

Gov. Pritzker Says He Advances Fiscal Responsibility, Invests in Working Families in FY25 Budget

February 21 2024 4:04 PM



SPRINGFIELD – Building on five years of fiscal progress, Governor Pritzker’s sixth balanced budget proposal will continue on the path of fiscal responsibility, introduce new investments in healthcare accessibility and equity, and build on our historic progress in education and economic development.

Please see below for links to the proposed FY25 budget as well as the Governor's remarks as prepared for delivery:

[Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget](#)

[Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Budget](#)

[Fiscal Year 2025 Budget in Brief](#)

State of the State and Budget Address

Wednesday, February 21st, 2024

Remarks As Prepared For Delivery

Speaker Welch, President Harmon, Lieutenant Governor Stratton, my fellow constitutional officers, members of the 103rd General Assembly, Chief Justice Theis and members of the Supreme Court, honored guests, the First Lady of Illinois, my soulmate, MK, and all the people of the great state of Illinois, I am so grateful to be here to deliver my sixth State of the State and Budget address.

I love my job. I love living in Illinois and spending every day working to improve the lives of our residents. In a world seemingly filled with chaos, it's a privilege to be tasked with bringing stability and progress.

We live in a state that's filled with people who exude decency and kindness. And if you take the time to listen, Illinoisans will tell you rich and rewarding stories about how we came to be who we are.

Here in Springfield, one of the most interesting guys I know is Ian Hunt, the head of acquisitions at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. And if you ask Ian, he will tell you one of my favorite stories.

Illinois owns an original version of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. It's known as the Everett Copy—one of only five to have been handwritten by Abraham Lincoln himself. It's named after Edward Everett—a famed orator and a former Massachusetts Senator and Governor.

At Gettysburg on November 19, 1863, Everett was the other guy who spoke. He gave a two-hour speech—that almost no one remembers. When Everett was finished, Abraham Lincoln got up and delivered a two-minute speech that has never been forgotten.

A life lesson for every politician.

The Everett Copy of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address remained in private hands for almost 80 years. And then in 1943, with a world war raging across the globe, word came to Illinois Governor Dwight Green. The owner of the Everett Copy had passed away and the document was likely to be auctioned off.

Governor Green desperately wanted Illinois to own this priceless piece of history that is so intimately connected to our most famous son. So, his administration came to an agreement with the seller to purchase it for \$60,000.

The problem was Illinois didn't have \$60,000 to spend on the Gettysburg Address in 1943. And Governor Green knew this.

So, he did something unusual. He enlisted the school children of Illinois to collect pennies and nickels to raise the money.

There must have been some skepticism that kids were going to come up with enough cash for the Gettysburg Address—especially in the middle of a world war, and on the heels of the Great Depression.

But no one should ever doubt the children of Illinois.

A few years ago, a newspaper interviewed a Springfield man named Gene Rubley who noted that, as a young boy in 1943, he sacrificed his Saturday afternoon movie for a few months so he could give his weekly allowance to the donation drive.

It took the children of Illinois only six months to raise \$40,000. Marshall Field III, the grandson of the famous department store magnate, helped with the rest. In March of 1944, almost exactly eighty years ago, four schoolchildren presented the handwritten Gettysburg Address to the Illinois state historical library, and it has been our most valuable state artifact ever since.

I love this story. It has everything. Imagination, ingenuity, sacrifice, patriotism. It includes elected officials who didn't stop at no—and children, with a vision beyond their years, doing something important for our future.

It's a story about how, penny by penny, Illinoisans once saved something important. It's a story about our past, but it's also a story about who we are today.

Because penny by penny, we are still working together saving important things for our state.

Five years ago, when people said we couldn't do it, many of us went to work eliminating our bill backlog and balancing five state budgets in a row. We created a \$2 billion Rainy Day Fund. We achieved nine credit upgrades. And in the face of a pandemic and high inflation, we delivered historic tax relief, provided record levels of rental and mortgage assistance, and reduced interest costs by paying off more than \$11 billion in debt.

We've also grown Illinois' economy to over \$1 trillion. That's more than most nations. In 2023 alone, we attracted billions of dollars in new business investments and created tens of thousands of new jobs.

