

CAPITOL RECAP: Pritzker sworn in as proposals advance in lame duck session

By CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

SPRINGFIELD – Gov. JB Pritzker was sworn in to his second term Monday, Jan. 9, with the state’s other constitutional officers, promising a bold and ambitious agenda for the next four years.

The ceremony was held at the Bank of Springfield Center, the same venue that for several months served as a makeshift House floor during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for social distancing. Pritzker recalled that time while reflecting on his first term in his inaugural address.

“The hope we share, the hope I expressed at my first inauguration, was born of a truth lodged firmly in my heart – that Illinois has always stood at the intersection of American ambition and human resilience. And that combination is what has made this the greatest state in the union,” Pritzker said.

A friendly crowd of supporters and fellow dignitaries was enthusiastic about the governor’s proposals, applauding and cheering at the mention of banning assault weapons, bringing down the cost of higher education and ensuring reproductive rights in the state.

Pritzker said education will be a main priority in his second term, and he emphasized the importance of making preschool more readily available and college tuition free for every family with median-income or below.

“I propose we go all in for our children and make preschool available to every family throughout the state,” he said, eliciting an eruption from the crowd. “And let’s not stop there. Let’s provide more economic security for families by eliminating child care deserts and expanding child-care options.”

With time running out to pass a ban on the sale of assault weapons in Illinois before the new General Assembly takes office Wednesday, Pritzker used the opportunity to advocate for the version of a bill passed by Democrats in the state House last week.

“When I campaigned for reelection and promised to pass an assault weapons ban, eight states already had one. Very soon, Illinois must be the ninth. And we ought to have a real accounting of the assault weapons currently in circulation,” Pritzker said. “Let’s get it done, and then the federal government should follow our lead.”

He also touted accomplishments from his first term, including Illinois’ six credit upgrades, raising the state’s minimum wage, legalizing recreational marijuana and passing legislation that targets climate change.

As he emphasized the importance of protecting reproductive rights, the crowd responded with enthusiastic applause and even shouts.

Attorney General Kwame Raoul in his speech praised Illinois’ reproductive health care laws, comparing them to neighboring Missouri’s, where his daughter recently graduated from the state’s flagship university.

“I was so pleased to drive into the state of Missouri to the temporary graduation last year, but not nearly as happy as I was to drive out of Missouri – out of a state that does not reflect a woman’s right to make decisions about her body,” Raoul said.

Pritzker was sworn in by Chief Justice Mary Jane Theis,

accompanied by First Lady MK Pritzker and their daughter Teddi and son Don. He took his oath on two Bibles. One belonged to Henry Horner, Illinois’ 28th governor who held the office from 1933 until 1940. The other belonged to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States whose image is ubiquitous in the capital city, which is home to his presidential library.

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PAY RAISES: Officials at the highest levels of state government will receive substantial pay raises this month after the House and Senate passed a budget bill that also advances a \$400 million business incentive fund proposal pushed by Gov. JB Pritzker.

Under the bill, lawmaker salaries will increase to \$85,000 annually, up from approximately \$73,000 – a roughly 16 percent increase to their base salary. Lawmakers also receive per diem reimbursements and stipends for leadership positions. Additionally, the measure adds new leadership positions within any caucus that maintains a supermajority – which Democrats currently do – that are eligible for stipends.

The state’s constitutional officers are also slated to receive raises, and Pritzker signed the bill into law Monday hours before the new statewide officers were sworn in at a Springfield convention center.

Under the pay schedules outlined in the bill, salaries of the lieutenant governor, comptroller and treasurer will increase from \$143,400 to \$160,900; and the attorney general’s and secretary of state’s from \$165,400 to \$183,300.

Pritzker told the Associated Press Saturday that the idea for cabinet pay raises originated with him as an effort to retain top talent and make Illinois’ salaries commensurate with other large states. Lawmakers, he also told the outlet, maintain the authority to determine their own salaries.

Sen. Elgie Sims, D-Chicago, reiterated that the raises were meant to help Illinois attract “the best and the brightest.”

The governor’s pay would increase to \$205,700 from \$181,670, although Pritzker, who has a net worth exceeding \$3 billion, does not take a salary.

Top state agency directors and some of their deputies will also receive raises for their terms that begin anew this month. That includes a salary of at least \$200,000 for Department of Children and Family Services director Marc Smith, up from \$182,300. The raises generally range from 10 to 15 percent, and the governor will have the authority to up those salaries under the measure. The agency salaries will also be subject to increase at the rate of inflation.

Sen. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, faulted the measure for including the automatic raises, calling it “bad policy.” He noted that lawmakers already effectively received a 2.4 percent pay bump in July, as Democrats declined to negate the automatic cost-of-living increase laid out by state law.

