**Tomorrow’s University for Tomorrow’s World**

**2018 State of the University**

*Delivered Monday, January 29, 2018, by Chancellor Rebecca Chopp.*

Thank you so much for coming today. The annual State of the University address is a time for us to come together, to discuss the University as a whole, to hear about where we are and to talk about where we are headed.

I’d like to take a moment for all of us to thank those who have helped to arrange this event: Cathy Grieve, Blanca Ruiz, and the staff in Conference & Events; Deb Welke and other Ritchie Center staff who have converted the space and arranged A/V. And, of course, thanks to the Sodexo staff who have prepared and served today’s meal. Let us have a round of applause in appreciation of these colleagues.

It’s wonderful to see so many friends and colleagues here today. When I arrived, so many of you told me about your aspirations to build One DU and to continue to expand our mission of serving the global public good. I am so thankful and excited by how we are building and creating One DU, how we are using knowledge to address the local and global challenges and expand our deep engagement in Denver and beyond. And, most importantly, I love seeing us build upon our tradition of “students first” and expanding the ways they learn and prepare to live lives of success and purpose in the 21st century.

I have now been your chancellor for three and a half years, and I have loved every moment of it (well, almost every moment). Surprisingly, I am still occasionally asked why I left the Northeast ivory tower to join the University of Denver.

I say, as I did then, that there’s just something magical about DU and Denver. I think it has a lot to do with our willingness to be creators and inventors, and, like all good innovators, to risk failure to do so.

Denver is a city of reinvention. A city that looks relentlessly forward. I have learned that this is a city and a university filled with practical optimists, tenacious doers, and resilient builders.

That spirit of “find a way or make a way” is the unique inheritance of our university. It’s the spirit of “We are Denver.”

Though DU initially opened its doors in 1864, it turns out the school and its faculty, staff and students were a little ahead of their time, or as we say here in Colorado, they were “out over their skis.”

The city didn’t grow as quickly as they had optimistically predicted, and the school, then known as Colorado Seminary, shut its doors after just four years, in financial ruin.

You could say that our university started as a bold but failed experiment.

This story reminds us that invention and reinvention are not always easy, simple, or linear and that a founding may be a beginning that simply has to be entirely rethought and restarted in very different circumstances, using very different methods.

Progress happens unpredictably, in fits and starts. It’s stymied by unforeseen challenges.

Sometimes, these obstacles can be cleared out or clambered over. Other times, they are immovable, and the only choice is to clear a new path so that others can follow.

We have had great successes.

The DU business department opened in 1881 and later became one of the nation's first schools of business in 1908. The better part of a century later, it was one of the first to require ethics in our core business curriculum in 1989.

We established one of the first schools of social work in 1931, in the midst of the Great Depression; now it is a top 20 school in the nation.

But there have also been tragic and trying moments along the way.

Very much on our mind is the tragedy of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe people. The land upon which DU now stands was once the land that was home to generations of Cheyenne and Arapahoe. The forced migrations and the broken promises made to the natives are one of the great tragic flaws in our country. And we live daily thinking, but never forgetting. Trying to rebuild. Never forgetting.

And there have been trying times.

A trying and defining moment was a debt crisis in the 1980s that nearly brought the University to its knees. Chancellor Dan Ritchie remembers that well, as do many of you in the room. Together you took the risk, made a way, and we continue to benefit from your reinvention of the University.

DU, like all institutions I know and have studied, has a storied history and an unpredictable trajectory. I am reminded of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that **“progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.”**

We work for it. We fight for it.

We build and reinvent toward a future that we know will come, but we don’t stay so true to our course that we cannot recalibrate when change occurs.

When I arrived on campus, we began building toward the future by launching the planning process that resulted in DU IMPACT 2025.

The fact is that most universities are content simply to honor their traditions. They may launch a new initiative or hire a new faculty member who teaches an emerging discipline, but these changes are tweaks to the existing structure.

That approach isn’t just a poor business decision, it’s a failure of imagination. And that’s a big part of the reason I wanted to be here at DU.

Thousands of members of our community collaborated on the bold vision of DU IMPACT 2025, including many of you.

Let me tell you about how our plan is already coming to fruition.

**Four Transformative Directions**

First, we are building on our core *student-centered* strengths by creating and expanding our programs to help our students grow and learn to be successful professionals, engaged civically-minded and ethical leaders.

We know that different students learn differently. Our Learning Effectiveness Program—a model program for institutions nationwide—supports students with learning differences. I am so very proud of this program. We can support the changing needs of more of our students, perhaps eventually all of our students, even more effectively by expanding visionary programs like LEP.

