

Startup Ecosystem Stars Awards Remarks

Wednesday, December 4th, 2024

Remarks As Prepared For Delivery

Bonjour, a tous! Je m'appelle Gouverneur JB Pritzker, et je suis honoré d'être ici. There are so many startup leaders here from across the world – and I am proud to accept this award on behalf of the state of Illinois and our dynamic startup ecosystem.

Je voudrais remercier International Chamber of Commerce et Mind the Bridge pour cette reconnaissance – for bringing together such a dynamic group of organizations for this event; and for all of your efforts to fuel the spirit of entrepreneurship and progress in communities across the world.

I was a businessman and investor in the startup and venture capital industry for most of my career before I was elected Governor of Illinois, so this is a very special day for me. When I was elected to public office, I can tell you that I didn't leave behind the enthusiasm for the things I loved before. It takes great people to make big things happen in the world, and I feel lucky to have a staff of innovators who can think and move at a speed faster than the usual bureaucracy. That is why I want to acknowledge the many dedicated people across my state government, especially in my Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology and my Department of Commerce, who have worked so tirelessly to achieve a stronger, healthier business and startup environment in Illinois. This award is a testament to their ability to foster growth and opportunity for our people and our broader economy.

As I look around the room today, I feel Illinois has become a member of a special club of the best of the best. Across the world, governments, businesses, and NGOs are focusing more of their attention on building environments of innovation that can uplift emerging startups, light the fires of creativity, and harness human potential to not just drive prosperity – but also find solutions to humanity's greatest challenges.

That is a mission that we have taken seriously in my home state. For those of you who have not yet heard about Illinois or our great city of Chicago, let me introduce you to the most exciting and best kept secret in the United States.

Situated perfectly on the shores of 20% of the world's surface fresh water, in the heart of the US industrial belt and the agricultural heartland, Illinois is a major economic player in the US and around the world. If we were an independent country we would be a member of the G-20 nations. Our central location at the crossroads of America and our modern infrastructure – have made us a diverse economy, flourishing in manufacturing, finance, healthcare, agriculture and beyond. Illinois is now #2 in the United States for corporate expansions and relocations, the #1 state in the Midwest U.S. for new business creation, and #1 for tech innovation and access to capital. And the city of Chicago is now the top US metropolitan area for new and expanding companies.

But our future depends in large part on innovation, with startups and entrepreneurs leading the way. Illinois has been a center of technological and scientific advancement – for example, the first nuclear reactor, the first cell phone, and the first graphic internet browser were invented in Illinois.

The scientists, researchers and entrepreneurs at our world class educational institutions and research laboratories – like University of Chicago, Northwestern University, University of Illinois, and our two National Laboratories are some of the progenitors of cutting-edge innovation.

Beyond that, the startup infrastructure we've built over the years has helped harness the potential of our people. And as governor I've made it a top priority to invest in deepening and solidifying our status as a leader in startups, scientific research, and entrepreneurship.

But none of that leads to commercial success without startup capital, startup incubators, and small business development centers. That's where the Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Technology and the Illinois Innovation Venture Fund come in. Together

with innovation hubs across our state, they provide a dynamic array of resources, strategic partnerships, and cutting-edge support to help emerging ideas and established enterprises flourish.

And we made other investments laying the foundation for world-changing advancements in Illinois.

For example, five years ago Illinois was the first US state to make a major investment in building an ecosystem for quantum computing, quantum communications and quantum sensing. Then again in early 2024, Illinois committed \$500 million and launched the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park – the first independent hub for public-private collaboration to develop and commercialize this transformative new technology. Illinois intends to be the US leader in quantum.

Our investments are paying dividends. Illinois has consistently been among the highest ranked US states for startup growth. And new European tech companies looking to expand to the US are now taking root in our state.

Illinois is proud to be a recognized part of this global startup community. With each step we grow closer to conquering our greatest challenges and in the process, we create a stronger, more connected, and more prosperous world.

I want to once again thank the ICC and Mind the Bridge for this incredible honor, and I want to congratulate all the other recipients on their well-earned awards.

Et enfin, permettez-moi de vous remercier tous - de continuer à inspirer la prochaine génération d'innovateurs qui changent le monde.

Merci beaucoup!