

# Pritzker's speech in New Hampshire drives presidential campaign buzz

*The Illinois governor drew wide applause as he urged Democrats to abandon efforts to compromise with “a madman” when he spoke in a key state on the road to the 2028 presidential nomination.*

**By Maeve Reston  
Washington Post**

MANCHESTER, N.H. — In a fiery address to New Hampshire Democrats on Sunday night, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker condemned what he described as President Donald Trump’s “authoritarian power grabs” while also blasting the “do-nothing” Democrats in his party — stating it is “time to fight everywhere, all at once.”

The billionaire Democratic governor repeatedly brought the crowd to its feet with acidic attacks on the morals and ethics of the president, adviser and top donor Elon Musk, as well as members of the president’s Cabinet. He slammed their efforts to dismantle government programs that the most vulnerable Americans rely on and said the Democratic Party must “abandon the culture of incrementalism that has led us to swallow their cruelty.” It is time for his party, he said, to “knock the rust off poll-tested language” that has obscured “our better instincts.”

Pritzker was most searing in his condemnation of what he cast as the Trump administration’s infringement on the rights enshrined in the Constitution, stating that it should be easy for Democrats to say “it’s wrong to snatch a person off the street and ship them to a foreign gulag with no chance to defend themselves in a court of law.”

“Never before in my life have I called for mass protests, for mobilization, for disruption. But I am now,” Pritzker said to a standing ovation accompanied by whistles and cheers from the audience. “These Republicans cannot know a moment of peace. They must 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.”

Calling out Trump’s “xenophobia” and thirst for power, the Illinois governor said Democrats must “stop thinking we can reason or negotiate with a madman.” His hope, he added, is that Republicans who enable Trump “feel in their bones that when we survive this shameful episode of American history” that their portraits will be relegated “to the museum halls reserved for tyrants and traitors.”

Turning to his own party, Pritzker argued that Democrats have spent too long listening to voices who “would tell you that the house is not on fire, even as they feel the flames licking their face” and called out politicians “whose simpering timidity served as a kindle for the arsonists.”

Nearly six months after former vice president Kamala Harris’s loss to Trump in the presidential election, the 2028 Democratic contest has no obvious front-runner. While Pritzker and the other likely contenders have demurred on questions about their White House ambitions, Democrats nationally are frustrated with their leaders in Washington and are looking for a new standard bearer to chart the direction of their unpopular party.

New Hampshire Democrats are also eager to reassert their historical role in vetting White House aspirants. Joe Biden and his allies in the Democratic National Committee essentially bypassed the state in 2024 by stripping its first-in-the-nation status to make South Carolina first on the nominating calendar as they tried to shore up Biden’s reelection prospects.

The Democratic governor’s speech at the New Hampshire Democratic Party’s annual McIntyre-Shaheen 100 Club Dinner marks the first major appearance this cycle of a 2028 White House hopeful in a pivotal early primary state, drawing an audience of more than 800 people for the party’s annual fundraiser.

In a 2028 field that is likely to be dominated by governors, Pritzker has positioned himself as one of the most forceful and consistent critics of Trump’s actions while pointing to his record in Illinois as a template for improving the lives of working-class voters.

While other governors took a wait-and-see approach in the early weeks of Trump’s term, Pritzker said, local law enforcement officials in Illinois would not cooperate with the Trump administration’s massive deportation

operation, except if it involved the removal of convicted violent criminals. He condemned Trump's pardons of Jan. 6 rioters and barred more than 50 people from Illinois who had been granted pardons or commutations by Trump from being hired by state government, calling their conduct "disgraceful."

Pritzker, who is an heir to the Hyatt Hotels fortune, has also been an outspoken critic for months about how the Trump administration's cuts are affecting veterans, early-childhood education and seniors. He has also been sounding the alarm about the GOP's potential Medicaid cuts, which he said could cost a million people coverage in his state. He is bullish about the Democrats' chances of regaining power in 2026 and beyond.

