



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

“Full Circle”

2024 President’s Fall Address

Colorado State University

President Amy Parsons

Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024

Good morning, Rams, and welcome. A special welcome to our Board of Governors, University leadership, our community partners, our partners from the City and the County, our alumni, and especially to our students.

It’s an honor to be here with you today. It’s been a full year since we were all here together on another perfect fall day for the investiture and Fall Address. That’s a day that I will never forget, and what a year it has been. We’ve reached new academic heights, set research records, received transformative gifts, raised the recognition of CSU to new levels, and added exceptional new leaders to our ranks, including new deans: Dr. Kjerstin Thorsen and Dr. Carolyn Lawrence-Dill.

I shared last year what it was like when I first arrived on this campus as a 17-year-old student filled with excitement and gratitude. This fall I got to experience it in a whole new way when we moved our youngest daughter to CSU as a freshman. In the same week, my husband and I moved our older daughter, now a junior here at CSU, into her first off-campus house with her friends. And I met my own freshman roommate for lunch to talk about it all.

I’m not sure that the idea of coming full circle really does justice to that week. It was the convergence of multiple circles that can only happen in a community such as ours, one in which connections endure and lives keep intersecting even as this place and its relationship to the world keep changing. My family’s story is just one small, full circle story among so many thousands out there.

Let me tell you a big intersecting story that we all experienced this fall. Last month on September 7th, we celebrated Ag Day. It was our biggest Ag Day yet, and it was a glorious day here at CSU. Our entire campus burst into pumpkin orange, and we were the Aggies again celebrating with a 4,000 person BBQ and a sold-out stadium for a victory over UNC. We looked out at the freshly painted “A” celebrating 100 years of proclaiming our Aggie roots.

And that day, we also retired number 14 in recognition of Lt. Col. John Mosley. John Mosley came to CSU from Denver’s Manual High School in the fall of 1939. He became just the second African American to play football at CSU and the first African American letter winner in CSU’s history. He

was a leader on and off the field and became the vice president of the student body. After graduating, he enrolled in the Tuskegee flight training center and became a bomber pilot, serving in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Later, he became an advocate for Black athletes and the Tuskegee Airmen, among so many accomplishments. On Ag Day, we had the privilege of watching Lt. Col. Mosley's children and grandchildren bring the Mosley name full circle back to campus as they participated in another of our great traditions, the ringing of the bell at the Iris and Michael Smith Alumni Center at the start of the football game. And the bell they rang has its own amazing and slightly mysterious full circle story.

About 30 years before John Mosley arrived at CSU, around 1910, we acquired that very same 500-pound bell and installed it at the tower of Old Main. It was used to ring out at the start of classes and after victorious football games. But John Mosley never got to hear that bell because it mysteriously disappeared in 1919. Then in 1970, when Old Main burned down, the fire took the bell tower down with it, and the mystery of the bell was on its way to being forgotten until 2016. That year, many of us were busy with the construction of Canvas Stadium and our new alumni center. Kristi Bohlender, the executive director of the alumni association, received a call from an attorney representing unnamed clients who were asking whether now would be a good time to return the bell 100 years later, and if we could put it to use (and also if we would be willing to give immunity for the original crime a century before and for the decades of cover up). Kristi smartly said, "yes, of course," but was quite shocked when several nights later she received a call from her husband who, upon returning home from work, found the 500-pound bell sitting in their driveway.

Much about the bell and its travels over that century remains unknown. We know that it was buried under the ground for about 50 years, that it traveled from place to place for a while, and that it was cared for by generations of Rams who saw to it that it would eventually return to its rightful home. Now it hangs in the Jim and Nadine Henry Tower at Canvas Stadium. That's where, on Ag Day, wearing our Aggie orange, we listened as John Mosley's descendants rang the bell first heard on campus 115 years prior.

History, commitment, excellence, and a touch of mischief all reverberated in that remarkable moment when so many Rams from multiple generations had that big feeling of coming full circle. How fortunate we are to be part of this community with these incredible and intersecting stories and people. I have asked a few of you to tell me about your favorite connections to CSU.

