Five questions for Kerry Tipper[1]

Kerry Tipper didn't take a straight line to the University of Colorado. Raised in Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States, she learned early the value of language, identity and perspective as the daughter of a teacher and a military veteran.

Before law school, she waited tables. She credits that job with teaching her about listening, patience and real-world problem-solving. She still draws on that experience, which reminds her that every role, regardless of title, is about service.

As CU's vice president of University Counsel and the system's chief legal officer, Tipper[2] serves as the top legal adviser for the university, providing leaders with legal insight, political experience and strategic guidance to help them navigate complex decisions while prioritizing the university's mission and people. She previously served in a similar role for the city of Denver; her past time in public service also includes two terms in the Legislature, winning election to represent House District 28 in central Lakewood.

1. Your background spans multiple cultures and countries. How did that shape your path into law and public service?

I was born in Denver, but my childhood was spent largely in Costa Rica and Mexico, where my mother attended graduate school. Growing up bilingual and bicultural opened my eyes to how identity and experience shape opportunity.

I always saw lawyers in books and on TV as people with agency and a voice, people who could help others, and that resonated with me from a young age.

My early job as a Spanish translator at an immigration law firm exposed me to the real stories behind immigration and the difficult choices families make. Seeing people risk everything to cross a desert for a chance at a better life solidified my desire to become a lawyer, not for prestige, but to advocate for those who need it most.

2. What drew you to CU and this leadership role?

I was serving as the city attorney for Denver and loved the combination of legal complexity, strategy and public service. CU offered something similar, but on a much larger scale. We are the third-largest employer in Colorado with a mission that directly transforms lives.

Education changed my parents' trajectory, and mine, in a single generation. Being part of an institution like CU, whose purpose is to create that kind of generational change, was irresistible. I'm living proof of what access to education can do, and working at CU means I get to help ensure that opportunity exists for thousands of others.

My political background and time in the Legislature also give me a unique lens for navigating decisions that aren't just legal, but strategic and public-facing.

3. How would you describe your leadership style?

I'm deeply collaborative and inquisitive. I want to understand the "why" behind people's perspectives and create space for honest insights, including the things people usually think but don't say out loud. In the city, we called these the "left-hand column thoughts," and I encourage my team to voice them respectfully. If we don't surface concerns, we can't solve problems. Nine times out of 10, someone else is thinking the same thing – and naming it respectfully moves us from assumptions to solutions.

Leadership, to me, is helping people get where they want to go by meeting them where they are, not dictating from above.

4. People often assume your job is purely legal. What's something they might not realize about your role?

Yes, I'm the top lawyer for CU, but legal expertise is only part of what this job requires. I serve as a sounding board and strategic adviser. Some days, my role feels like that of an ER doctor: I triage the issue, stabilize the situation and hand it off to subject-matter experts.

Being calm under pressure sets the tone. My responsibility isn't just to identify legal risks, but to help leaders understand operational, political and optical implications so they can make fully informed decisions.

My role is to provide as much information as possible so decision makers can make informed choices. You can't be afraid to speak your truth, even when it's uncomfortable. My job isn't to make decisions for others, but to give leaders the clearest picture possible so they can make the right ones.

5. When you're not navigating legal strategy, how do you unwind?

If it's Friday afternoon, I'm probably trying to get out of Denver with my 1- and 5-year-old in tow. Camping has become our reset button, even if it means a terrible night's sleep.

Recently, we visited Camp Hale, the former 10th Mountain Division training ground, and it was stunning. Getting my kids outdoors, spending time with them and my husband exploring different parts of the state – that's my joy.
[3]

Write your next chapter with Retirement Ready series [4]

Call for entries: 2026 CU Innovation & Efficiency Awards[5]

Every day, CU employees implement innovative ideas that save time, money and effort across our shared systems. The CU Innovation & Efficiency (CU I&E) Awards Program recognizes and celebrates these forward-thinking solutions, providing a platform to share success stories that inspire and benefit the entire CU community.

