

# AMY L. PARSONS, J.D.

CEO MOZZAFIATO LLC

FORMER EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE CSU SYSTEM

September 29, 2022

## Dear Members of the Presidential Search Committee:

Please accept this letter, vita, and references as my application materials for the position of President of Colorado State University. My deep roots at CSU, including 16 years of executive leadership positions at CSU and the CSU System, have prepared me to now step into the role of President. While serving in the positions of Executive Vice Chancellor of the CSU System, Vice President for University Operations, and Deputy General Counsel, I oversaw many of CSU's largest divisions and budgets, strategic initiatives, capital projects, and represented CSU throughout Colorado and the world. In addition, my personal experience as a CSU student, alumna, and donor to CSU, and now as the parent of a CSU student, inform my passion, energy, and vision for the University every bit as much as my professional endeavors. My current position as CEO of a private international company has further sharpened my business acumen and entrepreneurial drive, creativity, and focus on CSU's role in preparing students for the workforce of tomorrow and its contributions to the economic and social fabric of Colorado and the world.

The Search Committee has identified a clear set of criteria for the new President, seeking candidates who bring business and fund-raising skills and experience; an unwavering commitment to access and opportunity; a deep appreciation for the bedrock values of academic freedom, shared governance, and administrative transparency; and strong knowledge of the challenges and opportunities facing not just Colorado's system of higher education but the American West and its people. In this letter, I'll discuss my experience as it relates to these criteria and how I believe it has prepared me to serve CSU and Colorado in this role. I will also express my sincere belief in the opportunities for land-grant research universities to improve the lives of the citizens they exist to serve.

A Colorado native, I grew up in Wyoming, watching the Rams play the Cowboys in the Border War, participating in my local 4-H Club, and dreaming of attending CSU after high school. My parents worked hard to help me attend CSU, and I worked two jobs in the Lory Student Center to help defray the cost. I loved every aspect of my student experience, including serving on ASCSU, giving campus tours as an Admissions Ambassador, serving as a White House intern, and participating in Greek Life. My experience as a Political Science major helped to shape my lifelong appreciation for the value of a Liberal Arts education and later in life when I was able to donate back to CSU, I chose to give to the College, establishing a scholarship in the name of one of my professors who made a significant difference in my time as a student. Today, the Bob Lawrence Gateway to Law School Scholarship is an endowed fund that helps students with financial need and aspirations to attend law school.

Following my graduation from CSU, I attended the University of Colorado School of Law. In my summers there, I interned with the CSU General Counsel's office, where I became immersed in Title IX law and other legal aspects of the University, sparking my professional interest in the world of higher education. I researched case law for the graduate course The Law of Higher Education, which the CSU General Counsel taught at the time, a course that, years later, I would also teach in the Student Affairs in Higher Education program. After I graduated with my J.D., I entered private practice as a

litigator at the firm Brownstein Hyatt & Farber in Denver. While there, I continued to work for CSU on matters as outside legal counsel, including on contracts and employment disputes. In 2004, CSU offered me the position of Associate Legal Counsel for CSU, and I jumped at it. That was the start of a nearly 20-year career dedicated to all aspects of the Colorado State University mission.

From 2004-2009, I served as Associate Legal Counsel and Deputy General Counsel, representing CSU in every type of legal and regulatory matter, and advising on all manner of state and federal legislation. It was in this role when I served on the faculty of the Student Affairs in Higher Education graduate program, teaching the Law of Higher Education. These years gave me a deep understanding of the inner workings of the University, from its policies, laws and regulations, to employment matters, real estate, contracts, crisis response, constitutional rights, intellectual property, and risk management. I helped to build a collaborative, professional, involved team of attorneys who worked as partners to leadership across campus, and worked closely with the CSU Board of Governors, and legislative lobbying teams. Just as important, this time gave me the opportunity to become deeply familiar with the issues, policies, and state and federal laws that impact the work of our faculty and the lives of our students. From DACA to financial aid legislation to free speech challenges, I have navigated complex issues side by side with my academic and administrative colleagues, and that experience helped to shape my deep respect for the role and mission of a land-grant research university. It also gave me a depth of appreciation for the people who are essential to the success of the University, and our responsibility to the students we serve.