In fact, on average, a new business moved to Illinois or expanded here every single day last year.

Thanks to our bipartisan tax credit legislation, Illinois is now the world's fourth largest data center market, and we broke an all-time record for film and TV production revenue. Tourism is booming. Last year, Illinois' hotel industry set a record at \$5.5 billion.

In the Midwest, we are now the number one state for workforce development. Across all fifty states, we are number two for infrastructure. Number two for education. Number three for power grid reliability. We have the number one and number two best business schools in the country. Since 2018, we moved up a whopping thirteen spots in CNBC's Best States for Business.

These are the things that matter to businesses looking for a home. Where their workforce can live, work, and play affordably and with world class healthcare and education.

Now we have a lot of work left to do—but we, together, have met this moment we are in. Do not let the doom grifters steal your optimism about what's ahead for Illinois. Our future is bright, and opportunity lies ahead.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Last year, we launched a groundbreaking, multi-year plan called Smart Start to make Illinois the best state in the nation for preschool, child care, early intervention, and home visiting.

It's already making a huge difference for young families across Illinois. We thought we would be able to add 5,000 preschool seats by the end of year one. We exceeded that goal by fifteen percent. We created 5,823 new preschool spots, all of which are options parents didn't have before. As a result, right now we have over 82,000 publicly-funded

preschool classroom seats—the highest number in our state’s history. Staying on the Smart Start plan, we will achieve universal preschool by 2027.

Smart Start also expanded access to early intervention and evidence-based home visiting services for families with babies and young children by adding 26 more programs serving nearly 3,000 more kids. And we established the nation-leading Early Childhood Workforce Grant program, thanks to our initial investment of \$130 million—stabilizing and raising wages for a workforce that is primarily women and people of color. That helps providers maintain and grow staffing, while still delivering the quality care that Illinois children deserve.

Smart Start is having the desired benefit for working parents and their children. Childcare utilization rates are higher than ever before with 166,000 children receiving services. There was a real fear that our entire childcare system might crumble in the wake of the pandemic. Instead, it’s growing.

Heather Andrade is a Rochester parent, and when I recently visited her, she told me that Smart Start has changed her child’s life. In 2019, after a tremendously difficult pregnancy, Heather brought little Natalia into this world—a healthy, happy little baby. But as Natalia grew, Heather noticed that she was experiencing some delays in her development—and in her speech. Heather knew she needed help.

Thanks to Smart Start, Rochester EC1 was able to open a full day program—offering early childhood education and childcare, including early intervention services, like speech therapy.

Since Natalia’s first day in the program, her progress has been nothing short of remarkable. She can spell and write her name. Once nonverbal, Natalia now talks so much that they’re even considering pulling her out of speech therapy. Natalia is on track to thrive when she enters kindergarten, and her path ahead couldn’t be brighter.

Heather’s success story as a mom stands as a testimonial. It reminds us of all the parents out there who need just a little extra help to give their kids that smart start. Heather is here today, and I ask you to give her a round of applause.

It’s with Heather and Natalia in mind that I propose we stay on plan and increase Smart Start funding by \$150 million in year two to create 5,000 more preschool seats, continue growing childcare, and reach thousands more families with critical early childhood services. And I also ask that in this budget we begin the first phase of consolidating state government’s early childhood programs into one agency called the Department of Early Childhood.

With a \$13 million investment, parents and providers will have a one-stop shop for resources and programs—from finding child care and preschool to accessing Early Childhood Block Grants and daycare licensing.

K-12 EDUCATION

Nearly every study shows that investing in early childhood isn't just about your child's first five years. It's also about paving the way for success in their K-12 education and beyond.

Every single year I have been Governor, we have increased our investments in education, because a quality education is the foundation of a good life and the cornerstone of a strong society. It's why education has been a central tenet of all six budgets I have proposed. There have been some standout champions among you like Majority Leader Lightford and Senator Loughren Cappel along with Representatives Davis and Stuart who have spent their entire careers fighting for our public schools—all while weighing the tough choices to keep our budget in balance.

