

President's Fall Address to the University 2019

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Thank you all for being here today.

I am deeply grateful to have the opportunity to deliver my first Fall Address to the CSU community as your 15th President.

But this event comes after a tragic beginning for this campus. In the first three weeks of the semester, we lost several members of our community, including two of our students and two recent alumni. I ask all of you to take some time today to reflect on what it means to us when we lose a member of our community, how painful that is, and how big a hole one person can leave behind. Each and every member of this community is deeply valuable and valued, and we must make one another feel valued every day.

With these lives in mind, I ask you to attend to our students, faculty and staff who are here at CSU and do not feel safe or valued because of racism and other forms of bias. We suffer from some of the same pains that our nation suffers from now. Most of you here today know why we must address these issues right now. But for those who may not be aware, let me contextualize. Over the last few years, this campus has been the site of a number of incidents of bias. Most recently, a photo of four of our students in blackface was posted to social media, and last night we discovered a swastika on the wall in one of our apartment complexes.

Whether individual or institutional, racism and bias is antithetical to the core mission of excellent higher education. Our universities and colleges must be places of equality and achievement driven by discovery and difficult conversations. Robust debate on a public campus is protected by the First Amendment, but this does not mean

we are powerless to fight for change through positive engaged discourse, action and accountability. Many who are here today have worked hard at CSU, in Fort Collins, and Colorado, across the nation and in other countries to promote equality. Our efforts are long-standing and extensive, but they have clearly not been enough. As many of us have heard privately, and as our whole campus heard publicly spoken last night, there are people on this campus who demean and dehumanize and threaten others because of the color of their skin, their religion, their country of origin, or other aspects of their identity.

We must do better – we must join together to rise. We want each student to thrive and succeed. We put tremendous resources into supporting our students, but if we do not come together as a community to fight against racism and bias, we are not helping all our students succeed. Indeed, as we have heard them tell us directly, we are forcing them to fight against the very community that should be their haven and their home.

We have increased diversity on campus. We have an Office of Diversity and a Commission on Diversity. But we have learned a hard lesson this week that diversity alone is not enough to create an environment in which all are valued and have an equal opportunity to succeed. Each of us must accept responsibility and be accountable for creating the unbiased culture necessary in an institution of higher education such as CSU. We must do this to fulfill our land grant mission.

To those of you here today who have been the victims of racism and other forms of bias on our campus and who have not felt supported by CSU, I am deeply sorry for all the ways we have failed you. I know that you are angry. You are frustrated. You are sad. And you are tired. I cannot ease those feelings today. We may not be able to ease them for months, but we will try. You have the right to be angry and we respect your outrage. What we ask of you is not that you set it aside but that you cultivate hope with your anger, and work with us to make things better.

Together, we can attack racism head-on. Today, I am announcing the creation of a Race, Bias, and Equity Initiative. I believe that this can have a powerful and positive impact here at CSU. In 2015, the University of Washington launched such an effort and

it improved campus climate. It has made it possible – although difficult – to engage in conversations among people with vastly different backgrounds and perspectives. It has made the University of Washington campus climate better, reduced incidents of bias, and made it possible for diverse students with diverse perspectives and ideas to feel safe, to learn, and to succeed. And I am very, very proud of our students who are marching right now and exercising their First Amendment rights.

The Race, Bias, and Equity Initiative here at CSU will include students, faculty, and staff at every step of the way. It will encompass both short-term and long-term actions that will be implemented with urgency and courage. And our efforts will be at the individual, institutional, and system levels. **We start immediately.**

I want to give you an example of just how serious we are about this. Hundreds of our students, students from the University of Northern Colorado, members of the Fort Collins community, alumni and leaders from Denver came together at a meeting last night of the ASCSU – CSU's student government – to exercise their First Amendment rights to speak and assemble. Many of our students had the courage and passion to stand up in front of an enormous crowd and share their stories, their anger, and most importantly, their ideas. My office will invite every CSU student who spoke to participate in launching the initiative. However, I want to pause here to make clear the burden should not be on our students. **The burden is on us!**

Let me share with you what I predict will happen after this address. We will hear loudly from some who believe we have gone too far in taking our students seriously. They may blast us in social media for being too liberal – for coddling our students. I also know we will hear loudly from those who think we have not gone far enough, that we are apologists but not serious about change. There will be many other perspectives and I know we will hear them all. But I am here to tell you we have a strong moral compass at CSU. As a land-grant institution founded on the principle of access, we cannot turn our backs on **any** of our students. We owe it to **all** our students to create an environment in which they can flourish and succeed.

One of the things that drew me powerfully to CSU was the great minds and hearts at the core of this campus. Now that I count myself a member of this community,

I feel that even more. We care, we care about other people, about what's right, and about our world.

150 years ago, as we know from Land Acknowledgement statement that Serena read a few minutes ago, before this university was established, the green space where we are all gathered was open prairie. This land was also home to people whose very way of life was swept aside in order to build another way. None of us here today were responsible for the suffering and indignities inflicted on Native peoples during the creation of Colorado State University. It would be easy to say: it was not our fault.

But we do not say that. We care and must demonstrate that care through our action.

In the midst of all that has happened in the last few weeks that challenges us to be better, phenomenal work has been done at CSU. I have many exciting things to tell you about our university, about what we are doing to change our world for the better, and about where we are going as we build upon the legacy of 150 years to look towards our future. But today I want to share these things in light of the hard work we must do together.

