Remarks As Prepared For Delivery By Governor Pritzker FL Dems Leadership Blue Weekend

Good evening, Florida Democrats!

I'm thrilled to be here in the Sunshine state with some of the fiercest Democratic fighters in the nation.

Thanks to Chairman Manny Diaz, Leader Book, Leader Driskell, and our great Democratic candidates for governor we're going to beat Ron DeSantis and turn Florida BLUE.

And of course, I'd like to raise a water bottle to the woman who is going to defeat Marco Rubio, Val Demings.

I feel like I need to begin my remarks tonight with a bit of an apology.

Four years ago, I ran against incumbent Illinois Republican Governor Bruce Rauner. Rauner ran a campaign in 2014 pretending to be a moderate Republican who would get the state's finances back on track. Instead he waged an unhinged war against the state's labor unions and held all of Illinois hostage for two years by refusing to sign a budget - racking up massive debt and 8 credit downgrades.

In 2018, I beat Bruce Rauner by nearly 16 points. Illinois voters humiliated him, so he promptly picked up and moved to Florida. He's your problem now.

Sorry about that.

Unfortunately, that's not all I have to apologize for. Rauner's biggest financial backer was a hedge fund manager named Ken Griffin who gave more than \$60 million to Illinois Republicans because, as he put it, wealthy people like him have "insufficient influence" on politics. After I beat Rauner, Ken Griffin was apparently enraged, and vowed to defeat me the next time around. So he picked a new front man for 2022 and gave him <u>\$50 million</u> to run for Governor. Well, Griffin's new guy was handily defeated last month in the GOP primary. So like a spoiled rich kid, Griffin announced he was taking his toys and leaving Illinois. Where did he move to? You guessed it. His \$400 million, 20 acre Palm Beach estate. And he's one of Ron DeSantis's largest donors.

Again....really really sorry about that.

The funny thing is that both Rauner and Griffin claim they don't come from the Donald Trump wing of the Republican Party. Instead they would say they're DeSantis Republicans - which is a little bit like saying you've never been a fan of Darth Vader but you support the Empire's political agenda.

For example, while Trump clumsily proposed that doctors explore injecting bleach into patients to cure COVID, DeSantis instead just pretended COVID was a minor disease by cooking the books on Florida's COVID data, and refusing to order COVID vaccines for children under five.

Remember when Trump said there were "very fine people on both sides" of the Charlottesville white supremacy rally? DeSantis took a quieter tack. After a neo-Nazi demonstration in Orlando, he sent his spokeswoman out to ask "Do we even know they are Nazis?" before going on to suggest they were really Democrats in disguise.

While Trump was overt in taking away LGBTQ rights, DeSantis is more subtle, dressing up Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill as an effort to address "education" and prevent "indoctrination." And while Trump flagrantly breached the ethics laws by hawking pillows for his pal the My Pillow guy and by billing taxpayers for stays in his Trump hotels, DeSantis blackmails companies like Disney for opposing his legislative agenda.

You see, DeSantis is just Trump with a mask on.

He's trying to pass off his covert racism, homophobia and misogyny as a more reasonable form of Trump Republicanism. And what I worry about even more is the dangerous complacency we've fallen into, that has wrapped its poisonous arms around our political conversations, and tried to trick us into believing that calling out the truth is some form of incivility. As if civility can exist without honesty.

And THAT is what led me to accept your invitation to be here tonight, Florida Democrats. You are fighters, because you've had to be. Our Party needs all of us, every elected official, every candidate, every local party chair and precinct committee person and engaged volunteer to ditch cautious rhetoric and even more cautious electoral strategy and start speaking honestly and bluntly about the dangers democracy is

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facing from the MAGA Republican Party. We cannot let this country quietly go to hell because we aren't willing to wake the neighbors!

I first ran for Governor of Illinois in 2018. The state was facing unprecedented challenges because we had a Republican governor who decided to hold the state budget hostage.

Things in Illinois government were a mess.

My friends thought I was crazy to run for Governor. They told me state government couldn't be repaired. And anyway, who would vote for ME?

Look... I'm a Ukrainian-American, Jewish, Democratic, billionaire, businessman. That's not exactly the archetype the party was looking for to run for governor.

