



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

“The Renaissance”
2023 President’s Fall Address
Colorado State University
President Amy Parsons
Oct. 4, 2023

Good morning. Thank you, Chancellor Frank, Governor Valdez, and the entire Board of Governors. Thank you to our university community—our faculty, staff and students; and thank you to our Faculty Council Chair Mendy Smith, for serving as Mace Bearer today. This is also a day when I owe thanks to my own family, my husband Jeff, my daughters, my dad, and dear friends and colleagues who are her. Thanks to everyone who has made preparations for our time here together, and who has a role in today’s festivities, including our outstanding marching band, spirit squad, Wing Walker Honor Guard, and all of the musicians.

It is a remarkable honor to stand with you today, and to serve as the 16th president of Colorado State University. I am both humbled and energized by this opportunity to serve CSU. But most of all I am dedicated to our continued work together in building upon the important history of our great institution.

Since officially starting in this role in February, there have been many moments when I feel that 18-year-old student inside of me coming up, looking around and saying “Can you believe we’re here? Isn’t this the best place in the world?” Today I definitely have that feeling, that voice that is so grateful to be part of this community.

I could never have guessed then that the professor who taught my freshman seminar on global military politics, Bob Lawrence, would become a lifelong friend and mentor, and would e-mail me days before my first fall address as president to tell me that he’s proud I have “moved from ops officer to base commander.” He truly is a testament to the role one great professor can have on the life of a student. This is something I know continues to play out daily through our dedicated and talented faculty all across CSU.

After I graduated from CSU and went to law school, I took an internship back here in the General Counsel’s Office. That was the summer of 1997, the summer of the Spring Creek Flood, the very event that launched this annual tradition of the Fall Address and University Picnic.

I know that many of you who were here that summer remember both the damage and destruction of the flood, as well as the tremendous camaraderie and resilience of this remarkable community. Dr. Al Yates was president, and he was determined to use that time of

adversity to make us stronger. I have held those lessons of resiliency, determination, unflinching pursuit of excellence, and gratitude for this community, from that time until today. And those values will guide me every day going forward, as president, as an alumna, and as a parent of a CSU student.

The gratitude I have for all of you and the time you've spent with me over these first months is immeasurable. I've had the privilege of having hundreds, maybe thousands, of conversations with you, individually and in groups, in my home, the office, classrooms, laboratories, ceremonies, stadiums and arenas, and out across the state and around the world. I've spent time with alumni, donors, parents, fans, community members, and business and civic leaders. I've met with Faculty Council, Administrative Professional Council, Classified Personnel Council, and ASCSU on our commitment to shared governance.

Everywhere I go, I hear the pride we all have in Colorado State University. I hear the belief in who we can become and the impact we can make. I hear a community that has steeled its resolve and determination for excellence. I hear resilience, and I hear gratitude for this community – values I first experienced here long ago.

Our Foundation is So Strong

Our new incoming class is the most diverse in CSU history, with the highest number of racially minoritized and first-generation students ever. Our retention and graduation rates continue to rise. This September, CSU was recognized as having the best interdisciplinary sustainability curriculum in the entire country.

We have world class environmental science faculty and researchers, and there is a broad commitment to societal and behavioral impacts across all our colleges. Our veterinary medicine program is ranked second in the country and CSU's leadership there has broadened into a far more comprehensive One Health strength. We have record-breaking numbers in sponsored research expenditures, with nearly half-a-billion dollars – a total of \$498.1 million – in the last fiscal year. We are a research powerhouse. We've done excellent work around strategic planning, including the Academic Master Plan.

While we are proud of our achievements, we are not satisfied with the status quo. We are ready to move boldly forward, to lead a renaissance of the land grant mission, and to pursue excellence in all that we do.

I believe we have the team here to do it – starting with our outstanding faculty across the university. Today I'm honored to announce Dr. Marion Underwood as our new Provost and Executive Vice President – Marion is here today – welcome to CSU. We are all excited to support you in this important role. Thank you to Lise Youngblade and the entire search committee, and thank you to Dean Jan Nerger for serving in the interim position. Thanks to all of our outstanding deans, and a special welcome to Dr. Allen Robinson who starts this week as Dean of the Walter Scott Jr. College of Engineering. And a special congratulations to our Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences James Pritchett, who will be stepping into the role of Vice President for Engagement and Extension starting January 1. Thank you to Kathay Rennels for serving in that interim role over the last year. And to our new and long-serving leaders: Vice President Kyle Henley, Vice President Derek Dictson, Vice President Eric Ray, Vice President Kauline Cipriani, Vice President Brendan Hanlon, Vice President Blanche Hughes, Vice President Brandon Bernier,

Athletics Director Joe Parker, Vice Provost Laura Jenson, Interim Vice President for Research Christa Johnson, and Deputy General Counsel Jannine Mohr. Thank you for your tremendous energy and expertise.

