

Senate President James Coleman Opening Day Remarks as Prepared for Delivery:

Good morning! Welcome to the second regular session of the 75th General Assembly. It is my honor to be with you all this morning to celebrate the beginning of another legislative session.

I'd like to begin by welcoming our guests this morning. So many family and friends, former lawmakers – basically everyone who doesn't have to be here when our debates stretch into the night or, God forbid, the weekend.

They aren't here in the chamber today, but I want to acknowledge my family as well. They are my rock, and I would not be here today without them.

Shayna – my wife, and partner of 25 years, thank you for being there to celebrate my successes, for lifting me up on the more challenging days, and for taking on every day together in partnership.

Naomi and James – one of the main reasons I do this work is for you. To help build a future where every door is open and every opportunity is waiting for you. My first opening day, you were both small enough to sit on my lap. Flash forward ten years, you're behind the wheel of a car. I am so proud of both of you and every day you make me grateful to be your dad.

I would like us all to extend thanks to all our nonpartisan staff, who have seen some changes since we were here this summer for our special session. Join

me in welcoming our new members of the Senate team, and members taking on new roles on the team: Olivia Hart, Mary Ann Admire, Matthew Rivera, Benjamin Noren, Dennis Pinto, and Jerry Touslee.

Welcome to the Senate, we're so happy to have you join the family. And thank you to the returning staff – I'm grateful to work alongside you another year.

If you know me, you know that I don't do any of this alone. I'd like to thank our Senate leadership team – Majority Leader Rodriguez, President Pro Tempore Michaelson Jenet, Assistant Majority Leader Cutter, Caucus Chair Roberts, and our whip, Senator Hinrichsen – for their help in keeping this train on the tracks.

I also can't do this without the greatest Minority Leader this chamber has ever seen, Alamosa's own, Senator Cleave Simpson. It's an honor to lead alongside you.

We must also give a warm welcome to the newest member of the upper chamber: Senator William Lindstedt! Just wait until you see how efficient we are over here.

I'm just kidding though, of course we love our friends in the House. And I'd be remiss if I didn't wish the good Speaker McCluskie well in her final session in the House.

Her work to invest in Colorado's future will be transformative. Whether through implementation of a new school funding formula that ensures resources are going directly to students that need them most, her dedication to protecting Colorado's water future, and her hand in ensuring access to

affordable health care for all – it has been an honor to learn from her and lead alongside her, and I will miss her partnership.

Speaker, don't forget about us on the other side, and please don't be a stranger!

And to Governor Polis, who is also entering his final year as the leader of our state. It's been a privilege to work with you in this leadership capacity and I look forward to all that we'll accomplish together this year. I can't wait to hear your final – and I'm sure best – State of the State tomorrow. Last year I learned that my assigned seat is fully in view on the Colorado Channel. I've been practicing my facial expressions and reactions all week. I'm ready!

Colleagues, we have been through a lot together over the past year. We have fiercely debated policies with one another, we have deliberated on Colorado's toughest issues, we have celebrated wins.

And, colleagues, we have grieved together.

We continue to mourn the unexpected, tragic loss of one of our own: Senator Faith Winter.

Faith's loss is immeasurable, and as we embark on our work this session I hope that we can incorporate her tenacity and the joy that she found in this work into our policies, as well as in the conversations we have with one another.

Because Faith never forgot to be moved by the people behind her policies. She never forgot how to be human in this work – flaws and all.

She would work with anyone who would work with her. A coalition and team builder for the ages, she would not let the letter after someone's name, a district number, or the county they call home get in the way of getting good policy over the finish line.

Policy that puts Coloradans, and Colorado, first.

We will miss her presence in our chamber each and every day. She showed up with a warmth and brightness reflected in the clothing she wore, the fresh flowers on her desk, and, most of all, in her smile and friendly hello.

May we honor Faith not only in memory, but in how we show up for the work and for one another.

Colleagues, we have accomplished so much together.

In just the last year, we stepped up to protect safety net providers through legislation sponsored by Senators Mullica and Kirkmeyer to ensure Coloradans everywhere from Craig, Cortez, to Crowley are able to receive the health care they need.

We set Colorado kids up for greater prosperity by increasing school funding through last year's School Finance Act and creation of the Kids Matter Fund, thanks to Senators Bridges and Kolker.

