



**2020 CU Denver State of the Campus Address  
Delivered by Chancellor Michelle Marks on November 17, 2020**

Hello, and thank you for joining us. It's great to have you. In this most unusual of years, we're doing a lot of things differently -- including this State of the Campus address. Since we can't be together in person, I'm using this opportunity not only to *tell* you about the state of CU Denver right now, but to *show* you. We'll be hearing from many members of our community, who have some updates and stories to share.

And what an incredible community we have. I'm now in my 5<sup>th</sup> month as Chancellor here at CU Denver. It's been a pleasure meeting with so many of you during my 100 days listening tour. I met virtually with over 1000 members of our community – students, faculty, staff, alumni as well as employers, donors, and civic leaders in our community. My overwhelming takeaway from our discussions is the pride you feel. People love this place. Not that you don't see room for improvement. You shared concerns, and I heard you. And many of you shared ideas for how to make us stronger.

But you are also justifiably proud of the progress that this young university has made in its first 46 years as an independent campus. I was impressed with how many of you have been with us for decades, playing a major role in the tremendous growth and progress that CU Denver has experienced. And now I know that so many of you want to build on our momentum and boldly shape our future.

I know it might seem strange to talk about our future in the middle of the worst pandemic in over a century. It's true that many of us are struggling right now, and we need to take care of each other as we get through multiple crises, including an escalation of COVID cases in Denver and the election aftermath. But I want to point out that this global crisis has underscored what we need for a healthy functioning society: knowledge, scientific discovery, innovation, creative expression, talent -- and the ability to care for and about each other, respect other perspectives, and communicate across our differences.

The world needs what this urban public research university provides: educated, diverse, informed and engaged citizens taking leading roles in society – as our teachers, health workers, historians, architects, accountants, bioengineers, film makers, scientists, conservationists, civic leaders, and entrepreneurs. This is what we do. And we do it well.

**Safe Return to Campus**

We're proud of this. And you know what else I'm proud of? The way this community has handled

the COVID crisis, from the quick pivot to remote teaching and learning in the spring semester to the careful planning for a safe return to campus in the fall that prioritized campus safety and flexibility for students. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the remarkable staff and faculty who have managed our COVID response with creativity and compassion for our community.

I want you to hear directly from two people who were intimately involved in leading changes to enable our fall semester, Cary Weatherford and Joann Brennan, to tell us about that experience.

### ***Safe Return Video Clip***

Thank you, Cary and Joann.

The way this community took our health and safety measures seriously and adapted to these strange new times gives me great confidence that we will emerge from this pandemic stronger than ever before.

But before we emerge, we've got to get through it. In the same way a virus attacks a body, COVID-19 has invaded our lives. This pandemic, the economic hardships, racial tensions, and the divided political landscape are all taking a toll. Even more so because there's no clear end date in sight. We know from surveying the community that we're facing many challenges, including trying to work and parent within a given workday. Many of you need more flexibility. So we've revised our telework policy – during the pandemic – and now employees who are also having to care for relatives at home (kids, parents, or anyone else) can do so during regular working hours.

### **Mental Health**

We're also, collectively, facing a host of mental health challenges. So we've been working to acknowledge and address them, and to bring more services and support to our campus community.

I'm announcing today that with support from the CU Foundation we're making an immediate \$500,000 investment over the course of this academic year to meet mental health needs, including bringing more counseling services to our students and employees. We are taking four actions that will provide more help quickly.

First, we'll be investing in "Single Stop," a tool that has helped students all over the country by providing a one-stop shop that connects them to resources to meet their basic needs, such as low-income housing, food stamps, and health care. We've heard directly from other universities that it has been exceptionally helpful, and we expect that here it will help students hardest hit by the pandemic.

Second, we're bringing additional case managers onto our CARE team, which provides assistance to students whose behavior indicates that they're struggling.

Third, we'll be providing the Counseling Practicum program in the School of Education and Human Development with technical support to expand their ability to offer counseling to our students remotely.