And to the staff of the President's Office: I don't know what I did to deserve you but I'm beyond grateful for you. Chief of Staff Rico Munn, June Greist, Abby Marweg, Wayne Hall, Somer Gomez, Brett Anderson, Jim Braedeen, Scott Shrake, and the incomparable Emily Lewis. And, of course, a very special recognition of Rick Miranda who leads in any role he takes on with humility and skill and support.

This is a winning team, one I am honored to work with every day. A team that truly believes in the land grant mission and in what we can become.

Our Land Grant Roots and Mission

When I was a student here, I did not fully appreciate what it meant to be a land grant university. It was only over the course of my career, thanks in large part to Chancellor Frank's persistence in quoting Abraham Lincoln and in keeping the legacy of the land grant front and center, that I came to hold the deep respect I have for the land grant mission.

Stepping into this role, I feel a special sense of urgency and acknowledgement that our mission is as important today as it was in 1862. When President Lincoln and Senator Morrill conceived of the land grant act, they imagined a great democratization of education in this country based on the revolutionary idea that every person with the drive and talent to achieve a degree should have access to an excellent university.

This was to be a mighty tool to help build up a country torn apart by war, a tool to strengthen the economy, to unify communities, and to build our competitiveness in the world. A tool to bring excellence in education out into the communities that can directly benefit. And to seek truth through debate, research, and science, and apply it for a better world.

Is that mission not every bit as present and urgent today as it was at our founding? Are we not much better equipped to carry out that mission now than we were at the founding?

Today we know that throughout much of the land grant history, leaders did not acknowledge the grave impact of taking land from Native Americans and did not fully open doors to all people regardless of background. I want to thank the CSU Native American students, staff, and faculty who created our land acknowledgement, which helps us to remember this history and our commitment to collaborative relationships with tribal communities.

I've recently been contemplating a quote shared with me by Associate Vice President for Indigenous and Native American Affairs Patrese Atine. Patrese is a member of the Navajo Nation and shared a well-known Navajo quote from Chief Manuelito, which he spoke a few days before his death. He said: "My grandchildren, education is a ladder, tell our people to take it." Chief Manuelito and President Lincoln were contemporaries, living very different lives in this country at the same time, yet both speaking to the power of education for all people. How do we now, a century and a half later, as stewards of this great university, take their vision, and all our history between them and us, and look ahead to create a renaissance for the land grant university?

The work ahead is critical. While not in civil war, we are in a time of deep political polarization and increasing social division. What is our role here? It is not merely to sit on the sidelines and comment, critique. Our role is to step firmly forward and into that fire. To reaffirm that land grant universities remain our nation's greatest and most powerful tool in modeling reconciliation, progress, democratic ideas, and excellence. That is true for all land grant universities, and Colorado State University should be at the vanguard.

Last year, the Boyer 2030 Commission, supported by the Association for Undergraduate Education and Research Universities, housed here at CSU and led by Executive Director Steve Dandaneau, published a report called *The Equity Excellence Imperative* that accurately captures our biggest challenge and opportunity in this moment.

The report is grounded in a belief that excellence and equity are inextricably entwined, such that excellence without equity is not true excellence, and equity (mere access) without excellence is an unfulfilled promise. It states: "We must not accept the false, invidious trade-off between equity and excellence. Democracy entails the opposite."

I believe that. I believe if we keep focused on that Excellence Equity Imperative, we will succeed in the renaissance of the land grant mission and will succeed across all of our institutional priorities including:

1. Student success
2. World class academic and research programs
3. Institutional competitiveness
4. Outreach and impact around the state and world
5. Strengthening our democracy

Student Success

We start always, of course, with student success. We are a community dedicated first and foremost to student success – united by our belief in the power of a CSU degree to transform lives. In this time when we often hear people questioning the value of higher education, we must answer that with the well-documented proof of the extraordinary value of a CSU degree.

Whether they are arriving as first-year students, transfers, or lifelong learners, our message at all times from all segments of our community must be: you are welcome, you will be supported, and you will succeed here. We prove this by doing things like offering free applications for Colorado residents, working hard to keep tuition affordable, continually investing in financial aid, and leading in support for our student veterans and military families.

