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House Minority Leader Brian DelGrosso Delivers Opening Day Remarks

DENVER— Today, House Minority Leader Brian DelGrosso(R-Loveland) delivered his opening day remarks to the House of Representatives.

A copy of DelGrosso's remarks can be found below:

Mr. Speaker, Madam Majority Leader, esteemed colleagues and honored guests, welcome to the Second Regular Session of the 69th General Assembly.

I would like to start by congratulating our newest member, KC Becker. I look forward to working with you and I sure hope you know what you got yourself into. I also look forward to working again with all of our returning members.

I would like to thank my family, my wife Amber, my kids who were unable to attend today because of school, Andara, Bransen, and Breeley, and lastly, my parents George and Kathi. I would not be able to do this job without your tireless support and encouragement.

I would like to say a special thank you to all of the spouses and family members that have to deal with us being gone all the time and our crazy schedules. It is truly your sacrifice that makes it possible for us to do what we do.

Colleagues, this past year has tested the resolve of Coloradans. For the second year in a row we experienced devastating wildfires that caused record damage and loss of life.

Then less than three months later, we were faced with four days of record breaking rain that led to the most damaging floods in our state's history, resulting in more loss of life, and total damage that may not be fully realized for years to come. These natural disasters and the recent tragedy at Arapahoe High School have forced Colorado to cope with unthinkable hardship this last year.

Yet, through all the tragedy, we were able to see the best in Colorado. We saw first responders once again putting themselves in harm's way to save lives and minimize the damage that was caused. We saw a massive outpouring of fundraising and volunteer efforts to help those affected. In my home town of Loveland, we saw churches open up as shelters for those who were evacuated, and individuals open up their homes to those in need of a place to stay. We saw businesses give selflessly in the form of food, services, and supplies. Teenagers organized themselves into groups to help remove mud and debris from affected homes and businesses. We saw the list of volunteers for the disaster relief center reach into the hundreds before the center even opened.

I am just one of many legislators that had areas affected by tragedy this last year, and I know that these are just a few of the great stories that we heard happening around our state. Although our resolve was tested, we were not broken, and we will recover to be a stronger state as a result. To see this kind of Colorado spirit was truly amazing.

Helping our friends and neighbors impacted by these tragedies will be a top priority of Republicans this session, and I am glad to hear that it will be for my colleagues across the aisle as well.

Here at the Capitol, challenges of this magnitude undoubtedly shape how we approach our job as legislators. Yet despite our best intentions to prevent these types of tragedies from happening again, we have to align our expectations with our abilities.

There is no bill we can pass that will prevent wildfires, floods or an individual intent on doing harm. We cannot control tragedy, but we can control how we react to it.

Rather than respond with ineffectual legislation, let's work together to help rebuild our communities and heal Colorado.

To start, let's work to ensure that our municipalities have the funding and aid necessary to rebuild flood-damaged communities, and continue to knock down barriers that will keep them from being successful.

Rather than imposing costly mandates, let's work together to help educate Coloradans about the need for fire mitigation, while working with the U.S. Forest Service to reduce the wildfire risk on state and federal lands.

We know we will face future challenges, so let's prepare to meet them by further increasing our statutory reserve, and saving for the future.

Coloradans have shown they can overcome extreme adversity, let's follow their example and work together as legislators to meet the needs of Colorado.

Over this last year, House Republicans continued to take time to meet with people throughout Colorado and learn about the different issues they are facing.

We took the time to listen.

On our annual statewide tour, we met with several small business owners as well as some of the largest companies in Colorado. These people are the life blood of our economy. If our business community is not thriving we will not have a thriving economy.

Members, there is evidence our economy is improving, but fully recovered it has not. Yes, Colorado's unemployment rate is down and that is encouraging. But what cannot be ignored are the many parts of Colorado that still struggle today. Outside the Front Range we have communities stricken with stagnant or in many cases declining economies.

We saw the loss of over 300 jobs at the Oxbow Coal Mine in the North Fork Valley. This may not sound like a lot to you, but this will have devastating effects on those small communities in that area.

In four years, Grand Junction has seen a 10 percent drop in their workforce. Nearly 8,600 people have left the region in search of a better economy. Several businesses in other areas of rural Colorado talked about declining sales in their distressed markets as well.

Perhaps most alarming was a recent report by the National Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. This report measures policies and costs impacting small business and entrepreneurship. Colorado dropped from number 9 to 14 on the index that rates policies supportive to small business. While some may tout that number 14 is good news; I say we are moving the wrong way on the scale. I guarantee moving further back on this scale will not help attract business to Colorado.

When meeting with the business community, almost all of them said that the #1 thing that we could do to help them, is to leave them alone. New regulations, even with the best intentions, take an enormous amount of time and resources to navigate. Businesses do not need another competitor in the form of government getting in their way and erecting barriers to success. Our 2014 jobs agenda was developed to give businesses more flexibility, reduce regulatory burdens and boost local economies.

In just two years, there have been more than 14,000 pages of new rules and regulations enacted on businesses in Colorado. While I, like every other business owner, try to stay compliant, it is difficult to stay current with the many changes.

We hope Representative Szabo's bill this year requiring state agencies to issue warnings in lieu of fines for first-time violations is met with as much support from my Democratic colleagues as it has from Colorado's small business community.