And finally, we'll be helping the psychology clinic in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences with capacity support to expand their teletherapy for our students and also for our faculty and staff. Let's hear a little more about Mental Health & wellness during these trying times from Amber Long & Kristin Kushmider

### ***Mental Health Video Clip***

Thank you, Amber and Kristin.

### **Life in COVID**

In addition to the mental health concerns we're all facing, there are the challenges of operating a university through a pandemic and adjusting to this strange new normal. For students physically on campus, there's the weirdness of reconfigured classrooms, one-way passages in corridors, social distancing that allows limited gatherings in the dorm, mask wearing in all common spaces, and so much more. And our students who are studying remotely face a different set of challenges, including isolation, spotty Internet, and finding a quiet space to study or go to class, and the frustration of not being able to hang out with classmates and friends.

One big disappointment is that many of our international students have been unable to return. We want them back. They're a vital and treasured part of our campus presence, and we really miss them.

And yet, we've also had triumphs. Unlike at many of our peer institutions, our students overwhelmingly chose to return to their studies this year – overall enrollment is actually up from last year. And we've seen how they've tackled this semester as true Lynx -- with grit, tenacity, and resourcefulness. They're adapting to new ways of accessing the services they need, whether it's a remote advising session or a socially distanced power yoga class.

While we would all obviously prefer to be living in a world where we could gather freely and hold in-person classes without constraint, that's not possible right now. My inspiration has been seeing how our indomitable faculty and staff are focusing on what IS possible – coming up with creative new ways to serve students and teach across different modalities. Budding science teachers in Bud Talbot's Elementary Science Methods class are virtually visiting his backyard "shed of science" for weekly teaching demonstrations. Now able to access services, like advising and tutoring, virtually in the evenings, one student said: "Before this whole Zoom thing, I could never go to your tutoring sessions. With two kids it was just impossible... (But now) ever since I came to your session, I understand so much more. Thank you for inspiring me and for making me love physics."

Imagine that. Adapting in the face of this crazy pandemic, we've fired up someone's enthusiasm for physics.

It's been a challenge, no question, but I think because we're a young university that isn't stuck in its ways, we've made advances in technology and service orientation in the past 6 months that would have taken 6 years under normal circumstances. The really good news is that many of the innovations you've developed as pandemic adaptations are worth keeping.

Let's hear from three people who've found new ways to adapt.

### ***Life in COVID Video Clip***

It's not always easy to see the silver lining, but we appreciate your perspective, Dana, Anthony & Alexis. Thank you and keep up the great work.

### **Budget**

I can't say enough about the way the CU Denver community has come together during this crisis, working to figure out assistance and support of every kind. Among the many challenges we've faced as an institution has, of course, been financial. The budget impact of COVID has been enormous: about \$33 million, or 15 percent of our budget in this year alone. We've done a lot to manage our way through it – including implementing graduated furloughs, which spread the impact. Even more importantly, it enabled our employees to keep their jobs. We are taking it as a team, with the highest paid taking the largest number of furlough days. This is a different approach than many of our peers – and speaks to our core value of equity.

Every university has taken a big financial hit from COVID. But here again, CU Denver was in a position to adapt in order to manage the change. Even pre-COVID, our budget team had been preparing the campus to deal with financial pressures in a new way. It started with the shift to an incentive-based budget model in 2017. What's great about this model for CU Denver is that it shares more information and gives more budget decision-making authority to units. We are also shifting the way that we're approaching enrollment.

I'll turn things over to our CFO, Jennifer Sobanet, for more details on budget and enrollment.

### ***Budget Video Clip***

Thank you, Jennifer.

COVID is dealing an economic blow not just to our university but to many individuals within our community. With the help of the Loving Lynx Fund, which provides emergency financial support to students, we've heard from some of our most affected students that the fund kept a roof over their head and helped them stay safe as they work to complete their degrees. Here's the thing about this fund – much of its support comes from our own faculty and staff giving. I'm so impressed by this – just how much our faculty and staff care about our students' lives, beyond academics. For our faculty and staff who are experiencing temporary setbacks, this fall we established the CU Denver Employee Emergency Relief Fund, which is accessible on the HR website.

