

Possibility and Promise
Inauguration Address of Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker
January 14, 2019

I want to begin today by thanking my family. First, my partner, my best friend, the love of my life, and now the First Lady of Illinois, MK Pritzker. My wonderful children Teddi and Donny. I love you more than life itself. And my parents Sue and Don Pritzker, who departed this world too soon more than three decades ago but who left behind a set of values around honor and decency that will endure as long as there are good people in the world.

And please join me in giving an ovation for my partner and your Lieutenant Governor, the incomparable Juliana Stratton.

I want to acknowledge the other distinguished guests here today: Chief Justice Lloyd Karmeier, President John Cullerton, Speaker Michael Madigan, Leader Bill Brady, Leader Jim Durkin, Attorney General-elect Kwame Raoul, Secretary of State Jesse White, Comptroller Susana Mendoza, Treasurer Mike Frerichs, Members of the General Assembly, Members of the Congressional delegation, Governor Jim Edgar, Governor Pat Quinn, Governor Bruce Rauner, Governor Jim Thompson, Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and National Guard Adjutant General Richard Hayes. To all of you, on behalf of the people of Illinois, thank you for your service.

Ladies and gentlemen, for 200 years Illinois has proudly stood as the beating heart of our Republic... a place whose people have high hope and clear vision. This is where Lincoln found the mettle to grip a warring nation in both hands and hold us together. This is where Obama came to organize and to witness the courage that runs deep in our communities – in whom he found the fortitude to launch his bid to make history. This is where the 13th and 19th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were first ratified, ending slavery and guaranteeing a woman's right to vote.

This is where, on the Sunday morning after the Great Chicago Fire, Reverend Robert Collyer, pastor of the First Unitarian Church, an immigrant, an ardent anti-slavery abolitionist, and a

women's suffrage advocate, stood amidst the broken ruins of his once grand church and brought hope and vision to his devastated congregation. His parishioners gathered around him, the sun peeking through gutted walls and splintered beams, an overturned column serving as his pulpit.

His words that morning have survived the 147 years since he delivered them...a testament to their power and truth:

“What is lost?” he asked. “First, our homes. Second, our businesses. But these are temporary. ... We have not lost our geography. Nature called the lakes, the forests, the prairies together in convention long before we were born, and they decided that on this spot a great city would be built. ... We have not lost our hope. ... The fire makes no difference to me. If you'll stay here, I will. And we'll work together, and help each other out of our troubles.”

Since Reverend Collyer's time, Americans have often had to gather in broken cathedrals – some of stone and glass – some of aspirations and promises – to reaffirm our faith in one another.

We find ourselves at such a moment now.

We contend every day with an economy that gives little and takes too much... that allows passion and work ethic to be overwhelmed by student loans, unexpected health emergencies and the rising cost of living.

We want strong families, but we have yet to embrace more robust policies supporting paid parental leave and affordable child care that will sustain them.

We watch 100-year storms that now come every year – and yet we don't allow the science of climate change to guide our decision making.

We fail to hold accountable leaders who sacrifice truth for personal gain – who substitute pageantry for patriotism.

We are a nation founded on fearless ideas - and yet we move away from those drawn to that vision.

We want better roads, better schools, better wages – but we vilify anyone who dares suggest a workable path to those things.

We allow our schools, our movie theaters, our hospitals, our neighborhoods to become battlefields – legally accessible by the weapons of war.

Our abdication of responsibility must end.

Just a few weeks ago, I went to Mercy Hospital to attend a vigil honoring the victims of the murderous shootings there:

To honor the police officer who ran into gunfire and not away.

To honor the doctor – a University of Illinois graduate – who raised money for disadvantaged kids and led her church choir.

To honor the pharmacist who went into medicine because she had struggled with health problems herself.

These are the very best of Illinois.

As a public servant, it's hard to bear witness to violence such as this.