- Marion Underwood, our Provost and Executive Vice President, said that a favorite tradition is convocation, that exciting moment when new students join our academic community. She also remarked on the power of a more somber moment, a memorial and tree planting last spring in memory of our treasured college, Diana Wall, a globally renowned environmental scientist and University Distinguished Professor of Biology, who passed away in March.
- Kevin Keefe, a 1981 graduate, now an accountant here at CSU, said the interactions he has through the Alumni Association, Athletics, and particularly the Fostering Success Program, all give him a "tremendous feeling of community."
- Lucy McCrossan, a second-year drum major with the CSU Marching band, and a fourth-year music education student, said that one of the traditions that makes her feel most connected is when the entire band is in the tunnel before they go out for a football game and they start chanting "I said I'm proud to be a CSU Ram." Honestly, the band has all the best traditions. You guys are awesome.

- Kelly DiMartino, I know you're here. Kelly is our Fort Collins City Manager and a CSU alum. She is a season ticket holder for volleyball. She said she loves how people come out with enthusiasm and CSU pride at the beginning of each season, making the games feel like mini reunions with community members and fellow fans.

In August, we welcomed more than 6,000 new students to campus, each of them ready to create their own CSU stories and participate in their own traditions. This class of students is very special and a class that we should all be extremely proud of. It's not just one of the largest classes, it's also one of the most academically qualified and diverse classes ever to arrive at CSU. More international students, more students from rural backgrounds, more first-generation students and more honors students enrolled. Thanks to the great work of so many people here, our retention rate has also gone up. With leadership from Provost Underwood, Vice President for Student Affairs Blanche Hughes, and Vice President for Enrollment and Access Kevin MacLennan, we are positioned to continue this success as we deliver on our land-grant mission.

For what is CSU's number one priority? That's right, it's student success. To succeed, our students must first arrive. That starts with smart outreach to them and their families and with clearly communicating about our tremendous value. How do we do this? We waive application fees for undergraduate residents, and we have just started doing the same for graduate students. We improve the way we package financial aid and recruit top scholars. We innovate how we recruit and support transfer students, especially those from community colleges. We make our visit days and orientations welcoming for all students and all families, and we make Ram Welcome the best welcome week of its kind in the country. We lead the way in student advising using new technologies to connect students to internships and their first jobs. We support our first-generation students, and this year celebrated 40 years of CSU leading the nation with our first-generation scholarship. We relentlessly focus on improving retention and graduation rates. We grow and strengthen our alumni network, which today is the largest and most connected alumni network in Colorado. Thanks to Vice President for Marketing and Communications Kyle Henley and his team, we are telling these stories in new and compelling ways, connecting with broad audiences around the world.

The success of every CSU student and alum is grounded in our second priority, excellence in our academic and research programs. There are many ways to look at our remarkable progress here. One important way is to look at our annual research expenditures. Under the leadership of Vice President for Research Cassandra Moseley and her team, we will set a new record this year with expenditures exceeding \$576 million, placing CSU among the ranks of the best research universities around the country.

Another way to look at excellence is through awards and distinctions, and we've had many this year. This is just a sample.

- CSU's College of Business was selected as a winner of the *Financial Times's "Best Business School"* for responsible business education.
- CSU's Engineering professors Sonia Kreidenweis and Jorge Rocca were elected to the National Academy of Engineers.
- Faculty Council Chair and Professor of Biology Mendy Smith, and Dean of Engineering Allen Robinson were elected to the Fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

- In our College of Health and Human Sciences, the Occupational Therapy graduate program ranked No. 7 in the country.
- We're so proud that Dr. Joel Berger in the Warner College of Natural Resources is a finalist for this year's Indianapolis Prize – the world's leading prize for animal conservation.
- College of Natural Sciences Chemistry Melissa Reynolds and CVMBS Professor of Surgery Dean Hendrickson were named Senior Members of the National Academy of Inventors.
- CSU was once again named in the top four most sustainable universities in the country, a ranking we've held for the last 10 years.