We made Colorado a national leader in reproductive rights and we have stood up for a woman's right to determine her own future, most recently through passage of legislation like Senators Gonzales and Weissman's Emergency

Medical Treatment and Labor Act and Senators Daugherty and Rodriguez's legislation to implement the will of the voters and guarantee coverage for abortion care to Coloradans on Medicaid.

Over the interim, I had the privilege of visiting every member in their district all across the state:

- Senator Rich was kind enough to drive me through District 7 to see the beauty of the Colorado National Monument and understand the vitality of the Western Slope;
- I traveled up to District 17 to visit Senator Wallace and catch up over a beer at Oskar Blues;
- In District 10, Senator Liston and I toured UCCS and learned about their state-of-the-art cybersecurity systems;
- And I joined Senator Roberts at a town hall in District 8 and got to visit Strawberry Hot Springs.

Not to mention that Minority Leader Simpson and I got to check out some of the coolest cars I've ever seen at a car show in Alamosa.

At each of these visits we reflected on our progress and talked about the challenges still facing Coloradans. Colleagues, I'm here to tell you that we are not as divided as some might want you to believe. Coloradans need a safe place to live, they need to be able to go to the doctor without driving for miles or paying a fortune, they need to be able to afford gas, groceries, and childcare. They need clean drinking water and enough water to work the land and grow livestock and crops. And they need us to stand up for their rights and protect their liberties.

To accomplish these goals, we must be courageous leaders and lawmakers.

Because we are facing headwinds and will have to confront serious challenges.

Our budget environment will mean extremely difficult funding decisions. The federal government's tariffs and haphazard clawbacks of funding for critical programs have sown uncertainty in our economy. They threaten our ability to provide the resources Colorado kids and families, seniors, and rural communities depend on.

Colleagues, we are here to work for Colorado, for Coloradans. I know each of us are capable of doing so, because I have seen us do it before. So, I call on each of you to continue to, once again, govern courageously. My great hope is that each of us shows up here ready to work with one another to make life better for Coloradans.

We have, and will, work across the aisle to build a better Colorado – because the challenges facing our state demand nothing less.

People across our state are having to stretch their dollars further just to make ends meet. Rent and housing prices are leveling off but remain high. Groceries, insurance, utility bills, and everyday expenses are making monthly budgets a math problem that is increasingly more impossible to solve.

We have a role to play here. We won't sit idly by while Coloradans are hurting.

As we enter Colorado's 150th year of statehood, we will tackle the big issues head on. Our work this legislative session can and will improve outcomes for Coloradans in every corner of the state.

We will build an economy that rewards hardworking people and where every Coloradan has a fair chance to thrive.

This year we will work to build up affordable housing stock to increase opportunities for homeownership and lower housing prices for everyone. By stabilizing health care premium rates to keep more people on their plans, we can keep insurance premiums manageable for us all. We will continue to take on deceptive pricing practices and hold corporations accountable who pad their pockets at the expense of working families.

This year, we will also work to streamline workforce programs to help more Coloradans enter highly-skilled careers and fill in-demand positions – strengthening our economy to create more resiliency in the face of turbulent national tides.

We'll follow through on our commitments to reach our climate goals and invest in diverse energy sources to drive down utility costs and bolster an economy that's ready for our rapidly changing future.

We will also govern with the confidence guaranteed to us by our Constitution. Our rights and our freedoms are non-negotiable, and we will find the strength required to do our work knowing that we stand on the right side of history, and on the shoulders of leaders who fought for the freedoms and democracy we enjoy today.

Our work this year will lift us all.

Now, many of you know I am a minister. I won't preach too much this

morning, but I do want to leave you with a few lines of scripture. Matthew 25:

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Let us work this year for our brothers and sisters who need our help the most. When we do, we will serve something bigger, greater than each of us in this room. When we do, we'll see Colorado's future in each and every constituent we serve.

So let us rise to the challenges facing our state and our collective future – as I know that we can. And let us fill Faith's shoes and be moved by the work. See each other as equals, and as humans.

Let us build a Colorado for everyone.

Our work in this building does not end on sine die or when we leave this building, but it does begin today.

Colleagues, thank you for your time this morning.

We have our work cut out for us. Let's do this.

Thank you.