Pat Quinn has been trying to get rid of Illinois Power Agency (IPA) Director Mark Pruitt almost since the day the governor was sworn into office. He finally did it, but the move is backfiring.

The governor is a big cheerleader for alternative power sources such as wind and solar. But Pruitt, whose main job is negotiating contracts with electricity generators on behalf of consumers, refused to sign some alt-energy contracts because they'd cost consumers too much money.

Pruitt's IPA was created after mega utility ComEd announced that it intended to buy electricity via a weird reverse auction system that was roundly slammed by Attorney General Lisa Madigan and every other reasonable political leader in Illinois. As a result, Pruitt claims to have saved Illinois electricity consumers $1.6 billion since 2007, and he has the numbers to back him up.

The IPA was created by House Speaker Michael Madigan, who to this day lists the creation as one of his greatest accomplishments. Pruitt wasn't initially Speaker Madigan's guy, but the speaker grew to respect him and found himself protecting Pruitt against Quinn's hostility, eventually passing a bill this past spring that removed the Power Agency from Quinn's direct control. Quinn, in a move he'll likely regret, vetoed Madigan's proposal this summer.

Pruitt is most certainly an egghead, not an administrator. He initially tried to run the IPA by himself, which resulted in an embarrassing report by the Illinois Auditor General. And although the Quinn administration denies it, word from inside is that the governor has blocked Pruitt from hiring staff, and Quinn has repeatedly taken money from Pruitt's special fund to shore up the rest of the state budget. That turmoil is mainly why Speaker Madigan finally stepped in and attempted to insulate the Power Agency from Quinn's meddling.

Back in June, Quinn tried to replace Pruitt with a lawyer who works for the attorney general's office. The Senate Democrats decided that the lawyer didn't meet the state law's job requirements and quietly demanded that his name be withdrawn.

Quinn's people still insist that the man was qualified. But they also claim, in a bizarre bit of

pique, that he was actually pressured into withdrawing by the attorney general. The attorney general's office flatly denies this allegation.

The governor's folks say they asked Speaker Madigan for names to replace Pruitt, but heard nothing back. That's not surprising considering Pruitt is Madigan's guy.

Quinn finally ousted Pruitt last week and replaced him with Arlene Juracek, a retired ComEd executive. Juracek actually testified on behalf of the much-ridiculed reverse auction and admits to owning Exelon stock, but she won't say how much.

Exelon, ComEd's parent company, will be on the other side of the table when Juracek negotiates power prices. The Quinn people say the job requirements are so strict that they had little choice but to name Juracek to the post. Plus, they say, the Illinois Commerce Commission can veto any unfavorable deals Juracek might negotiate with her former parent company, which is cold comfort to the attorney general.

The bottom line here is that the governor has made a move that would've caused a gigantic uproar if Rod Blagojevich had done the same thing. Just imagine the hostile reaction if Blagojevich had appointed a ComEd retiree who still owns shares of her former parent company's stock as the point person for negotiating power prices with that very company.

And below that bottom line is an even bigger problem. The governor has angered both the House speaker and the attorney general just weeks before the start of the fall veto session, which was already looking like a disaster for Quinn as members prepare to override or reject almost all of his vetoes.

It's not certain yet that Juracek's nomination is doomed, but it is sure starting to look that way. The governor spent last week flying around to various Downstate media markets to gin up public support for his veto of ComEd's "Smart Grid" bill. How he can bash ComEd on the one hand and hire a ComEd veteran to negotiate electricity prices on the other is more than a bit beyond me.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax *(a daily political newsletter) and CapitolFax.com .*