



## 2005 SESSION OVERVIEW

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## AWAKEN THE SLEEPING GIANT THAT IS COLORADO

As your state Senator, let me welcome you to the 65<sup>th</sup> General Assembly! We are excited to be back at the capitol working on the issues that impact you the most. We are eager to get to work because we know that Colorado has tremendous potential to be a better state-but constraints are holding us back. We are a Sleeping Giant that is stirring and about to awaken.

Colorado is facing difficult budget decisions ahead. We have an ambitious agenda that includes providing:

*a paycheck for every family,  
a textbook for every child and  
a doctor for every patient.*

## ISSUES

### ***Economy***

*We have been meeting with business leaders from around the state and we have heard that they want us to fix the state budget. The state has added 300,000 residents since 2000 at a time when Colorado lost 150,000 jobs. They know the economy will not rebound under the present constraints. Nearly everyone from the Colorado Banking Association, the Denver Metro Chamber and the Jefferson Economic Council have expressed an absolute need to fix the state budget problems now. Dan Ritchie, University of Denver Chancellor, has formed a group to look at the problem. We all bring a sense of urgency to the state's economic problems.*

The centerpiece of the budget reform package includes reducing the tax rate from 4.63% to 4.5%, but allows the state to keep the revenue it receives rather than refunding it. Other economic development proposals include:

- Building deep underground research facilities (DUSEL)
- Keeping Tourism strong and healthy
- Investments in nanotechnology
- Business Personal Property Tax conformity
- Small Business insurance (Keller)
- Pension Protection – (Fitz-Gerald) -- AG to prosecute Securities Fraud
- Keep Jobs in Colorado Act-- Outsourcing – (Hanna)
- Invest in K-12 and protect Higher Education
- Bridge the transportation shortfall

### ***Health Care***

*Healthcare is going to be a major component of our agenda. Though the state's role is limited and finite, we have a vision to make healthcare more accessible and affordable for everyone. Our plan includes expanding preferred drug lists and drug purchasing pools and making it easier for small businesses to get insurance for employees.*

- Gordon – Change to the procedures for appealing denials for health benefits
- Groff – Creation of a program addressing racially based healthcare disparity
- Hagedorn – Allow Colorado to participate in a multi-state pharmaceutical purchasing pool
- Hagedorn - Whistleblower protection for substandard hospital care
- Hanna – Prevention of pharmaceutical company price gouging during drug shortages
- Hanna – Healthcare reform assembly Bill
- Keller – Special taxing districts for mental illness treatment
- Sandoval – Adoption of School Board policies improving children's nutrition
- Shaffer – Childhood immunization
- Tapia – Protecting small physician owned outpatient clinics from insurance company discrimination
- Tochtrop – Certified Nurses Aids administering and monitoring medication in nursing homes
- Tochtrop – Drug list reimbursement
- Williams – Mandatory reporting for at-risk (abused and handicapped) adults
- Windels – Making the failure to disclose HIV status a misdemeanor

### ***Education***

*Our intent is to strengthen our public schools. We are changing the focus from labeling, threatening, and punishing to provide support encouragement. The previous administration has tried to create the belief that our public schools are failing. Their approach has been to undermine support. Our approach is to build up public schools.*

#### Accountability

- Streamline three accountability systems into one
- Charter school accountability
- Omissions that were made in defining the state chartering authority
- Online Education—Growing faster than any other area.

#### Higher Education College Opportunity Fund

- Recognize that higher education has sustained 20% budget cuts over the past two years.
- Shield higher education from any more budget cuts. Even without a TABOR fix, we need to keep higher education accessible, affordable and solvent.

#### Quality Schools

- Opt out of No Child Left Behind for school districts. (Ask voters to replace lost federal funds with local elections as Denver has done.)
- Replacing the CSAP test with PLAN test. Better test that is one-quarter the cost.
- Restoring funds for school breakfasts
- Restore the 2000 preschool slots (were cut two years ago)
- Preschool and full day kindergarten

### ***Homeland Security***

The Senate has announced the formation of a Select Senate Committee on Colorado Preparedness that will address the following: We must be aware that the safety and security of our citizens is in our hands. Are our first responders adequately equipped? Have we enough regional partnerships in place to move forward if something should happen here? Are we ready and are we prepared?

### ***Other Issues***

Besides the budget, healthcare, education, and security there are many other issues facing us this session such as: water, rising heating bills for our citizens, childhood immunizations, and the environment.

*If you have comments or questions about the work of the legislature, please contact me.*