



"The best defense against usurpatory government is an assertive citizenry."

- William F. Buckley

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Suffrage in Colorado

Below is a special historical perspective by Dr. Thomas J. Noel on suffrage in the State of Colorado, and the opportunity for female and minority candidates in Denver's municipal election as a result of past successes.

Spring 2003

And the Flowering of Women and Minority Candidates



Portrait of Elizabeth Bonduel McCourt "Baby Doe" Tabor, second wife of Horace Tabor, 1938

For the first time in history, women are running for mayor, auditor, council and other posts in Denver's May 2003 elections.

As of 2003, women also reign in the Colorado State Legislature where, for the first time ever, they prevail in the leadership of both parties.

Lola Spradley is the first ever female Speaker of the House. Norma Anderson is the first woman ever to be Senate Majority Leader while Joan Fitzgerald is the first woman Senate Minority Leader and Jennifer Veiga the House Minority

Leader.

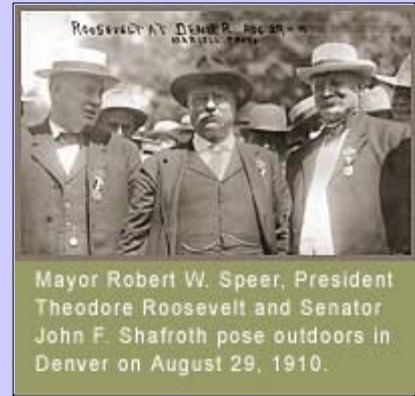
Women are rising to political prominence in the Queen City of the Mountains and High Plains, although the top spots - the governor's chair and the mayor's seat - have eluded the few female candidates to aim for the top.

Ladies belong in all these positions and races as the Queen City of the Mountain and Plains was the first large city in the world to give the fairer sex the vote. True, Wyoming women had the vote earlier, but it came as part of a large territorial constitutional package that included many other provisions. In Colorado, men voted solely on the issue of women's suffrage in 1893.

The win was no accident. Denver women had organized and campaigned

for years after failing to get suffrage written into the 1876 state constitution and losing an 1877 statewide referendum.

Rocky Mountain News reporter Ellis Meredith, physician Mary B. Bates, teacher Martha Pease, African American leader Elizabeth P. Ensley, and others struggled for suffrage and gained support from many prominent women, including Mrs. Horace "Baby Doe" Tabor who donated office space for the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association in the Tabor Grand Opera House at 16th and Curtis Streets.



National suffrage leaders such as Susan B. Anthony campaigned in Colorado. After the great victory of 1893, Anthony wrote to Ellis Meredith, "How glad I am that at last we have knocked down our first state by the popular vote." Until California sanctioned equal suffrage in 1911, thereby enfranchising women in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Denver was the only sizeable city in the world where women could vote.

Women won despite vicious opposition, including that of Colorado Governor Henry Buchtel who claimed that "only the dregs of womankind vote in Colorado." Other politicians, especially "Honest John" Shafroth, Colorado's great reform governor, U.S. representative and U.S. senator, were lifelong champions of women's rights, starting with the ballot box.

"Let the women vote," urged suffragist Ellis Meredith. "They can't do any worse than the men."



Many of Denver's early elections had been embarrassingly corrupt. Voters in those days were rewarded with dollars and drinks. In 1889, an unusually large Republican slush fund enabled Mayor Wolfe Londoner to reward his supporters with \$2 and, presumably, two beers, per vote. Abuses in that 1889 spring city election were so flagrant that the courts investigated. Mayor Londoner became the first, and only, Denver mayor forced to resign because of election fraud.

Women helped clean up politics and a lot of other civic problems, ranging from prostitution to promiscuous expectoration (spitting), as Marcia Tremmel Goldstein puts it in her wonderful book, *Denver Women in Their Places* (Historic Denver, Inc.).

Marcia writes, "Savvy suffrage leaders helped Denver women from all walks



of life win the right to vote in Colorado. Throughout the 20th century, Denver women have served in the state legislatures and city government, and led many public institutions. Women yearned for and built stability in the form of businesses, schools, churches, parks, and the arts."



The first city councilwoman, Elisa Damascio Palladino, graced the council's elegant fourth floor chambers in the City and County Building after being appointed by Mayor George Begole to fill a vacancy in 1935.