### **Philanthropy**

While we're on the subject of giving, I'd like to acknowledge the generosity of many committed donors who are making a huge difference at CU Denver through support of our programs, our faculty, and particularly our students. In a community where 47% of our students are Pell-eligible and 35% of students' households earn less than \$33,00 per year, a scholarship can literally change a life. To show you what I mean, let's take a look at some student reactions to hearing that they were awarded a scholarship from the bequest of former chancellor Georgia Lesh-Laurie.

### ***Georgia Lesh Laurie Scholarship Recipients Video Clip***

Now I'd like to shift gears a bit, from how we've managed through COVID to how we've continued to pursue our mission during this extraordinary year.

#### **Research and Creative Activities**

The lifeblood of our operation, our faculty, have long demonstrated their commitment to solving problems facing our city, state, and beyond. And now, more than ever, our world needs their ideas, their discoveries and their creative works.

Here's the remarkable thing. With all that our faculty had to do this year – coping with COVID like the rest of us AND having to quickly figure out new ways of teaching and connecting with their students – they're continuing to lead in their fields and to be recognized across disciplines for their extraordinary contributions. Here are just a few examples.

#### ***Research Video Clip***

Thanks to all of you. We're so proud of your work and that of all of our incredible faculty.

#### **Online Learning**

Now let's talk a bit about our students. From the moment we were founded, CU Denver has been serving adult and working students. And still today, the majority of our students are either adult learners, working students, or both. We understand the importance of offering flexibility to students who have competing demands. For 20 years CU Denver has been in the online learning space, so it's not surprising that we are poised to do even more.

Across America, the demand for high quality online education is increasing, as the adult student market grows and the 18-22 year old student market is declining. In Colorado alone, there are 800,000 people over the age of 25 who have dropped out or stopped out of college, without earning a degree. And they are often juggling work and family obligations. Online learning offers the flexibility they need.

We have been witnessing a job market that is shifting and changing, due to advances in technology and healthcare and science. The impacts of COVID-19 are accelerating much of this change.

Even those with college degrees find themselves needing to reskill, upskill or change professions entirely. We need to be ready to be life-long learning partners with our students, who will think of education not as something to do between high school and a first job, but as something to move in and out of over the course of a lifetime. This includes undergraduate and graduate degrees but also credentials and stackable courses that allow people to access education when and how they need it. We're doing some of this now, and to be relevant and competitive in our market, we need to do more of it.

We'll be building on our expertise in online and digital pedagogy to create a campus-wide strategy for online and hybrid education, and we'll be engaging our community in the discussion. This effort will get a boost from the CU system, which is making an investment in supporting the campuses to scale online programming.

Luckily, we have a running start. We've set a goal of launching some additional programs in Fall 2021. It's an ambitious timeline and there's a lot to do between now and then, but I'm confident that we can do it, especially because we have such a solid base from which to build.

Let's hear now from some of the people who have been developing that base.

### ***Online Video Clip***

Thanks for leading the way, Suzanne & Emily.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

We've talked about how the pandemic is not affecting everyone equally. People of color are also bearing a disproportionate impact. In addition, we've seen a resurfacing of issues of racial justice, across the country and right here at CU Denver, and calls to confront systemic inequities.

At this pivotal time, it's not enough for us to tout our diverse student body or our values and believe we've met our responsibility in addressing racial bias and equity. We need a comprehensive approach to tackle these issues in a thoughtful, holistic, and systematic way. And we need to act. That's why I spent my first 10 days on the job listening to the community specifically on equity and racial justice. What I heard from you informed a number of commitments and actions we're taking.

In September, we launched the search for a CU Denver-specific Vice Chancellor of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. I appointed the Director of our Ethnic Studies program, Professor Faye Caronan, as our first-ever faculty fellow to advise me and my leadership team and work on projects on areas of concern to underrepresented members of our community. We also worked with Auraria to establish a community advisory board to the Auraria Campus Police Department.

And to delve deeper into the core of our challenges, just last month I launched the CU Denver equity task force. This group will be evaluating structural barriers to the hiring and promotion of underrepresented faculty and staff, and how we close the achievement gap. By the end of March, they'll develop recommendations on an ambitious action plan to determine where we should be investing our resources to achieve the equity we all value and aspire to.

