

President's Fall Address 2016
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Welcome! And I want to offer a special welcome to those faculty, staff, and students who are new to our University. We're glad you're here and that you've taken the time today to join in one of our really wonderful CSU traditions. (I'm talking, of course, about the picnic that comes right *after* the speech...)

Actually, I really do enjoy this event. Maybe it's because I grew up on a farm with all of the cyclical rhythm that comes with agricultural life, but I love the flow of the recurring cycles of academia. At this time of year, campus comes back to life and we gather here as fall approaches, to renew our friendships, to reflect a little and to look forward. It's one of the milestones of every fall semester – a chance to mark the passing of time, celebrate the progress we've made, and spend a little time here on the Oval while the days are still long.

One of the ways that we mark the passage of time is, of course, through memory. In 2009, I stood just over there -- on the steps of the Administration Building -- to give my inaugural address as president of Colorado State. We talked about the people who had laid the foundation for our University, as we reflected on the challenges and fear we faced at that time in the early days of the Great Recession -- and we contrasted them with those faced by our predecessors during the Dust Bowl, World War II, and the Vietnam era.

And yes, I talked about Lincoln – as I have been known to do.

But ultimately the message of that first Fall Address was a simple one with two parts: we would focus on the fundamentals of our academic

mission and never stop striving for excellence; and that this was, in fact, the legacy left to us by those who had built CSU.

- It's the great and generous legacy of an American land-grant university — Colorado's university — providing access to a world-class education, with its roots deeply planted and its vision focused on the horizon of our future.
- It is a legacy of enormous achievement and breathtaking possibility.
- It was – and it remains – our legacy.

I spent last week on the eastern plains, finishing up this year's annual statewide tour. We chat with alums and Rotary clubs, we visit Ag Experiment Stations and reconnect with our Extension and Forest Service staff. We listen. And we give folks an update on the state of the university.

- We explain eight consecutive years of record enrollment, a decade as Colorado's school of choice, the largest and most diverse entering class in our history, celebrating 1 in 4 of our students being the first in their family ever to go to college, that 44% of our students graduate without debt, and that 80% have jobs in their field within six months of graduation. And we talk about the finances that are re-shaping – for good and ill – American public higher education.
- We talk about years of records in research funding, the life-changing work and scholarly productivity of our faculty, and some of the numerous awards and prizes that reflect this quality.
- We reinforce our renewed commitment to agriculture and to rural Colorado, to a university that is fully engaged with the citizens of the state it exists to serve.

- We update them on the changing face of campus as it is renewed for generations to come.
- We thank them for their support in yet another record year of fund raising; and we explain how this makes all the difference in access, yes, but access to excellence.
- And we end on that note: that we will never back away from striving for excellence in all that we do, from the arts to athletics, from Fort Collins to Rocky Ford to Antarctica, from a freshman student determined to make their mark, to an emeritus professor cementing their place in the legacy of CSU. In all of these things and so many more, the quest for excellence unites us, directs us, and inspires us. It is who we are. That quest is CSU.

Every one of the above areas – and all the ones I didn't mention – have so many components to the story of success; so many names I should mention and call out to highlight work that is above and beyond, work that makes a difference, work that changes lives.

But that would make this a very, very long speech, and it is another part of CSU that we don't spend too much time pausing and looking back. When we pause, we tend to wipe our brow, take a breath, smile, and then put our shoulder back to the wheel – because we know there is so much more to do and CSU *does* things.

But that begs a question: Do we sometimes try to do too much? Do we over-reach?

It would be easier – some might even say wiser – to take on fewer issues in the face of so many challenges. Maybe discretion is the better part of valor in the face of so much uncertainty. Do we need to admit all these students and grow the University now? Maybe now is a time to focus on a few key research areas. After all, we need to be healthy before we can help others; we need to take care of ourselves.

And before you know it, these comments are weaving themselves into a narrative that inaction – on many fronts – is really just the prudent course.