And the results are plain to see. In 2023, US News ranked Illinois high school students number two in the nation in college readiness, and CNBC ranked Illinois number two overall for education. We notched our highest graduation rate in thirteen years, and teacher retention was the highest ever on record. The rate of ninth graders on track to graduate now exceeds pre-pandemic levels. Chronic absenteeism is turning around, and proficiency in both English language arts and math increased dramatically.

We can draw a direct line from these results to last year's budget.

Our \$45 million teacher pipeline grant program brought 5,384 new teachers into the field—reaching more than 730,000 students in 170 districts with the highest need. Teachers are the single most important investment we can make in our schools. So, I propose we invest another \$45 million in the teacher pipeline, bringing thousands more educators into the field.

The evidence-based funding model is working, so my budget proposal follows the EBF law's recommendation, increasing it again by \$350 million. And we will fully fund special education and continue increasing funding for school transportation by \$30 million.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education continues its tremendous upward trajectory. For the second year in a row, the Illinois Community College system celebrated historic headcounts—marking

the second largest increase in enrollment numbers in the last thirty years, and far higher than the rest of the United States.

More Illinois students are now taking advantage of our great colleges and universities with well-funded MAP grant and AIM HIGH scholarship programs. The net tuition cost for most Illinois students attending Illinois schools continues to decline. Our higher education institutions are on the rise, and it's important that year in and year out, even in lean budget years, we demonstrate a commitment to these institutions—which is why my budget proposal includes a more than \$30 million increase in direct operating support for public higher education institutions, and that's on top of continuing record capital investments we are making through Rebuild Illinois.

HUMAN SERVICES WORKFORCE

Improving educational attainment and retention is assisting private industry to overcome the Illinois workforce shortage—and it's also having a similar effect in state government. We are finally moving closer to achieving the staffing levels we need to support our work. The Departments on Aging, Human Services, Healthcare and Family Services: every social service agency has improved its hiring to fill out its budgeted headcount. DCFS, for example, has achieved its highest staffing in more than fifteen years, through a combination of funding, ingenuity, and sheer hard work.

DCFS is more focused than ever on how to best protect Illinois children. Today, nearly every call to the abuse and neglect hotline is answered immediately. That's up from only 50% back in 2019. Of the more than 94,525 investigations conducted last year by DCFS, 99.7% were initiated within 24 hours. And within seven days, 96% of children have been seen by an investigator. With an additional \$14 million in funding in FY25, DCFS will reach a headcount of 4,000 staff for the first time in more than two decades.

As always, there is more to do, and DCFS is committed to doing it. I want to thank outgoing DCFS Director Marc Smith for his five years of service in the state's most difficult job, and I also want to welcome incoming director Heidi Mueller, who served two gubernatorial administrations as the pioneering head of the Department of Juvenile Justice. I've visited many DJJ facilities over my time in office, and it's impossible to ignore the trust and admiration the state's most vulnerable children have for her. We are lucky to have her in this new role.

The people who work at DCFS are witness to trauma and heartbreak every single day. They are rarely lauded for their successes, and most often used as a convenient punching bag for larger societal issues. They work long hours, and on occasion, these heroic workers have been the subject of threats and violence. I want them to know that I see them—that I see their work—and that I am incredibly grateful for their service. I ask

each of you in this chamber to offer them your gratitude too. Their dedication is worthy of recognition.

CONSUMER PROTECTION & NETWORK ADEQUACY

Restoring the safety net has been a goal of mine from the very beginning. But to do so, we've had to work on transforming our healthcare ecosystem. After so many years of neglect, we've begun to turn things around by reducing the price of prescription drugs, implementing hospital transformation, and enacting a lower cost state-based health insurance marketplace.

I want to particularly thank Senators Linda Holmes, Ann Gillespie, and Laura Fine as well as Leader Robyn Gabel for their groundbreaking work on healthcare reform over the last few years.

Now it's time we take another giant leap forward. This legislative session, I am introducing a bill to curb predatory insurance practices—putting power back into the hands of patients and their doctors.

