

**2023 State of State Address As Prepared for Delivery for Colorado Governor Jared Polis -
January 17, 2023**

Intro

To Speaker McCluskie

President Fenberg

Majority Leader Duran

Majority Leader Moreno

All the Members of the General Assembly, which for the first time in our history is a majority women,

Lieutenant Governor Primavera,

Treasurer Young

Attorney General Weiser,

Secretary of State Griswold,

Our dedicated First Gentleman Reis,

Members of the State Board of Education,

Justices of the Colorado Supreme Court,

Members of the Cabinet,

And members of the Colorado Delegation to the 118th Congress of the United States

Welcome.

Today our administration is standing on the threshold between four years past and four years to come. We are middle-aged! But God willing our mid-life crisis is in the past! I have a bit less hair than four years ago, but more wisdom and experience.

We've gone through a lot these last four years, Colorado. COVID-19. Shootings. Devastating wildfires. Record inflation. Spiraling hate speech.

But Coloradans should know that no matter what comes our way, I'll continue to fight everyday to protect our state.

Colorado is unique, we always have been. We are a state that just this year voted to cut the income tax again while legalizing mushrooms.

Our state might be shaped like a square but the political pundits can't put us in a box, so they label us whatever one color they see - red, blue, purple. I see a harmonious rainbow of colorful opinions that make up our state of pragmatic westerners. So as we start this new session let's not forget who we are, let's not get lost in zero-sum politics, and let's focus on working together for good results.

We've seen the consequences of divisiveness and what happens when we retreat into silos and stop having productive conversations, and that's just not who we are. With extreme partisanship grinding progress to a halt in Washington, it is more important than ever to lead the Colorado way.

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That means showing up and coming together when duty calls. We dig in, setting aside our differences, and we get to work on the thorny issues. We move forward together, making important decisions and compromises in pursuit of REAL results that improve our lives.

None of us in this chamber are here because it's easy. We're here because we believe in this work. We believe in a better tomorrow for our children. A Colorado for All.

As I stand before you today, I'm recommitting myself and my administration to bold ideas that move Colorado forward. To take on our greatest challenges with determination, optimism, and the voices of all Coloradans.

Together we will build on our successes from these last four years, but we aren't for one second resting on them.

Like the Nugget's Nikola Jokic (Yo-Kitch), who won back to back MVP awards, but continues fighting for that championship alongside his teammates.

Or Gandalf the Grey from the Lord of the Rings, who fought the Balrog through Moria's underworld, helping Frodo escape, and then returned as Gandalf the White to help defeat Sauron's army and give Frodo the chance to destroy the ring.

And like Trey Parker and Matt Stone, who created the hit show South Park and then one of the most successful Broadway musicals of all time. Now they're tackling their greatest challenge of all - Casa Bonita - which we're thrilled will be opening this May. I got a sneak peak last week. Y'all are gonna love it.

What do these folks have in common? Yo-kitch, Gandalf, Trey and Matt, and Colorado believe the next chapter is the best one - and I do too. Our best days are yet to come.

Three years from now, in 2026, we will celebrate our Centennial State's 150th birthday and the United States of America will celebrate 250. The words we need to learn are sesqui-centennial for Colorado and semi-quin-centennial for America.

Thank you to Senator Zenzinger and Representative Catlin who shepherded the legislation to create the America 250 - Colorado 150 Commission, ensuring we make the celebration one for the ages.

But really it is all of us who will decide what we are celebrating, because we are the living heritage of this State and together we are the architects of its future.

As we prepare to mark this historic milestone, we must ask ourselves:
How can we learn to pronounce sesqui-centennial and semi-quin-centennial correctly? Just kidding.

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We should ask ourselves:

- 1) Who do we as Coloradans want to be in our 150th year?
- 2) How can our work now and over the next few years make that Colorado possible?
- 3) And finally, how can Colorado's example shine a bright light for the nation?

In Colorado, we've already taken action to protect a woman's right to choose.

We've built a world-class voting system to ensure that every Coloradan can make their voice heard.

Joining us today is Secretary of State Jenna Griswold, a champion for voting rights and access.

We also fight for every person's right to be who they are and love who they love.

We believe in freedom of the press and freedom of speech. And we defend everyone's right to live with dignity.

In Colorado, we lead by example, enshrining these values in all that we say and do. By the time America is 250, we hope for a country that also respects freedom and the personal health decisions of women, transgender Americans, and all Americans. We want secure, accessible elections for every voter. And, of course, we must secure our borders and fix our inhumane, broken immigration system.