Forty years later, Cathy Donohue and Cathy Reynolds became the first women elected to City Council. Deborah Ortega and Ramona M. Martinez became the first Hispanic councilwomen in 1987, followed by the 1990 election of Allegra "Happy" Haynes as the Mile High City's first African-American councilwoman. Indeed women now form a majority in city council.

Stephanie Foote, a former councilwoman appointed deputy mayor and manager of public works in 2000, is the highest-ranking woman ever to serve in Denver city government. Jennifer Moulton in 1983 became the first female to head the city's Community Planning and Development department.

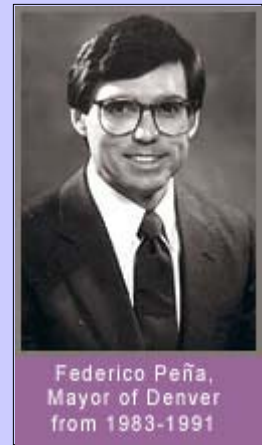
Elizabeth Schlosser, who has a master's degree in city planning from CU-Denver and experience as a preservationist, planner, and regional art dealer, is running for mayor this spring, as is former councilwoman Sue Casey.

Elizabeth observes: "Championing and defending local strengths is one reason we need more women in politics--we only have 13 in the U.S. Senate. Women traditionally are advocates for families, schools, neighborhoods, and health care. And we tend to work for consensus rather than conflict."

Former state senator and state representative Dennis Gallagher, a current city councilman running for city auditor, discussed women candidates the other day at the Wasted Friday Afternoon Club at the Wazee Lounge and Supper Club.

"I welcome women in public campaigns and in public office. They raise the level of debate. And women are often more practical. Instead of declaring war on some foreign country as a solution to domestic problems, they tend to focus on the important domestic issues-like health care, schools, streets, libraries, and neighborhoods. Our city is blessed to have women voting and shaping our city for the better for the past 110 years."

Before women rose to power, other minorities set the pace. Wolfe Londoner became the city's first Jewish mayor in 1889. Thomas G. Currigan became Denver's first Catholic mayor in 1963, followed in 1969 by another Irish Catholic, William H. Cinches, Jr., Federico Peña (1983-1991) and Wellington Webb (1991-2003) became the first Hispanic-American and African-American mayors.



Peña won in a city that is only 31 percent Hispanic by attracting many non-Hispanic voters with his campaign to "imagine a great city." Critics who scoffed at him and his followers as "Feddy and the Dreamers," were in for a surprise when he proved to be one of Denver's most energetic mayors.

In 2003, the mayoral candidates include an African-American, a German-American, a Hispanic-American and the first Greek-American ever to run for mayor of Denver, as well as three women candidates. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who form the majority of Denverites, have not elected one of their own to the mayor's office since Richard Batterton (1959-63). Denverites have distinguished themselves by judging candidates on the issues and not letting gender or ethnicity become the issue.

That tradition, as current Mayor Wellington Edward Webb points out, is one to celebrate as Denverites head to the polls on May 6, 2003, to elect their councilpersons and their 38th mayor.



"Daddy" Bruce Randolph, an African-American restaurant owner and philanthropist, holds a street sign with his name during a ceremony in the Five Points neighborhood.

Mayor Federico Peña, City Councilman Hiawatha Davis and others are present. 1984.

The mayor of Denver, thanks to the city's strong mayor charter enacted in 1904, has more power than any other Colorado politician.

Denver's mayor can make a greater difference than the governor, whose actions are watchdogged closely by the Colorado legislature, or the state's U.S. representatives and senators. Thus it was that Mayor Peña brought to the city Denver International Airport, the Colorado Rockies and Coors Field, the new Colorado Convention Center, and

the large and stylish 1999 Central Library.

Mayor Webb has contributed the city's largest municipal office building, doubled the city's park space, built a new Red Rocks Visitors Center, and transformed the central South Platte Valley from a trash strewn bum's jungle to a series of parks and new residential developments. While other

politicians talk or try to persuade legislative bodies to act, Denver mayors can unilaterally accomplish a great deal.

The ability to make a huge difference inspires many to run for mayor of Denver, where a half dozen or more candidates usually enter the field. As a majority vote is required to enter the mayor's office, the race usually ends in a run-off between the top two candidates. Another factor behind the large field is the historical evidence that Denver voters do not let gender or race or religion limit candidacy.