These are just a few of many distinctions. Yet another way to look at excellence is through our impact and growth. There are many examples to recount here. I will share a few and then I have a very exciting announcement. CSU is among the institutions leading the Colorado-Wyoming Climate Resilience Engine, a \$160 million project funded by the National Science Foundation, aimed at helping communities monitor, mitigate, and adapt to climate change in the West and beyond.

In two weeks, we will break ground on one of the most powerful laser facilities in the world, an international epicenter for fusion research with potential to deliver profound benefits to the earth. In May, we broke ground on a world-class Veterinary Health and Education Complex on the south campus, keeping CSU at the leading edge of veterinary care and education. Work is underway on our renovation of our beloved Clark Building, transforming Clark A and B wings and providing a fitting home for our departments in the College of Liberal Arts.

And, this week, we announced that CSU will launch a new construction engineering program, starting in the fall of 2025. With a generous donation from Kiewit, students will learn construction projects from start to finish and receive instruction from top faculty in Construction Management and Civil and Environmental Engineering and industry experts. And that program will be one among several housed in a brand-new state of the art technology building that I'm excited to announce today.

The vision for the building was first supported several years ago by Don and Susie Law, two alums who have demonstrated a long-term commitment to CSU engineering students. Our students stepped in to support the project, making an impressive \$50M commitment of student fees. And their investment inspired even more support. Today, I am overjoyed to share that CSU has just received a commitment for one of the largest gifts in university history. Thank you to the Scott Family Foundation for a new \$50 million gift to CSU to support this project.

Together, these generous contributions paired with our students' inspiring investment will support the state-of-the-art Don and Susie Law Engineering Future Technologies Building. It will be a transformative addition to the heart of our campus, right on the site of today's Glover Building. The facility will be home to classrooms, laboratories, innovation and maker spaces, all focused on the ways digital technology and AI will transform engineering and all disciplines. It is an impressive statement of CSU's strength and trajectory. Congratulations to Dean Robinson and the Walter Scott, Jr. College of Engineering.

Our University Advancement team, led by Interim Vice President Brett Anderson, works so hard to bring such visions to life, and through their efforts we will continue to transform CSU through philanthropy. And we are supported every step of the way by the CSU Foundation led by Cheri O'Neill and CSU STRATA led by Ajay Menon.

For that trajectory to continue, we must attract, support, and celebrate the best and brightest faculty and staff in every position. Which is why our third priority is institutional competitiveness. We are so fortunate to be here in beautiful Fort Collins, Colorado. Am I right, Mayor Arndt? This is a city that I believe, and I know you believe, is one of the best college towns in the entire country. It's no wonder that so many extraordinary people call this place home. We're proud that *Forbes* magazine named CSU the best educational employer in Colorado in 2024. With leadership from Vice President for Human Resources Eric Ray and Vice President for Inclusive Excellence Kauline Cipriani, we continue to engage in critical work to make sure we have competitive compensation and benefits; to ensure pay equity; to affirm our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and to celebrate teamwork and respect. There is much work here to be done, and we are committed to keeping our momentum going.

I am so grateful to Vice President for Operations Brendan Hanlon for his tireless work in overseeing our budgets and finances, his focus on securing our financial future, and his ability to patiently educate our community while keeping our capital projects on track. And a big thank you to Vice President for Information Technology Brandon Bernier, who leads a team that keeps everything running and stays a step ahead on cybersecurity, positioning CSU as a national leader in IT and artificial intelligence.

In addition to these leaders and their dedicated teams, a secret sauce we have at CSU is our shared governance. Our Faculty Council, Administrative Professional Council, Classified Personnel Council, and ASCSU, along with standing advisory groups such as the Multicultural Staff and Faculty Council and the Graduate Student Council, are made up of dedicated faculty, staff, and students who listen to their constituents, believe in our mission, and think creatively about how we can make progress towards shared goals. We cannot succeed without shared governance at CSU, and we're fortunate to have so many extraordinary leaders in our ranks.