It's called the Healthcare Consumer Access and Protection Act, and it has three parts. The first part targets a practice called utilization management. What is utilization management? That's insurance-speak for denying coverage. Utilization management allows insurance companies to boost profits by requiring that consumers get permission before they receive care. It won't surprise you to know that those requests are frequently denied. One method of utilization management is referred to as "prior authorization," where a consumer must get permission from the insurance company to get treatment their own doctor has deemed medically necessary. Another method of utilization management is called "step therapy," where a patient is forced to try a less effective treatment and then have that fail before getting the actual quality care their doctors said they needed in the first place. Any doctor you talk to will tell you how much they loathe these practices and how often they are used to deny patients the medications and treatments they desperately need.

Almost everyone has a horror story about prior authorizations and step therapy. Lest you think I'm exaggerating, let me share one such story. One of our state employees was diagnosed by his cardiologist with serious heart disease and scheduled open heart surgery. Three days before the procedure, which took a month to schedule, the health insurer denied the prior authorization request. The insurance company made the decision, without consulting this person's doctor, that heart surgery was unnecessary—leaving the employee to cover the cost out of pocket. It was only after my office got involved at the request of this individual's family—who was afraid he could die—that the prior authorization was granted.

That is simply unacceptable. Doctors and their patients should be making decisions about patient care. There should never be an instance where an insurance company employee can deny coverage for something as serious as open heart surgery. We should never, ever, ever, *ever* cede those decisions to the whims of insurance executives whose focus is always on the bottom line. When it comes to patient care, the only bottom line that really matters is what needs to be done to keep people healthy.

The legislation I am proposing would totally ban step therapy in Illinois, and force insurance companies to use the same definitions of medical necessity that doctors use.

Among the other features of this bill, Illinois will become the first state in the nation to ban prior authorization for in-patient adult and children's mental health care. That means patients suffering a mental health crisis can get the care they need without jumping through hoops designed to deny coverage. And we are going to make sure that insurance plans publicly post all treatments that require prior authorization, so consumers can compare plans when they are shopping for coverage.

We are also going to prohibit insurance companies from selling Short Term Limited Duration plans, also known as junk insurance. These are plans that seem enticing because they offer lower premiums to bridge gaps in insurance coverage. But in reality, these plans fail to meet even the minimum standards of the Affordable Care Act. They don't cover pre-existing conditions. They don't cover maternal healthcare. They don't cover mental health and substance use treatment, or prescription drugs. Like twelve other states, it's time for Illinois to ban junk insurance plans.

The second part of this legislation covers network adequacy. That's the standard insurance companies must meet to ensure there are enough in-network doctors to treat consumers when and where they need healthcare. In recent years, we've seen the rise of "ghost networks." That's where an in-network directory shows doctors and specialists who in reality either aren't accepting any new patients, aren't in-network, or don't exist at all.

Health insurance companies should be helping consumers get quality care. Not tricking them. So, we're going to require insurance companies to update their in-network directories of doctors to reflect the actual availability of healthcare, and we're going to punish them if they don't.

The third piece of the Healthcare Consumer Access and Protection Act prevents insurance companies from unfairly increasing rates on consumers. Last year, my administration was proud to work with members of the Senate, House, and other

stakeholders to end unchecked rate increases in the small group insurance market who serve small businesses and individuals. This year, we're going to require that large group insurance carriers do the same.

I'm haunted by the reality that there are Illinoisans who are suffering and, in some cases have died, because they lost a battle with an insurance company. I have talked to people who have just given up because of the mountains of paperwork, or the endless search for an in-network doctor, or the dozens of hours on the phone arguing with an unsympathetic insurance company. Getting the healthcare you need shouldn't be this hard.

Now I know how hard the insurance industry will fight me on this. But let me be perfectly clear: I am willing to spend serious political capital and put my shoulder to the wheel to get this done. It will save lives and lower healthcare costs for millions of Illinoisans.

MEDICAL DEBT

It's also time to help those who have suffered financial harm, often through no fault of their own, from past failures of a broken health insurance and healthcare billing system. Treating a health emergency is not an optional expense. But too many Illinoisans have had their credit ruined or have been pushed into bankruptcy when they had one unexpected accident or one prolonged illness.