The wide-ranging bill also allows for the transfer of \$850 million to the state’s “rainy day” fund to buoy its balance, currently at its highest-ever levels.

And it allows for the transfer of \$400 million to a “large business attraction fund”

backed by Pritzker. The governor has floated such a “closing fund” as one that would keep Illinois competitive with its neighbors in trying to lure new businesses, such as electric vehicle-related companies, to Illinois.

House Majority Leader Greg Harris said last week that the fund would need to be further defined in law before any of the money could be spent.

The measure was contained in Senate Bill 1720.

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GUN BILL: On the first full day of his second term, Gov. JB Pritzker on Tuesday, Jan. 10, signed a bill banning the sale, distribution and manufacture of high-power assault weapons, .50 caliber rifles and ammunition, and large-capacity magazines while still allowing people who already own such weapons to keep them.

Pritzker signed the bill during a ceremony in the Statehouse just hours after the final version of it cleared the House, making Illinois the ninth state in the nation to impose such a ban.

As recently as Sunday, the House and Senate seemed to be far apart, both on the weapons ban and a bill expanding access to reproductive health services, two of the biggest items being considered in a lame duck session that will conclude Tuesday.

But by Monday night, House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch, Pritzker and Senate President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, announced that they were all in agreement on a final proposal.

The final version of the bill, contained in a package of amendments to House Bill 5471, includes a requirement that people who currently own such weapons register them with the Illinois State Police. Those individuals would be required to disclose the make, model and serial number of the specified weapons to obtain a special endorsement on their Firearm Owners Identification, or FOID card. The deadline for compliance to Jan. 1, 2024.

Other changes included a more up-to-date list of weapons that would fall within the banned category along with authority for the Illinois State Police to modify the list through administrative rules to capture new and copycat models as they come onto the market.

The Senate bill also clarifies that any device that makes a semi-automatic weapon fire more rapidly – whether it converts the weapon into a fully automatic one or merely increases the rate of fire – will be illegal. And it defines large-capacity magazines as those capable of holding more than 10 rounds for a long gun or 15 rounds for a handgun.

The Senate version also does not change the age limit to obtain a FOID card, meaning people between the ages of 18 and 21 will still be able to obtain one with the consent of a parent or guardian. The House had proposed eliminating that exception.

In an effort to ease concerns from hunters and sportsmen, the bill also contains a provision authorizing the Department of Natural Resources to adopt administrative rules exempting weapons used only for hunting that are expressly permitted under the Illinois Wildlife Code.

That, however, was not enough to quell the opposition of gun rights advocates who argued that the weapons

to be banned are “commonly used” weapons in American society and thus, under standards of recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, will likely be deemed unconstitutional.

Democrats pushed the bill through the Senate 34-20, sending it to the House, where it passed 68-41 on Tuesday afternoon with two Republican votes.

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ABORTION CARE, GENDER AFFIRMING: Democrats in the General Assembly on Tuesday, Jan. 10, approved a wide-ranging measure aimed at shoring up Illinois’ position as a “haven” for abortion access in the Midwest, including legal protections for health care professionals and patients traveling from states where abortion access is illegal or restricted.

Democrats also included provisions in their bill allowing physician assistants and nurse practitioners to perform vacuum aspiration abortions – the most common type of in-clinic abortions for pregnancies up to around 14 weeks – which do not require general anesthesia.

Under the bill, Illinois would also speed the process for granting temporary permits for all doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners to address health care shortages in all areas.

Also under the bill, which Gov. JB Pritzker said he will sign, Illinois would join California, Massachusetts and a handful of other East Coast states in establishing “shield laws” protecting information about abortions from being subject to subpoenas and orders for witness testimony issued from courts in other states.

Like the shield laws enacted by those other states, Illinois’ legal protections would also cover patients and health care professionals engaged in gender-affirming care – a practice some Republican-led states have already begun clamping down on in addition to restricting abortion access.

And if a medical professional had his or her license revoked in another state solely for performing abortions or gender-affirming care, he or she would be able to practice in Illinois, pending an investigation by Illinois’ professional licensure oversight authority.

The bill also includes liability insurance protections so that doctors coming from states where abortions or gender-affirming care is illegal can’t be charged higher rates for practicing in Illinois, based on them breaking those other states’ laws. Similarly, hospitals wouldn’t be allowed to revoke a doctor’s clinical admitting privileges due to having their license revoked in another state solely for providing abortions or gender-affirming care.

Sponsors made clear that these protections are not available to health care professionals accused of genuine malpractice. But Sen. Terri Bryant, R-Murphysboro, said it was ridiculous to offer protections to “lawbreakers.”