People have always come to America in search of freedom, safety and economic opportunity, often escaping brutal oppression from authoritarian, communist dictators like Maduro in Venezuela. But we as a country haven't always lived up to those values. We are doing our part in Colorado to support migrants, and a special thanks to the City of Denver, Larimer County and so many nonprofits including Organizacion Papagayo (PAPA -GUY-OH), Vive Wellness and The American Friends Service Committee, for being great partners in ensuring every migrant coming to our state is treated in the most humane way possible. They are here with us today, please join me in thanking them. (UPPER GALLERY - TO THE RIGHT)

But we need our federal government to act. The time is now.

We are joined today by Representatives Neguse and Crow, as well as our two newest Representatives Pettersen and Caraveo. Thank you all for taking these Colorado values to Washington D.C. (IN FRONT TO THE RIGHT)

Colorado can help shape our country's quest to become a more perfect union by setting the pace of progress, fighting for liberty, and delivering on our promises.

So, when Colorado is 150 years old, who do we want to be?

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I'm sure many of us have been asked that dreaded question, "where do you see yourself in five years?" I often ask it when I'm interviewing people for jobs. It can be a tough question, but when it comes to the future of our state, it's also a powerful question.

Let's start with housing.

Many Coloradans are struggling to find a place where they can afford to live. Many more are being forced out of their neighborhoods with no hope of ever living close to where they work. This means more traffic, lost time and money spent on long commutes, more air pollution, and greater economic and workforce challenges.

This is not just a local problem. Since issues like transportation, water, energy, and more inherently cross jurisdictional boundaries, it becomes a statewide problem that impacts all of us.

We need an approach that creates more housing now, protects Colorado's resources and reduces sprawl. It's clear that the actions of one jurisdiction impact others, especially when it comes to housing, our environment, transportation systems, roads and transit, water and sewer infrastructure, and indeed our economic prosperity and growth.

Frankly, Coloradans see it that way too and it's why we're all here today. The people of Colorado expect us to deliver to make housing more affordable.

And if we don't act now, we will soon face the point of no return.

Just look West. In California, decades of poor planning has led to interruptions of drinking water and electricity for entire towns and cities, average home prices over a million dollars in major cities, and 16-lane freeways with bumper to bumper traffic.

We are not California, we are Colorado.

And I refuse to let us make those same mistakes.

When Colorado is 150 years old, we need our state to have more housing for every Colorado budget, close to where jobs are.

You know the last time Colorado made major land use changes was in 1974 — before I, and most of you, were born! We were a different state then. Over the last half century, housing prices have increased roughly four times the rate of income. That means a house today costs over four times as much compared to today's income levels than 60 years ago, putting the dream of homeownership out of range for too many Coloradans. This has got to stop. We need to bring our land use policy into the 21st century and prepare ourselves for success these next 150 years.

We need more housing now. It's simple supply and demand.

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These aren't new ideas. In fact the Good Book offers similar urban planning advice in Isaiah 54:2-3

Make your tent bigger, stretch them out and make them wider, do not hold back. Make the ropes longer and stakes stronger, because you will spread out to the right and to the left, and your children will live again in cities that were once abandoned.

Let us heed the words of Isaiah in our times. It's time to legalize more housing choices for every Coloradan and give homeowners more freedom, revitalize our cities and towns, while protecting the character of our state.

Colorado can be a place where people live where they want to live – close to their jobs, their kids' schools and efficient, low-cost transit. We can save Coloradans money on housing and we can do it while meeting our climate goals!

Building smart, efficient housing statewide, especially in urban communities and job centers, won't just reduce costs, it will save energy, conserve our water, and protect the lands and wildlife that are so important to our Colorado way of life.

It will also support our vision for public transit, which is to create lower-cost ways to travel that gives Coloradans more choices and leads to more breathable air and less traffic.

Together we have laid the foundation for a statewide road and transit system that meets the needs of Coloradans. First, with investments from the historic Senate Bill 260, and then with the creation of the Front Range Rail District, which is scheduled to deliver a draft service plan by 2024. Thank you to President Fenberg, Senator Winter and Senator Zenzinger, for your leadership on those bills. Over the next few years we will continue working toward that vision, and I am asking CDOT to work with local transit partners to identify and take the next steps towards better lower cost transit options.

More housing now is for people, for planet, and for prosperity. It's for people who need a roof over their head and who want to recognize the dream of home ownership and wealth building. It's for the planet to reduce our emissions and conserve water. And it's for our prosperity as a state to ensure that businesses can hire people to power our economy.

Let me be clear - Housing policy is climate policy.

Housing policy is economic policy.

Housing policy is transportation policy.

Housing Policy is water policy.

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Housing policy is public health and equity policy.

It impacts EVERY part of our lives, which is why it's so critical that we get this right. We need everyone to come to the table and work toward a real solution.

