

Pritzker Thunders Against ‘Do Nothing’ Democrats as He Stokes 2028 Talk

In a fiery speech in New Hampshire, the Illinois governor railed against both President Trump and what he called the “simpering timidity” among some Democrats.



“Never before in my life have I called for mass protests, for mobilization, for disruption,” Gov. JB Pritzker said in a speech on Sunday night in Manchester, N.H. “But I am now. These Republicans cannot know a moment of peace.” John Tully for The New York Times

By [Lisa Lerer](#) and [Reid J. Epstein](#) April 27, 2025

Lisa Lerer and Reid J. Epstein have reported on Democratic Party politics since President Trump came to power the first time.

Gov. JB Pritzker of Illinois strode into a ballroom filled with top New Hampshire Democrats on Sunday and by the end of his nearly 30-minute speech had them ready to storm the political barricades against President Trump.

“It’s time to fight everywhere and all at once,” he told the group of Democratic activists, officials and donors, who jumped to their feet with hoots and applause. “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.”

“The reckoning is finally here,” he declared.

For the Trump administration, of course, but also for his own party.

In the fight over the future of the Democratic Party, Mr. Pritzker has emerged as a leader of an insurgent faction calling for a full-throated, unflinching barrage of attacks on Mr. Trump, his Republican allies and their right-wing agenda.

His speech was a call to action more aggressive and comprehensive than perhaps any other by a major liberal figure since Mr. Trump took office, [rivalled only](#) by rallying cries from Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York on their Western tour. But unlike them, Mr. Pritzker set his stem-winding address in a state with a century-long hold on the nation's first presidential primary contest — a striking statement on its own.

Mr. Pritzker, of course, rebuffed any suggestion that his appearance on Sunday night in Manchester, N.H., represented the opening bell of the 2028 Democratic primary race. He said he was focused on backing the party's efforts in next year's midterm elections.

Yet his appearance was likely to stir more speculation. Mr. Pritzker wears a triple crown in Democratic politics, simultaneously one of the party's most prominent elected officials, most generous donors and most talked about 2028 presidential prospects.

"I'm one of the people leading the fight, and that is my role," he said in an interview before his speech. "We've done an awful lot in Illinois, and we can be doing those things in other states."

While other governors [have made ham-handed attempts at reconciliation](#) with Mr. Trump, Mr. Pritzker has turned his state into a bulwark of opposition to the administration's crackdown on immigration, cuts to the federal government and tariffs on other countries.



Mr. Pritzker occupies a unique position in Democratic politics: He is one of the party's most prominent governors, a top donor and a potential 2028 presidential contender.

John Tully for The New York Times

He has done so as some congressional Democrats, including Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader, have urged their party to be selective with their attacks against the president to avoid alienating independent voters who supported him. Mr. Pritzker, by contrast, wants his party to adopt a posture of zero accommodation.

“The main divide within the Democratic Party is not between left and right — it’s whether you think this is a constitutional crisis or this is politics as usual,” said Ezra Levin, a co-founder of the progressive activist group Indivisible. “Pritzker is really demonstrating what it looks like to lead an opposition party against the overreaching authority of the federal government.”

In recent months, Mr. Pritzker has preached a gospel of staunch resistance to some of the most engaged Democratic activists across the country, delivering the keynote speech at party fund-raisers in Illinois and Austin, Texas, and at an annual gala for the Human Rights Campaign in Los Angeles. Next month, he is set to speak at a fund-raising dinner in Detroit for the Michigan Democratic Party.

In his speech in New Hampshire, he criticized Democrats who have admonished the party for its perceived overreach as “timid, not bold.”

“Fellow Democrats, for far too long we’ve been guilty of listening to a bunch of do-nothing political types who would tell us that America’s house is not on fire, even as the flames are

licking their faces,” he said. “Today, as the blaze reaches the rafters, the pundits and politicians — whose simpering timidity served as kindle for the arsonists — urge us now not to reach for a hose.”

While his targets went unnamed, there were obvious candidates: Gov. Gavin Newsom of California, the host of a podcast that has [featured stars](#) of the [MAGA movement](#), and the Democratic strategist James Carville, who has argued for “a strategic political retreat” until Mr. Trump’s approval ratings fall.

“Those same do-nothing Democrats want to blame our losses on our defense of Black people and trans kids and immigrants,” Mr. Pritzker said, “instead of their own lack of guts and gumption.”

