



## Who's There: Flo Raitano to head I-70 coalition

**BY BOB BERWYN**  
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It's a big job, but somebody has to do it, so the Interstate 70 Mountain Corridor Coalition decided to draw on the wisdom and experience of Dillon resident Flo Raitano, tabbing her as the 30-plus member group's new director.

"I told them, when they asked me why I was interested in the position, that I'm at a point in my life and career where I'm only interested in taking on a project that matters, that makes a difference. This, I'm convinced, is one of them," Raitano said Monday, sitting at her dining room table, daunting piles of I-70-related paperwork piled up in front of her.

Raitano, a third-generation native Coloradan, came to Summit County in 1982 to practice veterinary medicine.

"I was living in Casper, Wyoming. The wind always blows up there," she said, explaining how the wind blew her to Dillon.

By 1986, she was mayor of the town, serving in that capacity until 1993, when most of the way through her second term, she heard of a new opportunity. A new state-federal partnership for rural development was brewing under Gov. Roy Romer's administration, and Raitano said she took on the job of executive director of the Rural Development Council in part to advocate for telecommunication infrastructure in Colorado's rural reaches.

That involved sitting at the table with some heavy hitters, including then-U.S. West president John Scully.

"He said, 'Tell me why I should spend the money to bring broadband all the way out here when there aren't enough people and they don't know what to do with it,'" Raitano recalled with a smile. "I said, 'those are fighting words, John.'"

Raitano, who currently also serves as head of the Summit County Hospital Committee Advisory Board, will likely bring the same sort of tenacity to the I-70 process, where she is charged with building organization and direction.

Establishing some sustainable funding for the group of disparate stakeholders who all see the I-70 corridor as their economic lifeline is another high priority, she said.

To help her, she will tap into a philosophy of regionalism that plays a big role in economic development these days. I-70 corridor communities, from Idaho Springs to Silverthorne, Vail and beyond will all have to sink or swim together, she said, explaining that she will build on the common interests of the region to help unite the voice of the coalition.

But the metro communities of the Front Range also need to be part of the solution.

"I don't see it as an we-versus-they," she said. "The Front Range stands to benefit as much as we do from a positive solution."

Raitano hopes there are some innovative short-term solutions that can be applied to ease some of the most pressing safety concerns along the corridor, while simultaneously planning for a long-term transportation future that will have huge impacts on everyone in the corridor.

“It’s going to a challenge. It’s going to be another wild ride,” she concluded.

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