Now I know this won't be easy. Nothing worth fighting for ever is. But in Colorado, we don't shy away from tough challenges; we roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Since 2019 we have invested billions of dollars into housing. We created the first ever dedicated funding source for affordable housing and put American Rescue Plan Act dollars toward projects around the state. Now, voters have passed Prop 123 to dedicate hundreds of millions of dollars in the coming years. But we can't just buy our way out of this, we have to break down government barriers, expand private property rights, and reduce regulations to actually construct more housing options at a lower cost so all Coloradans can thrive.

We took a first step to break down those barriers and support local innovation with House Bill 1271. I want to thank Speaker McCluskie, Representative Jodeh, and Senator Gonzales for their efforts on this bill.

One of the grants from that bill went to support the City of Greeley, which utilized funding to encourage different types of housing, including homes with a smaller footprint, options for accessory dwelling units, manufactured homes, micro homes and more. They are also creating more home ownership opportunities in partnership with Habitat for Humanity.

Today we're joined by City Manager Raymond Lee and his team, thank you for your work.
(UPPER GALLERY - MIDDLE LEFT)

We're seeing this kind of local innovation and leadership in other parts of the state, as well.

Summit County and the Town of Breckenridge are building a new 52 unit workforce apartment complex near Downtown Breckenridge to make it easier for workers to find a place to live in their own community.

Projects like this typically take 18-24 months just to get approved, but thanks to Summit County donating the land and the leadership of local officials, this one got the greenlight after just six months, leading to 52 new homes years ahead of schedule and millions of dollars in savings.

From Breckenridge we are joined by Mayor Eric Mamula (MAM-YU-LAH), members of the Town Council, and Senior Planner Laurie Best. From Summit County we are joined by Commissioners Tamara Pogue, Elizabeth Lawrence, and Joshua Blanchard, and Housing Director Jason Dietz.

Please join me in welcoming them all today. (UPPER GALLERY LEFT CORNER) & MAYOR IN WELL TO LEFT

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But the innovation and savings don't end there.

Because Summit County is partnering with modular home company Fading West out of Buena Vista, they are saving roughly 20% on construction costs and months of construction time. If you can believe it, Fading West can build a home in roughly 18 working days, compared to about a year for traditionally built homes. I had the chance to visit their factory in November, and it's so exciting to see this innovation at work.

Today we're joined by Fading West CEO Charlie Chupp and Vice President of Sales and Strategic Partnerships Eric Schaefer. They and other modular and prefabricated home companies are committed to building more housing opportunities quicker and at a lower cost. Please join me in thanking them for their cost-saving innovations. (UPPER GALLERY - LEFT CORNER)

But listen, the reality is that projects like these are the exception, not the rule.

The more common scenario is that housing projects are rejected or mired in years of red tape – adding costs and time.

I'm here asking you to help me protect the Colorado we love, so Coloradans can stay in their communities and live near where they work, protect our open space, and reduce traffic. Let's make sure Colorado stays Colorado.

This means that we need more flexible zoning to allow more housing, streamlined regulations that cut through red tape, expedited approval processes for projects like modular housing, sustainable development, and more building in transit oriented communities.

Of course, we also recognize that the state must be a contributing partner in this work, so we are aggressively making parcels of state-owned land available for housing. One example is the Dowd Junction project in Vail Valley, where we are planning to build 80 units of workforce housing on state land. My budget includes funding for other governments and public land owners like counties, school districts, cities, and transportation districts to proactively partner with the private sector to build more housing, and I call on all of them to join our efforts.

We also want to continue our work to reduce property taxes for Coloradans.

Last year we saved Coloradans more than \$700 million through historic property tax relief for homeowners and businesses, while protecting funding for schools thanks to the work of Senator Hansen and Representative Weissman. But residential values grew more than 26% over the last two years, much more than most people's incomes went up during the same period. If we don't act, property taxes will go up by hundreds, even thousands, of dollars. We need to prevent these steep increases by taking decisive action.

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We must also work together to pass a long-term property tax relief package that reduces residential and commercial property taxes and creates a long-term mechanism to protect homeowners from being priced out of their homes, while protecting school funding. This will make Colorado more competitive and more affordable.

I'm proud that this year, Colorado is the first state in the country where every homeowner can defer paying some of these increases in their property taxes until their property is sold. No one should lose their home simply because its value, and therefore property taxes, went up. I want to thank our state treasurer, Dave Young, for his tireless work to help property owners and I look forward to finding opportunities to expand deferrals to save people money on property taxes.

We should also make the senior homestead tax exemption portable. Our seniors should be able to downsize without having to pay higher property taxes, freeing up their larger old homes for younger, growing families.

A more just tax system that promotes prosperity for all is a passion I share with many of you in this chamber. While we don't always agree on the path, I know all of us want to save Coloradans money!

