

Pritzker's Campaign Speech Against Republicans

On April 27, 2025, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker delivered a fiery speech at the New Hampshire Democratic Party's McIntyre-Shaheen 100 Club Dinner

Well thank you so much John and good evening, Granite State Democrats!

Well now you all know that uh when I was elected in 2018, I asked Governor Lynch to come to Chicago to help me plan for my first year in office and honestly it turned out to be the most productive year that any well first term governor has seen in quite a long time.

We enshrined reproductive rights into law, we legalized cannabis, we protected labor rights, we joined the U.S. climate alliance.

Now and I'm not going to go through the rest but it is true that we had an awful lot of fiscal challenges in the state which now after 25 years of getting 21 credit downgrades for the state of Illinois we've now had nine credit upgrades in my first six years, but here's one thing I learned it's that New Hampshire's Democratic governors know how to get things done.

It's great to be back here in the Granite State. Tonight, I want to thank Chair Ray Buckley. Thank you, Rey. You've been so kind to me personally um yeah, I want to shout out your amazing Congresswoman Maggie Goodlander and of course your next United States Senator Chris Pappas.

There ought to be some sort of medal honestly given out to Democrats willing to serve in that Looney Tune Republican Congress, so God bless the two of you.

Thank you, Senator Maggie Hassan who had to step out because she had a pressing engagement uh a couple of weeks ago, I watched her absolutely flambeau Donald Trump's U.S. trade representative at the Senate Finance Committee.

Did anybody see that? I loved it, I loved it. Poor guy. I haven't seen it someone look that lost and alone since well Ron DeSantis was running for president.

What an honor it is to be here again with a true New Hampshire legend, Senator Jean Shaheen. Now Senator, I'm not sure why anybody would ever want to leave the United States Senate especially not now but there are few people in the country truly who deserve a relaxing and happy retirement more than you. On behalf of your many enthusiastic supporters all across this nation thank you thank you for serving our nation with honor and integrity.

So, when I was here about eight months ago at the AFL CIO Labor Day breakfast, I laid out the bleak situation that we would find ourselves in if Donald Trump returned to the White House. Now well, here we are. I gave it to you straight last year and I'm going to give it to you straight again.

Tonight, in this fragile moment, the direction of this nation will turn on who we choose to listen to whose stories.

We decide to tell about what is happening, who we elevate, and who we ignore, who we find noteworthy, and who we label as just noise. Who we listen to will shape the way we react to events as they unfold. Fellow Democrats, for far too long we've been guilty of listening to a bunch of do-nothing political types who would tell you that America's house is not on fire even as the flames were licking their faces. Today, as the blaze reaches the rafters the pundits and politicians well the pundits and politicians whose searing timidity served as kindle for the arsonists they urge us now not to reach for a hose. Meanwhile, if we took care to listen to the voices of real people we would hear our neighbors and our friends standing on the streets outside screaming for a response— one big enough for a five alarm.

So today, I want to talk to you about those people. I want their voices to be what we Hear, their stories to be the ones that we tell.

Andy Smith lives in Edwardsville which is a small city in southern Illinois. On February 4th of this year, Andy took a homemade sign to a spot where she figured she would get the most visibility the intersections of highways 157 and 143 and on her own she lifted up her sign and she started protesting the Trump administration. Later, she told the local paper that on that first day she felt like a crazy person standing out there all by herself and then someone walking her dog saw her sign stopped and decided to join Her. That helped Andy said. The next day, February 5th Andy showed up to protest again and this time four friends came to join her. Well two days later, on February 7th, the small but hearty band of Edwardsville protesters got their first counter protester— one guy who yelled obscenities at them but in true Midwestern fashion that guy later returned to apologize. Andy Smith's protesters now meet every Friday. At 1:00 p.m. last week there were 300 of them.

Gavin Carpenter is a disabled military veteran and a maintenance mechanic at Yusede National Park. Every February Yoseite fills with people waiting to see an event that happens only once a year. The winter sun lights up a waterfall on the face of the park's most famous cliff El Capitan. This year on that day Gavin climbed to the top of the cliff and he hung an American flag upside down famously known as a signal of dire distress. When asked why he did it, Gavin pointed to the cuts that Elon Musk and Doge were making to his beloved national parks and he said, "We're bringing attention to what's happening to our parks which are every American's properties."

Lucy Welch writes the Daily Snow Report at the Sugar Bush Resort in Vermont. Last month, JD Vance went on vacation at Sugarbush so Lucy decided to write well a very different kind of snow report. Instead of the usual details about powder conditions and weather she wrote about what was happening to the diverse and wonderful community of veterans and people with disabilities and LGBTQ plus friends and immigrant workers and people of color. She wrote "All of these groups are being targeted undervalued and disrespected by the current administration." And she finished her snow report by writing "I am using my relative platform as snow reporter to be disruptive. I don't have a whole lot to lose. We're living in a really scary time in a really serious time what we do and don't do matters.

