

Denver Post questions to mayoral candidates about jobs and economic development

[Note: These answers were submitted at 12:03pm 2/17 and were therefore three minutes late to meet the “Thursday morning” deadline. So they were not included in the 2/20 print edition of the Denver Post or denverpost.com online posting of edited answers from other mayoral candidates.]

What role can the mayor play in bringing jobs to Denver?

The mayor, through his or her own example, must culture an atmosphere of far reaching vision, unrestricted innovation, complete open-mindedness, thinking big, aiming high, and truly believing that anything is possible. I have many examples of this in my campaign web site.

A mayor needs to play the role of Denver’s brightest “Sun” – a radiant source of light, energy, and warmth. These qualities must radiate naturally from within the mayor, ignite unlimited human resources within the people of Denver, and allow city to radiate this to the world. The mayor needs to shed light on emerging negative economic trends early on, shine a light on a broad range of visible and hidden opportunities and resources to reverse those trends, and energize the city to create and attract businesses.

What are the most important steps that need to be undertaken to lure more businesses to Denver?

1. Denver needs to be viewed as a welcome and fertile field for innovative businesses. It can become a “happening place” and create an appeal like the “Burning Man” festival has for CEOs, cultural creatives, and entrepreneurs from around the world. That means Denver leaders and news media need to get informed and excited about progressive strategies going on elsewhere for increasing innovation.

For example, the prestigious Global Competitiveness Forum in Saudi Arabia in January 2011 seems to have been unknown to Denver news media, political, and business leaders. Forum speakers included former heads of state Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, and Jean Chretien, and top executives from some of the world’s most innovative corporations such as Google, CNN, and Disney International. Unique to this forum was a panel where top ‘UFO’ experts discussed “UFOs and innovation” later changed to “Contact: Learning from Outer Space.” The discussion was serious and the audience respectful. What has Denver done to compare with that?

2. We need to be on the same page with an open-minded approach in attracting businesses. Elected leaders should be privately questioned about saying things like “That is not the kind of job we want to create”. That is what Councilman Charlie Brown is quoted as saying in the Wall Street Journal when asked by a WSJ reporter in October 2010 about attracting more of the multi-billion dollar sci-fi film industry, and space-travel researchers, to Denver. For that kind of quote to get into the Wall Street Journal does not help negative perceptions of Denver.

Why have Dallas, Minneapolis and Atlanta been able to land those major corporate headquarter businesses and not Denver? What could be done to attract those kinds of businesses to the city?

I do not know the incentives that attracted major corporate headquarters to these other cities. But I know that a vibrant and preferred business climate can be created to make Denver a “happening” place – like Florence, Italy during the Renaissance, or Silicon Valley and other capitals of open-minded innovation.

Describe your economic plan – something that drives economic development in the city?

“Electro-magnetism”- Just as the electromagnetic spectrum from the sun drives biological development, a parallel strategy can drive economic development in Denver. Imagination and innovation are the fuel and engine for creating something out of nothing. Creating that kind atmosphere will make Denver a super-magnet for a full spectrum of “visible”, and “invisible” businesses of all sizes and kinds to be created here or be magnetically attracted here. And a ‘spaceport’ is still a target on my list.

My plan is too comprehensive and multi-faceted. But an example of a specific piece of my plan would be to make Denver the “silicon valley” for businesses engaged in research, development, and manufacturing related to magnetism and hydrogen energy and other high technology businesses in the renewable and sustainability sectors. There is a lot of this going on “underground” and “off the radar” already, but not so much in Denver. The overall theme would be “anything is possible” and everyone is welcome. But I would shift more emphasis to small and medium sizes businesses and home businesses.

More specific features of my plan:

- 1. Tax credits/incentives – to the extent these are used at all, I would give a “most favored” status to businesses that satisfy some form of socially responsible investment criteria.*
- 2. Diversity – just as diversity is the strength of an eco-system, a more diversified base of home-scale and small businesses would be encouraged to strengthen Denver economic system*
- 3. Human scale R & D - What “Silicon Valley” did for garage-scale research and development in computer-related businesses, Denver can do for advanced and exotic clean energy sources.*
- 4. Neighborhood-based health care using efficacious ancient and modern holistic healthcare, and an infinite number of innovations in all areas. Disruptive technologies that could alter the energy economy are being developed in basements and garages all over the U.S. and the world.*
- 5. Health and medical - A full range of medicinal plants can be researched, cultivated, and distributed from Denver. Truthfully, there are weeds literally growing in the cracks of Denver sidewalks that are known throughout the world to have more health promoting properties than much of what comes from the pharmaceutical industry.*
- 6. Plant fiber based economy – I would re-examine Henry Ford’s proposal from the 1930’s for the U.S. to have a hemp-based economy. Hemp is not marijuana and there are other fibrous plants like kenaf that also have great potential in this area.*

What experience in your own life would you bring that would guide you in improving economic development in Denver?

My life-long, open-minded promotion of extraordinary solutions to a wide range of local and global problems is my greatest asset. This experience has also connected me with many of the geniuses creating the future business success stories. It has solidly prepared and qualified me to create an atmosphere of innovation and excitement in Denver. These are solutions that not only improve quality of life to make Denver more attractive, but create new and better jobs.

- Jeff Peckman