

Budget challenges confront Pritzker

Migrant crisis and projected shortfall weigh on spending plan ahead of address

By **Jeremy Gorner and Olivia Olander**
Chicago Tribune

Funding challenges from the migrant crisis and immigrant health care to boosting early childhood education butt up against a projected shortfall of almost \$900 million in the coming fiscal year as Gov. J.B. Pritzker prepares to give his sixth budget address on

Wednesday. The Democratic governor's scheduled speech before the Illinois General Assembly follows his pledge last week to allocate \$182 million in the next budget year for shelter and other services for asylum-seekers in the Chicago area. The proposed investment came just a few months after the Pritzker administration announced it was taking \$160

million from the current budget to address the ongoing crisis. It will be up to Pritzker's allies in the Democratic-controlled General Assembly to approve a spending plan that takes the migrant crisis into account. The issue has spurred some intraparty disagreements over whether too much public money is going to the new arrivals and not enough is going to U.S. citizens who live in impoverished communities around the state. The House Democrats' top budget negotiator, Rep. Jehan

Gordon-Booth, said "we're going to continue to listen to our caucus" about how to balance funding for the migrant crisis with other needs in the state, including public safety, education, workforce development and violence prevention programs. "There's no denying that there's a major issue at the border being driven by a humanitarian crisis in Central and South America. We know that what we're seeing in Chicago and some of the surrounding suburbs, sadly, is a result of politicians using human beings

to distress a situation," the Peoria legislator said. "But here we are. And we have to deal with the hand that we have been dealt." Echoing a position often voiced by Pritzker, Gordon-Booth said the migrant crisis needs to be addressed in Washington and "it's unrealistic to think the state is going to be able to tackle and fix something that only the federal government is going to have the ability to fix." The \$182 million Pritzker is

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Navalny's widow vowing to fight on

Calls for all to unite in 'one strong fist,' punish 'mad regime'

Associated Press

The widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny vowed Monday to continue his fight against the Kremlin, while authorities denied his mother access to a morgue where his body is believed to be held after his death last week in an Arctic penal colony. With her voice cracking at times in a video posted on social media, Yulia Navalnaya accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of killing her husband in the remote prison and alleged that officials' refusal to hand over the body to her mother-in-law was part of a cover-up. Russian authorities said that the cause of Navalny's death Friday at age 47 is still unknown — and the results of any investigation are likely to be questioned abroad. Many Western leaders have already said they hold Putin responsible for the death. Navalny's death has deprived the Russian opposition of its most well-known and inspiring politician less than a month before an election that is all but certain to give Putin another six years in power. It dealt a devastating blow to many Russians, who had seen Navalny as a rare hope for political change amid Putin's unrelenting crackdown on the opposition. Navalny had been imprisoned since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow after recuperating in Germany from a nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin. He received three prison terms since his arrest, on a number of charges he has rejected as politically motivated. "They are cowardly and meanly hiding his body, refus-

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Rick Ringold mingles with friends and customers at the grand opening Thursday of Galaxy cannabis dispensary, which he owns with his wife, Michelle Ringold, in Richton Park. **CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Cannabis companies are taking it 'vertical'

Growing, selling of products controls costs, enhances connections

By **Robert McCoppin** | Chicago Tribune

Michelle and Rick Ringold have built a successful partnership — both in marriage and in cannabis. Rick is a U.S. Army veteran and construction contractor. His wife, Michelle, runs an accounting firm. It took all their business know-how and a roughly \$9 million investment to win a state license and launch Galaxy Labs LLC, a craft cannabis-growing business. But they wanted to both grow and sell their products. So they bought a cannabis retail license from a competitor and opened the dispensary last week in a strip mall in Richton Park, drawing crowds to celebrate with a live DJ, food and a "sesh bus" in which people could smoke.

With its store three doors down from its grow lab, Galaxy is one of the few independent cannabis companies in Illinois that is vertically integrated — meaning it grows and sells its own products. "We are filled with joy," Michelle Ringold said. "Our experience really did help us get to the next level and become successful." Selling their own product not only controls costs, but helps making connections with other companies. When vendors call to get their products into the Galaxy store, the Ringolds ask to also be stocked

in their competitors' stores. It took six months from the time they opened their grow lab until their first harvest hit the shelves, but their flower and joints are now in about half of all stores statewide. Galaxy is believed to be the first vertically integrated Black-owned cannabis company in Illinois. It boasts a state-of-the-art, multitiered electronic growing system that monitors and can control factors like humidity, lighting and carbon dioxide. The Ringolds raised capital from

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Record-breaking warehouse growth

Huge warehouses sprouted up across the Chicago metro area at a record-setting pace in 2023. Retailers and other companies are still hungry for space to store and distribute their products, so these new buildings are likely to lease quickly. **Business**

Israel occupation before UN court

The Palestinian foreign minister accused Israel of apartheid and urged the United Nations' top court to declare that Israel's occupation of lands sought for a Palestinian state is illegal and must end immediately and unconditionally. **Nation & World**

Rooftop solar has been skyrocketing in Illinois



Jared Salvatore, right, and Garrison Riegel, of Celestar Solar, carry a solar panel onto a roof on Nov. 30 in Schaumburg. **TRENT SPRAGUE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Report shows state 9th in nation in growth despite Midwest lagging

By **Nara Schoenberg**
Chicago Tribune

Illinois ranked ninth in the nation for small-scale solar growth in a report released this week from the nonprofits Environment America Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group. Small-scale solar — the majority of which is installed on roofs — produced 10 times as much electricity nationwide in 2022 as it did 10 years earlier, enough to power 5.7 million typical American homes, according to the report. And while the Midwest lagged behind other regions, Illinois,

which passed a major climate bill in 2021, produced 1,300 gigawatt-hours of electricity from small-scale solar in 2022, or enough to power 116,300 homes. "Illinois fared really well in this study, and in particular, in the last five years," said report co-author Johanna Neumann, a senior director at the Environment America Research & Policy Center. "Nationwide, two-thirds of our solar capacity has come online in the past five years, and rooftop solar in Illinois skyrocketed over that period," she said. But the news wasn't all good. The Midwest as a whole lagged, with no other state in the region making the Top 10 list for growth alongside heavy-hitters like Cali-

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