This is a hypnotic and seductive call to inaction. It is an excuse in a candy coating – a coating that dissolves, leaving to taste its bitter medicine as we remember that we were not created to serve ourselves – we were created to serve others; to push ourselves, to stretch and strain – and then to do it again.

If we do not find ways to admit and educate the next generation despite funding challenges, then who will? If we do not invest in our research infrastructure, where will our faculty make the next world-changing discoveries? If we do not try to find a way to feed a world of 9 billion in a sustainable manner, what is our answer when we are asked why we turned away? We've asked these questions before: If not us, who? If not now, when? And we have never shied away from the answers.

We are the most sustainable university in the country because so many people here knew it mattered and they got to work and simply made it so.

- This is CSU in action.

We committed to equitable work environments for our women colleagues and for our non-tenure track colleagues because it's the right thing to do, and we're making progress even as we acknowledge there is a long path ahead.

- This is CSU in action.

We've embarked on efforts to look the issue of race directly in the eye and to make change – because we know if we don't get this right, we condemn yet another generation to suffer through the disease of racism, and CSU won't accept that.

- So CSU acts.

We're reframing our views on sexual violence and we, the men of CSU, are holding ourselves accountable because we know we hold it in our hands to remove this stain on our society – today.

- And so today, CSU acts.

We're wading into the issues of housing attainability and living wages – not because this is simple, but because we don't believe we can wait to address these challenges.

- CSU doesn't wait – she acts.

We're re-envisioning our campus not because we're shy on things to do in the here and now, but because we know that the seeds we plant today are the here and now of tomorrow and we are no less accountable to those who will follow us than we are to those who came before and built the legacy on which we stand.

So as we look to the year ahead, we will continue to focus on the fundamentals of our academic mission and the legacy we all sustain – a legacy that requires us never to shrink from re-imagining how we can do better – how we can be better – in every dimension.

To my mind, all of this is CSU; it's the CSU spirit.

- A spirit that is proud but not satisfied.
- A spirit that watches the path immediately before us to assure that our academic and fiscal fundamentals never lose their footing,
- ...but also keeps an eye clearly fixed on the future that we are determined to deliver to the next generation.

This is the spirit that is embodied so perfectly in the 25th anniversary of School is Cool. This is an amazing program – a labor of love conceived by a couple of our folks a quarter century ago as a way to help the children and families of our community. 40,000 children have been helped by this program and this year we honored the program's guiding

light with the creation of the Kathy Phifer School is Cool Legacy Scholarship. This program wasn't started because people didn't have full plates or had time on their hands. It wasn't started because anyone thought it would be easy. It was started because people of immense heart and character saw a need and didn't stop to argue that this was someone else's job, they just stepped in, got their hands dirty and changed lives.

That action in the face of challenge is CSU. We've seen it in ourselves these past eight years. We inherited it from those who built this university.

It's a trait that ran strongly in the man who created land grant universities with a stroke of his pen on July 2, 1862. In a series of letters between 1858 and 1862, Lincoln, for reasons that are historically obvious, frequently wrote of perseverance in the face of immense challenge.

- The cause must not be surrendered at the end of *one*, or even one *hundred* defeats.
- I know not how to aid you, save in the assurance of one of mature age, and much severe experience, that you cannot fail, if you resolutely determine, that you will not.
- I may not be able to do *more* than I can, but I shall do *all* I that can.
- And my personal favorite – a portion of a longer quote I keep in my wallet: I do the very best I can, the best I know how; and I mean to keep on doing it until the end.

This is the spirit that runs in our veins.

This spirit makes CSU this place we have all come to love.

It makes us CSU.

I end my remarks to alumni groups on statewide tours by saying that we hope they're proud of their alma mater because it is our privilege to represent her on their behalf.

And I'll offer that same sentiment to all of you today: I hope that you're proud of your university – not satisfied. Not thinking we do everything perfectly. But proud of our direction, our effort, our action. I hope you're proud because you – the sum of your actions – *are* CSU.

And it remains my deep honor to represent you.

Let's have a great year, CSU! Let's make a difference. Go Rams!