It's no secret that I, and most economists, despise the income tax. I was proud to have supported two successful income tax cuts at the ballot and since I took office our income tax rate has gone from 4.63% to 4.44%, helping produce strong economic growth and low unemployment. We have worked together to close special interest tax loopholes to pay for the income tax cut and provided even greater tax relief to Colorado families, seniors and small businesses. Last year we also worked together to send every tax filer \$750 nearly a year ahead of schedule, providing real inflation relief just when people needed it most! Together, we can and should do more.

I don't expect that we can fully eliminate the income tax by our 150th anniversary, but let's continue to make progress. With healthy budget surpluses from our strong economy, we should further reduce the income tax rate for everybody while doubling down on relief for working families with policies like expanding the earned income tax credit. We have the tools to save people money. It's what the voters sent us here to do.

Making our state more affordable and creating more housing now is truly one of the most effective ways to reduce homelessness. We continue seeking proposals from local governments to utilize the \$200 Million that this legislature invested last year to reduce homelessness. Thank you to Representatives Woodrow and Valdez, and Senators Gonzales, Hansen, Fields, and Coleman for your work securing that transformational funding. There are many approaches that have worked in other states, and we hope to see those proven models replicated here.

This is going to be a lot of work, and it's going to take all of us in this chamber to get it done. We are here to solve the big problems, and the cost of housing tops that list.

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This is what Coloradans are calling for, and it's up to us to take action to protect our shared future.

Just as the future of our state is tied to housing, it's also tied to water.

Water is life in Colorado and the west, it's as simple as that. But we're at a crossroads.

Increased demand, chronic and extreme drought, conflicts with other states, and devastating climate events are threatening this critical lifesource – and we've all seen the impacts.

Wildfires have destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres, and devastated entire communities.

Farmers and ranchers across the state fear that Colorado won't have the water resources to sustain the next generation of agricultural jobs.

When Colorado is 150, I want our state to have the water resources necessary for our farms, communities, and industries to thrive, and the tools in place to protect our state's waterways and defend our rights.

Your work around housing will truly go a long way to protect water - our most precious resource. But we must also continue investing in water projects around the state.

We don't want to see a single dollar left on the table.

For every dollar the state invested in Water Plan grants last year, we got four dollars back. In the last fiscal year, we awarded more than \$23 million in grants that supported nearly \$100 million in projects, and we're hoping to once again position Colorado to punch above our weight and pull down major investments from the federal government.

This includes funding for water infrastructure and water quality projects like the Arkansas Valley Conduit. This project has been years in the making, and the combination of state and federal funding will help get it off the ground, delivering clean drinking water to dozens of communities throughout Southern Colorado.

These dollars also translate to restoration of critical streams and waterways, greater access to water for our producers and ranchers, and water security for our communities.

But the most important thing we can do for water security is protect our waterways and rights.

Hotter, drier conditions have strained our resources in a time when demand continues to grow.

Our rivers and streams aren't just life sources for Colorado, but for the entire American West.

We must continue to fight for our rights and lead the way to a sustainable future.

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The road ahead will be paved with challenges, but we aren't leaving anything to chance. We are gearing up, and bringing in the expertise we need to defend what is ours.

This is about water, but it's also about our future, our livelihoods, and the very foundation of who we are as Coloradans.

The same goes for our approach to climate.

We have already secured more than 80% renewable energy by 2030. By the time Colorado is 150 years old, we look forward to having a clear path to 100% renewable energy by 2040.

And from there, we will work to make progress towards our statewide climate goals.

Our work around housing and more sustainable development is a critically important part of this progress.

But we also remain focused on investing in clean transportation, accelerating the use of renewables, reducing oil and gas emissions, and holding polluters accountable.

And I'm proud to propose \$120 million annually in new, clean energy tax credits.

With this tax relief and incentives, we can improve our air quality, accelerate innovation, and make more rapid progress towards our goals, while saving people money at the pump and on their utility bills, and increasing access to clean, low-cost transportation options.

We've made a lot of progress on electric vehicles, with 10% of vehicles sold now electric - making us 5th in the nation, and these tax credits will help us continue pushing toward more zero emission cars and trucks sooner rather than later.

This builds on the work of the legislature to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit and Colorado's Child Tax Credit, putting more money back into the pockets of Coloradans. Thank you to Representatives Emily Sirota and Mike Weissman, Senator Chris Hansen and Majority Leader Dominick Moreno for bringing those bills across the finish line.

We are also focused on continued development of clean energy technologies of the future like geothermal and hydrogen.

As Chair of the bipartisan Western Governors Association I am championing geothermal energy through our "Heat Beneath our Feet" initiative. And I'm excited that my budget request provides funding for Colorado Mesa University to expand campus-wide geothermal systems, with a goal to become the first university in America to be fully powered by geothermal.

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And under the leadership of Will Toor at the Energy Office, our administration is also leading a multi-state consortium with Utah, Wyoming, and New Mexico to gain additional federal investment as a hydrogen hub.