So today, I propose that over the next four years we eliminate \$4 billion of medical debt for over 1 million Illinoisans. Working with a national non-profit called RIP Medical Debt, it costs on average one penny to buy back and eliminate every dollar of medical debt, and we can start this year with a \$10 million dollar appropriation to relieve nearly \$1 billion in medical debt for the first cohort of 340,000 Illinoisans. County Board President Toni Preckwinkle has already done this for residents of Cook County. Let's make this a reality for all of Illinois.

MATERNAL HEALTH

In Illinois, a serious effort to reduce maternal mortality rates is long overdue. And Black women in our state are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women. It's imperative that we act now, ensuring that as we do, we also reduce and eliminate racial disparities.

The current system is failing our most vulnerable women and babies. The solution lies, as it often does, at the community level. Dr. Jeanine Valrie-Logan is a certified nurse-midwife at the Birth Center PCC in Berwyn—the first freestanding non-profit birthing center to open in Illinois.

But in Jeanine's home community on the Southside of Chicago, no such center has ever existed.

After years of mobilizing and submitting grant applications, Jeanine finally is able to open the Chicago Southside Birth Center to meet her neighborhood's needs—offering a full spectrum of reproductive care from contraception, STI screenings, and abortion to pre-natal, birthing, and post-partum care. It can be a model for how Illinois can decrease Black maternal mortality.

Because of work my administration has already done, beginning this year, doulas, midwives, and lactation consultants can now be recognized as Medicaid healthcare providers, ensuring that they can be fairly compensated. That will make more services more readily available to communities with the highest mortality rates.

But we can do even more. I intend to break down bureaucratic barriers in state government by coordinating work across agencies to improve access to a full spectrum of reproductive healthcare services. Our Department of Public Health will provide grants to assist providers with Medicaid certification and licensing associated with starting and sustaining a community-based practice. We'll also invest an additional \$1 million in DCEO capital grants related to the cost of opening.

And DHS will invest \$1 million in a pilot program to ensure new moms and babies have clean diapers, along with an additional \$5 million into home visiting for our most vulnerable families to connect new moms and babies with resources they need to be healthy and thrive during babies' first year of life.

My budget also proposes investing \$12 million to create a Child Tax Credit for families raising our youngest children. By targeting this investment at low and middle-income families with children under 3, we can put money back in the pockets of our newest parents who need it most and make those early years just a little bit easier.

Altogether, we're making a \$23 million investment that will put us on a path to birth equity—a path and a destination Jeanine and her colleagues in the field can be proud of.

Jeanine is here today, and I would ask her to stand and be recognized.

GROCERY TAX

One of my missions as governor is to make life easier for working families. Establishing a child tax credit, eliminating medical debt, lowering the cost of healthcare, making it easier to get a college education, bringing quality childcare closer to home so moms and dads can go to work—these are not esoteric policy proposals but actually do lift burdens everyday Illinoisans face. And even though inflation continues to cool off, folks are still feeling the squeeze every week at the grocery store.

So, there's one more thing we ought to do. For the good of our state's working families, let's permanently eliminate the grocery tax!

It's one more regressive tax we just don't need. If it reduces inflation for families from 4% to 3%, even if it only puts a few hundred bucks back in families' pockets, it's the right thing to do.

COMBATTING HOMELESSNESS

Food access is far from the only necessity we are tackling. In 2021, I signed an executive order that launched Home Illinois, a whole of government approach to prevent and end homelessness. And last year, we put this plan into action—investing \$200 million into prevention, crisis response, housing units, and staffing, to ensure that every person has a fighting chance. In a matter of months, Home Illinois sustained and created thousands of new shelter beds for long time Illinois residents across the state. We provided housing and services to young adults aging out of foster care who were at-risk of becoming unhoused, and we gave one-time financial support to working Illinoisans who, due to an acute crisis, fell behind on their rent and risked losing their home or their apartment. We kept thousands of Illinois families in their homes—people who might otherwise have become unhoused.

Take, Jasmine for example. Jasmine was living in her car with her five children while she was eight months into a high-risk pregnancy. When Jasmine was finally connected to Housing Forward, a homeless services agency in Oak Park, they immediately took her in—providing shelter and wraparound clinical services. While at Housing Forward's RISE Center, Jasmine gave birth to a healthy little baby, enrolled her kids in early childhood education, registered for a GED program, and now Jasmine is looking for employment. Today, she's on the path to permanent housing.