We deliver world-class education and hands-on learning in inspiring environments like nowhere on earth – from our classrooms and labs, to the Mountain Campus, Todos Santos, the Spur Campus, and Semester at Sea. And through our cultural and resource centers, athletics programs, hundreds of co-curricular activities, and opportunities for undergraduate research. And we deliver degrees that prepare our students for careers and for life.

Academic and Research Excellence

Our academic reputation has never been better and continues to rise. We are poised to:

- Continue to grow our research portfolio and boost our technology transfer
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration across campus and with peer institutions
- Strengthen our global footprint and more actively engage with our alumni worldwide
- Innovate around industry partnerships and curriculum including online learning and credentialing
- Fuel emerging capabilities for advancing clean energy including through cutting edge laser research, and so much more.

Of course, this all hinges on our ability to recruit and retain top talent. Which leads me to the third priority: institutional competitiveness.

Institutional Competitiveness

We must strive to be the first choice not just for students, but also for faculty, graduate assistants, researchers, and staff in all positions. This means competitive compensation and pay equity in starting positions and senior roles; top benefits packages; investment in personal and professional development; commitment to diversity and inclusion; teamwork and respect; investment in our physical infrastructure and beautiful surroundings; and investment in our community.

It means continual improvement of our systems; transparency in processes and budgeting; and strengthening our shared governance. It means excellence in advancement, philanthropy, stewardship, and alumni relations. In every aspect of what we do, we should seek to set the standard, be innovative, and live out the Excellence Equity Imperative.

Engagement and Extension around the State

Which brings me to our fourth priority, our extension, engagement, and commitment to all corners of our state and our rural communities. Thanks to investment by our Board of Governors in the Rural Initiative, we have made significant progress in listening to our communities, responding with resources, and investing in youth, healthy communities, and our agricultural and food economy.

We have invested in faculty status for many of our Extension specialists and agents. And we're piloting 4-H programs to reach underserved populations, as well as collaborating on bachelor's degree programs with community colleges throughout the state.

Our impact is significant and our voices are trusted. As we move into this new era of leadership in Engagement and Extension, I'm confident that every community, agricultural sector, and student across Colorado will know they are a priority for CSU.

Democracy

Which brings me back to the final priority I will highlight today – the strengthening of our democracy. We were forged by the great experiment of the democratization of higher education across all communities, but we still have much to do.

Democracy is not a spectator sport. We must all be on the field of play. That's why I am so pleased that CSU is undertaking a Thematic Year of Democracy this year. During the year we are

highlighting democracy throughout our classrooms, art galleries, and events. We are hosting discussions around the First Amendment, economic disparity, climate, and media, and we are bringing in speakers of all political and ideological persuasions to model civil, thoughtful, and productive dialogue. Thank you, Dean Withers and Marissa Dienstag, for your leadership of this effort.

And who better to take the lead in this area than CSU? We are uniquely positioned among universities in Colorado and in the country to lead in this space, intentionally weaving together a rich tapestry of diverse perspectives, welcoming and embracing them. Democracy needs champions in this moment. It is our responsibility to be and to produce engaged, prepared citizens who are ready to work with one another, to vote, to volunteer, to run for office, and to participate in all facets of civil society.

It is my hope that, collectively, we will take this Thematic Year, and build upon it a lasting priority for CSU to be a leader in this country in building the path forward for a healthy democracy. That is how the renaissance takes root.

The Next Chapter

So, as we begin this next chapter in our great university's history, I'll leave you with these words taken from the famous poem "The Hill We Climb" by Amanda Gorman, which serves as an inspiration for all:

"We are striving to forge our union with purpose. To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man. And so we lift our gazes, not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must put our differences aside...while democracy can periodically be delayed, it can never be permanently defeated. In this truth, in this faith we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us."

Rams, let's seize this moment together, as a community steeled in its resolve and determination for excellence, and as a community burnished by resilience and rich in gratitude. That's our CSU community.

I want to thank all of you for what you are doing to achieve excellence and equity, and to establish CSU as the leader among all land grant universities in this country. I pledge to you my very best in supporting you as president.

And finally, dad, thank you and mom for sending me to CSU and supporting me every day, from my first day as a freshman to today as president.

Let's have a great year – Go Rams!

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Agricultural Sciences

Business

Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering

Health and Human Sciences

Liberal Arts

Warner College of Natural Resources

Natural Sciences

Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

SCHOOLS & PROGRAMS:

Graduate School

International Programs

Online Degrees and Courses

School of Materials Science and Engineering

School of Music, Theatre and Dance

School of Biomedical and Chemical Engineering

School of Education

School of Global Environmental Sustainability

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