In the House, all but three of the 71-member Democratic majority voted for the bill. The bill received unanimous support from all 41 Democrats in the Senate, despite earlier reservations from the caucus about provisions that would require insurance plans regulated by the state to cover certain medications with no copays. Those would include abortion medications typically used up to about 10

weeks of pregnancy, the HIV prevention drugs infections PrEP and PEP, as well as gender-affirming hormones.

The state doesn’t have the power to regulate most employer-provided insurance plans in the private sector, exempting those plans from the required coverage. Still, the bill would apply to thousands of individuals who buy their own health insurance or are public employees in Illinois.

Additionally, if a patient is forced to go-out-of-network because their provider covered by insurance refuses to perform reproductive health care or gender-affirming care under the state’s Health Care Right of Conscience Act, the legislation requires there not be any increased cost for that out-of-network care.

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PAID LEAVE: A bill that would guarantee a minimum of 40 hours of paid leave per year for all Illinois workers passed both chambers of the General Assembly Tuesday, Jan. 10, and will soon head to Gov. JB Pritzker, who says he will sign it.

Under Senate Bill 208, workers begin to earn paid leave on their first day at a rate of one hour of leave for every 40 hours worked, up to 40 hours of paid leave for the year. They can begin using their leave after 90 days, although an employer may allow them to use it sooner.

Once signed, the measure would take effect on January 1, 2024.

Republicans who opposed the bill said it would be bad for small businesses, criticizing the legislation for raising costs.

Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth, D-Peoria, who sponsored the measure, pushed back on that argument.

“The idea that we have to play this zero-sum game of you either support business or you support employees, I refuse to accept that is our reality,” she said. “I believe that we can show and have shown with this negotiation that you can support employees, all the while supporting employers by providing the consistency and the implementation of a policy such as this.”

Under the law, workplaces would still be able to require their employees to provide notice before taking paid time off. If the paid leave is not used by the end of the year, it carries over.

The bill still needs approval from Pritzker, who expressed his support in a statement.

“Working families face enough challenges without the concern of losing a day’s pay when life gets in the way. I’m looking forward to signing this legislation and giving a safety net to hardworking Illinoisans,” he said.

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DURKIN EXIT: Illinois House Republican Leader Jim Durkin left the Illinois Statehouse Tuesday, Jan. 10, for the last time as a state legislator.

After a bruising 2022 election cycle in which House Republicans lost five seats, Durkin did not seek another term as leader of the caucus. But on Tuesday, the final scheduled day of the 102nd General Assembly, he resigned his seat altogether, and he left with some less-than-complimentary words for his own party.

“When you’re in Springfield, numbers matter, and this is a game of addition. And unfortunately, we’ve been

playing the game of subtraction on a statewide level,” he said during a final news conference in his Statehouse office. “And that’s not going to help this party.”

Durkin was first appointed to the House in 1995, a time when Republicans were highly competitive in the Chicago suburbs and other parts of Illinois. He chose not to run for reelection in 2002 when the decennial legislative re-map plan put him in the same district with another Republican, instead making an unsuccessful run against Democratic U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin.

In 2006, Durkin returned to Springfield via another appointment by party leaders before being elected to the 82nd District seat. His successor will be chosen in that same appointment process, a method Durkin acknowledged isn’t perfect but contended is better than holding a special election.

A self-described moderate Republican, Durkin twice served as the Illinois chairman for U.S. Sen. John McCain’s presidential campaigns. But during his time in office, he witnessed the national GOP move further to the right and the base of the state party move further toward southern Illinois – a move that at times put him at odds with his own caucus.

Most recently, he was the only Republican in the House to vote in favor of an assault weapons ban Tuesday.

Durkin said that as his party became more conservative, it also became more intransigent and less willing to compromise on key issues, even to the point of punishing members who did not measure up to what he called a “purity test” imposed by conservatives.

“Again, this purity test that some of the people in this party demand, it’s just ... it’s nonsense,” he said. “It’s absurd. And it’s going to further damage the Republican brand.”

The split between Durkin and the conservative wing of the party was evident during the 2022 election cycle when Durkin refused to endorse state Sen. Darren Bailey’s campaign for governor. During the primary, he endorsed Aurora Mayor Richard Irvin, but Bailey ended up winning the nomination, only to lose to incumbent Democrat JB Pritzker by 12.5 percentage points.

But it was also evident in his public criticisms of former President Donald Trump, whom Durkin blamed for much of the party’s losses in 2022.

“You know, he had an opportunity to do good things, but he turned into a bully,” Durkin said. “And he doesn’t understand that there’s a Constitution which requires a peaceful transition of the office. He just can’t get over it. But he is a person that still gets into the minds of so many people throughout the country, and it’s wrong.”

Durkin said he plans to return to his private law practice in the Chicago area, but he also plans to continue giving speeches and offering his opinions on issues he thinks are important.

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