The 2026 CU I&E Awards Program is now accepting submissions through March 31. This is your opportunity to showcase your ingenuity and contribute to a culture of continuous improvement at CU.

Last year's submissions[6] highlighted a diverse range of innovations, from automated academic workflows and advanced research operations to campuswide process improvements that boosted efficiency, accuracy and communication across units.

The top prize in 2025 was awarded to Sustainability in Simulation Operations[7], by Emily Bishop from CU Anschutz. Which campus will take home this year's top honor?

Cash prizes of up to $1,500 will be awarded to individuals or teams whose innovations stand out, as determined by our judging panel.
Learn more about the CU I&E Awards Program[8] **Submit your project here**[9]
Don't miss this chance to inspire others and be recognized for your contributions. Share your success story and help drive innovation at CU.

- Office of University Controller

Complete survey now to help shape CU's next Strategic Plan [10]

The current survey of all members of the CU community, an important stage in the development of CU's Strategic Plan 2.0, is set to conclude Friday, Feb. 6.

Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to respond to the survey, which was sent via email. A reminder email was sent Monday, Feb. 2, to those who had not yet completed the survey.

The survey asks all recipients to voice their thoughts on the future direction of the university. To take the survey:
Use the unique URL sent to you via email, with the subject line "Share Your Voice on CU's Future," to respond. This link is unique to you and can't be shared. Plan to spend about 10 minutes to complete.
As added encouragement to respond, the campus with the highest completion rate across faculty, staff and students will win a $1,000 donation to the campus food pantry.

"This survey is designed to gather perspectives on university priorities, performance and opportunities for improvement," President Todd Saliman said in his email launching the effort late last year. "The insights you provide will help shape our next Strategic Plan as we work to continue delivering for our community."

Feedback from faculty, staff and students will be essential in shaping a strategic direction that reflects the values and aspirations of the entire community, said Strategic Planning Co-Chairs Lynn Vidler, provost at UCCS, and Chad Marturano, vice president and chief financial officer for the CU system.

CU's next Strategic Plan will succeed the existing five-year plan at the end of this academic year. A draft plan is due to President Saliman by June, with the final Strategic Plan 2.0 slated for presentation to the Board of Regents in the summer.

Learn more about the strategic planning process.[11]

Conference on World Affairs announces 2026 speakers [12]

Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience continues to drive breakthrough research and support [13]

Immersive landscape architecture studio designs for food sovereignty on the Wind River Reservation [14]

Can a 'fibermaxxing' social media trend reverse America's 'abysmal' intake? [15]

Federal update: FY26 appropriations, grad program loan limit NPRM, more[16]

From Jan. 30, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on FY26 Appropriations, Grad Program Loan Limit NPRM, Negotiated Rulemaking for Accreditation, OMB Federal Funding Review, NSF NCAR Letter, and Substance Abuse Disorder EO.

Click here to read the post.[17]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions[18] page.

Warrick to mark 55 years of service with lecture [19]

Doak set for Feb. 17 Distinguished Research Lecture [20]

Buffs competing in Winter Olympics [21]

CU Boulder focuses on affordability for in-state undergraduates[22]

CU expands rural recruitment to identify new suicide interventions[23]

CU Denver launches ‘Shark Tank’ style challenge to reshape downtown[24]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-kerry-tipper[2] https://president.cu.edu/university-leadership/kerry-c-tipper[3] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/kerry_tipper_family_resize_02-05-2026.jpg[4] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/write-your-next-chapter-retirement-ready-series[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/call-entries-2026-cu-innovation-efficiency-awards[6] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/cu-innovation-efficiency-awards-2025-submissions[7] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/past-submissions/cu-ie-submission-sustainability-simulation-operations[8] https://www.cu.edu/controller/innovation-efficiency-awards[9] https://www.cu.edu/controller/forms/2026-cu-innovation-efficiency-awards-submission-form[10] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/complete-survey-now-help-shape-cu-s-next-strategic-plan[11] https://www.cu.edu/strategic-planning[12] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/conference-world-affairs-announces-2026-speakers[13] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/lyda-hill-institute-human-resilience-continues-drive-

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