After more than a decade of extreme scandal and gross government mismanagement, far too many Illinoisans seem to be wallowing or even perversely reveling in our state's embarrassing failures. Just try to point out a positive aspect of this state and you'll be shouted down by all sides as a naive homer.

But accentuating the positive is just what Governor Pat Quinn tried to do last week, and, man, was he ever hammered for it.

Putting aside all the resulting uproar for a moment, the governor's State of the State address was probably the best speech I've ever heard Quinn give, at least on a technical basis. It was well-written (his 2010 speech was horribly ad-libbed), well-delivered (he's given some real snoozers), and, as far as a State of the State speech goes, it hit all the right high notes.

Yes, it was heavily criticized for being way too light on budget specifics, but, hey, this was not a budget speech. Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka said Quinn was "putting dessert on the table before the vegetables." Well, yeah. But, the broccoli address will be delivered in just a couple of weeks. Next year's budget will be the toughest one Quinn has ever crafted. I can wait a couple more weeks to see what he's going to do.

Then there's this, from Article V, Section 13, of the Illinois Constitution: "The Governor, at the beginning of each annual session of the General Assembly and at the close of his term of office, shall report to the General Assembly on the condition of the State and recommend such measures as he deems desirable."

The annual State of the State address is not supposed to be about the government. It's supposed to be about Illinois itself. So much of the over-the-top hand-wringing and teeth-gnashing about Quinn's address not being focused enough on the government itself was misplaced.

Yes, I agree that he should have tried harder to steel our collective nerve for the fearsome battles ahead. But, overall, the governor delivered a pretty standard State of the State address as required by the Constitution. Quinn's no Roosevelt or Reagan, but not many are, and

Illinoisans knew that when they elected him.

The speech was roundly slammed for being too rosy, but was Quinn really exaggerating when he extolled the virtues of our state's reviving manufacturing base, our skilled workers, our creative entrepreneurs, our technology, our recently amazing successes with exports?

Are we really at a point in history when a governor cannot tout the true goodness of Illinois without being thought of as a clownish optimist?

Despite what you've read in most of the papers and saw on the TV, there were some quite positive reactions to Quinn's speech, including from some folks you might not have expected.

The press release from Illinois Chamber of Commerce President Doug Whitley all but gushed over Quinn's proposals. The Illinois Manufacturers' Association's Greg Baise not only praised Quinn's ideas but said Illinois should do even more.

Trouble is, neither of those guys has a vote in the General Assembly. And when you looked around the legislature, it was tough to find all that many positive remarks about the governor's address.

The main reason, apart from partisanship, was a Civic Federation report released last week that projected an almost-impossible-to-imagine $35-billion stack of overdue state bills by 2017. The report's projections used the state's own numbers and have not been challenged by the Quinn administration. The disastrous projections have gut-punched the entire Statehouse. So legislators were in no mood for happy talk when Quinn took the podium.

Most of their negative reactions focused on the $300 million or so Quinn wants for tax breaks and increased spending.

"I look forward to hearing how we can fund these important priorities within a balanced budget"

was how Senate President John Cullerton delicately put it. Then again, it was Cullerton who negotiated and pushed through the CME Group tax-cut deal just a couple months ago, which will cost the state almost $100 million a year.

The Republicans were predictably unanimous in opposition to Quinn's ideas, despite having adamantly insisted on a far-costlier corporate-tax-cut package just a couple months ago.

We have serious problems in Illinois. But it's time to stop wallowing in all our failures and divisions. Admit mistakes, face up to the problems like grownups, and move forward together. Is it really too much to ask?

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax *(a daily political newsletter) and CapitolFax.com .*