But this job also exposes you to the people who stitch us back together time and again, to the Illinoisans who remind us what amazing capacity we have to change. At the Mercy Hospital vigil, Sister Barbara Centner read a Franciscan prayer that speaks to who we are in Illinois:

“May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy. And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that

we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.”

At 200 years old, Illinois is still a young promise. Our time here has been but a blink. In 2019, we must begin a new century with new maturity...and enough foolishness to believe we can make a difference.

That starts with leadership that abandons single minded, arrogant notions.

No. Everything is not broken.

Our history is a story of leaps forward and occasional stumbles back - and a promise renewed with each generation that we will try harder...that we will do better...that big breakthroughs are built of centuries of selfless effort by unheralded heroes ...that big change rides on what we can do together, not what one person attempts alone.

Neighbors working side by side in Taylorville lost their homes and worldly possessions in the recent tornadoes. They know that what Reverend Collyer said after the Great Chicago Fire was right – we work together to help each other out of our troubles.

So today, with all the challenges Illinois faces, Democrats and Republicans will work together, and we must begin with our most basic responsibilities. We will propose, debate and pass a balanced budget this year.

It won't be easy, but let's confront this challenge with honesty. Our obligations as a state outmatch our resources. Our fiscal situation right now is challenging. And the solution requires a collective commitment to embracing hard choices.

We need to bring real efficiencies to state government. Our information technology systems are outdated and cost more to maintain than they do to replace. Inexpensive healthcare prevention programs were decimated, causing higher spending to treat diseases that could have been cured.

Balancing the budget means lowering the cost of government while delivering the high quality services Illinoisans deserve.

But be clear about this: I won't balance the budget on the backs of the starving, the sick, and the suffering. I won't hollow out the functions of government to achieve an ideological agenda – I won't make government the enemy and government employees the scapegoats. Responsible fiscal management is a marriage of numbers - and values.

Which is why it's time to start the earnest work of creating a fair tax system here in Illinois. Our regressive tax system, including property taxes and sales taxes, currently has the middle class paying more than double the rate the wealthy pay. That's not fair, and it also doesn't pay our bills. Today our state's fiscal instability affects every single person who lives and works in Illinois...whether you earn millions or the minimum wage. It means that our government wastes tens of millions of dollars paying higher interest rates than almost any other state, and we scare businesses and families away because they fear our uncertain future.

The current tax system is simply unsustainable. Others have lied to you about that fact. I won't. The future of Illinois depends on the passage of a fair income tax, which will bring us into the 21st Century like most of our midwestern neighbors, and like the vast majority of the United States.

I'm not naïve about what it will take to do this. All who enter a discussion about our state's budget and a fair tax system in good faith will be welcomed to the table. But if you lead with partisanship and scare tactics you will be met with considerable political will.

It is time to update and repair our state's aging infrastructure. Railways, roads, bridges and fresh water arteries are on the verge of collapse. Crumbling bridges mean people's lives are in danger. Deteriorating rail systems mean goods and services take longer to deliver and cost more. We are the nation's supply chain hub and we must be built like it.

Let's remember too that an aging highway system is not just concrete and steel. It's a longer commute home. It's missing those golden hours between dinner and bedtime when your kids are young where you spend a few minutes reading a book together and talking about their day.

The seemingly dry acts of government really do affect the richness and joy of our lives.

We must treat the decisions we make together – the decisions of our elected officials to champion a cause and the decisions of our citizens to embrace or reject those efforts – with an eye to the pursuit of their happiness.

As we enter Illinois' third century, we must bring a renaissance to downstate Illinois which has been deprived of some basic resources for education and business building that are taken for granted elsewhere in our state. To begin, we will work to deliver high speed broadband internet coverage to everyone, in every corner of Illinois. Today every new job and every student is dependent upon connectivity, and no part of our state should be left out.

Our future depends upon our actions today. That's why we must embrace a broad vision of environmental protection, or else decisions are going to be forced upon us in ways that will offer us little control and catastrophic outcomes for our children.

I believe in science. To that end, as one of my first acts as Governor, Illinois will become a member of the U.S. Climate Alliance, upholding the goals and ideals of the Paris Climate Accord.

