

Governor Quinn Delivers 2013 State of the State Address

Written by Leslie Wertheimer
Wednesday, 06 February 2013 15:42

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SPRINGFIELD – February 6, 2013. Governor Pat Quinn today delivered his 2013 State of the State Address. Please find a copy of the address below:

President John Cullerton, Speaker Mike Madigan, Leaders Christine Radogno and Tom Cross, members of the General Assembly, and distinguished guests: Good Afternoon.

It is an honor to address you at the start of a new legislative session. And let me again welcome our 38 new legislators, women and men committed to serving their districts and our state.

We are joined this afternoon by Lieutenant Governor Sheila Simon, Attorney General Lisa Madigan, Secretary of State Jesse White, Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka, Treasurer Dan Rutherford, Auditor General Bill Holland, and Superintendent of Education Chris Koch. Thank you for your presence.

And thanks, in particular, to Secretary White, for your career of public service and the impact you have made in reducing traffic fatalities over the past four years to historic lows.

I'd like to recognize today Erin Merryn, who advocated to give us "Erin's Law" to prevent sexual assault and abuse of children. Thank you Erin.

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As we gather today, let us also pause to thank our Illinois men and women in uniform, whose service and sacrifice make occasions like this possible.

We're honored to have with us today Sergeant James Cissell, a Lead Firefighter with the Illinois National Guard 662nd Fire Fighting Team based in Sparta.

Last year, Sergeant Cissell was scheduled to leave military service, but instead he volunteered to extend his service so he could deploy with his unit to Afghanistan. There, he and his 7-man team responded to dozens of fires and emergencies.

He just returned to his wife Angela and children Courtney, Cori, and Cody in October. Sergeant Cissell, you are man of great courage.

This year, we mark the 10th anniversary of the Illinois Military Family Relief Trust Fund, a program which has provided more than \$14 million to support families of our deployed service members, including Sergeant Cissell and his family last year.

In Illinois, we understand the profound debt of gratitude we owe our heroes. And I'm proud to say, on behalf of the people of Illinois, to Sergeant Cissell, and to all our servicemembers, veterans, and their families:
thank you
for your service and sacrifice.

Fellow citizens of Illinois: I am here to report on the state of our state.

And let there be no mistake: our state is at a critical juncture.

We have made strong progress in the last four years, on everything from creating jobs and

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reforming our education system, to enacting strong ethical standards and improving our roads, bridges, and rail systems like never before.

We have moved Illinois forward. But we have much more to do. At this point, each and every one of us has a choice to make about what we want our Illinois to look like.

Do we want, in the years to come, a prosperous Illinois where working people continue to have good jobs.....where businesses thrive.... and where all our children have a world-class education?

Or do we want to stop the progress and watch our economic recovery stall?

This is a choice about whether we'll make the tough decisions necessary to balance our budget by reforming our public pension systems...or whether we will let our jobs, our safety, and our schools be squeezed out by skyrocketing pension costs.

We have a tall task ahead of us. This is no small issue. And doing what's hard isn't always what's popular at the moment.

But, we must remember that hard is not impossible.

In fact, last year, we made major progress on some of the most impossible issues that have ever confronted our state.

We overhauled our Medicaid program and saved it from the brink of collapse.

We abolished the troubled legislative scholarship program.

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And we successfully closed 54 state facilities, saving taxpayers \$100 million a year.

We did these hard things working together.... in good faith... across the aisle.

And that's because we're not an Illinois of 13 million individuals, each going their own separate way.

No. We're a community..... a community of shared values.

And we all share a vision of an even better Illinois. An Illinois that is more prosperous. An Illinois that embraces all people...whose communities are safe...and whose children are educated for the good jobs of the future.

We all want this...this is our Illinois...and we've made great strides toward making it a reality.

JOBS

Our Illinois is a place where everyone has an opportunity to work...and where our companies innovate and grow.

When I took the oath of office four years ago, Illinois had not had a jobs program to build highways, bridges and schools in more than 10 years.

Within 10 weeks, we passed Illinois Jobs Now!... the largest public works investment in our state's history.

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Between that and our Tollway initiative, we've been investing \$43 billion to build and strengthen our infrastructure. This is supporting more than half a million jobs.

Construction workers, like operating engineer Dawn Voce, who is with us today, have been busy working. Thank you, Dawn.