There are many hundreds of people like Jasmine out there in need of help. And we know that Black individuals and families make up 61% of the unhoused while making up only 14% of the overall population. So, this year, we created a racial equity roundtable on Black homelessness—the only effort of this kind in the entire nation. To advance that

work, I am proposing an additional \$50 million to attack the root causes of housing insecurity for Black Illinoisans, while continuing to serve other at-risk populations like veterans and those who are medically vulnerable with the shelter and wraparound services they need.

Underlying Home Illinois is the belief that this state values the dignity of human life and the universal right to a safe home. Not so with all states.

ASYLUM SEEKERS RESPONSE

“I would build a wall of steel, a wall as high as Heaven, against the admission of a single one of those Southern Europeans who never thought the thoughts or spoke the language of a democracy in their lives.”

Those words were spoken a hundred years ago by Georgia Governor Clifford Walker at a Ku Klux Klan rally. But the reality is, it could have been a social media post by President Trump last week.

Time might march forward, but our society’s worst impulses seem never to go away.

I’ve spoken many times about my own family’s refugee history. I will not join the chorus of people in this country or in this chamber who eagerly look to slam shut an immigration door that was once open to our ancestors.

Over the last eighteen months, more than 35,000 asylum seekers have arrived in Illinois. Most of them landed here in buses sent by Governor Abbott of Texas. Abbott willfully planned the arrival of these individuals in locations and at times that would engender the maximum chaos for the city of Chicago and for the asylum seekers themselves.

Children, pregnant women, and the elderly have been sent here in the dead of night, left far from our designated welcome centers, in freezing temperatures, wearing flip flops and T-shirts. Think about that the next time a politician from Texas wants to lecture you about being a good Christian.

Our immigration system has been broken for a long time. No doubt, the current migrant crisis is a problem of the federal government’s making, and I mean both political parties.

I am sure that when I leave the podium today, there will be some who will walk outside this chamber, looking for a microphone so they can start yelling about sanctuary cities and immigrants taking our tax dollars.

I hope that the press covering those statements will ask these politicians one important question: “did you or did you not support the federal immigration bill that the White House agreed to with Senate Republicans?”

There was a chance two weeks ago for a breakthrough on immigration policy. And the President and Congressional Democrats did what most voters say they want from leaders—they sat at a table with Republicans and negotiated a bipartisan compromise.

The White House announced a bill that was supported by top Republican leadership in the Senate—and then within hours—*hours*—Republicans who had helped write the legislation announced they were suddenly against the legislation.

Including, most glaringly, every single Republican member of the Illinois Congressional delegation.

Why did this happen? Why did every single Republican run away from something they claimed they desperately want? Because Donald Trump told them to, and they’re afraid of him. And why did Trump tell them to reject the bill? Because he wanted to use the issue of immigration against President Biden in the November elections.

I’m not making hyperbolic statements. Donald Trump said that out loud.

That bill would have helped Illinois. It would have provided money and resources that we don’t normally receive as a state far from the Southern border.

Maybe some Republicans find it hard to put country over Party. But our obligations to the people we represent supersede the letter after our names.

Joe Biden has been a very good president who has rescued the economy and protected freedom. But states and cities in the country’s interior are not equipped alone to handle the rapid influx of new arrivals we have seen. The White House and the federal government need to step up—to coordinate and manage these asylum seekers when they cross the border and are in federal custody, and not leave it to the Governor of Texas who has no goal but to sow chaos and destruction.

Listen, maybe some of you think we should just say, “this is not our problem,” and that we should let the migrant families starve or freeze to death. But that’s not what decent Midwesterners do. That’s not what leaders do.

We didn’t ask for this manufactured crisis. But we must deal with it all the same.

With our partners in Cook County and the City of Chicago, my administration has worked to develop a cost effective and comprehensive response plan over the next twelve months. We used the most reliable data available and estimated what it would take to ensure that the most basic human needs are met for asylum seekers arriving in Chicago.