"I think we've got the best argument of all about who can rebuild the country and rebuild these programs after the Republicans tear them down," Pritzker said in an interview. "From day one of (Trump's) administration, it's been a steady drumbeat of attack on constitutional norms and on programs that are really important to some of the most vulnerable people in our society."

One of Pritzker's advantages among the potential White House aspirants is his ability to swing at Trump from a solidly blue state where the state legislature is controlled by Democrats. From the outset, he took a more combative approach than other potential rivals such as Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan and Gov. Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania, Democrats who represent narrowly divided states and initially emphasized their interest in bipartisan collaboration with Trump.

Pritzker also has not faced the same kind of constraints as other top contenders such as California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who was one of Trump's top antagonists in 2024 but now needs Trump's cooperation to help him secure the nearly \$40 billion in federal disaster aid that he has requested to rebuild the Pacific Palisades and Altadena after the devastating fires in January.

Governors from both parties, who are responsible for balancing their state's budgets, are facing challenging economic headwinds because of Trump's tariffs, his administration's layoffs of federal workers, and the potential loss of a critical safety net for many poor and disabled Americans if the GOP-led Congress makes deep cuts to Medicaid — a program that is funded jointly by the federal and state government.

Facing a president who is both punitive and transactional, governors such as Whitmer have been testing the powers of quiet diplomacy with Trump.

While seated next to Trump at the black-tie dinner for governors at the White House in February and in two subsequent White House meetings, Whitmer has intensely lobbied Trump and members of his administration to invest in a fighter mission at the Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Macomb County, Michigan, noting its strategic position at the international border.

The Air Force had been slated to phase out the A-10 aircraft at the base. But while addressing Selfridge during their recent Oval Office meeting, Trump told Whitmer in front of the cameras that he thought “we’ll be very successful there.” And he is planning a visit to Macomb County, where the base is located, on Tuesday to celebrate his first 100 days in office.

Though manufacturing in Michigan could be harmed by Trump’s tariffs — with about 20 percent of the state’s economy tied to the auto industry — Whitmer also walked a careful line on that issue in a recent speech in Washington. She said she shared Trump’s goals of making “more stuff” in America and “bringing good-paying, middle-class manufacturing jobs back home,” adding that she was “not against tariffs outright.” But she argued that it is illogical to use the “tariff hammer to swing at every problem without a clearly defined end goal.”

Whitmer was rebuked by some Democrats who believed she gave too much latitude to Trump. Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, another likely contender for the White House in 2028, called Trump’s tariffs “reckless” and responded directly to Whitmer’s speech by arguing on social media that “the ‘tariff hammer’ winds up hitting your own hand rather than the nail.”

Newsom ensured that California was the first to sue the Trump administration over the economic impact of the president’s tariffs, arguing that Congress was “sitting there passively as this guy wrecks the economy.” And Shapiro recently toured businesses and industries in Pennsylvania that would be most impacted by the tariffs, accusing the president of creating chaos and confusion with his policies.

Pritzker, for his part, said Sunday night that the country’s small businesses “don’t deserve to be bankrupted by unsustainable tariffs.”

And he did not show any restraint in taking on members of Trump’s cabinet in sharply personal terms. He charged that Trump has a secretary of education “who hates teachers and schools” and an attorney general “who hates the Constitution.”

He reserved perhaps the harshest attacks for Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

“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 back seat of his car,” Pritzker said of Kennedy.

He also alluded to Hegseth’s past struggles with alcoholism and the allegations of sexual assault against him, arguing that military service members don’t deserve to be told they can’t serve in certain roles because they are “Black or gay or a woman” by “a washed-up Fox TV commentator.”

Pritzker also suggested that Trump’s crackdown on protesters on college campuses in the name of antisemitism is a farce. The Ukrainian American governor, who is Jewish, spoke of his own ancestors’ history fleeing Russian pogroms in the 1880s.

“Let me say this to Donald Trump: Stop tearing down the Constitution in the name of my ancestors,” he said. “Do not claim that your authoritarian power grabs are about combating antisemitism. When you destroy social justice, you are disparaging the very foundation of Judaism.”