends to those who need our care and protection – including unborn children.

These are the people we've been sent to represent, and defend, in this remarkable era.

We live in a time of unrivaled prosperity. Life is good for a good many people:

- A recent editorial in the Wall Street Journal was entitled, “The 99% get a bigger raise”. It explained that employee compensation rose 4.5% in 2017, and 5% in 2018. Not just for the rich. The 99%.
- The numbers were even higher in Colorado, with wages and salaries increasing 6.1% in 2019
- Inflation is low, just like unemployment. Minorities are finding work in record numbers.
- Businesses and individuals are optimistic about the future.

This didn't happen by accident. It was planned. It was predictable, because the same burst of economic energy came when presidents Kennedy and Reagan cut taxes and regulation. Republicans understand that government can't create prosperity; it can only create conditions that enable the imagination and hard work of Americans to be rewarded. Thanks to President Trump, those conditions exist.

The reverse is also true. A large and money-hungry state government takes the shine off national prosperity. When a government demands more in taxes (whether they're called taxes or fees), workers have less to share with their children, their families, and their communities. Their incentive to work shrinks.

So in a state like California, a state held hostage to public sector unions and the progressive ideology, there are big problems:

- The highest **rate** of poverty in the nation
- The highest **rate** of homelessness in the nation
- A large exodus of the middle class
- A huge wealth gap between the rich and the poor

That's not the future we want for Colorado, and judging from recent issue-driven referenda, that's not what most Coloradans want, either. **What we want to be is Colorado, proud and free; we do not want to be eastern California.**

In the past five years Colorado taxpayers have handed the government a pay increase (in the form of higher General Fund revenues) that's five times larger than population growth (27%/5.8%). In the recent election voters told the politicians to do their job with the money taxpayers have already provided. Republicans listened.

I don't know about you, but I come to each legislative session with a certain frame-of-reference. Students in bioethics are taught, "First, do no harm" (echoes of the Hippocratic Oath). That's also a pretty good place for legislators to start. If I can put it

another way for us, “First, do no harm to life, or liberty, or the promotion of justice, mercy and prosperity”.

One area where we’re not prospering is **education**. There are many great teachers and schools in Colorado. And every year we’re spending more on them.

- Almost 37% of the state’s General Fund went to public education in 2018-19.
- According to recent audited figures from the Department of Education (2017-18) Colorado school districts collect nearly \$14,000 per student on average from all sources.
- That works out to \$322,000 a year for a class of 23 students (and \$3.86 million for their 1st-to-12th grade experience). That’s a lot of money by anyone’s reckoning.
- But many parents know something’s not right.
- For example, when it comes to high school science, fewer than 11% of black and Hispanic students “met or exceeded expectations” on the 2018 standardized test (CMAS), while a paltry 35% of white students did. That’s not right.
- 8.4% and 9.1% of fourth grade black and Hispanic students (respectively) “met or exceeded expectations” on the 2018 CMAS Social Studies exam, yet on the 7th grade test, the scores of these groups were 4.5% and 5.3%. In other words, scores got about 50% worse between fourth and seventh grade. That’s not right.
- You might have noticed I provided results from 2018. The results from 2019 are worse. That’s not right.
- Our problem isn’t a lack of money. We’re spending more than ever.
- It’s a lack of imagination when it comes to offering parents and students more choice in education; when it comes to setting the right priorities, when it comes to putting our students **first**. We need to make it right.
- Some of that is the legislature’s fault – we pass laws that require more administrators, when what we really need are more and better teachers. By law

we can't set their salaries, but we can provide school districts more discretion to put more money into classrooms.

- It's amazing to me that in a society where we can choose whether to shop online or in stores, Can choose from several versions of iPhones, or Galaxies, or whatever, Where we have choices about how to receive news, where to watch movies, and a host of other things. We still have people that want to limit our choices in education.
- That's **not** the way forward.

It's no secret that children in urban environments face particular challenges when it comes to education. It's also no secret that a great teacher, an effective teacher, can make a huge difference in the lives of those children. Whether it's a gift or a calling, the work they do is important. Far too often these teachers are undervalued, and leave. And their students are the ones to suffer. For that reason, I'll be supporting an education bill to provide a hefty financial supplement to insure that great teachers, doing great work among the underserved, are appreciated and rewarded. We need their service.

For years teachers have paid for things like notebooks and pens for students out of their own pockets; this year we'll support a bill to cover those costs.

We'll give rural and underperforming districts more options to create a better future for themselves, one that puts students first.

And we'll support parents by making the school rating system more transparent for them.

The vast majority of our caucus has signed up for education bills this year with a twist: to give parents and their students more choice, to prioritize spending and make better choices for our children. To put students and their families first. These are the values Coloradans support because they know our children will benefit.

Providing more education choice for students and their parents and guardians; and having better spending priorities will not only benefit students, but also our freedom and our democratic process. The ignorant are easily misled. We rely on an educated people, a genuinely educated people.