Dawn and her fellow workers are ready to rebuild the Jane Addams Tollway to Rockford. They're building a bridge across the Mississippi River in East St. Louis. And they've already completed the new Wacker Drive in Chicago.

But we have much more to do. So, Members of the General Assembly, let's enact House Bill 190 without delay – and keep creating construction jobs.

That's our Illinois.

Four years ago, many thought high-speed rail was a pipe dream. But now, we're making it a reality in Illinois, creating thousands of jobs and paving the way for more economic growth.

Four years ago, we had leaky pipes, broken water mains and obsolete wastewater treatment facilities.

Some of the pipes still in use in Chicago were laid when Ulysses S. Grant was president of our country.

That's why one year ago, right here in this chamber, I made a commitment to every Illinois resident to update our water systems and make sure that everyone has access to clean drinking water.

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Through our Illinois Clean Water Initiative, we're investing \$1 billion in clean water...supporting more than 28,000 jobs to replace broken water systems, upgrade sewers, and clean up environmental threats.

And to Larry Swope of the Illinois Pipe Trades, and Jim Coyne, head of Plumbers Local 130: thank you for your hard work.

We're investing in clean water in Pekin, in Princeton, in Hinckley, in Elmhurst, in Flanagan, and in Chicago.

And we have much more to do.

Soon, we'll be putting workers on the job for new Clean Water projects in Kankakee, Murphysboro and all across Cook County.

We are leading the way in creating clean water jobs.

That's our Illinois.

In our Illinois, small business means big business.

Driving economic growth for small businesses requires doing all we can to make sure government is not in the way – while always protecting the health and safety of consumers.

Four years ago, Illinois had one of the most burdensome worker compensation systems in the country. That didn't help our businesses or our workers.

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So we reformed the system, saving business millions of dollars in insurance premiums. And we did it working together, with both parties. Thank you, Leader Christine Radogno.

Achieving this reform was not easy; but hard is not impossible.

Now, we all know that business requires capital. And four years ago, capital was hard to find as all of Illinois suffered from the Great Recession. So we invested in our small businesses, providing \$23 million in federal funding to scores of companies through Advantage Illinois.

And we've awarded micro-loans to hundreds of businesses, primarily to minority- and women-owned small businesses in high-need communities. In the past four years, we've increased the participation of minority- and women-owned firms in state contracts. And we're going to do more.

Our investments are helping businesses like Urban Juncture in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood, where owner Bernard Loyd is creating 70 jobs and tackling the food desert. Thanks for putting people back to work, Bernard.

In our Illinois, working people find good jobs not just for today but for tomorrow.

We've worked to expand our Clean Energy Economy, creating 10,000 green collar jobs. But we have much more to do.

We're making buildings more efficient. And we're expanding our renewable energy capacity.

That's what our Illinois looks like.

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To create 21st century jobs, we're also investing in innovation.

We worked with Argonne National Laboratory to bring a new research facility to Illinois.

In the next five years, Argonne will lead a public-private team to create the next-generation battery - a battery that is five times cheaper and lasts five times longer than today's batteries.

We also helped create 1871, a digital hub that has become home to more than 200 startups.

But there's more to be done.

Now is the time to take that same innovative, public-private approach to advanced manufacturing.

In the last 3 years, manufacturing has been one of our state's leading growth sectors, creating nearly 40,000 new jobs. We're at the cutting edge of advanced manufacturing, and we need to stay there.

That's why we're partnering with the University of Illinois and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications to create an advanced manufacturing hub where companies – big and small – come to learn and use the world's most sophisticated tools and software.

The Illinois Manufacturing Lab will make our manufacturers more competitive.

Now, in our Illinois, we leave no worker behind.

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As we create next-generation jobs, we must ensure that our workers are equipped for them.

Today there are 140,000 job openings in our state that are unfilled because the people looking for jobs don't have the necessary skills.

So we're closing this "skills gap." Over the past year, we've trained thousands of workers for jobs in high-demand industries like healthcare, manufacturing and construction.

But let's not forget one community that already has great technical skills and training. That's our veterans. We need to make sure their military training counts here in Illinois.

That's why, this morning, I signed an Executive Order that directs our licensing agencies to assess military training for state license requirements.

Just last month, we completed a great first step, with the Board of Nursing approving a suggested "bridge" curriculum for military medics to obtain LPN licenses.

We owe it to our veterans – and to our companies – to keep this process moving.

