

THE  
ECONOMIC  
CLUB OF  
CHICAGO

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The Honorable John W. Hickenlooper, governor of Colorado, was the featured speaker at the Club's First Forum Meeting on November 14, hosted at The Hyatt Regency Chicago. Governor Hickenlooper, whose second term will end on January 8, 2019, spoke to the legacy he leaves behind in Colorado after serving in the role for eight years. After he provided brief remarks, Governor Hickenlooper participated in a Q&A session moderated by Club Second Vice Chair David Snyder, COO of Chicago CRED, who took live questions from the audience via Poll Everywhere.

Below are top takeaways from the presentation and Q&A:

***On leading Colorado in legalization of marijuana...***

“When it got elected, I was against it. Every elected official, pretty much everyone I knew in Colorado was against it because no one had ever done it before [...] My mother's family were Quakers and the Quakers – I'm not a Quaker – but I do think it's interesting they have a whole context where they think of what's called a ‘fair witness;’ someone who doesn't have a self-interest one way or the other but does their best to see if we can find truth in the issue. I thought that was the appropriate role for state government – to do our very best to see if we could make this work. I found the smartest people I could get, had a young guy out of Harvard Law who came in and became our marijuana czar. I'll tell you, the things that we most feared – a spike in teenage consumption, spike in overall consumption, people driving while high – we haven't seen them.”

***On considerations to make in implementing legalized marijuana ...***

“In terms of regulating it and going after the black market, don't overtax it. You don't want the price so high that you continue to have a black market. Drug dealers don't care who they sell to. We set a limit of 21. You can't buy pot until you're 21. We still have a black market and it's a serious problem, but we now have \$250 million a year of tax money that we can put towards that. We also put it towards a lot of the chronically homeless, most of whom have mental health problems, but almost always have drug issues. That allows us to have resources for that, which is incredibly important.”

***On universal background checks for guns...***

“In 2012 [...] in Colorado state with 5.4 million people at the time, there were 38 people convicted of homicide who tried to buy a gun and we stopped them, 133 people convicted of sexual assault, 620 burglars, 1,300 people convicted of felony assault [...] we stopped them. There were 420 people that had outstanding warrants that they couldn't see their ex-boss or their ex-spouse; they tried to buy a gun and we stopped them [...] there were 240 people who when they showed up to pick up their new gun, we arrested them for an outstanding warrant for a violent crime.”

***On being laid off as a geologist and starting fresh in business...***

“After a good but short career in Colorado and that long recession in the 80s, the price of oil collapsed and our company was sold. Everyone got laid off. Over 25,000 geologists lost their jobs in about a five year period, so no one was hiring. It's funny when you're out of work for six months or eight months you begin to see a different person in the mirror. You don't have the same confidence you had before. I had to, as when I was a kid, raise myself up. I had to reinvent myself.

I'd seen a brewpub out on the west coast – a restaurant that brewed its own beer. So, I went to the library and took out a lot of books on how to write a business plan. As a geologist I didn't know what the words pro forma meant. That's pathetic, I realize. We ended up signing a lease in 1988 for \$1 per square foot in lower downtown Denver. That's a reflection of how abandoned that warehouse district was. It took about two years to raise the money. My own mother wouldn't invest. She kept saying, ‘Who wants to have dinner in a brewery?’ I said, ‘Mom it's like a bakery, it's fresh. Beer is food.’ She never invested.”

### ***On running for Mayor of Denver...***

“I made a commitment I would never do a negative ad. I would not say anything negative about my opponents. [...] I've never to this day, I've never persuaded anyone to change their mind on anything that really matters by telling them why they were wrong and why I was right. Only by listening and then listening harder. I did that, I went out to visit all the mayors in the suburbs. I ran this positive campaign and I got 48 percent in the general election. The next closest person got 24 percent. Then in the runoff election, I got 66 percent.”

### ***On building out infrastructure in rural areas...***

“We'll never be great if everyone's not participating in the economy. I think when 2018 is judged [Colorado] will be measured as having the strongest, fastest growing rural economy in the country. If you just look at the rural counties in Colorado, compare them to other rural counties in America [...] we'll have high-speed broadband in every town, every city in Colorado by the end of 2020, or maybe in the middle of 2021. Right now, 98 percent of the kids in Colorado have broadband in their schools.”

### ***On a new kind of political leadership...***

“We've got to get more people from business into government. Seventy-eight percent of people to get graduate degrees in management are working in business. Nonprofits and government are almost two-thirds or 63 percent of all the employment in the country and we don't have the managers where we need them the most. You wonder why people don't care about government or don't believe in government anymore – well that's a big part of it. It's hard to have a big complex organization that's dealing with the toughest problems when you don't have good leadership throughout.”

*Please note that the content of this program was edited and condensed for clarity.*