These efforts will help us capitalize on these untapped resources, close the 20% gap to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2040, reduce emissions, clean our air, and do our part on climate. They would also help us prevent the kind of spikes in utility bills that Coloradans are experiencing due to high costs of natural gas.

The Texas storm in 2021 showed us just how vulnerable we are to commodity price swings, and the Suncor shutdown has done the same.

I'm committed to doing everything in my power to alleviate the impacts of the temporary Suncor disaster on Coloradans and their families who are already struggling with inflation and high costs. I've already lifted regulatory burdens around trucking hours, truck weight limits, and directed agencies to ease-up on pipeline transporting requirements during the Suncor shutdown. My administration has also been working to secure outside supply to minimize disruption.

But the only long-term solution is to continue pursuing low-cost, reliable, renewable energy. We simply must end our reliance on costly fossil fuels, improve energy security, and save people money.

This is why the Electric vehicle and ebike tax credits I'm proposing are so important, and why we've focussed on increasing access to electric vehicles and transit options since day one. This tax relief amplifies the work of the Front Range Rail District, free bus fare months, and the need for greater transit options.

I look forward to working with the General Assembly to make Colorado a place where geothermal, hydrogen, and carbon capture technologies can and will succeed.

While we do our part to improve air quality and reduce pollution, we are also preparing our state for the hotter, drier climate that we are experiencing.

Since 2019, Colorado has supported response efforts for more than 2,000 wildfires, including the three largest in history AND the most devastating. It was only a few weeks ago that we marked the one-year anniversary of the Marshall Fire in Boulder County, a reminder that the threat of wildfire is no longer seasonal. It's year round, and we need to be ready.

Colorado has invested in some of the most effective fire prevention and response measures out there - from our state's first Firehawk helicopter to forest restoration and other proven mitigation efforts. I want to thank President Fenberg and the Joint Budget Committee for leading the way on these resources.

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But we know there is more work ahead.

We must continue strengthening our aerial capabilities, supporting our professional and volunteer firefighters, and preparing for a hotter, drier climate.

We must also expand our fire prevention efforts, including building fire defense in communities that are at risk, and elevating the work of the Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program.

Getting this right is critical for the health of our communities and the future of our state.

But it's not about just the health of our environment, it's also the health of our people. Unfortunately, after housing expenses, healthcare costs are some of the highest that families face.

Too many Coloradans are forced to choose between the care they desperately need, paying their rent or mortgage, or putting food on the table.

Our own Lt. Governor Dianne Primavera knows this story all too well.

Dianne was diagnosed with breast cancer, and told she had five years to live. With two young daughters to raise, her life was turned upside down and she was forced to wrestle with the questions that many other Coloradans have faced.

Can I support my family and pay for my treatments? Will this devastate us financially? Will I be there for my children?

We are proud to say that Dianne didn't just survive, she has thrived. She dedicated her career to public service - serving as a legislator and in state government - and today she's the best Lt. Governor in the country and the head of our Office of Saving People Money on Health Care. Please join me in recognizing our Lt. Governor Dianne Primavera!

Together we've reduced costs for health care coverage through Reinsurance, the Colorado Option, Omni Salud, and expanded Medicaid and CHIP. Just last week we learned that more than 34,000 people have enrolled in Colorado Option plans, saving Coloradans Millions of dollars and surpassing original estimates for enrollment.

We've saved people money by capping insulin costs, by passing pharma rebates on to consumers, and increasing hospital transparency.

We've also taken the first steps to fix our behavioral health care system with the creation of the Behavioral Health Administration and investment of American Rescue Plan Act funding.

But we have a lot more work to do. The United States spends far more on healthcare than our peers around the world, and our results are no better.

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Meanwhile, Coloradans still pay some of the highest costs for healthcare, particularly hospital care. Sadly, we are among the top 10 states for hospital cost, price and profit. Let's change that.

Our work to save people money on healthcare is more urgent than ever before, and we must leave no stone unturned.

When we turn 150, I want Colorado to be a state where everyone can get the care they need easily and affordably.

First, we have to continue saving people money on their prescriptions.

Prescription drug costs still take up too much of a person's monthly expenses, with costs rising faster than inflation. In 2021, nearly 10% of Coloradans were unable to fill a prescription because of cost.

With us today is Karisa, a type 1 Diabetic. Thanks to our work to cap insulin costs - the first legislation of its kind in the country - she no longer has to choose between buying groceries and the insulin she needs. She described that bill as "saving her life" and we are so grateful to have her here today. Please join me in welcoming Karisa! (UPPER GALLERY - RIGHT HAND SIDE)

Karisa's not alone. Because of that legislation, every diabetic in Colorado can get their insulin at an affordable price. I know this is personal to many of you, and I want to thank Senator Roberts and Senator Priola for your incredible work.