That's ok with me. I know who I am and where I come from. My Great Grandfather arrived in Chicago as a refugee without a penny to his name. When the Russians were killing Jews in Ukraine, a refugee assistance organization gave him a ticket on a ship bound for America, and sent him to Chicago. They found him a place to live. And he got a free public school education. His grandson, my father, became a Naval officer, a crypto analyst decoding Russian submarine transmissions during the Cold War in the 50's. And he went on to start a successful motel and hotel company. He was a Democrat through and through. My mother was an elected Democratic Party leader and an activist for reproductive rights, for LGBTQ rights, for economic and social justice for societal change that was ahead of her time.

I've been lucky in life and I know it. That's why I've worked hard. After law school I founded my own successful business. I also became a national advocate for early childhood education, co-founded a Holocaust Museum, started the world's number one small business incubator, Chaired the Illinois Human Rights Commission, and helped elect Democrats for more than 30 years. The Democratic values my parents burnished in me, about being on the front lines in the fight for human and civil rights, about giving voice to the voiceless, about lifting up working families and those who've been left out and left behind those are the values that led me to run for Governor.

My slogan for that campaign was "Think Big" - yes, it was a pun about my size. But it was also an expression of what I believe. Small mindedness only produces small results. I believe in being bold and setting goals that seem improbable but are attainable if you provide a vision and then inspire others to join in the endeavor. And I believe in our shared Democratic values and our ability to deliver.

So I promised big things. I said I'd raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. I'd pass a record setting infrastructure bill. I promised to enact a comprehensive, nation-leading law to fight climate change. I said I would enshrine reproductive rights into Illinois law.

And we accomplished all of that, and more.

I protected our elections and expanded voting rights, reformed our criminal justice system, gave tax relief to Illinois families and balanced the budget. Oh, and I legalized cannabis with the most equity centric legislation in the country.

I could not have done all of that without the help of a Democratic legislature willing to vote for big change.

I finished my first year in office a little tired, but with historic victories in hand, and optimistic about achieving success with even more big things on our Democratic agenda. Then came March of 2020 and a global pandemic.

I gave more than 180 daily press conferences about COVID that year, the first of them on March 9th. I remember how I finished my remarks that day. I warned the citizens of Illinois "this is going to affect your daily life."

Every hour of that terribly long first two months of the pandemic was dedicated to one emergency after another and a frantic search for more PPE and ventilators.

When Trump decided it would be better for his reelection if he politicized the pandemic, we had to refute his attacks on science, endure threats against our homes and our families and an unending Republican stream of misinformation meant to weaken our resolve.

We grieved the dead. We mourned with the living. We yearned for a White House that would help us save lives.

In Illinois we danced in the streets when President Biden was elected and Democrats won the Senate and delivered on so many promises to bring much needed aid to families and small businesses and cities and states.

You know what Republican elected officials in my state did during the pandemic?

They said they wanted to stop mitigations and deliberate about the fast spreading deadly disease. They celebrated any setback...they diminished every victory...they made it harder every single day to help working families and to keep people safe.

They tried to distract from solving ACTUAL problems by yelling about FAKE ones.

They were enraged because I told voters I would do big thingsand then I got those big things done.

One truism in politics is: No one has ever voted anyone into office to think small, to go slow, or act indecisively.

And Republicans know this. But their game plan is to convince us - their opposition - that the most obvious of our political instincts are wrong.

And unfortunately it's a game plan that's been working.

In 2022, we are living in an entirely new world. And politics does not handle "new" very well. Politicians, in general, like to reach to the past when they are trying to navigate forward.

But our view of the past is a stone at the bottom of a river, all its rough edges and scars smoothed over and evened out by time and pressure. That sometimes leads to dangerous nostalgia.

Republicans know that we can't live in the old world anymore, but they have convinced some Democrats that our Party shouldn't even \underline{try} to embrace a new world. It's dumb to go along with that way of thinking — and it's dangerous.

These past few years...they've been so hard. I feel it's important we say that.

It's hard to manage your family through the pandemic that's still lingering. It's hard to pay a grocery bill. It's hard to take a vacation — or afford gas.

It's hard to find an affordable apartment. It's almost impossible to buy a house.

It's hard to find baby formula. It's hard to schedule a doctor's appointment without a several month wait. It's hard to find a used car or purchase a sofa that will arrive before your toddler leaves for college.

Life is just hard right now... especially for those who have traditionally been marginalized. And we don't do ourselves any favors by pretending it's not.