When it comes to **business**, people should know that we don't regard business as the enemy of the people. Businesses are the employers of the people. Businesses **are** the people. And so we don't believe it's the role of government to pick winners and losers, to take from one group, punish its success, and give to others while calling it 'compassion' and claiming the middleman is "compassionate".

That approach divides people. It hurts everyone. It divides people into oppressors and victims, when really, we're all in this together.

Last year, we saw a particularly bad example of one-sided legislation along these lines.

The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission has slashed well approvals by 57%, and permits by 58%. Halliburton has announced layoffs, and Petroshare filed for bankruptcy citing changes in our laws. Many other companies are struggling. Meanwhile, outlook for the state economy dropped from 63.4 in third quarter 2018 to 49.6 for third quarter 2019 according to the Denver Business Journal, with business leaders citing the new environmental legislation.

So what happens when a man or woman loses a good-paying job as a result? Is a child supposed to be consoled that they've helped save the world when mom or dad can't pay the mortgage? When they're forced to leave friends and relocate to another city or state?

Bad policies have real-world consequences. People get hurt. Families get hurt. It's all so avoidable if we'd just remember, "do no harm".

When opportunities arise for us to work with Democrats to pass legislation that is good for Colorado and all its people, we'll do it. We're not afraid of working with the other side and giving credit where credit's due.

But when bad laws are proposed, when life and liberty and justice are threatened – we'll stand up and fight. When we see a legislative car accident coming, when we see policy that's been tried and failed in Colorado or somewhere else, we'll try to stop it.

Of course it won't be easy. The average citizen doesn't realize that for the past 20 years the left has assembled an enormous collection of special interest groups that owe their very existence to the money that Democrats send their way in the form of government grants and the like. The groups have their websites and committee witnesses, and most of the public doesn't understand where these people come from or how they get paid.

But I ask myself, what about the average man and the average woman? **We** are committed to be **their** voice and to fight for **their** values. And that's what we'll do this session.

- If the rights of parents to safeguard and make decisions about their young child's healthcare are threatened, as they were last year over vaccines, we'll fight it.
- The parents of these children recognize the helpful role played by the Governor in these debates, we hope it will continue.
- If the rights of parents to supervise the sex education of their children are threatened, as they were last year, we'll fight it.
- If the rights of Coloradans to protect their children against criminals with force are threatened by irresponsible or unworkable new gun laws, we'll fight them.

- If a new payroll tax is imposed under the guise of a “fee” to establish a state ‘family leave’ bureaucracy, we’ll fight it.
- If free market reforms to healthcare are traded-in for a new, expensive state version of Obamacare, we’ll fight it.
- And if families and the poor are forced to pay higher utility costs, more for the vehicles they need and use, and suffer under new environmental regulations based on the flawed vision of Climate Alarmists, we will fight it.

A lot of what’s done here is done under the label of “compassion”. I use the word myself. But the fact is, the people of our state **are** compassionate. They give millions to charities to feed the poor, house the homeless, educate children, help those with addictions and build up faith communities. In addition to the millions they give to charities, Coloradans also enable the state government to care for the least among us, those who cannot care for themselves. For example, every year taxpayers support families with disabled children. It costs tens of thousands of dollars per family to do so, but it’s the right thing to do. It’s the compassionate thing to do.

But calling something “compassionate” doesn’t make it so.

- It’s no compassion to underwrite the slow-motion suicide of our fellow citizens with safe injection sites. Are you kidding me?
- And it’s no compassion to endanger Americans by shielding violent alien criminals from federal law. Are you kidding me?

It would be “compassionate”, or a least very nice, to improve our roads and bridges. To shorten commutes. To give people access to attainable housing outside expensive and sometimes dangerous metro areas. Governor Polis says he’ll spend \$550 million from the General Fund on Transportation. Republicans will gladly work with him on this because it will help everybody. But if Governor Polis can’t get Democrat

legislators to support his agenda, or if they propose some bait-and-switch scheme or the sort of new taxes that voters have repeatedly rejected, all Coloradans will suffer.

Let me conclude with this. In this House, we are committed not merely to political outcomes, but to a process. A process designed to encourage debate and discovery. A process that involves personal relationships – the very opposite of the name-calling we see elsewhere. It's a place where a man or woman's word is their bond.

I appreciate that while Madam Speaker and I don't often **see** eye-to-eye, we can **look** each other in the eye. The Majority Leader and I, though we don't always **see** eye-to-eye (mainly because he's about 2 feet taller than me) ... can **look** each other in the eye. It is good for this House, and the people, when leaders are true to their word.

And so I have a suggestion for this session. Above all, "do no harm". In all we do, let's protect life, let's preserve freedom, and let's promote its benefits for **all** the people of Colorado. May God bless this House, and this Great State. Thank you.