There is more we can and must do.

By saving people money on their prescriptions, we can prevent the rationing of medication that leads to worse health outcomes and ultimately higher healthcare costs.

That's why, in addition to our efforts to import lower-cost drugs from Canada, we'll be working to build on the work of Senator Gonzales, Senator Jaquez Lewis, and Representative Kennedy to strengthen the Prescription Drug Affordability Board so we can continue making progress to save people money on life saving medications. Like our prescription drug rebate legislation last year, we will also continue to hold middlemen accountable for cutting the cost of prescription drugs so employers can pass savings to consumers and reduce premiums.

But this is just one piece of the puzzle.

We have worked with the healthcare industry in good faith to lower costs, but not all of them have held up their end of the bargain.

Some health insurers continue to profit from Coloradans while administrative costs, unrelated to patient care, continue soaring. Insurers need to step it up for lower costs and better outcomes.

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Similarly, some large hospital systems are making record profits, paying zero taxes, and sitting on enormous reserves while overcharging customers. Meanwhile, they are consolidating providers, which drives up costs and leaves fewer options for Coloradans.

It's time that we hold them accountable.

First and foremost, that means stop overcharging patients.

It also means that nonprofit hospitals must work with their communities to live up to that promise, providing benefits like mental health, maternity care, healthcare workforce growth, and support for social determinants of health like housing and food.

We should build on and strengthen Representative Kennedy and Senator Winter's great work to track these resources and ensure that nonprofit hospitals actually use community benefit dollars for community benefit.

We can and should support the great work of Reinsurance, created by Speaker McCluskie and Senator Rich, to deliver even more savings to consumers through lower insurance premiums.

After healthcare and housing, education is another big cost for many Coloradans.

Access to a quality education is a fundamental right and critical for our economic prosperity.

At 150, I want to see an education system that prepares every child, and learners of all ages, for success.

It starts in early childhood.

Thanks to Representative McLachlan, Senator Bridges and Senator Fields, free, full-day kindergarten saves families thousands of dollars every year.

And thanks to Representative Sirota, Senator Buckner, President Fenberg, so many others, and of course, the people of Colorado, free preschool - launching this fall - will save families at least \$6,000 per year and give our children the best possible start in life.

This is a monumental achievement and today is the first day families can apply to enroll their children. I'm so excited to share that more than 4,300 Colorado families have already started applying.

Today we're joined by Shar Portillo, a teacher at Strasburg Elementary, and her three children Elias (UH-LEE-US) a kindergartener, Ethran (ETH-WREN) a preschooler, and Tyler, who will start preschool this fall!

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Earlier today, the family filled out Tyler's preschool application making them one of the very first to sign up! Thank you Shar, Elias (UH-LEE-US), Ethren, and Tyler for being here with us today. (UPPER GALLERY - CENTER RIGHT)

And to the rest of you out there, tell your friends with three-year-olds to go to [upk.Colorado.gov](https://upk.colorado.gov) today. I'll take a moment so you can text your friends with three-year-olds right now.

We want to support more families like the Portillos with even more hours of free preschool. I'm calling for the legislature to refer a ballot measure that would allow Colorado to utilize excess Prop EE funds for preschool, just as the legislature did on a bipartisan basis for excess marijuana funds in 2015. This would give voters the choice to support more services for more children, and help lower-income families enroll their child in full-day preschool.

And for K12 learners, I'm proposing in my supplemental and budget amendment package today that we raise per pupil funding by an additional \$925 - or an additional 20,000 dollars for Colorado classrooms every year - building on last year's historic raise made possible by Senator Zenzinger, Senator Lundeen, Speaker McCluskie and Representative McLachlan.

Districts can use these funds to increase pay, like the Lake County School District that raised teacher pay by 16% in just one year with a major bump for staff like bus drivers, para professionals and others. Or how Colorado's two largest school districts are starting their teachers at just over \$50,000 per year. These new funds can also support smaller class sizes, revive extracurriculars, or fund mental health support for our students.

And today, I am proud to submit a proposal to buy down the Budget Stabilization Factor to its lowest level ever and set our state on a path to finally eliminate it altogether during my second term, fulfilling our state's commitment to our schools.

The last few years have been tough for our K12 learners and educators, and those challenges are reflected in test scores, particularly math.

To help improve achievement, we are proposing new investments in high-quality math curricula and training to ensure that our educators have the support they need to help all of our students thrive. And we are increasing our commitment to high-quality before and after school programming – saving parents thousands of dollars.

This is a key part of helping students graduate with the skills they need to succeed. Another key component is increasing the number of students who graduate with more than a diploma.

In Colorado, roughly 53% of high school graduates earn college credit in high school, saving them an estimated \$53 million on tuition costs each year. But that number can and should be much higher.