But you see, the Republican game plan is to get each of us to feel alone in a struggle we're all facing together. The Republican game plan is to get the Democratic Party to turn on itself - to convince us that there isn't enough room in our tent or in this country for many diverse voices speaking up at once. They want us to believe that myself and Stacey Abrams and Gavin Newsom, and Kamala Harris, and Pete Buttigieg and Gretchen Whitmer and Joe Biden all speaking out against the GOP insanity is somehow a cacophony and not a choir. Our Democratic voices are more powerful together - one doesn't diminish another. Each of the voices is part of the harmony that produces the music that's just right.

The Republican game plan is to divide Democrats and to divide America. They want to cast obvious solutions to everyday problems as something exotic or woke. They're hoping, as the old story goes, that no one is willing to say that <u>their Emperor</u> has no clothes.

Well, Florida, I'm here to tell you that the GOP is naked and afraid.

They're afraid of workers' rights to organize and bargain.

They're afraid of fighting inflation by producing goods Made in America, and they're afraid of holding bad corporate actors accountable for driving up prices.

They're afraid of fiscal policy that says that the highest income earners — like me — should pay the highest tax rates.

They're afraid to raise the minimum wage because it might unshackle the working poor. They're afraid of a Democratic agenda that prioritizes building wealth in Black and brown communities, in communities that have been left out and left behind.

They're afraid when Democrats say plainly that you can't pull yourself up by your bootstraps if you never had any <u>boots</u>.

And by God Republicans are afraid of allowing women the freedom to make decisions about their own bodies.

Birth control, fertility treatments, the morning after pill and safe access to abortion - these things have allowed women for 50 years to choose how and when and if they'd like to start a family. It enabled women to marry who they want to, when they want to — to make choices about their careers and education and financial stability and happiness.

And that absolutely terrifies Republican politicians. That's why they've spent literally half a century doing everything in their power to take that right away, even to the point of making the word "abortion" verboten to say — because when you can make a word shameful, you make the people associated with that word shameful as well. It has enabled the moment we find ourselves in right now. The Supreme Court reversal of Roe is already revealing its unbearable consequences. Like the enraging story this past week of a 10 year old girl, a rape victim, forced to flee her home state of Ohio to seek a legal abortion in Indiana. Republicans questioned whether her story was true — always so quick to deny the testimony of women. And when the gruesome details were confirmed, the Republican Attorney General of Indiana publicly named the doctor who performed the legal abortion, and announced his intention to put that doctor in jail. A year ago, most GOP leaders pretended nothing like this would ever happen. They lied.

So get ready, because the next thing on their to-do list is to pass a nationwide abortion ban. Quite frankly, national Democrats had the chance for years to put protections for abortion into law, but they were too complacent. In Illinois, we didn't take that chance, we did our job at the state level. We listened to women, and now we're an oasis protecting women's reproductive rights. But Floridians, you can stop national Republicans in their tracks if you elect Val Demings to the US Senate.

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The Republican Party is so afraid of the power and influence women have achieved in our society that they are desperately seeking to shame and criminalize your right to choose.

And they're playing the same game with guns.

For a full year, Republicans have been screaming about crime. They particularly like to target my home city of Chicago.

Just for the record, Chicago should be no one's punching bag. It's a beautiful city that boasts glorious summer festivals, the very best cultural institutions, entertainment and food, and the kindest and most amazing people you will ever meet. It's the birthplace of gospel music and the Blues Brothers. It's where Barack Obama came from. We're a diverse, compelling place with a proud history. And we're hoping to host you all in Chicago for the 2024 Democratic National Convention!

Just like it is in every major city and state across the country right now, crime is a problem in Illinois. Republicans are hell bent on making you believe that the solutions are simple. They begin and end with veiled rhetoric that points at Black and brown people and then they scream "lock them up!" Reducing crime starts with real investments in proven violence interruption programs, youth employment, funding for mental health and substance use treatment, and providing law enforcement with the resources they need to solve crimes.

But make no mistake. Dealing with crime also involves getting <u>guns</u> off the streets. And man oh man is the GOP afraid we're going to start shouting <u>that</u> from the rooftops.

In 2018, when the gunman at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School was done with his rampage, he left 17 dead and 17 wounded, and took away the glint of the bright futures of so many in the deadliest high school shooting in US History. You know better than most what carnage an assault weapon can do.

Earlier this month, we lost 7 people in Highland Park, Illinois. Dozens of others were left injured. They were Moms and Dads and Grandparents and children gathered to watch a Fourth of July parade in the neighborhood where Molly Ringwold turned 16 and Ferris Bueller took a day off. But gun violence is no more horrific and no more acceptable when it happens in broad daylight on the tree lined streets of a wealthy suburb rather than in the small hours of the night in the back corners of downtown Chicago or on the South or West side.