Andy, Gavin, Lucy those are the names that we should be paying attention to. Those are the stories that I want to share no pontification no punditry there no tortured op-eds about party messaging no hand ringing over which battles to pick. These three Americans acted on an instinct that we teach our children as one of their first lessons in life. When you see a danger, you yell for help at the top of your lungs.

We Democrats we shouldn't be comfortable ignoring those cries for help the fact that so many are speaks to the real reason that we lost last November.

What I find ironic about the current conversation surrounding our party is that the voices flocking to podcasts and cable news shows to admonish fellow Democrats for not caring enough about the struggles of working families are the same ones who, when it comes to relief of the struggles of real people, have been timid not bold. They didn't want to fight the health insurance companies and the drug manufacturers. They didn't want to demand an increase in the minimum wage or require paid family leave. They gave in to the powerful hedge fund managers and tech bros whose blind pursuit of profits is now destroying everything that matters to middle class families from home ownership to health care to veterans' benefits. They told us to ignore the fact that most Americans can't afford a vacation while they're young or retirement once they're old.

Here's the problem with the do nothing crowd now telling us what to do well they spent their years watching Republicans illegitimately pack the Supreme Court, take away voting rights from people of color systematically chip away at the constitutional order and all the while they offered in response a simple defense of norms and decorum and a blind hope that one day soon Republicans would wake up to find their better angels. Well, that got us exactly where we are today.

So folks, the reckoning is here and now that this culture of timidity is on full display those same do-nothing Democrats want to blame our losses on our defense of black people of trans kids of immigrants instead of their own lack of guts and gumption.

Voters didn't turn out for Democrats last November not because they don't want us to fight for their values but because they think we don't want to fight for our values. We need to knock off the rust of poll tested language, decades of stale decorum. It's obscured our better instincts. We have to abandon the culture of incrementalism that has led us to swallow the cruelty and the callousness with barely a cowardly croak. It's time to fight everywhere and all at once. Now let's start with something that should well be easy to say.

It's wrong to snatch a person off the street and ship them to a foreign goolog with no chance to defend themselves in a court of law and I want to be clear, this is not an argument about immigration. This is an argument about the Constitution. Remember Trump just last week arrested and deported three children under 8 years old all US citizens all of them one of them a four-year-old with stage four cancer. Let that sink in.

This country was founded on the idea of habius corpus. It's a fancy legal term that in plain words means no government has a right to arbitrarily take your freedom away from you. Preserving habius corpus is not some fever dream of the left-wing echo chamber. It's a fundamental concept of justice that people have fought and died for dating back to the Middle Ages. It was in the Magna Carta. It was considered by our nation's founders to be so vital to our liberty that they wrote it right into the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson called it the essential principle of government.

Benjamin Franklin opined that those who would give up habius corpus for temporary security deserve neither liberty nor security and Alexander Hamilton wrote that the practice of arbitrary imprisonments has been in all the ages the favorite and most formidable instruments of tyranny.

Franklin, Jefferson, Hamilton standing for the idea that the government doesn't have the right to kidnap you without due process is arguably the most effective campaign slogan in history. It's the OG of political messaging. So, I mean what do we think that Colonel Stark was talking about if not this when he said live free or die.

Today, it's an immigrant with a tattoo, tomorrow it's a citizen whose Facebook post annoys Donald Trump. There are plenty of people in this country who hold opinions that I find abhorrent but my faith and our constitution dictate that I fight for their freedoms as loudly as I defend my own and as a Ukrainian American Jew who built a Holocaust museum whose family immigrated here as refugees from the Russian pilgrims let me say this to Donald Trump— stop tearing down the Constitution in the name of my ancestors. Do not claim that your authoritarian power grabs are about combating anti-semitism. When you destroy social justice you are disparaging the very foundation of Judaism. When the pendulum swings back and it always does you will have contributed to the climate of retribution that will inevitably follow. So let's dispel another myth from the MAGA Republicans.

We Democrats believe that undocumented people who are convicted of violent crimes shouldn't be allowed to stay in this country. Convicted of violent crimes. We want public safety just as much as Republicans do and when we get back control of the Congress and we will and when we get the White House back and we will, Democrats need to make it a priority to pass real sensible immigration reform. We need to secure our border, we need to keep and attract hardworking taxpaying law-abiding people and give them a path to citizenship. Immigration with all its struggles and its complexities is part of the secret sauce that makes America great. Always immigrants strengthen our communities enrich our neighborhoods renew our passion for America's greatness enliven our music and our culture enhance understanding of the world.

The success of our economy depends upon immigrants. In fact, 46% 46% of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or the children of immigrants. The return on investment for America's 250-year commitment to immigration is incalculable but because of Donald Trump's xenophobia we've seen foreign students already choosing not to attend our universities and being told to leave. Businesses from overseas are afraid to invest their money here and to bring their executives to our shores. Scientists are choosing to innovate in European laboratories instead of American ones. Already in just 100 days if the best and the brightest around the world no longer flock to this shining city on a hill then the US economy is likely to fail but failure it's starting to look like that's the point of all this doesn't it?