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Let's ensure that every student has access to career-connected learning while they are in high school and let's reward those schools that are doing more to help their students succeed in the workforce and in life! Whether it's dual and concurrent enrollment, career and technical education, work-based learning and apprenticeship, or even receiving an industry certification or associate's degree.

But we don't want the innovation to end at graduation, we want to create more training pathways to help Coloradans shape their own success.

Luke Skywalker wasn't born knowing the ways of the force, he was trained under the guidance of Jedi Master Yoda.

"Two available jobs for every unemployed person, Colorado has."

That's right, we have two available jobs for every unemployed person today in Colorado. Colorado might not need more than a small council of Jedis, but there are many other industries where we need lots of talent!

At 150, I want every Coloradan to have access to the skills needed to get a good-paying job that supports them and their families, and a workforce that meets the needs of our businesses to power our mighty economic engine of growth.

This is another reason why our work on housing is so important. Coloradans have to be able to afford to live in our communities where they can earn a good living and companies must be able to find the workers they need to thrive.

We've already made historic investments in Colorado's workforce. We're creating regional training opportunities, supporting our local workforce centers, increasing disability employment opportunities, and adopting skills-based hiring practices and apprenticeship opportunities.

I want to thank some of the legislators who worked on these critical bills, including Speaker McCluskie, Senator Rich, Senator Lundeen and Senator Bridges.

Last year we created Care Forward Colorado, which makes it completely free for Colorado students to pursue careers in health care at any community or technical colleges, and guess what, demand and enrollment increased. But we want to go beyond just healthcare and into other areas where we are experiencing shortages.

I'm proposing we expand Care Forward Colorado to include free training for other in-demand fields in the public and private sector like construction, firefighting, law enforcement, nursing, and early childhood education.

In addition, we know that the number of Coloradans pursuing postsecondary education or training right out of high school has been declining.

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To address this challenge, I am proposing a new scholarship for graduating high school seniors in the class of 2024 who pursue postsecondary education, training, or certifications.

The reality is that today's economy demands access to quick skill acquisition, whether that is a one, two or four year degree, professional training, an apprenticeship, or on-the job training. We are going to jumpstart access to training to help more Coloradans be career ready, earn more, and power our economy

This work must be done in collaboration with all of those involved – from education, to labor and unions, to training providers, and of course the business community.

We also want to continue investing in the hardworking state employees that drive Colorado forward, who plow our interstates, staff our state hospital in Pueblo, manage our prisons and more. Our state workers deserve our respect, fair, competitive wages, and good benefits. I want to thank Colorado WINS for their partnership.

Together, we negotiated a compensation package that – if funded by this legislature – will ensure we can attract and retain the very best talent for Colorado's state government.

I look forward to working with all of you to support the future of our workforce and economy, and together, maybe we can help more Coloradans not just aspirationally answer the question “where do you see yourself five years from now,” but actually achieve their career goals.

As we think about our future, we also have to think about how we can make Colorado a safer place to live.

Every person deserves a safe home and a safe community, and in three years I want Colorado to be closing in on our goal of becoming one of the top ten safest states.

Right now, Colorado falls in the middle of the pack on crime rates, but that's not good enough. We can and we must do better.

I want to commend our legislators who helped pass last year's public safety package especially- Senator Janet Buckner, Representative Valdez, Representative Ricks, Representative Bacon, and so many others. From investments in recruitment and retention for local law enforcement to physical improvements in our communities and support for proven crime prevention strategies - this bipartisan collaboration is already beginning to have an impact.

Thanks to this work, the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office, like many others, received a grant that will support new and existing officers, making their communities safer for everyone. Today we're joined by Sheriff Tyler Brown, who actually came straight to the Capitol from a swearing in ceremony for new officers who were recruited with support from the funding that you passed last year.

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Join me in welcoming Sheriff Tyler Brown and thanking him for all his incredible work! (UPPER GALLERY - DIRECT RIGHT)

We're also joined by Summit County Sheriff Jaime Fitzsimons, Estes Park Chief of Police David Hayes, Pueblo Police Chief Chris Noeller, Chief of Auraria Campus Police Mike Phibbs, and Chief Matt Packard of the Colorado of the State Patrol.

Thank you for the commitment of all of our men and women in blue for keeping our communities safe!

Equally important is the work of our community organizations who are helping kids achieve future success.

Thanks to legislation passed last year with the leadership of Representative Daugherty, Representative Gonzales Gutierrez, Senator Coleman and Senator Hinrichsen, Boys and Girls Clubs in Colorado received funding to launch a pilot across 21 club sites in 15 counties to provide meaningful enrichment opportunities outside of school to help youth reach their full potential and avoid entering the justice system.

