

Guest Commentary: Put patent office in Colorado

By U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet and John R. Posthumus *The Denver Post*
Posted:

denverpost.com

In the summer of 1940, a newly minted Harvard grad by the name of Walter Orr Roberts set out for Climax, Colo., to set up the Western Hemisphere's first solar coronagraph, an eclipse-inducing telescope that blocks out the sun's brightness to allow observers to see nearby objects.

Roberts discovered the disruptive effect that flares from the sun's outer lining, or "corona," could have on radio communications on Earth — a finding that proved integral to military communications during World War II.

Roberts, who later went on to found the National Center for Atmospheric Research, was a pioneer and innovator. As a friend and fellow scientist described, he "was ... of [an] enduring optimism [and] believed very strongly in grappling with real issues."

The same can be said about Roberts' adopted home of Colorado: confident, pragmatic. Here, a deeply embedded culture of innovation has helped establish our state as a destination for inventors and entrepreneurs. We are home to an array of cutting-edge industries and countless research institutions that churn out new ideas and inventions at an almost daily clip.

With officials from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) set to decide soon on a location for a new satellite patent office, we urge them to follow Walter Orr Roberts' lead and come to beautiful, innovative Colorado.

A patent office in Colorado would generate more than \$400 million in economic activity and hundreds of new jobs, according to the University of Colorado at Boulder's Leeds School of Business. It would increase the speed at which inventors can get patents issued, which in turn will help them and the businesses they work for bring new inventions to market and create private-sector jobs.

But a patent office isn't only good for Colorado. It's good for the USPTO as well. Taking into account all office expenditures — lease rates, construction costs, etc. — the USPTO's cost per employee is more than \$80,000 lower in Colorado than in Virginia, where the agency is headquartered. With a satellite patent office that will eventually house nearly 600 full-time employees, the cost savings to the USPTO, an entirely self-funded agency, would be substantial.

Beyond dollars and cents, a patent office in Colorado would help the USPTO meet its core objectives of shrinking its application backlog and improving the quality of patent examination, particularly by boosting its ability to hire and retain highly qualified employees.

In Colorado, the USPTO could tap into a world-class workforce that boasts more than 13,000 skilled scientists and technology workers. We are the second most-educated state in the nation, and are among the top 10 states for adults with degrees in science or engineering. In Colorado, the USPTO has access to some of the best and brightest minds in the country.

Some 300 days of sunshine, tremendous opportunities for outdoor and cultural recreation and a relatively low-cost of living combine to make Colorado a great place to live. Our state's high quality of life would provide a powerful tool to recruit and retain a talented workforce.

Finally, Colorado is easy to get to, by air or by car. The USPTO can leverage these assets, combined with Colorado's location at the center of the country, to improve outreach and better connect inventors and innovators in Colorado and throughout the U.S. to the patent office.

There are many reasons why the USPTO should choose Colorado as the new site of a satellite patent office, far from its headquarters in Washington, DC. Here, they can tap into an inviting and inspiring environment that has lured pioneers like Walter Orr Roberts for over a century.

We hope the USPTO will look west to an incredible source of innovation.

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