Through the newly approved Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences strategic plan, all its undergraduate students will have Keystone Experiences, in which students choose experiences that match their individual goals, developing a flexible, student-focused blueprint. Students will take their regular course of studies, but in addition, have this highly personalized and adaptive learning map for their journey

From academic counseling and skills building to strengths finding and crisis support, our Campus Life & Inclusive Excellence staff are a tremendous resource, especially for students who might feel frustrated or distressed.

But none of this matters if we can’t attract students of all backgrounds. Our Advancement operation has expanded into a world-class division that will lead a $1 billion campaign, focused primarily on meeting our students’ financial needs.

The second part of our plan is to create and expand knowledge that addresses society’s challenges.

The Disruptive Innovation and the Digital Literacy Initiative help us better understand and use technology. Technological change defines this era: how will we use it for human well-being and global sustainability?

The Professional Master’s degree program in the Ritchie School of Engineering and Computer Science is exploring multi-modal, multi-discipline opportunities for working professionals.

This year, with a $20 million gift from Dr. Dennis Law and his mother, Loretta Law, we launched the Joseph and Loretta Law Institute for Arts and Technology, which fuses art, technology and cultural diversity to create performance experiences that push us past the barriers of our expectation.

Our third direction—and in the spirit of serving the public good—we partner with a larger *community*, starting right here in the Denver region and the world.

Across the University we are engaging and expanding the hundreds of partnerships we have across Colorado and beyond.

In the Sturm College of Law, the Low Income Taxpayer Clinic and Veterans Advocacy Project, for example, provide direct services to those who need them. Our Graduate School of Professional Psychology’s clinics have provided low-cost psychological services for three decades.

The Interdisciplinary Research Incubator for the Study of (In)Equality—or IRISE—has established a significant reputation in just four years. Now, it is re-envisioning its work around creating solutions to those racial equity gaps in education, health, income, housing, and employment that persist throughout the state and region.

This fall, the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning launched the first DU Grand Challenges initiative around the theme of “Thriving Communities” to create measurable change locally, regionally and nationally. Scholarships and class grants foster collaborations to help build thriving communities. There are year-round forums for those of you who want to get involved in building for the public good in new ways.

The Barton Institute for Philanthropy and Social Enterprise launched the [Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab](http://news.du.edu/colorado-evaluation-and-action-lab/) with Governor Hickenlooper. This government-research partnership pairs researchers with state and local officials to study problems and scale proven solutions.

From the world makers we educate in the Josef Korbel School of International Studies to the teachers and educational leaders that emerge from the Morgridge College of Education, our students and alumni are extending DU’s reach while changing lives.

Our fourth direction undergirding these accomplishments and ambitions is the notion of *One DU*: a diverse, inclusive, engaged and sustainable community that works independently and together toward the common vision of DU IMPACT 2025.

Across all disciplines, sustainability remains a top priority. We are building upon existing coursework to create certificates, Master’s degree programming and lifelong learning opportunities in conservation law, sustainable innovation, and other topics relevant to this shared objective.

To encourage a culture of shared scholarship, the Office of Academic Innovation, headed by Marty Katz, hosts “pop-up” faculty clubs.

We’ve adopted new software to standardize budget and finance operations and help us with multi-year planning. Now we can control for several variables, address some of the uncertainties in higher education and anticipate financial scenarios.

Exemplifying our spirit of excellence in our One DU, student-athletes represent DU with pride and honor. While championships garner headlines, we often overlook the coaches and athletic staff’s commitment to academics and leadership. Grade point averages and graduation rates demonstrate this commitment.

While in our individual departments and “silos” we might not always see the vast changes afoot, this progress across campus is well worth celebrating. And as much as our DU IMPACT 2025 planning process laid the foundation, none of these extraordinary initiatives would have been possible without the brains and boots of many of you here today.

Thank you, too, for the tremendous generosity you and so many friends of DU have shown us over the years. The $200 million we have raised in the past three and a half years allows us to continue to expand our mission and provide financial aid to deserving students.

**Structural Changes**

We have much to celebrate. But just like those builders and innovators who have gone before us, we’re not here to reminisce about past successes. The question we’re here to answer is—what comes next?

And if we’re being honest with each other, the truth is that our work gets harder from here as we continue to strive toward our DU IMPACT 2025 goals and make DU the greatest university it can be.

To build on our success, we need to overcome the barriers, seize the opportunities and continue to expand our momentum.