There is a term that many of CSU faculty, staff and administrators have already heard me use: *Strategic Transformation*. I use this term instead of the term "strategic planning" because it signals actual change, not just the preparations that lead up to change. And I use it in hopes that we will be inspired to think outside the box in terms of just what our next steps will be. When we plan, we often stay in a straight line, or on a path that someone else has marked out for us. That's true whether we're talking about our academic curriculum, our research endeavors, or our strategies for creating a climate in which all students succeed. But planning is not enough, in any of those areas. We truly must transform. Transforming is more than changing. It speaks to the unexpected, to the extraordinary, even the impossible.

That's what we're aiming for at CSU. And since we want to do this boldly, bravely, and with a sense of urgency let's call what we're doing **Courageous** Strategic Transformation. That means moving forward with our minds and our hearts wide open

to new ideas, to new ways of doing what we need to do, to new shapes to our physical spaces, our academic and institutional processes, our anti-bias work, and our research models. And it means including all who must be included and accounted for in our community and in our world.

I urge us all to embrace the Courageous Strategic Transformation of CSU, and to focus on some clear goals.

First, we must do our part to keep college accessible and affordable. We know that many families and students are having increasing difficulty paying for higher education. We can ease their burden by the careful implementation of courageous transformation strategies that include constant attention to our purpose, processes and respect for people.

Second, we must improve how we get things done. We will deploy a CSU Excellence Model that adapts the scientific method to making higher education more nimble. It is a problem solving and improvement methodology that sharply defines specific problems, analyzes them, attempts to solve them, measures progress, does it within established time frames then repeats in a constant cycle of improvement for excellence.

I believe we are excellent and that with a commitment to global preeminence we will set the standard across the nation and the world for what a great land grant university looks like in the 21st century. Colorado State has a proud history of 150 years of work on behalf of the people of Colorado and of the world. **Let's join to up our game!**

I was recently reminded of another way that we might measure ourselves, which is in terms of the health of our organization. There are eight qualities of a truly healthy organization. These apply to any organization, from a government to a Fortune 500 Company, from an institution like CSU to the many organizations within CSU. Colleges. Departments. Student orgs, etc.

A healthy organization practices openness, humility and respect from top to bottom.

A healthy organization fosters an environment of accountability and personal responsibility.

A healthy organization embraces difference and diversity and creates a climate in which difference and diversity are allowed to make it better.

A healthy organization allows freedom for risk-taking.

It has a fierce commitment to “doing it right” and a willingness to tolerate and learn from mistakes.

A healthy organization has unquestioned integrity and consistency.

A healthy organization pursues collaboration, integration, and holistic thinking.

And we demonstrate courage and persistence in the face of difficulty.

I was excited when I first read these qualities, because so many of them resonate for me as absolutely true of CSU. I know that I am still new to this community. Some of you may feel that we have a long way to go to call ourselves a healthy organization. But I believe that the desire to do so is already here. I think this community truly **longs** to meet all the qualities of a healthy, excellent university. And because we do, we will get there, through Courageous Strategic Transformation and by truly working together.

I feel a tremendous sense of urgency to do the incredible work we are here to do. And our state and our world need us to do that work **now**.

We offer access to higher education to people from across Colorado, and we welcome students from around the nation and the world. We must continue to educate these talented young people, and we must do so by giving them all the tools they need to succeed, to graduate from CSU and enter the workforce. Our students are changing and so are their needs, and so our classrooms must change, our learning spaces must evolve, our climate must change. Our teaching methods, curricula and ways of engaging with our students **must** transform to meet our students’ needs. Otherwise, we fail them.

We conduct research and do creative work in fields as diverse as atmospheric science and contemporary poetry, veterinary medicine and aging human brains. Our scientists, scholars, and researchers at all levels are world-class. As our Provost, Rick Miranda, shared a few minutes ago, our faculty members have won national and international accolades — too many to list in one speech. And on a larger scale, our researchers are making the world a better place now, today. Our Biological Manufacturing and Academic Resource Center produces human vaccines and diagnostics for the CDC. And our researchers work closely with regional communities to control infectious disease that kills millions.

Nevertheless, we must up our research game. We must move faster to solve the great challenges we are facing today. We must think more creatively and more boldly about how to apply our discoveries and how to share them with the world. Otherwise, we fail to make good on the promise of the Research 1 university.

We also serve our community, our state and our world. CSU Extension reaches throughout the state, including youth programs through 4H. Our veterinary hospital literally saves lives every day, as do some of our research innovations into disease and food scarcity. Meanwhile, we work with farmers and ranchers on water, soil and production issues, with businesses and public schools, with non-profits and partner institutions on research from climate to energy, and with our government to demonstrably improve the quality of peoples' lives. We will never stop doing this. It is who we are, as a land grant institution and as an institution with great minds and hearts. But our community's needs are changing every day. They are changing as our climate changes and as our highly-connected global world moves faster. We must open ourselves to hearing what our community needs from us. Otherwise, we fail to honor our land grant mission.

But we will not fail. Working together, committed to Courageous Strategic Transformation and to becoming a truly healthy institution, we will not fail. Because we are brilliant.

This is something else that many of you may have already heard me say. I have said it as an exhortation to everyone at CSU: faculty, staff and students: **Own your**

brilliance. I mean that in terms of the brilliance of the minds that make up this academic and research community. Because there are so many brilliant minds here, from our newest students who don't even know what they want to major in yet to our University Distinguished Professors and Teachers. And our world needs our brilliance. We cannot, we **must** not, hide our light under a bushel basket.

And I mean this phrase — *Own your brilliance* — in another way as well. Because we are not just a campus of brilliant minds and great hearts. We have a powerful, shining bold spirit as well. It's a spirit of hope and optimism, a bold spirit, a spirit that will not be dimmed by challenges and will not give up when the going gets tough. Let's own that brilliance and shine together, today, tomorrow and far into the future.

Thank you very, very much for being here today.