Working men and women deserve to have a governor and a Department of Labor that will enforce laws protecting workers' wages and workers' rights. And they deserve a \$15 minimum wage. It's good for the working families of Illinois and good for our economy.

As your governor, I'll be committed to helping us become the fastest growing big state economy in the nation. I will be our state's best Chief Marketing Officer to attract jobs and businesses to

Illinois. We will bring capital, technical assistance and mentorship to help Illinoisans across our state start and build new businesses and new jobs. Our economic success depends upon it.

In the interests of keeping the public safe from harm, expanding true justice in our criminal justice system, and advancing economic inclusion, I will work with the legislature to legalize, tax and regulate the sale of recreational cannabis in Illinois.

We will approach education with a holistic mindset – recognizing that students do best in community schools where teachers are paid well and where kids start learning at the earliest ages. And our economy grows when vocational training, community colleges and universities are strong.

We will do all of this with the most diverse set of voices and perspectives that Illinois has ever seen. I have built a cabinet of people who bring with them experiences I don't share, from communities I did not come from, with expertise I don't have, because to lead well, all of Illinois must be represented in the decision making. Furthermore, I want all the children of Illinois to see someone who looks like them in my government.

High hope and clear vision are what have built this state. Despite all the turmoil in this world, Illinoisans continue to build, innovate, create and dream. Our agriculture sector is built on some of the most fertile soil in the world, and it's expanding, employing nearly a million people in every part of the state. We have nearly 13,000 manufacturing firms in Illinois that employ more than 580,000 people – many of them proud union workers with the best training in the world. One out of 10 computer science degrees in the nation comes from Illinois colleges and universities.

Our entrepreneurs continue to be tireless dreamers, whether it's Jamie Gladfelter creating a software development incubator in Galesburg, Jeremie Draper shaping glass in Peoria or Leif Anderson still using his grandfather's original recipes to make and sell candy in Richmond.

That's the Illinois I see...one of possibility and promise. That's the Illinois I know, one whose people are fearless and audacious. That's the vision I have for our state...another century of boundless opportunity. When your faith in this future flags, I urge you to remember Reverend Collyer and his ruined church – how he was the vessel for his parishioners' burnt hopes. How he saw the natural beauty of Illinois and knew nothing could steal that from them.

I see the natural beauty of Illinois every day – in our people. More than anything else I see it in our capacity to be kind.

Consider the story a few weeks ago of Casey Handal and Zadette Rosado. Casey and Zadette moved to Barrington last May and they proudly flew a rainbow flag behind their home. And then someone snuck into their yard and stole it, replacing their pride flag with an American flag – ironic because the thief doesn't understand that you rob the American flag of meaning when you steal a person's symbol of self-expression.

That could have been the end of the story, but Casey and Zadette's neighbor Kim Filian wouldn't let it be. She put a pride flag in her yard in solidarity. And then she kept buying them because her neighbors kept asking for them too. Soon there were pride flags everywhere – a place that hate had tried to fill was conquered by love instead.

As Kim noted: "Frankly, I've grown weary of this, of all this hate. And I gotta say, it just seemed like there was one thing that I could do that I had control of."

Remember that our ability to grow weary of hate fuels our enormous capacity to be kind. The bright moments of our past...the North Star of our future...are all lit not by ambition, partisanship or greed...but by kindness.

A willingness to be kind is a virtue often overlooked in life...a commitment to be kind in politics can change the world. Over a century ago, public policy grounded by kindness offered a penniless immigrant to Illinois a bed to sleep in, a public school education and the opportunity to

succeed. 130 years later, his great grandson just took the oath of office to be Governor of this great state.

So thank you Illinois, for your faith in me. I promise to live up to it every day. Together let's go into this new century with enough faith to help each other out of our troubles, with enough foolishness to believe we can make a difference in the world, and with enough kindness to find the courage to change.

Thank you. God bless the state of Illinois. And God bless the United States of America.