Let's hear a bit more from some members of the task force.

### ***DEI Video Clip***

### **Entrepreneurship**

Let's talk about another critical area for us: entrepreneurship. First, let me share some context. Denver – the city and the region -- has long been a national leader in developing new business ventures. *Inc. Magazine* cites Denver as the fourth best place to start a business and the city with the second highest rate of entrepreneurship. With a generous gift from Jake Jabs, the business school has expanded programs for entrepreneurship education. And other colleges have made advances in innovation, creativity and design thinking as a core part of their education.

So, think about it this way. We are located in the heart of an entrepreneurial hub of the country. We have one of the most diverse student bodies in the country. And we know how to provide students with an entrepreneurial mindset....What would happen if we found a way to provide all of our students with exposure to this mindset, to design thinking, to creative approaches to developing new ideas, new solutions, new products and new services? And what if we made this education available to others in our city? I met recently with a group of school district superintendents for whom we had provided a training program on an entrepreneurial mindset, and they thought it was one of the best professional development experiences they have ever had.

So – what if we offered broader access to entrepreneurship education and programs, providing these kinds of skills and mindset to more of our diverse student body, to our future engineers, urban planners, sociologists, principals, chemists...to more women, more students of color, more veterans, more data analysts, more neuroscientists, more hospital administrators ...just imagine the surge of businesses, the ideas, the solutions that could emerge – solutions that we need to strengthen our economy, to solve our challenges, to create jobs, to improve our institutions.

Here's a bit more about entrepreneurship from the Director of the Jake Jobs Center for Entrepreneurship, MP Parthasarathy.

### ***Entrepreneurship Video Clip***

Thank you, MP.

### **Partnerships**

As “CU in the City,” we’ve long made our location a core part of our identity. And with good reason. As I’m learning more every day, Denver is a really cool place to live and work. In fact, it’s #2 on the latest *U.S. News & World Report’s* list of best places to live. Our employees want to work here and our students want to learn here. Talk about a built-in asset.

And throughout the university, we have many partnerships in the city with businesses, government entities, nonprofits, education partners, and more. This access gives our students a leg up in internships, real-world projects, and career connections. The way we engage our partners shapes our identity and could either help or hinder our priorities for research, experiential learning, fundraising, recruiting and quality academic programming.

But partnership is a two-way street. We have a special role to play in helping address issues in the city of Denver. We need to engage with our city in a more meaningful way, do more listening to what employers need, and better communicate our value to the community. And we need to develop a campus-wide approach to the creation, the growth and the nurturing of our partnerships.

Let’s listen in to Nolbert Chavez & Scott Dawson as they discuss our ongoing partnership efforts.

### ***Partnerships Video Clip***

Thank you for that look into our partnerships around the city.

## **100 Days of Listening Summary**

At the beginning of our time together, I mentioned how much I enjoyed meeting many of you in my first 100 Days of Listening sessions. I received five thousand suggestions from the community, both internal and external, which contained many ideas. As I listened, and read back over notes from the sessions, a number of themes emerged.

I want to share what I heard from so many of you.

