

**Liberty Common Charter School
Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
May 13, 1999**

Draft Remarks
Governor Bill Owens

Thank you for that warm introduction. I am excited to be able to join you today as we officially open new classrooms at Liberty Common. With these new classrooms will come new teachers, new opportunities, and more students dedicated to academic excellence.

All of you who have worked to make Liberty Common a continuing success deserve a tremendous commendation from the people of Colorado. As the first charter school to open in Fort Collins, and with your relentless drive towards excellence, Liberty Common has proven its worth. Dedicated teachers, staff, parents, and students have made Liberty Common a model for other schools. Just last week, this year's CSAP scores were released for third grade reading. Liberty stood out with an exceptional 86% success rate, significantly above the statewide average.

In fact, what amazes me about last weeks CSAP results is that seven of the top ten scoring schools in the state were alternative public schools – such as charter schools and alternative neighborhood schools. The reason is clear: Teachers, students and parents in these schools, like Liberty, are committed to the basics of learning and educational excellence.

We have come a long way since 1993, when I sponsored the bill to create charters in Colorado. Because of the political climate back then, Colorado was limited to 50 charter schools and 80% funding. Since that time we have gradually expanded upon that legislation to lift the cap on the number of schools allowed. After charter school opponents saw the difference that our charter schools were making, they had no choice but to lift the cap and allow our charters to grow. Today we have 64 charter schools operating in Colorado, offering some of the finest education available.

In addition to increasing in number, we have pushed to increase charter school funding. After too many years of watching our charter schools give 110% the effort and produce exceptional scores with just 80% of the funding, this year I worked with the legislature to ensure that our charter schools – which are independent public schools – receive fair funding like their other neighborhood

school counterparts. Earlier this spring I signed into law a bill that gives charter schools 95% of the funding they deserve. It was a huge step in the right direction and I will continue working to give charter schools full funding and our full support.

There are two more bills awaiting my signature that will help our charter schools. The first is House Bill 1274, which will allow more dollars to flow to charters and will allow them to keep any money left at the end of the year. This will allow our charter schools to save more and provide additional services to their students, teachers and staff.

The other bill is Senate Bill 52. This bill allows local boards and charters to extend contracts as they see fit and clarifies the tax exempt status of charter schools. I am excited about signing both of these bills to strengthen Colorado's charter schools.

I have also spent a good portion of my first four months working on a plan to give some of the tobacco settlement money to our schools. While the legislature did not pass legislation this session, I will continue to fight for my Read to Achieve plan.

It would use a portion of tobacco settlement money to ensure that every child in Colorado is reading at grade level by the third grade. My Read to Achieve plan would provide nearly \$1,100 per student that tests below proficiency to provide intensive reading services for those kids. The basic tool of reading is the most essential tool we can give our students and study after study shows that if we don't catch them by the third grade, they may never catch up. With Read to Achieve, Liberty Common would have additional resources to bring all of its kids up to grade level.

I would now like to take a moment today to recognize one of our distinguished guests. When I was in the state legislature, I worked closely with the late Representative John Irwin to get charter school legislation passed. Along with being a great friend and a well-respected legislator, John worked tirelessly with his wife Barbara to strengthen charter schools. In fact, it was with his help that we passed the bill that created charter schools in Colorado, and without John, we wouldn't be here today celebrating Liberty Common.

Thus I would like us all to thank Barbara for joining us today and for all that you and John have done to make charter schools a reality. *[Applause and student presentation of flowers to Barbara.]*

As we prepare to cut the ribbon on your expanded building, I would like to offer my hearty congratulations to Liberty Common, and to all those who made this possible. Your commitment and hard work is making a difference for Colorado students. Congratulations!