As any business owner knows there are good times and there are bad times. It is in these good times that businesses reinvest in their business to build for the future. Our State should be no different. Revenues have improved and now is the time to reinvest in Colorado. Colorado currently puts no General Fund money into roads and bridges. This year, House Republicans will propose The Invest in Colorado Act. This will provide an investment of \$100 million dollars into our roads and bridges. The ability to move people, goods and services across our state is vital.

Having a strong infrastructure is key to improving the needs of Colorado's economy and builds on the needs for our future success.

We all love Colorado's environment, and we, along with our families' breathe the same air and drink the same water as all Coloradans, but we realize that we must not hamstring our economic potential by implementing renewable energy standards that are not only unrealistic but unnecessary.

SB 252 from last session has not only put a financial strain on rural Colorado families, including our poorest counties in the state, but an unnecessary burden on businesses struggling to survive in these economically distressed areas.

The voice of rural Colorado is being heard loud and clear by House Republicans and I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will hear it as well.

This session Representatives Saine, Scott and Conti, will each introduce bills to either repeal SB 252, or at least change or reduce the renewable energy mandate in rural Colorado.

Additionally, Representative Humphrey will have a bill to classify all hydro-electric power produced in Colorado as renewable energy to help reduce the effects of the mandate.

Renewable energy can be something we work together to develop if it's done in a way that is economically responsible for Colorado.

In traveling around the state, we continued to see the invaluable asset our natural resources are to Colorado's economy. The Oil and Gas industry provides over \$1.5 Billion in Public Revenue to our state, and employs over 100,000 Coloradans. This industry is the life blood of many areas of our state.

I speak for all Republicans when I say we understand our obligation to protect our natural resources and protect our environment, but House Republicans will stand firm against any further warrantless attacks on Colorado's Oil and Gas industry.

Colorado cannot afford any further loss of jobs due to legislation passed at the Capitol.

We cannot have a conversation about improving jobs and the economy without also discussing education in our state. One of our greatest assets is our children. As a father of 3 school age children and another on the way, I can say that I want to see my children receive the best education possible, and to have all the tools and skills they need to compete in their future. I am not alone. I believe every parent and grandparent in our state wants the same thing for their children or grandchildren.

Many of the education reforms discussed last session were welcomed by House Republicans. But when you look at the state of our economy, conditioning these reforms on a billion dollar a year tax increase was bad policy.

When you consider this bill passed with no Republican support, it's no wonder Coloradans defeated it by a two-to-one margin.

The day after Amendment 66 lost at the polls, House Republicans rolled out our education reform agenda that will continue to improve our schools but will do so using existing resources.

In this upcoming session, Representative Wilson will introduce legislation to provide more spending transparency in our schools.

With our ever increasing enrollments in our charter schools, Representative Szabo will introduce a bill that will ensure that all schools have the same opportunity to provide safe and equitable facilities to their students. Representative Murray we will introduce a bill for a Charter Transportation Grant Program that will encourage districts and charters to work together in innovative ways.

We must also better serve our English Language Learner population, which is more than 110,000 in the state. Representative Navarro will once again introduce her English Language Proficiency Act to give English Language Learner students more time and resources to be successful, and give their teachers more professional development and tools to provide meaningful education to these students.

There are over 850,000 children in our K-12 enrollment, and we have to recognize that not all children learn the same. So we must continue to support all forms of education in our state.

This session, let's pass education reforms that will benefit all our schools and keep Colorado's economic recovery on track. .

Members, citizen input should be integral in our efforts; it helps us better understand how our ideas will affect their lives. To help facilitate our ability to listen to constituents, Representative Scott will introduce a bill to establish remote testimony for citizens in our state. What we do here must reflect the positions of our constituents, and our best chance to do that is by listening to Colorado.

One of the core responsibilities of government is to protect its citizens, but members, allowing citizens the right to protect themselves is equally important.

Taking away tools from our citizens to protect themselves, especially when it does nothing to improve public safety is wrong.

Colleagues, policy disagreements are expected under the gold dome, but when legislation, rushed through with no bipartisan support, causes recall elections and secession movements; this legislative body is failing Colorado.

There are over 2 million people represented by the Minority caucus. Each of us represents nearly 80,000 men, women, and children.

Last session, we shared long hours of debate on several controversial bills. With rare exception, amendments offered by the Minority were voted down.

Over and over again, we were reminded that we did not have the votes. We know we are the minority, but we represent over 2 million people who have a right to be represented here.

There are issues that we fundamentally disagree on, but rather than let the partisanship impede progress, let's cooperate, let's have healthy debates and arrive at decisions that are best for all of the citizens of this state.

We are willing to work together, and begin today optimistic we can cooperate.

I hope my colleagues across the aisle share these feelings and welcome our contribution the same as we welcome theirs.

Once again we all find ourselves back here, under the gold dome, facing remarkable opportunity.

I saw opportunity in Colorado, and used hard work and determination to make my entrepreneurial dreams a reality. Yet I am no different than thousands of other people who have come to Colorado in pursuit of their own American dream.

While I hope opportunity remains abundant in Colorado, I believe we must remember our scope as legislators: For our role is not to control the industries that drive our state, but enable an environment help drive them further. Our strength is not simply the ability to make rules but to remove barriers to success. And finally, our privilege is not the ability to speak to the all citizens of this state, but the chance to listen to everything that is Colorado.

Thank you and God bless us all.

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