His comments reflected how, for now, Democrats are chiefly divided not over health care or other policy issues, but [over the extent to which they should oppose Mr. Trump](#) and his agenda.

While some party donors and consultants have urged moderation, Mr. Pritzker is tapping into the Democratic base’s visceral desire for a fight — and for a leader.

“Voters didn’t turn out for Democrats last November — not because they don’t want us to fight for our values, but because they think we don’t want to fight for our values,” he said in his speech. “We need to knock off the rust of poll-tested language, decades of stale

decorum. It's obscured our better instincts.”



During his speech, Mr. Pritzker criticized what he called “do-nothing” Democrats who “want to blame our losses on our defense of Black people and trans kids and immigrants instead of their own lack of guts and gumption.” John Tully for The New York Times

Neera Tanden, the president of the left-leaning think tank the Center for American Progress and a longtime fixture in Democratic politics, predicted that these early months of the Trump administration could reverberate into the 2028 primary contest. Voters, she said, won't forget how potential presidential candidates behaved.

“People are going to remember how Democrats acted in this moment,” said Ms. Tanden, whose group hosted Mr. Pritzker this year. “At the moment when Trump was the scariest, what did Democrats do? Did they roll over? Make inroads to right-wing people or something? Or did they stand up and defend our principles?”

An heir to the Hyatt hotel fortune with a net worth estimated around \$3.5 billion, Mr. Pritzker is one of the richest elected officials in the country — a position that has given him a measure of political independence because he is not as reliant on party donors.

In 2018, he transformed himself from a longtime donor who was a major funder of Hillary Clinton's two presidential campaigns into a formidable politician in his own right. He has self-funded two campaigns for governor and spread his wealth to support Democratic candidates for governor and the state parties in battlegrounds — Wisconsin in particular.

In 2023, as he expanded his political brand, Mr. Pritzker established a political action committee called Think Big America, which spent millions of dollars backing ballot measures seeking to enshrine abortion rights into state law.

Even before President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s disastrous debate performance last year, Mr. Pritzker [was talked about as the Democrats' "break glass" nominee](#) — a candidate able to fund a White House campaign at a moment's notice.

Instead, he endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris and [threw his party a joyous convention](#) in Chicago, even commissioning for the event [his own JBeers](#) — craft brews bearing his initials.

Unlike 2024, the 2028 Democratic primary contest is expected to be crowded and wide open, with little deference for seniority or political experience. As the early jockeying [quietly gets underway](#), some Democrats believe Mr. Pritzker could be a fierce contender with his billions and his deep party connections.

First, however, he faces a 2026 campaign for a third term as governor of Illinois. While he has made no official commitment, he is widely expected to run for re-election. The strength of his political power will also be tested in the Illinois Senate race, in which he has endorsed his lieutenant governor — who is expected to face several well-funded Democratic primary opponents.

People close to the governor say his current moves are driven not by a desire to position himself best in 2028, but by a sincere belief that Mr. Trump poses a dire threat to American democracy and the world order.

"I don't think he's crafting a persona around this," said Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota, a friend of Mr. Pritzker's who was the Democratic vice-presidential nominee last year. "On some of the more authoritarian tendencies, I think JB feels very strongly on that. He finds it morally reprehensible, I think, where Trump ends up falling."

Unlike other Democrats, who went through a period of mourning after the election, Mr. Pritzker was ready to fight Mr. Trump almost immediately. As worrisome results from Virginia began rolling into cable news networks early on election night, he shifted into battle mode for what he called Trump 2.0, according to a person briefed on the discussions.

Two days after the election, Mr. Pritzker told reporters that his administration "was not unprepared" for a Trump victory. The planning had begun months earlier as his state stockpiled abortion medication and prepared to sue the federal government.

And he issued a warning: "You come for my people, you come through me."

Aides and advisers trace Mr. Pritzker's activism to his family history and Jewish faith. His ancestors fled pogroms in Ukraine to make their fortune in the United States. He led the campaign to build the Illinois Holocaust Museum and has for years invoked the specter of Nazism to describe Mr. Trump — a political comparison that has divided some of his advisers.

“What we’re seeing right now is 1930s Germany; the only way to actually stop that from happening is to be very loud and vocal about the pushback,” said Anne Caprara, Mr. Pritzker’s longtime chief of staff. “That is what is motivating everything he is doing right now.”

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