

Former member of Obama's cabinet to join CSU faculty

By: Piper Davis

Tom Vilsack, former United States Secretary of Agriculture for the Barack Obama administration, will join Colorado State University's faculty starting this month.

Vilsack will join CSU as the Global Chair for the International Board of Counselors on Food and Water Initiatives. Vilsack will also join Denver Water and serve as the Strategic Adviser of Food and Water Initiatives at the National Western Center. Vilsack's two part-time positions will create a bridge between Denver water and CSU as they collaborate on the National Western Center.

Vilsack served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from 2009 to 2017 under the Obama administration, the only member of the U.S. Cabinet to serve for the entirety of Obama's presidential career.

Previously, the Democratic politician served as the Governor of Iowa from 1999 to 2007. Prior to his first election as governor, Vilsack was the first Democrat to hold office in Iowa in over 30 years. He is [currently the CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council](#) as of Feb. 7.

Vilsack will contribute to the ambitious \$1.1 billion project and decade long effort to expand the Denver National Western Center. According to the [official master plan](#), Mayor Michael Hancock and his administration seek to remodel and enlarge the complex to serve as a year-round, agricultural innovation center.

The official proposal states, "The plan calls for a full rehabilitation of the site, one that repairs the long-term damage from years of industrial uses and creates

a new series of green and healthy spaces that help to launch a new era for the National Western complex and the adjoining neighborhoods.”

Vilsack is planning to intertwine his positions at Denver Water and the National Western Center project to target state water issues by establishing the **Water Resources Center**, a facility located within the National Western Center that serves as the core focus of the project.

The **official proposal** for the Water Resources Center states that a partnership with Denver Water will create collaboration surrounding issues such as water quality, conservation, recycling, treatment and more, and would bring together learning and application.

“The issue of water is something that is incredibly important to Colorado and the entire western part of the United States,” Vilsack said. “That’s where a lot of our agricultural production takes place. As we look at (water issues), we see the Western part of the United States will play a critical role if we are able to maintain and preserve it.”

Vilsack’s position at CSU will focus on solving agricultural problems with the inclusion of climate-smart policies and ideologies.

“We are going to have to increase agricultural productivity to feed billions of people,” Vilsack said. “That is going to require a 70 percent increase in agricultural production at a time when the climate is going to require us to look at more [problems] we don’t even know we have. The question is: who is going to help solve all those problems and where can we begin that process? It seems to me that Colorado State and the National Western Center are positioned perfectly to be part of the solution.”

Vilsack will be joined by his wife, Christie Vilsack.

Christie Vilsack, has also been hired at CSU, serving as the Senior Advisor to the Chancellor for Educational Access and Presidential Visiting Scholar of Educational Access. She has spent her life emphasizing the importance of education, from teaching English for 25 years to working as the Senior Advisor for International Education at the United States Agency for International Development. She also founded the Vilsack Foundation, a program that stressed the importance of local libraries and early childhood reading.

"Being a land grant university, Colorado is really focused on the state and giving students in this state an opportunity at a college education," Christie Vilsack said in an [interview with the University](#). "There are also a lot of undeserved communities, (many in rural areas). The Western Center is a real opportunity to create community and to educate the general public because you don't just go to school; you are a student for the rest of your life."

Their combined salary is \$125,000 annually for three years, with Mr. Vilsack earning \$75,000 and Mrs. Vilsack earning \$50,000.

President Tony Frank spoke for the [official announcement](#) of the Vilsack's employment.

"The challenges that are facing our globe will need all of our best efforts and all of our best thoughts to identify sustainable solutions," Frank said. "We are excited to add these two incredibly qualified national leaders to our team and to continue to elevate the conversation, and collaborate to create great impact for our state, our country and our world."