1. **Shaping Our Culture & Values.** You told me that CU Denver is a special place. We are scrappy. We are passionate and mission-driven. We are proud of how far we have come in such a relatively short history. But we're not perfect. I also heard that not everyone feels included, that sometimes it seems like we aren't all working in the same direction, and that under pressure to forge ahead we don't always remember the people side of change. Together, we must do the work to create the culture we want and embrace our values so that every person at CU Denver experiences a sense of belonging and flourishes. Everything else follows from this.
2. **Claiming Our Identity.** Over and over I heard that we need to get really clear about our identity. That means having thoughtful discussions about who we serve, how we differentiate ourselves and what we want to be known for. We'll need to come to consensus on what it actually means to be a public urban research university in the heart of downtown Denver -- and leaning into that distinction as we tell our story.
3. **Following Through on Student Success.** There is no doubt that the CU Denver community is committed to student success. I am so inspired by our students' determination and by the resolve of our faculty and staff to support their journey. And, as many of you acknowledged, we have work to do to ensure that every student has what they need from us. We must continue to strive for an unambiguous student-centered approach to student success and hold ourselves accountable for delivering.
4. **Living Up to Our Highest Ideals of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.** Our values and core identity are centered around equity and fostering a diverse educational community. We consider these to be among our greatest strengths. At this pivotal moment, we know that we need a comprehensive approach on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. We have a long way to go. It won't always be easy, and I am committed to making the hard decisions. If we really want to change things, we have to prioritize DEI in all its forms in every decision we make. I know now that I can count on this community to be all-in with me.
5. **Leveraging our Location for Deeper Community Engagement.** Many of you brought up our location in downtown Denver as a primary advantage, especially for attracting student, faculty, and staff talent and creating partnerships that have a real impact. You expressed a desire to strategically expand and coordinate our partnerships such that we create better outcomes for our students and the community. I heard from our partners that they too want to engage in deeper and more intentional ways – they really want to know who we are and what we are up



to. In order to be a preferred partner, we must listen to the needs of employers and the city and help them understand how to tap into our talent.

6. **Championing Academic Quality, Relevance & Innovation.** CU Denver is rooted in the idea that education should meet the needs of society. The commitment to providing quality, relevant, and innovative programs remains strong here. Through this commitment I heard the clear desire from both faculty and students to improve the student learning experience through advances in pedagogy, a focus on faculty development, and flexible modalities that meet the needs of adult and working learners. To do this, we must support our faculty to build new education models and work with employers and leaders outside CU Denver to align programs to the economic demands in our city and state.
7. **Leading the Way Through Research, Scholarship & Creative Activity.** I heard your passion around research, scholarship, and creative activity and the ways CU Denver's application of knowledge has a real, tangible impact – locally and globally. This work matters as an engine of economic mobility and innovation. But you also shared with me a number of factors that have inhibited the growth of our research enterprise. As a faculty member myself, I recognize the critical nature of that enterprise to recruiting and retaining faculty talent. If we want to take CU Denver to the next level, a thriving and forward-thinking research engine must be at the center of our university. I look forward to working with you to determine how we create an entrepreneurial ecology within which to grow our research, scholarship, and creative activities.
8. **Valuing Our People.** Your collective opinion is that our people are one of our greatest advantages, and I wholeheartedly agree! I was inspired by the praise that faculty and staff offered one another for being unambiguously dedicated to our students and unselfishly quick to support colleagues. Many of you shared the challenges that have come with navigating simultaneous crises over the last six months, while doing your best to balance it all with your work. We must do even more as an institution to invest in and recognize the value of the people who make us great at what we do.
9. **Navigating Structural Complexities.** Universities are complicated organizations, which for us is compounded by our intricate relationships with CU Anschutz, the Auraria Campus, and the CU System. As you described it, I heard a mix of frustration, cautious optimism, untapped potential, and confusion. I heard about people spending a lot of time and energy managing the complexities of these relationships. I want to work with you to realize the benefits of these partnerships and minimize the aggravation. I'll need your best ideas to make that happen. Another note here. You raised the tremendous potential of the partnership we have with CU Anschutz as a sister campus just 8 miles away. You'd like to see us do more to leverage this partnership in both our research enterprise and our health profession curricular offerings.
10. **Securing our Financial Future.** In nearly every session, I heard concerns about our financial future. There are many unknowns as we navigate the social and economic effects of the pandemic and major disruptions that have jarred higher education to its core. We don't know how much we can rely on state and federal funding. We are heavily tuition-driven, and we will need to have a more strategic position on enrollment management. We need to continue to

invest in our students, our mission, and our people. To build back even stronger after this pandemic, we need to get our priorities in order, think about new streams of revenue, and make hard decisions, which we will do together.

You can read the full report of what I heard on my website. Thank you for your honest, open appraisal of our situation. Our discussions have given me the opportunity to assess -- with the fresh eyes of a newcomer -- where we are today and where we need to focus our efforts from here.