We are responding to what so many of you have shared with us in terms of barriers to our aspirations, new ideas and opportunities and insights into what we could do in better and new ways. Keep those ideas coming!

Ever since I have arrived, many of you have talked to me about how we need space to be One DU, how we need better ways to launch our students and the radical idea of building a unique way to connect our students and our alumni. Those are just some of the reasons I’m excited about the Denver Advantage—a family of projects that address our most pressing needs, turning them into amazing opportunities.

A new Community Commons will replace the Driscoll Student Center and act as a “living room”—a comfortable gathering place for all of us to connect and learn. Many of our student support offices will be in the space, and there will also be an amazing dining space, rooms and patios for us to be One DU.

A new first-year residence hall will give incoming students 21st-century accommodations and a home base from which to set off on their academic and life journey. Our research indicates that if we can help our students get launched the right way (individually and as a class), they will have a much better and more satisfying time at DU.

And a new Pioneer Career Achievement Center will support our distinctive four-year career achievement model and allow students and alumni to hone their skills and knowledge for the marketplace and connect with over 140,000 DU alumni worldwide.

The next phase, guided by the Campus Master Planning process, will help us create a DU District by blurring the boundaries between campus and community. We want to blur our boundaries with the community, and we want more faculty, staff and students to be in our DU neighborhood.

And there are challenges we are struggling with. While we remain financially healthy, declining graduate enrollments in some of our units threaten the operating margin that for many years has allowed us to fund new initiatives and address deferred maintenance issues.

The deans and the faculties in the affected colleges are actively addressing these enrollment issues in traditional as well as quite innovative ways. And, thanks to our amazing budget and finance officers across the University, we will be more efficient wherever we can to keep our finances on track and our university moving forward.

We have an amazing momentum across the University, in our state and around the country. We are gaining a reputation as a school that is reinventing higher education, maintaining quality and building on its strengths. Central to how we got to this amazing point is the strength of our leaders. We are addressing important leadership changes with vigorous searches to find just the right leaders for where DU is and is headed.

As you know, this year two leaders, both of whom have served with distinction and contributed greatly to the University, are going to start new adventures in their lives. We will have plenty of time to celebrate what amazing leaders Provost Gregg Kvistad and Vice Chancellor Peg Bradley-Doppes have been and continue to be.

And of course, we welcome new leaders as well. This summer we’ll welcome Jeremy Haefner as our new provost. Jeremy’s experience and values are a perfect fit for DU, and I’m thrilled to see him take this important work from Gregg’s capable hands into his own. Earlier this year, in a national search for a new Vice Chancellor for Enrollment, our own Todd Rinehart rose to the top—and we benefit from his national expertise and deep love for DU. And soon we should be able to share news of our next Vice Chancellor for Athletics and Recreation.

These new leaders will join all of us to continue DU’s great trajectory in realizing our vision.

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I want to use my remaining time to think along with you about the question of why**.**

Why are we so focused on building the future?

Why must we break down systemic and cultural barriers?

This is not a theoretical question, nor does it come with a simple answer.

The world is changing at a dizzying pace.

We know that macro trends like artificial intelligence and machine learning are upending nearly every industry, reshaping the future of work and changing the skills people need to succeed in the global economy.

The current geopolitical climate reminds us that there are just as many reasons to be anxious and unsure about the future.

So that question of “why” is really a question about whether we think the current model of higher education—which frankly hasn’t changed all that much in the past 150 years—is really the best we can do to face this exciting, uncertain future.

My answer is that we can and must do better. DU can be a national and maybe even global model for what a great university must be today.

My commitment to you is that I’ll never shy away from tackling the complex issues about the future of higher education—and the future of DU—head on. Sure, we will honor and celebrate our past, but I won’t be the kind of chancellor who keeps doing the same thing simply because the status quo is safe and change is hard.

But we can only achieve this kind of transformational change if we do it together, as one connected and networked DU community.

At a time when the world stands on edge, and shouting can seem more effective than thinking, the University of Denver can model productive engagement—locally, nationally and internationally.

From one-to-one conversations in the “living room” of the Community Commons to global gatherings that connect DU with the world, we need a lot of voices in this conversation.

We can’t be afraid of rattling the status quo. That’s not the Denver way.

We need IQ, and we need EQ.

We need diversity of background, perspective and thought.

We need builders and innovators—for this campus community, for this city and for the world.

Thank you for your bold passion and dedicated investment to the ongoing reinvention of DU guided by our commitments build and serve the public good.

Together, we are realizing DU IMPACT 2025 every day. Let’s keep building. Let’s keep reinventing.

Thank you.