In 2009, Tony Frank became President of CSU, and he asked me to serve as the CSU Vice President for University Operations. In that role, I oversaw a dozen different divisions of the University, including Budgets and Finance, Human Resource Services, Facilities Management, the Police Department and Public Safety, Risk Management, Procurement, Training and Organizational Development, Environmental Health Services, and served as the liaison to the Administrative Professional Council and Classified Personnel Council. In these years, I developed broad expertise in the operations and budgets and strategic planning of the University. The first two years of my tenure as VPUO were during the recession, when we had to deploy federal funds and enact painful cuts to balance our budgets. I worked collaboratively with the employee councils to launch programs such as Commitment to Campus to support all of our employees through those tough times and beyond. I ensured that the employee councils had regular opportunities to interact with campus leadership and the Board of Governors to discuss their views, needs, and priorities. We also launched the early Ripple Effect program aimed at supporting women in all roles across campus and completed the first comprehensive salary study in gender equity. I worked with Human Resources, EEOC, and Training and Organizational Development to strengthen our commitment to diversity and inclusion across the University in all matters of hiring, paying, promoting, and training. Equity work is never done and must continue to be a central focus for CSU leadership, and I'm proud of CSU's past efforts to build a stable and transparent foundation upon which to continue to improve.

It was also in these years that we significantly scaled up our focus on sustainability in all facets of the University, from LEED certification in buildings to bike and pedestrian friendly pathways, to shining a light on the leading-edge teaching and research efforts across all colleges. CSU became a pilot institution for the STARS sustainability program, and ultimately achieved Gold and then Platinum status in STARS from AASHE. We adopted the first CSU Climate Action Plan in 2010 and made great strides in solar energy, composting, and eco-friendly improvements across campus. These early efforts paved the way for CSU's well-earned reputation today as one of the most environmentally friendly

universities in the country, a testament to the power of the culture at CSU when it unifies behind a shared goal.

During my tenure as VPUO, I negotiated CSU's most comprehensive strategic partnership agreements with corporate partners such as Coca-Cola and Office Max to creatively maximize revenue and reduce costs for the University as a whole. These partnerships were recognized by the vendors as "best in class" in the country and brought in new revenue streams and scholarships to CSU. I am a believer in the benefits of strong public private partnerships to fuel CSU's impact, revenue, and reputation. Working directly with industry partners in creative and beneficial ways is a skill I've honed over time and will enthusiastically build upon in the role of President.

As part of leading University Operations in those years, I was also responsible for overseeing close to \$1 billion in capital projects across campus, including constructing and renovating residence halls and dining facilities, academic buildings, parking facilities, large infrastructure and sustainability improvements, research facilities, and the early stages of the Health and Medical Center. Importantly, this work also included the construction of the new Canvas Stadium. From the earliest conversations about an on-campus stadium all the way to kick-off on our first game day, I was involved with every aspect of the project including chairing the Stadium Advisory Committee and negotiating the naming rights agreement with Canvas Credit Union. That project, at every stage, was an exercise in working across the University and the greater community, including close coordination with the City of Ft. Collins, to inclusively engage a wide variety of stakeholders with differing and passionate opinions about the project. I'm proud that we ultimately delivered a world-class facility and experience, on time and on budget, taking into consideration all of the varying considerations of our community. Through that project, I also developed an even deeper appreciation for the role of Athletics in the life of the University, from the student athletes to the fans, and I'm excited about the opportunity to further grow and continuously improve Athletics at CSU.

I also had the privilege of overseeing the development and initial programming of the CSU Campus at Todos Santos, Mexico, working with everyone from the original donors and the private development corporation, to local residents and the first faculty and students to launch programs there. One thing I'm particularly proud of is that I raised the money from private donors to fund the Spanish and English language programs at the Center, and the Kids Do It All Theater Camp. In the first three summers of our work in Todos Santos, we were able to fund the CSU Theater Department faculty and students to host Kids Do It All in Todos Santos as a free summer camp experience for the local children, cementing CSU's reputation as a committed partner to the community. Major projects such as Todos Santos and Canvas Stadium are today sources of pride for the CSU System and the Fort Collins campus, but each also came with its share of controversy. I am proud of how we worked through the challenges, with the Board of Governors' support, by listening, taking time to weigh input from various constituents, and adapting and evolving based on the input received.

In 2015, when President Frank took on the dual role of Chancellor of the CSU System, I accepted the position of Executive Vice Chancellor, working directly with the Board of Governors, CSU, CSU Pueblo, and CSU Global. Building on my years of experience at CSU, this role further expanded my knowledge of online education models and the important work of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and regional comprehensive universities. I worked closely with the state and federal lobbying teams on all types of legislative and regulatory issues impacting higher education generally, and the CSUS universities specifically, routinely meeting with elected officials at all levels of government. I worked directly with the Board of Governors to create a System strategic plan and coordinated Board meetings and

presentations with all stakeholders. I also managed the System office in Denver and oversaw various System-wide initiatives.

