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COLORADO SPRINGS THE GAZETTE

Governor: Springs not getting its share of young people

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Colorado Springs should focus on attracting more young people if it wants its economy to grow.

That was the first of several suggestions offered by Gov. John Hickenlooper during an interview Thursday with The Gazette editorial board, when asked how the state could help the Pikes Peak region recover from the recent recession.

"If you look at the money that Fort Collins or Durango have invested in bike paths and things that are more youth-oriented, there's an argument to be made... that your ability to attract young people has a lot to do with where businesses want to come," Hickenlooper said. "These new economies are based on young people."

The governor said he suspects Colorado Springs isn't getting its share of the 25- to 34-year-old demographic that's been migrating in droves to Colorado in recent years. And that may be why the local unemployment rate has stagnated at roughly 9 percent, while the state's rate got down to 7.8 percent in November.

Hickenlooper also suggested that Mayor Steve Bach (who had been a guest of Hickenlooper's Thursday morning at his State of the State speech) could put together a task force to come up with other possible ways to bolster job growth.

The best thing the state can do for Colorado Springs, Hickenlooper said, is leave the city alone.

"It's, how can the state help the Springs help itself," the governor said. "You don't want the governor to come down and start trying to do everything for you. What you want us to do is cut red tape and get out of the way."

There may, however, be highway construction jobs on the way, Hickenlooper intimated.

When asked about transportation funding to help decrease congestion on Interstate 25 between Monument Hill and Castle Rock, the governor said there may be additional state money available in coming years. Not only is the state spending \$300 million more per year for the next five years on transportation, but there are also cost-saving changes in the works.

The Colorado Department of Transportation will re-evaluate its priorities for road repairs this year. CDOT records are often inaccurate, Hickenlooper said, because highways more than 25

“It should be even harder for kids to get marijuana than for them to get alcohol,” Hickenlooper said.

At the close of the interview, Hickenlooper put to rest speculation that he may make a run for the White House in 2016. He said he rather focus his full attention on making Colorado a leader in health care reform and education excellence.

“Besides, it’s such a long shot. What are the chances someone like me could get elected president? One in a thousand, maybe,” he said with a laugh.

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