And when it comes to institutional competitiveness, we aim to compete at the highest levels in Athletics as well. Under the leadership of Athletic Director John Weber, we have ushered in a new era for CSU Athletics. In the rapidly changing landscape of collegiate sports, CSU has continued to aim high, invest in our students and their well-being, innovate, and stay a step ahead. Efforts from so many people led to CSU receiving an invitation to join the PAC-12 this fall. Joining the PAC-12 sets CSU on an exciting trajectory, both academically and athletically. I am thrilled that CSU is right in the middle of rebuilding this storied conference, along with seven other outstanding universities.

CSU's impact, whether through Athletics or Extension or Research, is felt in every corner of the state of Colorado, which is why our fourth priority is outreach and impact. Our Extension and Engagement activities across the state are a national model for how higher education can serve the needs of local communities. Led by Vice President for Engagement and Extension James Pritchett, we are strengthening our ties and presence in rural Colorado, and our recruitment of students from every corner of the state. And this team is championing youth development, including 100 years of 4H. In fact, here on the Oval today are OEE faculty and staff from all around the state. Thank you for the work you're doing to advance CSU's priorities.

Our impact is growing in the urban heart of Denver as well, as our Spur campus continues to develop and expand. Under the direction of Rico Munn, who will serve as Vice President for Metro Denver Engagement and Strategy, and Spur leadership, we're launching innovative ways to

widen access for students to CSU, we're bringing our research into the community, and we're providing educational opportunity to thousands of lifelong learners.

Student success; academic and research excellence; institutional competitiveness; and outreach and impact around the state are all critical elements of who we are. Considered together, it's clear why this institution is so important to Colorado, to the country, and perhaps most importantly, to our democracy. Democracy is our final priority, and for good reason: CSU is democracy's university.

When President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862, it signified our country's aspirations to heal and to prosper through education. This opened up access to those previously left behind and set our nation's sights on excellence to strengthen our young democracy.

Next month, our country faces an important election. In Colorado, ballots will go out in the next two weeks. As Nick said, thousands of our students will be voting for the first time, and tens of thousands in our community will be involved in this election. Our role in democracy is as important today as it was on the day that we were founded. For the past year and a half, we have embraced this role with vigor and spirit.

We have woven democracy into our curriculum and our research, brought in powerful voices across the political spectrum, and shined a light on unique programs such as the Center for Public Deliberation and the Strayer Center for Public Service Leadership. We have embraced the First Amendment and difficult decisions on local and global issues. We had bipartisan discussions involving senators and governors, and conversations with scholars, entertainers, and leaders from academia and government. CSU is leading nationally when it comes to facilitating these critical discussions.

And our students, led by our student government leaders: Nick DeSalvo, Braxton Dietz, and the ASCSU team, have been champions of this effort every step of the way. They are practitioners of democracy. They make sure that student voices are heard at every level of government. Their innovative work on democracy today is the ultimate full circle story of our founding as democracy's university in 1870. Knowing that they are the future leaders of our country should give us all great hope.

And that is the place to conclude this speech, with the focus on students and the focus on hope. Everyone here today has their own unique CSU story. We are all part of the story of that bell every time we hear it ring. We are all part of Lt. Col. John Mosley's story and the story of the "A." We are all inspired by the stories of the students here who are part of the band, spirit squad, and choir.

It is the honor of a lifetime to stand here today and to play some small role along with every one of you in the evolving stories of CSU. Thank you sincerely to all the leaders who serve on our Cabinet and Executive Leadership Team. Thank you to the President's Office staff: Emily, June, Abby, Somer, Wayne, Jim, Rick, Patrese, Teddi, Scott Shrake, Laura Jensen, Matt Tillman, and Maggie Walsh. Thanks to my husband Jeff, and my dad here in the front.

And could you give another hand to the CSU concert choir? Such a beautiful performance of "Measure Me, Sky!" That poem was written by Leonora Speyer and was published in 1926. I'll finish with another poem, written some 70 years later. Maya Angelou wrote this poem for the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1995. She begins by describing how we inhabit a "small and

lonely planet,” and how we have the potential to “come to” a “brave and startling truth” about greatness.

She writes:

*When we come to it
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear*

*When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it.*

Thank you all for working towards this “brave and startling” truth for our beloved CSU. Go Rams.

COLLEGES:

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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