One of my main takeaways was that while many of you said how proud you are of CU Denver's progress, nobody said we're finished. Unlike other places that aren't as innovation-minded, everybody said we have to go to the next level -- we just need to determine what that is.

So what's next? We're going to be building on these themes -- and on the momentum of the good work we've just been discussing -- to undergo a strategic planning effort that will chart CU Denver's future. I anticipate that these themes will help focus our planning process and spur even more creative and innovative thinking to build on our strengths and the vital work that has already been done.

### **Strategic Planning**

Why create a strategic plan now? Higher education is changing. Even before the pandemic, it was under attack for being too expensive, not relevant, too disconnected from employers, and hard to access.

It's true that it *is* more expensive for students to go to college now. The decline in state support for higher education over the past few decades has been steady across the country, and particularly steep here in Colorado, which ranks 49th in state funding for higher ed. That means, of course, that the cost has shifted to students -- which is why student debt has become such a problem. And that also means that too many opt out or drop out. Some companies are offering technical credentials as a faster, cheaper alternative.

And yet we know that those who obtain college degrees are faring much better than those who don't -- in terms of lifetime earnings, wellbeing, and many other facets of life. This difference is even more pronounced during the current economic downturn. We also know that recovering from the pandemic's societal and economic impacts will require big ideas, innovative solutions, and an educated, adaptable workforce.

These are the things CU Denver can provide. But in order to do that, we need people to know that we're here, what we stand for, and why a CU Denver education is a worthwhile investment. This will require us to think strategically about what differentiates us from the rest of the pack.

Our last strategic plan was created in 2007 and charted a path to a consolidated entity with Anschutz and to becoming a world class medical institution. And to the credit of many, Anschutz has been growing along that path. (Thank goodness, because we need their medical expertise

more than ever right now.) Though there has been tremendous progress, other parts of our joint plan weren't realized, especially CU Denver's full potential as an urban research university.

We need a new vision and a strategy for getting there. One that differentiates us. Because this country, this state and this city needs a thriving university that serves a student body that reflects the diversity of our growing population.

It needs a university that keeps education affordable, and that measures itself on *inclusivity*, not *exclusivity*. A university that understands how to weave itself into the fabric of its city, strengthening social and economic mobility for families, diverse talent pipelines for employers, research that contributes solutions to our society, ideas that become new businesses, and creative work that advances our culture.

We are the most diverse public research university in Colorado. Our urban location provides built-in relevance and a huge entrepreneurial community. People want to live here and go to school here. It's a combination of strengths that few universities have. Our grand challenge is to take advantage of all this to provide students with what is needed now and into the future: quality, affordability, flexibility, transferability, and stackability of credentials. And to embody this in a succinct, exciting set of ideas that propels the institution forward.

So now is our moment. And right now, we need to envision our future and the role each of us will play in shaping it. We need a vision for CU Denver 2030, that celebrates our past and, building upon our strengths, dares to design our future.

Marty Dunn, our Engineering Dean, has agreed to lead our strategic planning process. He is an seasoned academic, with a lot of experience in Colorado and globally in education, research and innovation. He understands design thinking and enterprise strategy. And I have confidence that he can run an inclusive process to get our campus involved in this effort. Earlier, I had the opportunity to sit down and chat with Marty. Let's look at some highlights from that conversation.

### ***Strategic Planning video clip***

After COVID-19 we will not be returning pre-pandemic way of life, but to a changed world. Throughout the pandemic, though, this community has shown its ability to rise to a higher level. We can use that same dedication and innovative spirit to boldly shape CU Denver's destiny.

We *need* to, because what we do matters. As a group, we have limitless potential to make an impact -- on our students, on our society, and on the world. It's why I was attracted to CU Denver in the first place and why I was so honored to become your chancellor. Like you, I was impressed by our public urban research university mission and our deep commitment to the public good. Emerging from the pandemic, and addressing the inequities it's so starkly revealed, will require innovation, ingenuity, and intelligence and integrity. All of which we've got. And united in shared purpose, we can realize our full potential.

So now you've heard why *I* think it's important. Let's end with why *YOU* do.

### ***Campus community video clip***