We have a Secretary of Education who hates teachers and schools. We have a Secretary of Transportation who hates public transit. We have an Attorney General who hates the Constitution. We have a Secretary of State the son of naturalized citizens a family of refugees on a crusade to expel our country of both.

We have a head of the Department of Government Efficiency an immigrant granted the privilege of living and working here a man who has made hundreds of billions of dollars after the government rescued his business for him who is looking to destroy the American middle class to fund tax cuts for himself.

And we have a President who claims to love America but who hates our military so much that he calls them losers and suckers and who can't be bothered to delay his golf game to greet the bodies of four fallen U.S. soldiers and we have a grand old party founded by one of our nation's bravest presidents Abraham Lincoln who today would be a Democrat I might add but a grand old party so afraid of the felon and the fraud that they put into the White House that they would sooner watch him destroy our country than lift a hand to save it.

Democrats we may have to fix our messaging and our strategy but our values are exactly where they ought to be and we will never join so many Republicans in the special place in hell reserved for quizzlings and cowards.

It's time for us to be done with optimism about their motives or their objectives. Time to stop wondering if you can trust the nuclear codes to people who don't know how to organize a group chat. It's time to stop ignoring the hypocrisy and wearing a big gold cross while announcing the defunding of children's cancer research and time to stop thinking that we can reason or negotiate with a madman. Time to stop apologizing when we were not wrong. Time to stop surrendering when we need to fight.

Our small businesses don't deserve to be bankrupted by unsustainable tariffs. Our retirees don't deserve to be left destitute by a Social Security Administration decimated by Elon Musk. Our citizens don't deserve to lose health care coverage because Republicans want to hand a tax cut to billionaires. Our federal workers don't deserve to have well a 19-year-old doge bro called big balls destroy their careers. Autistic kids and adults who are loving contributors to our society don't deserve to be stigmatized by a weird Nepo baby who once stashed a dead bear in the backseat of his car.

Our military service members don't deserve to be told by a washed up Fox TV commentator who drank too much and committed sexual assault before being appointed Secretary of Defense that they can't serve their country simply because they're black or gay or a woman and if it sounds like I'm becoming contemptuous of Donald Trump and the people that he has elevated it's because I am. You should be too. They're an affront to every value this country was founded upon but there's a way out of this mess. I know because I've been to this movie before when I was elected governor in 2018. It was after four years of a very destructive Republican chief executive. He had run on the idea of shaking things up as governor and he promptly started defunding key government agencies, slashing state benefits and refusing to pass a state budget. Illinois's credit rating took a dive, companies fled the state, social service agencies closed, and government services that the poor and elderly and sick relied upon vanished. Does that sound familiar?

Illinoisans hated it even the ones who voted for the guy they hated it so much that well four years later they elected me. But here's the lesson that I learned when we emerge from this and we will emerge from this. Our democratic agenda must be bold and our ideas fearless. We must be willing to slay sacred cows and allow the courage of our actions to match the immediacy of our words and we must deliver on that agenda for working families and for the real people who truly make America great. Listen, I understand the tendency to give in to despair right now but despair is an indulgence that we cannot afford in the times upon which history turns.

Never before in my life have I called for mass protests, for mobilization, for disruption but I am now. These Republicans cannot know a moment of peace. They have to understand that we will fight their cruelty with every megaphone and microphone that we have.

We must castigate them on the soap box and then punish them at the ballot box.

They must feel in their bones that when we survive this shameful episode of American history with our democracy intact because we have no alternative but to do just that that we will relegate their portraits to the museum halls reserved for tyrants and traders, and when the courage of our civic leaders waivers when they fail to stand up for our country in its moment of greatest need then we should remind them that cowardice always comes at a cost.

In the world's most successful republic no generation of Americans has escaped our true inheritance. The test that we are given that asks how hard we are willing to fight to keep our society free. It was selfish to think that ours would be the first but the fact that we are still here debating the question tells me our predecessors never failed this test in the past. Often in situations just as dire as the one in front of us cowardice can be contagious but so too can courage and courage born during times when complacency beckons like a siren call is the most important kind of all. Just as the hope that we hold on to in the darkness shines with its own special light.

These days I cling to the courage and the hope demonstrated by Andy and Gavin and Lucy courage and hope that risks limbs and livelihoods to go to the most visible place possible to wave a sign or to post an upside down flag and remind everyone that what we do and what we don't do matters.

So tonight, I'm telling you what I'm willing to do and that's fight for our democracy for our liberty for the opportunity for all of our people to live lives that are meaningful and free and I see around me tonight a room full of people who are ready to do the same. So I have one question for all of you granitesters. Are you ready for the fight for real Granitesters? Are you ready for the fight? Good night New Hampshire. God bless you and God bless these United States.