This plan also includes continuing our efforts to divert as many people as possible away from temporary shelter to more permanent settlement, wherever that may be. Not because we are unwelcoming of immigrants. But because Chicago's shelter system is near capacity, and it is dangerous if migrants have no shelter or support at all.

To date, we've moved 9,000 individuals through the process—from arrival, to temporary shelter, to independent housing and self-sufficiency. Thousands of others have moved on to find family or sponsors. We've also helped thousands through the Temporary Protected Status and Employment Authorization process so they can legally work. Private industry in Illinois has expressed a strong desire to hire those who are authorized to work.

I committed to the Mayor of Chicago and the Cook County Board President that I would come to the General Assembly and ask for funding for a little over fifty percent of the cost of this plan—which comes to \$181.7 million.

We don't have any clear idea how long Governor Abbott intends to hold the nation hostage, but his political stunt will eventually come to an end. So, let's start planning for its aftermath—ensuring that during the coming fiscal year, some of the thirty temporary migrant shelters can and ought to be converted to other productive uses—as determined by the communities themselves. Neighborhood clinics, community centers, workforce training, housing—there are lots of good ideas I've heard from people, so we have designated \$5 million in this budget for shelter conversion grants.

I won't pretend any of this is easy, but it would be irresponsible to do anything but come here, lay out the scope of the challenge, tell you what I think we need to do, and then work with you to make it happen.

Personally, I think each of us should follow the examples set by the good people of our state.

Evanston's Mike Moyer is fixing up bicycles to donate to migrants. Chicago's Samantha Oulavong is teaching English to our new neighbors on a South Loop basketball court. And then there's Oak Park's Elaine Pierce. A retiree, Elaine opened her modest two-

story, three-bedroom home to seven “new family members,” as she would say—absorbing all the costs on her own. Mike, Samantha, and Elaine are among the best of us—epitomizing what it means to be an Illinoisan through and through.

Our FY25 budget proposal makes some hard choices. I wish we had big surpluses to work with this year to take on every one of the very real challenges we face.

It’s important to note, that while this budget is tight this year, our fiscal house is in order, and we are able to keep our commitments to the people of Illinois. This year’s budget proposal is focused and disciplined, and because of the responsible actions we took in the last few years paying off state debt and treating federal pandemic relief as one time revenue, we are not facing the budgetary challenges that other big states are this year.

California, for example, has a \$38 billion deficit to contend with.

Meanwhile, Illinois’ budget is balanced, and it builds upon all of the progress we have made, paying our pensions in full, investing more in our public schools, social services, and healthcare while addressing the immediate and unique needs of the coming fiscal year.

Now, I expect that some of you will want to spend more, and some of you will claim you want to spend less. Know this: I am always open to good ideas that members of both parties have to more efficiently and effectively fulfill our obligations.

My one line in the sand is that I will only sign a budget that is responsibly balanced and that does not diminish or derail the improving credit standing we have achieved for the last five years.

Eighty years ago, in the middle of a world war, our state decided it wanted to preserve an important memento of our past. Governor Green knew that Illinoisans in every corner of the state were watching their family, friends and neighbors die half a world away fighting fascism. Good leaders are practical, but they also know the power of totems—especially virtuous ones.

It’s poetic and prophetic that it was children who came to the rescue in 1943 to enable the acquisition of one of Illinois’ true jewels. Somehow, it’s always our kids who know how to contextualize the past while reaching for our future.

I’m struck by the words of Gene Rubley, that Springfield boy who gave up his movie money every week to donate to the Gettysburg Address effort. He noted, years later: “It meant something to us, being part of something like that.”

And it did mean something to Gene. It sparked a lifelong love of history. When he retired, Rubley worked as a docent at the Abraham Lincoln Museum, where on so many days, he delighted in showing visitors the document he helped buy—so many years ago.

Gene's story—and the generosity of Illinois' children in 1943—is a reminder of something important. Our citizens rightfully ask a great deal of their representatives, but they are always willing to give so much of themselves in return. That reciprocal investment is the essence of statesmanship and citizenship. It's what makes a society strong. It is what has made Illinois great.

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