The people left behind have their lives shattered in equal measure. The terror visited upon a community is equally destructive. All of our children have an equal right to grow up safely.

We do, however, need to start recognizing that we have an epidemic of young men enamored with white nationalism shooting up their communities with assault weapons. The pattern repeats over and over and over again. The warning signs are eerily the same, and I'm tired of the conservative movement being so politically correct that they won't allow us to say what needs to be said - that this pattern is a clear domestic terrorism threat.

In Florida, your Governor doesn't want to admit any of that. In the wake of overwhelming evidence that white nationalist violence was a primary motivation for the tragic mass shooting in El Paso Texas, Ron DeSantis said he doesn't have any "interest in being part of people's <u>political</u> narratives." He's happy to pick on LGBTQ children or immigrants, but God forbid he calls out what the FBI refers to as our most pressing security threat: the rise of white domestic extremism.

Irina and Kevin McCarthy were two of the people who died in Highland Park on July 4th. Their son, Aiden, is two years old. Aiden survived the massacre because Kevin shielded him with his body. He laid on top of his son to keep him alive. This young boy was found wandering the streets alone after the shooting stopped - his parents both dead on the sidewalk behind him.

I can't stop thinking about Aiden. I can't stop thinking about how he will be forced to "navigate life as an orphan."

I lost both of my parents before I turned 18. Let me tell you what it means to "navigate life as an orphan." It means you are always stalked by ghoulish anniversaries – their birthdays that are no longer celebrated but instead mark another 52 weeks that a parent has been gone. It means growing older while your parents never age. It means never knowing them as an adult - never crossing the rubicon from being a child to being a friend. It means approaching with unnatural guilt the day when you've lived longer than they did. It means going through every joyous life milestone - graduations, big birthdays, weddings, promotions - with an empty space beside you in a picture, a sense of being robbed.

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Grief ebbs over time - but it never stops stealing a piece of your joy in the moments when you deserve to be happiest.

THAT is what the Republican obsession with assault weapons did to Aiden McCarthy. THAT is what it's done to countless families across the country over the last two decades.

We can tighten red flag laws and background checks and gun licensing. But ultimately, we need a federal assault weapons ban.

It's the guns. It's always been the guns.

And here is where the Republican game plan is the most audacious. They want to distract you into believing that gay marriage, Black history, Disney World, and library books are more of a threat to our children than an AR-15.

And if we can't call bullshit on that, well then Democrats, we don't deserve to win elections.

Do NOT tell us that a 10-year-old is too young to learn about the history of slavery but not too young to run active shooter drills where she learns how to play dead if a gunman shoots up the school.

Do not claim to support parents' rights until you are willing to protect the right of our children to live.

Do not lecture us about crime until you are willing to do something about guns.

And DO NOT tell us you are pro-life.

Because no part of the Republican agenda is about life.

Because if it <u>was</u> about life, health insurance would cover every last cent of giving birth, and childcare would be free.

Because if it was about <u>life</u>, we'd have the best family and medical leave policies in the entire developed world instead of the worst.

Because if it was about life, refugee children coming here to escape violence would be embraced, instead of incarcerated.

Because if it was about life, wearing a mask would be no big deal and getting vaccinated would be sacrosanct.

Because if it was about life, there'd be a bunch of kids from Sandy Hook elementary school getting ready to graduate from high school.

Republicans aren't the Party of life.

Whether it's assault weapons, or back alley abortions, or vaccines, or protecting transgender youth, or a frothing mob of TRAITORS marching toward the capitol looking to shoot members of Congress and hang the Vice President - GIVE ME ONE EXAMPLE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY SHOWING UP FOR LIFE IN THIS COUNTRY.

Let's tell it like it really is. Ron DeSantis isn't trying to empower parents when he champions the "Don't Say Gay" agenda - he wants to codify a modern day LGBTQ McCarthyism, forcing teachers to hide their marriages and children to out their peers at school. He doesn't care about "intellectual freedom" when he signs legislation asking Florida students and professors to register their political views - he wants a list of political enemies he can torment and persecute. And DeSantis isn't trying to teach students "how to be responsible citizens" when he promotes civic lessons that deny the separation of church and state he's trying to whitewash history.