Candidates are also encouraged by recent elections when underdogs have won the race. Federico Peña, a newcomer, upset incumbent William H. McNichols, Jr., and the other favorite, longtime Denver politician Dale Tooley, to become mayor in 1983.

In 1991, Wellington Webb, who started out with less than five percent support in the polls, upset the favorite candidate, Norm Early, a popular and respected district attorney. Perhaps the most notable thing about that contest was that in a city that is only 11 percent black, these two top contenders were both African Americans. Mayor Webb, like Mayor Peña before him, managed to build a broad coalition among Denver's multi-cultural electorate.

In 2003, term limits have introduced a large new cast of candidates.

Without term limits, Mayor Webb and most councilpersons could and probably would run successfully again. Term limits, as approved by Colorado voters statewide, kick in this year, so the 2003 elections will usher in a new mayor, a new auditor and at least 10 out of 13 city council members. Never in Denver's 145-year history has there been such a shake up at city hall.

Furthermore, this cast of newcomers will face one of Denver's bust periods, compounded by a severe drought. During the prosperous 1990s, Denver experienced an urban renaissance that drew national attention. The city used historic districts to transform skid row into a thriving recreation, arts, and loft district. Infill housing and resettlement of Skid Row, the Central Platte Valley, the abandoned Lowry military base, and the abandoned Stapleton Airport site helped create the first growth decade in the core city population since 1970.



Mayor Wellington E. Webb meets the first resident of Stapleton, Brian Tellinghuisen, as he moved into his new home on June 7, 2002.

His home, located on the former airport's east-west runway, was the first of a new community of 12,000 homes and apartments that will be built over the next 20 years.

Photo courtesy of Wonderland Homes



While many American core cities continued to decline in wealth and population, Denver thrived during the



The Lawrence Street Methodist Episcopal church in Denver, 1864. The Cherry Creek and the Platte River confluence is in the distance.

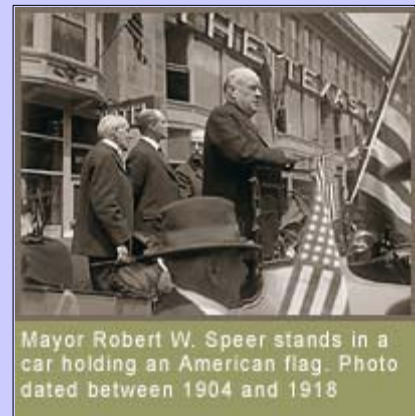
1990s, growing from a 1990-population of 467,610 to 554,636 in 2000.

Denver's boom and bust cycle, a legacy of its birth as a mining camp in 1858, came back to haunt the city in 2001. Soaring population, real estate markets, and employment abruptly nose-dived.

By 2003, the city had higher unemployment and office vacancy rates, and lower growth than the national average, although the rest of the country also fell into recession.

Faced with declining revenues, fewer jobs, and stagnant or falling property values, Denver voters need to pick carefully in 2003, for city leaders in the hard times have made a difference.

Mayor Robert W. Speer, who became mayor on the heels of the 1890s depression, generated jobs, confidence, and an economic upswing by launching a massive city beautiful building program that left Denver with new libraries, parks, parkways, bathhouses, mountain parks, an auditorium theater, and many other amenities.



Mayor Robert W. Speer stands in a car holding an American flag. Photo dated between 1904 and 1918

During the 1980s recession, when Denver was losing population and had the nation's highest office vacancy rate, Mayor Federico Peña launched an unparalleled expansion program to build a new airport, baseball stadium, new libraries, the Colorado Convention Center, and many other public improvements.

These government initiatives during hard times helped pull the city through dark decades past. This spring, voters need to carefully assess which candidates have the vision and experience to guide the city through the current dry depression to sunnier times ahead.

Dr. Thomas J. Noel teaches Denver history at the [University of Colorado at Denver](http://www.universityofcolorado.edu) and has authored or co-authored 30 books on Denver, including *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (with Stephen J. Leonard). Tom Noel also writes the "Dr. Colorado" column for the Saturday Rocky Mountain News/Denver Post and conducts tours of the Mile High City.

For more information, see Coloradowebsites.com/dr-Colorado, and also visit the "[Denver Welcomes You](#)" pages on DenverGov for history and facts about Colorado, authored by Dr. Noel.

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