The largest and most complex initiative I managed was the development of the Spur campus at the National Western Center, a project I believe is core to CSU's mission, heritage, and commitment to agriculture. At the very beginning, I led multiple large-scale visioning sessions for the project with broad and extraordinarily diverse groups of stakeholders. I worked closely with Chancellor Frank to secure state funding for the Spur campus, for the transformative buildings both in Denver and Ft. Collins. I worked closely with the City and County of Denver leadership and the Western Stock Show Association Board to negotiate the operating agreements, set all of the budgets, and execute on the design, construction, and branding of the three CSU buildings. From a programmatic perspective, I secured the funding for Together We Grow (a consortium of some of the country's largest agriculture interests focused on building the workforce of tomorrow) and helped to negotiate their move to being headquartered with the System and Spur, further establishing CSU as a national leader on issues around agricultural education and workforce development. I worked with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to launch the Water in the West annual conference, which continues today. I proudly served as a Trustee of the Stock Show Association and a member of the National Western Authority Board. All of these efforts were focused on strengthening CSU's foundation in agriculture and mission of outreach and extension, while forging new pathways to build common ground and understanding among rural and urban communities. I have always believed passionately in Spur's promise to promote educational equity and serve as a beacon of what the modern land-grant university can contribute in the 21st century; the opportunity to be part of its next phase of development as President of the flagship campus is one of the great attractions of the job for me. CSU must always embrace agriculture, and given its ever-increasing importance in the world, now is the time to lean into these major initiatives such as Spur, Water in the West, and Together We Grow with even greater focus and determination.

Throughout my entire tenure at CSU, I worked hard to develop an extensive professional network in Colorado and beyond and represented CSU at countless events, gave dozens of speeches and presentations, served on boards and in international delegations. On behalf of CSU, I served on the Executive Board of the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver, and worked hard to create new opportunities to bridge access between underserved K12 communities to CSU. I am particularly proud of how we worked with the Boys & Girls Clubs to build access into the very fabric of the Spur campus, and that work further helped instill in me personally a passion for access and inclusion for our local communities. I also served on the boards of Colorado Concern, The Big Green, and the Denver Metro Economic Development Commission. I created new points of partnership with the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, History Colorado, Butterfly Pavilion, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, Denver International Airport, and the Biennial of the Americas. I traveled to more than a dozen countries representing CSU in delegations led by various governors and mayors and CSU's own Office of International Programs and College of Business. I was recognized as an Outstanding Woman in Business by the Denver Business Journal in 2017. I even performed in the Dancing with the Denver Stars Gala for the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Company two years running, and served as co-chair of the Gala in 2021, to support programming in the arts for local K12 schools. I worked closely with the Green & Gold Foundation to connect that group of dedicated donors and alumni to the Board of Governors and provided special engagement opportunities such as trips to Todos Santos and small group meetings with Chancellor Frank. With the Chancellor's support and encouragement, I invested in my personal growth by joining YPO (Young President's Organization) in 2018.

In 2020, when everyone was at home due to the pandemic, I was recruited by a Denver-based entrepreneur to serve as the founding CEO of a new international company he was launching. This was an opportunity for me to be on the ground floor in building an exciting new company and to try my hand at being a private sector CEO and entrepreneur. I left the CSU System in November 2020 to be the full time CEO of Mozzafiato LLC, a company that works with all Italian luxury brands, importing them to the US and selling through e-commerce channels. Taking on this role as a private CEO has been an incredible learning experience for me, immersing me in the world of digital marketing and sales, customer service, international negotiations and shipping logistics, and private investor funding. The flexibility, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit I've been able to enjoy in this role are, I believe, particular strengths that would contribute significantly to my ability to innovate on behalf of the University and its tripartite mission. My experience leading both public and private organizations has prepared me to approach our enrollment and retention strategies with greater focus and precision, and honed my skills to create beneficial public-private partnerships. I would also look forward to participating in CSU's continuous innovation around educational systems and curriculum and degree structures to help students obtain timely, affordable, and relevant credentials.

This fall, I've been filled with pride to support my oldest daughter enrolling as a freshman at CSU. Going through the college selection journey with her, ending with her decision to attend CSU, has only served to fuel my passion, commitment, and vision for CSU, and love for its students. The excitement of orientation and Ram Welcome brought me back full circle to the day I began my CSU journey as a first-year student moving into Parmelee Hall.

