

SPRINGFIELD



Chicago attorney Michael Shakman has complained about politically-motivated hiring at the Illinois Department of Transportation. | Sun-Times File Photo

Federal monitor to be appointed to oversee hiring at IDOT

WED, 10/22/2014 - 10:22AM

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A federal judge has agreed to appoint a monitor to oversee hiring decisions at the Illinois Department of Transportation.

8+ U.S. Magistrate Judge Sidney Schenkier's ruling comes just two weeks before the gubernatorial election and was immediately seized on by Republican candidate Bruce Rauner as evidence that "Pat Quinn is corrupt and cannot be trusted to clean up state government."

But Quinn's camp disputed that, and Schenkier himself used much more measured language Wednesday morning, saying simply that appointing a monitor was "the best way to ensure compliance" with rules over political hiring in state government.

Campaigning lawyer Michael Shakman first asked for a federal hiring monitor to oversee IDOT in 2009 — a move opposed by Quinn.

But the request received fresh impetus in 2013, when a Better Government Association report uncovered evidence of political hiring at IDOT.

And a three-year probe by the Office of the Executive Inspector General published earlier this year also found evidence that hiring rules were skirted at IDOT since 2003.

Shakman said politically connected workers were hired into exempt positions at IDOT, then improperly transferred to non-exempt jobs. Other jobs were improperly listed as exempt, he said.

Lawyers for Gov. Pat Quinn had argued that a monitor was not necessary as the OEIG could oversee and root out hiring violations.

Schenkier said his ruling implied no criticism of the executive inspector general, but that the best way to ensure compliance with hiring rules was "by an officer of the court who is acting under the auspices of the court."

Rauner's campaign immediately issued a statement on behalf of the candidate, saying: "Pat Quinn is a phony reformer and a federal judge just confirmed it.

"I applaud today's decision and commit that my administration will work closely with the federal hiring monitor to root out Pat Quinn's patronage and corruption."

But Quinn administration spokesman Grant Klinzman said the OIEG report did not find that the governor's administration was implicated in hiring violations at IDOT.

He said, "When we became aware of the issues at IDOT, we took swift action to address them, implementing all of the OEIG's recommendations and going further by appointing a new secretary of transportation to enact reforms and ensure all hiring procedures are strictly followed.

"As was done with the OEIG, we'll ensure IDOT works closely with the court and continues to follow all rules."

Quinn campaign spokesperson Brooke Anderson, meanwhile, blasted Rauner for his oversight of companies his venture capital firm had invested in.