And that's exactly what my Executive Order will do. We'll help more companies hire veterans and take advantage of the Hiring Veterans Tax Credit we passed last year.

Our shared vision for a better Illinois also means we must honor the productivity of our workers.

Our businesses are only as good as the employees who drive their success.

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Nobody in Illinois should work 40 hours a week and live in poverty. That's a principle as old as the Bible.

That's why, over the next 4 years, we must raise the minimum wage to at least \$10 an hour.

Senator Kimberly Lightford, you are doing the right thing with your mission to raise the minimum wage.

And as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, it's always the right time to do the right thing.

HEALTHCARE

Dr. King also said, "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane."

In our Illinois, everyone should have access to decent healthcare.

Twelve years ago, when I walked 167 miles across Illinois, I met a young mother in Mendota who worked full-time as a waitress. She didn't have health insurance.

That wasn't right then and it's not right now. Hundreds of thousands of working people in Illinois today do not have health coverage.

Fortunately, thanks to President Barack Obama, we now have the Affordable Care Act, which will improve the health of the people of Illinois and create thousands of jobs.

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But to make this a reality, we must act now. We have work to do.

So I call on the General Assembly to increase access to health coverage for the uninsured through Medicaid and to create the Illinois Health Insurance Exchange.

I want to thank Speaker Mike Madigan for his commitment to ensure that we reap the benefits of the Affordable Care Act. And to the members of the Legislative Black Caucus, thank you for making sure it's "everybody in and nobody left out."

EDUCATION

We also share a vision of an Illinois where every child is prepared to succeed.

That starts with education reform. Four years ago, Illinois was behind.

But now we're setting the reform agenda for the nation.

I signed into law education reforms that put the students of Illinois first.

These reforms have improved school report cards, so that parents are empowered with more information about the schools that educate their kids.

These reforms also set clear benchmarks for teacher evaluation and put performance above tenure.

In addition to these reforms, we've invested \$45 million to build early childhood education

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centers in high-need communities across Illinois, including in Carpentersville, Dolton, and Cahokia.

But there's much more work to do.

That's why we are rededicating a new Lincoln Hall at the University of Illinois next week.

And why we're building Phase 2 of a new campus for Western Illinois in the Quad Cities.

And why we've just completed a new automotive aeronautics building at SIU in Carbondale.

In our Illinois, anything is possible...especially when it comes to educating our students.

But let's be frank.

The pension squeeze is draining our ability to teach our students. Our children are being shortchanged. And in the end, that shortchanges our economy, too.

That's not our Illinois.

In our Illinois, we find a way to get hard things done.

PUBLIC SAFETY

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We address the hard issues. Issues like the threat of gun violence.

Last December, our hearts broke along with the parents of the children who died in the horrific massacre in Newtown, Connecticut.

And our hearts break every day with families who suffer from violence in Illinois communities...families like the Pendletons, whose daughter Hadiya Pendleton was stolen from us last week.

I spoke with Hadiya's family on Monday. There are no words in the English language...or any language...to relieve the pain of parents who lose a child.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah wept day and night for the slain of his people.

Today, we all weep over the senseless violence in our communities.

But as elected officials, we're in a position to do something about it. We have life-saving work to do.

We cannot wait for another tragedy to happen before we take action.

We must move forward with a comprehensive plan that includes gun safety legislation, mental health care, and violence prevention strategies.

That's why today, I ask you to move forward with strong public safety legislation that will safeguard the people of Illinois.

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We must prohibit the sale of assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines in Illinois.

Of course, we must abide with the second amendment. But there is no place in our state for military-style assault weapons designed for rapid fire at human targets at close range.

And I want to thank Orland Park Police Chief and former Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy, an American hero who saved the life of President Ronald Reagan, for his help on this issue. Thank you, Tim.

We must ensure that guns are kept out of everyday public places, because guns don't belong in our schools, shopping malls, or sports stadiums.

And we must make Illinois safer by strengthening background checks and requiring gun owners to report lost or stolen guns.

I want to salute Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, State's Attorney Anita Alvarez, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel for their leadership on this issue.

We also must empower our law enforcement to keep guns from falling into the wrong hands. That means we need reliable mental health records.

For years, counties across our state have not been reporting their mental health records to the Illinois State Police. This year, we need every county to step up and do its part to ensure mental health records are updated in real time.

And if there is one thing we can learn from Newtown, it is that we can never rest when it comes to school safety.

