

Governor Quinn Launches Blue Waters Supercomputer at University of Illinois

Written by Erin Wilson
Friday, 29 March 2013 09:13

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State Invested \$60 Million to House Largest and Fastest Supercomputer on Any University Campus

URBANA-CHAMPAIGN – Governor Pat Quinn today joined the National Science Foundation, officials from the University of Illinois and other state and business leaders to launch the Blue Waters Supercomputer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Today's announcement comes as part of Governor Quinn's agenda to drive the Illinois economy forward and ensure that the state's universities are at the forefront of 21st century science. The largest and fastest supercomputer on any university campus in the world, Blue Waters will offer unprecedented capability for advanced science and engineering applications.

"The University of Illinois continues to be a national leader in innovation, research and engineering progress throughout the world, and today's launch of Blue Waters will allow users to process some of the largest and most challenging problems in science and engineering," Governor Quinn said. "This revolutionary supercomputer will also provide opportunities for private industry, serving as a powerful economic engine by allowing the development of less costly prototypes."

The state of Illinois invested \$60 million to construct the Petascale Computing Facility that houses Blue Waters. The National Science Foundation funded the purchase of the computer itself, investing an estimated \$350 million to purchase the hardware, pay for five years of support services, power and cool the computer, and provide their own staff to support the system and work with scientists who use it.

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Blue Waters is a collaborative effort of the United States Congress, the National Science Foundation, the state of Illinois, the University of Illinois and the Great Lakes Consortium for Petascale Computation. It is the most powerful system supported by the National Science Foundation, and gives the university a unique opportunity to perform groundbreaking research that would otherwise be impossible.

“Blue Waters is a truly extraordinary computing system that will enable the nation's researchers, as well as our innovative companies, to achieve breakthroughs in a broad range of science and engineering,” Thom Dunning, director of the university's National Center for Supercomputing Applications said. “Blue Waters is also a unique resource for the University of Illinois and the state of Illinois, enhancing the path-finding role that Illinois has played in supercomputing for more than 25 years.”

“For 146 years the U of I has been bringing solutions to the grand challenges of the world,” University of Illinois Chancellor Phyllis Wise said. “Each of our new discoveries has built on the ones before it, creating a chain of knowledge and experience that informs and drives the next idea. Blue Waters represents the next link in that unbroken chain,”

Blue Waters completes quadrillions of calculations every second and is designed to help researchers find insights buried in massive quantities of data. This has crucial applications for astronomy, physics, chemistry and engineering. Blue Waters can simulate how the cosmos evolved after the Big Bang, help design new materials at the atomic level, forecast the behavior of hurricanes and tornadoes, assist with genetic mapping to combat disease and simulate complex engineered systems like the power distribution system and experimental aircraft.

Blue Waters is part of the University's National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA). It was built from Cray hardware, operates at a sustained performance of more than 1 petaflop (1 quadrillion calculations per second) and is capable of peak performance of 11.61 petaflops (11.6 quadrillion calculations per second). It would take one person millions of years to complete this many calculations with just a calculator. The system also provides “big data” capacity: 1.5 petabytes of working memory, 26 petabytes of disk and 300 petabytes of tape storage.

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“Our university and our state will share an enduring link to the life-changing breakthroughs that Blue Waters yields, discovery that holds promise for accelerating medical advances, predicting the behavior of catastrophic weather events and producing more food to feed a growing world,” Ed McMillan, a member of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees said.

The system is now available for the NCSA’s industry partners, a group of 26 companies and organizations that includes ADM, BP, Boeing, Caterpillar, Dow, GE, John Deere, Procter & Gamble and Rolls Royce.

In commemoration of today’s announcement, the governor also proclaimed March 28, 2013 as Blue Waters Supercomputer Day in Illinois.

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