Today, I have clear eyes when it comes to the challenges facing CSU and the higher education landscape. Our campuses face an array of cultural, political, fiscal, and academic issues, ranging from potential enrollment declines to student mental health issues to academic freedom, the imperatives of keeping tuition affordable and addressing rising student loan impacts, a rapidly shifting landscape in intercollegiate athletics, to important conversations around social justice, equity, race, identity, and inclusivity, including our responsibility to the Indigenous people of Colorado and the West. In Northern Colorado especially, many employees are facing housing costs at an all-time high, and earnings that are lagging inflation. Attention to CSU's ability to remain competitive in recruiting and retaining talented faculty and staff is critical. While there may be candidates who have more personal experience with some of these issues than I, a white US citizen, have faced, I assure you that I have the empathy, insight, respect, and tireless commitment to work as part of a community in fighting for equity and advancement for all of CSU's people, and to sustain a University where the Principles of Community are more than words on paper.

Working with Chancellor Frank for 16 years instilled in me a deep appreciation for the history and promise of the legacy of the land-grant institution and its role in the lives of our students and our nation as a whole. It is incumbent on us to be the caretakers of Abraham Lincoln's challenge, and the visionaries for what it must be in today's world. CSU must be a place where all students, regardless of background and ideology, feel welcome and are supported, where all faculty and employees are heard and respected and included in the conversation. We must be a competitive, equitable, and rewarding employer, able to attract and retain the stellar workforce that is essential to our success -- and this obviously includes being a place where faculty and researchers thrive in their disciplines and have everything they need to succeed. I would look forward to partnering with a strong, experienced Provost to set the vision for academic excellence and work hard to develop and support faculty across the University. We want CSU to be a place where alumni are proud, excited, and engaged, and where

donors feel connected, invested, and know they are an important part of the community. With the right leadership on campus, CSU will be the clear leader in higher education in Colorado in the next few years and high on the national map for the best places in the country to learn and work in the years to follow. We will set the standard for a community that is energized, unified, proud, and making progress on our goals in leaps and bounds. I will work tirelessly to make that happen. Given my knowledge of and experience at CSU, I am ready to start work on Day 1, and I embrace collaborating with the System leadership, Board of Governors, sharing governance at CSU with Faculty Council, APC, CPC, ASCSU, and working in close collaboration with the Provost, Vice Presidents, and Deans.

While others are perhaps better able to assess my track record at CSU, I hope that all of the experiences noted above demonstrate what I believe to be true: That I proved capable – over many years and in different roles and projects – of building collaborative, diverse, healthy, transparent, and effective teams that galvanized around vision, strategy, and a shared commitment to high performance. I think I demonstrated an ability to hire and mentor outstanding team members across the University. Beyond experience, of course, are the personal characteristics that will enable the next President to succeed. In times of growth, change, and aspiration, leaders need to be accessible, collaborative, candid, and decisive – qualities I believe I bring to the table. I understand the public and private pressures that go along with the President's role, and I have both the confidence and humility that are essential to navigating such pressures with integrity and backbone. When mistakes are made, I own them. When we're successful, I credit the teams and individuals that made that success possible. I respect the need for gravitas in the President's role, and also understand the importance of creating a fun and energized atmosphere for the entire CSU community – amplifying traditions, supporting memorable experiences inside and outside the classroom, and utilizing special assets of the University such as the Mountain Campus, Todos Santos, Canvas Stadium, Spur Campus, and Magnolia House to create unique events to engage donors, partners, and stakeholders.

In closing, I simply want to thank you all for your consideration and the opportunity to express my interest in becoming CSU's 16th President. Certainly, the challenges facing higher education and any large research university are significant; with all we have achieved, there is still so much opportunity to grow and improve, and that work will require our best and most focused efforts in the decade ahead. Even with the challenges, I believe CSU is well-positioned based on more than 150 years of achievement, leadership, and success to weather and excel no matter what lies ahead. With me, CSU will get a leader who is both enormously proud of the University and equally committed to pushing it forward to excel and serve in new ways – a seasoned executive who understands how to efficiently and effectively operate the enterprise, but with an entrepreneurial spirit and perspective to challenge teams to think differently and creatively to solve problems and generate new opportunities. I bring a long and proven track record of setting inspired visions informed by collaborative teams, and executing to success in challenging environments with many competing interests. I learned many valuable lessons working closely with Tony Frank as President and Chancellor, including the enormous privilege and responsibility of leading an institution forged by the vision of Abraham Lincoln that every student with the ability and will to learn and earn a degree should have the opportunity to do so. It would be the privilege of my life to serve in the role of President, and in exchange, I promise my relentless energy, firm focus, and unwavering commitment to serve the institution and its people.

*Thank you for reviewing my application materials. Please let me know if you need any additional information.*

**Sincerely,**

*Amy L. Parsons*

**AMY L. PARSONS**