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Treasurer's Note

February 20, 2025

Our Free Financial Wellness Tool Is Here for You

I know a lot of people in Illinois don't look forward to the dark cold days of February, but two of my favorite holidays are celebrated this month.

No, not Groundhog Day, though I do like the Bill Murray movie filmed in Woodstock, Illinois.

I'm talking about Lincoln's Birthday, which I wrote about [last week](#). It's now officially observed by only five states. I am proud that the Land of Lincoln remains committed to celebrating our 16th president's actual birthday.

I'm also talking about Lunar New Year, which is one of the most celebrated holidays in the world. It frequently falls in February, but even when it lands in January, like it did this year, the celebrations continue into February.



I enjoyed visiting Chinatown to officially kick off the Year of the Snake. For some reason, they always put me in the back row.

Lunar New Year results in one of the largest mass migrations of humans in the world every year, as millions of people from China and several other Asian nations travel back home to be with their families.

Thirty years ago, I [worked as a teacher in Taiwan](#), and while there I took Chinese classes at the local university. One employee thought that it was sad that I had no one to celebrate the Lunar New Year with and invited me and a student from Japan to celebrate with his family on Taiwan's east coast.

We were part of that large mass migration of humans. I remember standing for a couple of hours in the space between train cars because there were no seats and the aisles were full. I remember the warm welcome from his family that was so excited to share their celebration with an American. There was so much food, so much red, and so many fireworks!

Not everyone in his family spoke English, so I was very glad that I had been studying Chinese.

We teach our children that it's important to study hard so that they can get good grades in school. As an adult, learning is still very important, but we tend not to be graded on our progress.

I learned to speak Chinese not to check a box, or to add something to my resume, but rather to have conversations with others and learn from them.

Every now and then, I get asked how often I use my Chinese in my job. I almost never speak Chinese at work, but the lessons I learned from traveling and speaking to people from a different culture are things I use every day. They taught me different ways of thinking, of organizing, and communicating.



Though the lighting from the projector leaves me looking blue, I'm always happy to address a group celebrating the Lunar New Year.

For many people, financial terms can seem like a foreign language. Many people struggle with finances because either we didn't teach them well or we taught them to the test, and they quickly forgot what they learned.

Money may not buy happiness, but money problems frequently lead to anxiety and stress. I want people to lead happier lives and reduce financial problems. That's why we created the [Illinois Financial Wellness Hub](#), or FinWell Hub.

This is not a university class where you will be graded. There are no tests. There is just information available to people who want to get out of debt, start saving for retirement or their kids' education, establish an emergency savings fund, or any number of other financial challenges in life.

I realize that people learn in different ways, so you can read, watch videos, or schedule an appointment to work with a financial coach. And all of this is free to you! I encourage you to sign up at the [FinWell Hub website](#).

In Chinese culture, during the Lunar New Year people frequently wish others good luck and prosperity. In this new year, I wish the same for the people of Illinois.

Sincerely,
Michael

P.S. It is also tradition for elders to give children money in red envelopes. In my office, we do not give red envelopes this time of year, but we do send checks in white envelopes throughout the year. Please check our missing money [I-CASH website](#) to see if we have money for you. We would love for you to use that to pay down your debts, to start an emergency savings account, or to be generous with children in your lives. It's your money, it's your choice.

Lost Money Returns to Its Rightful Owner



Susan from Shelby County admits that her recent experience with missing money "is a weird story," but it has a happy ending.

About five years ago, she noticed some money had disappeared from her bank account. The bank told her that her debit card had been compromised, and it had to be destroyed.

Somehow, she said, the money wound up in a digital wallet under her name. She repeatedly tried to access the cash there, but she couldn't because the digital wallet was associated with the old, now-destroyed debit card.

Last summer, Susan received a letter from the digital wallet company saying that those funds soon would be turned over to Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs' office as unclaimed property. Susan, who makes a habit of regularly visiting the [I-CASH](#) missing money database, made her claim online in December.

"It's a very easy-to-understand website," she said.

Two days later, the State Treasurer's Office told her to watch for a check to arrive by mail. The money – \$452.50 – came at a good time. "It was right before Christmas," Susan observed.

"I was incredibly impressed with how it went," she said, referring to the process of claiming her missing money.

To see if we have missing money waiting for you, please check your name at <https://icash.illinoistreasurer.gov/>.

Discover If You Have Missing Money



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