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Last month, I convened a School Safety Summit with education, public safety, mental health and law enforcement leaders to identify better ways to protect our schools.

Our students and teachers can never be too prepared. That's why we should pass legislation that will require every school in our state to practice active safety drills that will prepare them for even the worst.

Our Public Safety Agenda is both comprehensive and common sense. Together, we can get it done.

That's our Illinois.

EMBRACING ALL PEOPLE

We also believe in an Illinois where people from all walks of life are welcome.

And over the past four years, we have made major strides towards achieving this vision of a more perfect democracy.

We share the belief that everyone deserves an opportunity to follow their dreams and reach their full potential.

But four years ago, there was no scholarship program for high school graduates from immigrant families. We changed that by creating the Illinois Dream Commission. And this year, that Commission will start awarding scholarships to dreamers across Illinois.

And just a few days ago, we made history in Illinois, becoming the fifth state in the Union to legalize driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. This will make our roads safer and our

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families stronger. Thank you, Representative Eddie Acevedo and the entire Latino Caucus.

Four years ago, Illinois lagged behind the nation in providing community care to people with developmental disabilities and mental health challenges.

We were institutionalizing more people than any other state, even though community care has been proven to provide a better quality of life.

So we are changing that. We're committed to making sure all our citizens – regardless of the challenges they face - have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

That's why we closed outdated institutions – and we invested in community care.

We invested in people.

People like Eddy Fleming are now thriving with a better, more independent life.

After 12 years of living at a state institution, Eddy recently moved to a community home. He chooses what he wants to eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. He goes shopping, he walks around his neighborhood, and he practices guitar on his porch.

Eddy makes his own choices and chases his own dreams. That's our Illinois.

And I am pleased to announce today that, because of our commitment, Illinois will soon receive significant new resources to provide supportive housing for people with disabilities.

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These resources will provide not only a roof over their heads...but also the skills training, counseling, and services they need to become productive members of their communities.

And we're not done yet.

We want Illinois to be the nation's leading employer of people with disabilities.

With your partnership, we can double the rate of employment for people with disabilities by 2015.

Our Illinois is an "employment first" state.

But our Illinois is not a land of discrimination. Four years ago, nobody thought civil unions would be possible here.

Today, civil unions are the law of our state. And nearly 5,200 couples across 94 counties have joined in a civil union.

Now, it's time to take that next step in achieving full equality.

Marriage equality is coming to Illinois. And yesterday was a great start in the Senate Executive Committee.

I want to thank Senator Heather Steans and Representative Greg Harris for their work to move Illinois forward. Let's pass this bill for marriage equality.

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In our Illinois, we embrace the voices...and the votes...of all people. Our democracy is strongest when more voters raise their voices at the ballot box.

That's why Illinois should join 15 other states in making voter registration available online. We must move our election process into the 21st century.

And while we're at it, let's pass a long overdue law to allow voters to participate in primary elections without having to publicly declare their party affiliation.

That's our Illinois.

PROTECTING CONSUMERS

And in our Illinois, consumers are protected. Everyone in the marketplace deserves a fair shake.

Four years ago, runaway bankers brought the Illinois economy to its knees.

These shady operators peddled risky mortgage loan products – costing far too many people their homes.

We must protect our homeowners from this kind of fraud and abuse.

Thank you, Senator Jackie Collins and former Representative Karen Yarbrough, for your legislation to help people who are facing foreclosure. I will proudly sign your bill into law later this week.

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In our Illinois, we do not forget about our hardest hit families during their time of need.

That's why we've helped 6,550 families in 92 counties stay in their homes through our Hardest Hit program. And more than half a million families received counseling and other resources through the Illinois Foreclosure Prevention Network that I launched last year.

But there's much more to do. We want to help more families in the year to come.

A fair shake for consumers also means protection from unfair rates and practices by big utility companies.

Thirty years ago, I spearheaded a referendum campaign which created the Illinois Citizens Utility Board, our watchdog over the utility giants. Since then, CUB has reduced utility rate hikes and won billions of dollars in refunds for consumers.

Now more than ever, we need a strong Citizens Utility Board and a strong Illinois Commerce Commission.

That's why I'm nominating a proven advocate for the public interest, Miguel del Valle, to serve on the Illinois Commerce Commission. Thanks for your service, Miguel.

ETHICS

In our Illinois, government belongs to the people, not to the office holders.