These services will reach thousands of kids across our state. Today we are joined by the 2022 Youth of the Year Winner, Ameya (UH-MY-UH) Garcia, her parents, and Boys & Girls Club leaders from around the state, including Executive Director Kaycee Headrick. Please join me in thanking them for all their work! (UPPER GALLERY MIDDLE RIGHT)

To build on this work, I'm proposing an additional package that will provide even more resources for local law enforcement officers and community organizations doing work on the ground.

This funding will also help us crack down on auto theft with stronger tools like technology to help us locate and return stolen vehicles, an auto-theft task force, and greater support for District Attorneys in communities with high rates of auto theft to help them successfully prosecute the criminals responsible. Last fall I called on the Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice to get tough on auto theft sentencing, and just last week the Commission's Sentencing Task Force moved that recommendation forward overwhelmingly. I look forward to seeing the General Assembly take up this important recommendation.

This is an issue that has affected some of you in this room and so many of our fellow Coloradans, and I look forward to working with all of you to find an effective solution.

We're also investing in proven crime prevention strategies; expanding the capacity of the Colorado Bureau of Investigation; and improving school safety by helping our schools make necessary security improvements, expanding threat assessment training, and creating a one-stop shop to help schools and parents get the resources they need.

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I want to recognize a dedicated partner in our efforts to make Colorado safer, Attorney General Phil Weiser.

Partnership with our local leaders is also critical to making Colorado safer, and I want to thank Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers, Aurora Mayor Mike Coffman, and Denver Mayor Michael Hancock, who is represented today by Acting Mayor Laura Aldrete (ALL-DRETTI), for their leadership. (SITTING IN FRONT TO THE LEFT)

These mayors of the three largest cities in our state - Republican and Democratic - have helped identify tools to successfully fight crime in their communities and together we want the state to step up and be a more constructive partner in this work. I join their recent bipartisan call to action including: greater penalties for car theft, deterring unlawful weapon possession by felons, and cracking down on ghost guns, which are completely untraceable and increasingly being used to carry out violent crimes.

In the session ahead, let's take action on these and other priorities, continuing our bipartisan work to make our state safer.

The horrific shooting at Club Q is one of too many examples of how a crime can inflict pain and fear on an entire community.

I want to take a moment to remember those who were lost that night:

- Daniel Aston
- Kelly Loving
- Ashley Paugh (PAW)
- Derrick Rump
- Raymond Green Vance

I also want to recognize an act of heroism and two heroes here with us today.

These individuals were in the club that night. After the shooter entered and began firing, they brought them to the ground, stopped them, and, in so doing, saved many, many lives.

Please join me in thanking Colorado hero Richard Fierro, his wife Jessica and daughter Kassy-who was injured in the shooting - and Colorado hero Thomas James, for their incredible actions that day. (UPPER GALLERY - RIGHT CORNER)

We should always strive to learn from our experiences and as we move forward, we should strengthen Colorado's Extreme Risk Protection Order law to prevent those who are a risk to themselves or others from getting their hands on a gun. This legislation has been used hundreds of times successfully, but we can do more to spread awareness and make sure it is used when the situation calls for it.

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Right now, loved ones and local law enforcement have the ability to pursue an extreme risk protection order. But why not expand this to include additional petitioners, like District Attorneys?

I look forward to exploring common sense solutions with all of you.

Together, we will continue working to make our communities safer for everyone, and four years from now, we will all have something to celebrate in being one of the safest states in the nation.

James Baldwin said “There is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now.”

So I ask again, who do we want to be when our great state reaches our 150th birthday?

I want us to be a state where every person can find a home in their budget for rent or for purchase, where our water resources are protected and support the needs of our communities and economy. A state where we’ve secured 100% renewable energy by 2040, and every Coloradan can get the education and skills to succeed. I want us to be one of the 10 safest states in the nation. And I want healthcare, and everything in our state, to be more affordable for everyone.

I want our state, and our nation, to be a beacon of hope and freedom for all - no matter your gender, ethnicity, age, race, ability, who you love or who you are. A Colorado for All.

This is what Coloradans want too, and it’s up to us to deliver. If we can do that, we will have secured our future for the next 150 years and be an example for the rest of the country to follow at 250. To put things in perspective that’s barely a quarter Methuselah’s time on earth of 969 years, and less than one tenth the lifetime of Colorado’s oldest 2510 year-old Bristlecone Pine.

This is the future we deserve, so let’s make it happen.

Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated the beginning of a new year.

Instead of resolutions, some people choose a single word to guide them in the year ahead. If I had to choose a word for Colorado, I’d pick “limitless”, because I truly believe that if we work together, what we can do is limitless, and the example we can set for the rest of the country and the world is beyond measure.

Today in 2023, the State of our state is undeniably strong, but we know it can be even stronger, for our potential is truly limitless.

God bless you all, God bless Colorado, and God bless the United States of America.