



**OFFICE OF THE SENATE PRESIDENT
STATE OF ILLINOIS**

JOHN J. CULLERTON
SENATE PRESIDENT

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SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62706
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January 31, 2011

The Honorable Judy Baar Topinka
Comptroller of the State of Illinois
201 State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Re: Painless Cuts

Dear Comptroller Topinka:

I wanted to personally extend my congratulations on your recent inauguration. It's always nice to have former Senators back in positions of influence. I find comfort knowing you understand the budgeting pressures the General Assembly faces. Given this, I take interest in your recent remarks to the media about \$1 billion in "painless" spending cuts. The Senate has always approached our State's fiscal challenges with a desire to work together knowing that all ideas should be explored.

As you know, the new spending limits require the General Assembly find savings, reforms and cuts. Concrete ideas are welcomed. But I must stress as I have for quite some time that talking points will not suffice at this critical juncture.

I reviewed the list you provided to the media and have developed the following questions regarding your proposals:

- You suggest the state save \$100 million by rolling back a "giveaway" in the form of universal preschool, requiring those families "financially-able" pay for preschool. The Early Childhood Block Grant is the primary funding source for the State's effort to enroll children age 3 to 5 in quality preschool. Participation is limited to children most at-risk of academic failure and from low- to moderate-income homes. Financial realities never allowed this laudable program to meet the so-called "preschool for all" threshold despite the massive marketing hype of a previous governor.
- SB3778 is on the Governor's desk and provides that seniors who meet the Circuit Breaker income limitations may travel free of charge on public transit systems. I join you in encouraging him to sign it. This rolls back a former governor's effort allowing all seniors, regardless of income, to "ride free." As a former RTA director you know this was no "free ride" and cost transit agencies millions to subsidize

fares. And so, I'm confused as to how the state General Revenue Fund-- as opposed to the transit agencies -- would save \$40 million as you contend.

- I agree that combining the Comptroller and Treasurer offices deserves consideration by the General Assembly. The savings that could be achieved by this action, though, would have no immediate or even short-term impact on our desire to make effective cuts. The General Assembly could approve such a constitutional amendment for consideration by Illinois' voters and still it wouldn't be decided by the voters until November 2014. Again, while the concept deserves consideration, we should be realistic that any savings achieved by this action would come much later.

My office door is open and I'm happy to discuss your ideas, with the goal to produce immediate savings. If you have suggestions for meaningful, real cuts, I'm prepared to offer you the Senate Bills to accomplish them.

Congratulations on your return and I look forward to again working with you to find bipartisan and even nonpartisan solutions to the issues and problems we face.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John J. Cullerton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John J. Cullerton
Senate President