Look, I know that we're facing a struggle in the heart of our nation right now. We Democrats feel like we play by the rules - that we respect our Democracy, that we honor the results of our elections, that we compromise — and work across the aisle — on issues that voters care about. We want to believe that - surely - the GOP can come together with us and agree on common sense things that will make life easier and better for most Americans.

But every time we extend a hand to the other side and it's met with intransigence at best and scorn at worst, we feel like Charlie Brown looking back at Lucy holding the football.

I'm an optimistic guy, and I don't want us to lose hope for a better, less rancorous, political climate. We owe that to our children and our grandchildren.

But in the face of what's happening in this country today - in the face of what the Supreme Court and the radical right wing are trying to do to

the fundamental rights of every American - we, the coalition of the sane, owe something else to our children and our grandchildren.

We need to win.

And then we need to keep our promises to the people who elected us. I want the LGBTQ community to know we're not going to let them be forced back into a closet.

I want our Black and brown citizens to feel like they can count on us in a fight. <u>That we will do what we said we would do.</u> That we won't back down because some GOP ad maker figured out how to spin a melody out of a dog whistle.

I want the truth to be self-evident that the equality of women <u>finally</u> will be unalienable, that <u>her</u> liberty to pursue happiness is guaranteed.

Ours is the real patriotism. For free and fair elections. For a system that makes it easier to vote, not harder. For politicians who honor the nation George Washington founded, that Abraham Lincoln preserved and that Martin Luther King battled for the soul of. We stand with the people who barred the doors of the Capitol on January 6th - not the ones who were trying to knock them down.

Our majority isn't silent...it's exhausted. And I'm worried people won't wake up if someone doesn't start yelling.

I'm done with Democrats pretending that we can find political success in a watered down mish mash of policies that neither offend nor enlighten but merely satisfy. I don't want platitudes to replace passion, or cowardice to replace candor anymore.

Democrats...Let's not be scared of who we are. Let's stand up for who we are. I want to fight for who we are.

Let me share a secret with you...one of my proudest accomplishments is something I worked on before I was Governor. I hope hearing the story of it will give you insight as to why I'm here tonight — rather than what you might have read in the political news.

In 1999, a man by the name of Sam Harris came to me and asked for my help building a Holocaust museum in Illinois. Sam is a concentration camp survivor - his entire family, with the exception of two sisters, were murdered by the Nazis. He is also, counterintuitively, one of the happiest people I've ever known.

I asked Sam once how he could have survived so many terrible things and come out with such a great attitude about life. He told me he lives for the work of preserving the stories of Holocaust survivors and goes about life with a deep but profound conviction for a man of his background - that "good will prevail in the long run."

The ten years of work that I did with Sam and hundreds of survivors that went into getting the Illinois Holocaust Museum from idea to reality, it affected me deeply. It impressed upon me what the survivors really mean when they say "Never Forget."

What I learned, working so closely with survivors of genocide, is that history loses all meaning if we sanitize it. The survivors know better than any of us that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. And we are cowards, unworthy of the blessings of our ancestors, if we don't wear ourselves out fighting every attempt to cast a group of people as less than human, less worthy of fundamental rights, less deserving of basic decency and love and respect.

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My obligations to Sam, to the other survivors, to the Holocaust Museum we built together, to my own heritage, go deeper than any political calling. My obligation to be here, speaking up against the appalling denial of basic human and civil rights, would exist whether or not I was Governor of Illinois.

You don't build a Holocaust Museum with brick and mortar. You build it by living a life worthy of the lost promise of millions of souls extinguished too soon.

"Remember the Past, Transform the Future" – that's the mission statement the survivors wrote for the Illinois Holocaust Museum. Let it be a mission for us all.

I've earned a reputation back in Illinois as a somewhat irrepressible optimist. Let me tell you, it drives the Republican politicians in my state insane. They seem to take it personally that I don't endlessly badmouth Illinois and the country. It's not that I don't see or care about our common problems and struggles - I do. And I work to address them every day. But I believe to my very core that if you want to save your home, you have to love it first. You have to love its good things, and resolve to change its bad things. You have to love its past with all its warts. You have to love its future with all its worries. And you have to use all your courage and all your kindness to keep that love alive and maintain your resolve during our darkest days...

Why? Because we <u>fight</u> for the things we love.

So Florida, before I go, I have to ask you one question.

Are you ready for the fight?

I said...are you ready for the fight, Florida??

Are you ready to fight for this great state and this wonderful country?

Then let's get out there and fight for our country with the courage and the kindness to save it.

Thank you, may God bless you and may God bless our great nation.