Citizens should be able at all times to trust their elected officials.

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Four years ago, Illinois was the Wild West of campaign fundraising.

And it showed.

We had a corrupt governor removed from office and headed to prison, and another already in prison, both for fundraising abuses. This was not our Illinois.

So we changed it. We passed a strong ethics code for office holders and public employees.

For the first time in history, we enacted campaign contribution limits.

And we gave the people of Illinois the ability to use the power of petition to recall a corrupt governor.

But our constant mission to restore integrity to Illinois government cannot end here. We have more work to do.

In 1976, I led a petition drive to ban conflict of interest voting in the General Assembly. 635,158 voters signed this petition – the greatest number of signatures ever gathered on a single petition in Illinois history.

Silence about conflict of interest voting wasn't our Illinois then, and it's not our Illinois now. We can do better.

Conflicts of interest are regulated all over: from the Illinois Supreme Court, to right here in the Executive Branch.

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And more than 30 states have banned conflict of interest voting.

Illinois should too.

With this reform, we can keep moving towards a state government that always puts the people first, and a government that tackles the tough issues, no matter how hard.

And that brings us back to the toughest of issues: the public pension system which, left unreformed, is squeezing out education, public safety, and other vital services to the tune of \$17 million a day.

In our communities, that squeeze looks like Crete-Monee District 201 eliminating art, music and PE classes for grade schoolers.

In DuPage High School District 88, it looks like larger class sizes and less attention for students.

And across Illinois, it looks like credit downgrades and fewer roads and bridges repaired.

This is not our Illinois.

In the last four years, we have created jobs, invested in our public works, and enacted major reforms.

We've helped our auto industry recover, with Chrysler in Belvidere going from 200 jobs when I first took office to more than 4,500 jobs today.

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And we're bringing our economy back, lowering unemployment from 11.4 percent at the peak of the Great Recession to 8.7 percent today.

But we have a long way to go.

And we cannot allow our economic recovery to be held hostage by the pension crisis.

We simply must act.

Our vision for our Illinois cannot be fully realized without pension reform.

This problem cannot be delayed, deferred, or delegated to the next session..... to the next generation.

President Cullerton, thank you for recognizing this, and thank you for your leadership in providing us a path forward through Senate Bill 1, a comprehensive bill that stabilizes our pension systems and fixes the problem.

And thank you, Leader Tom Cross and Representative Elaine Nekritz for working together on a bi-partisan basis to make sure that pension reform is Job One for this General Assembly.

I urge all of you to be part of the solution. And while refinements may come, Senate Bill 1 is the best vehicle to get the job done.

Hard is not impossible.

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Last year was an election year, but many of you in this chamber did not let that stop you from working together to reduce our Medicaid liability by \$2 billion. That wasn't easy to do with a \$14 billion program, but you did the right thing.

You also worked with me to abolish the much-abused legislative scholarship program. That program was around for more than 100 years...but you did the right thing.

And when I proposed closing 54 facilities across Illinois to save taxpayers millions of dollars, some of you weren't happy...but we got it done...because it was the right thing to do.

As you look around this chamber, please realize: you are the answer. What we all need in this coming session is courage, real political courage to do the right thing.

We don't need to look any further for examples of courage than our men and women in uniform.

Men like Sergeant Tyler Ziegel, a proud Marine who grew up in Metamora, Illinois.

On Christmas Eve 2004, Ty suffered massive and disfiguring injuries when a suicide bomber attacked near his vehicle in Iraq.

Like so many of his fellow Wounded Warriors, Ty fought back. He fought back through 59 surgeries and untold emotional scars to become an advocate for veterans and military families.

Last December, Sergeant Tyler Ziegel died in an accident. May his immortal soul rest in peace. He was a good Marine – Semper Fi – and a man I was proud to know.

If our service members can summon that kind of courage day after day, then surely we can

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summon

political courage in the days to come.

With courage, hard is not impossible.

We are not a state – we are not a people – that shies away from hard things.

Not in the Land of Lincoln...that Illinoisan who showed the whole country and all posterity what's possible when commitment and integrity are brought to bear.

Together, we can guide Illinois safely through this pension challenge that we face.

And we can continue to make our Illinois a reality.

An Illinois whose people and businesses prosper.

An Illinois which lives up to its proud history and which would make Abraham Lincoln himself proud.

An Illinois in which the will of the people is the law of the land.

Thank you.

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