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State audit: Anti-violence program slammed

By Dave McKinney

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SPRINGFIELD - The state's top auditor slammed a $54.5 million anti-violence program launched by Gov. Pat Quinn one month before the 2010 election, leading to partisan cries Tuesday for a criminal investigation into what Republicans called a Quinn-controlled political "slush fund."

Auditor General William Holland described the governor's Neighborhood Recovery Initiative as "hastily implemented" and said it didn't target some of the most crime-prone neighborhoods in Chicago.

Holland found that Quinn's administration didn't "adequately monitor" how or on whom state grant dollars were spent; community organizations that hired people with those funds weren't maintaining time sheets; and city aldermen dictated where funding was to be steered.

"Our audit of the NRI program found pervasive deficiencies in [the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority's] planning, implementation and management of the NRI program," Holland's audit concluded, referring to the agency Quinn put in charge of running the program.

Republicans seized on Holland's report, calling for a criminal probe by federal investigators and suggesting that some of the findings could rise to the level of impeachable offenses by Quinn.

"There's a whole host of questions that really make one wonder how this could be ethical or legal," said state Sen. Bill Brady, R-Bloomington, who was Quinn's 2010 gubernatorial opponent.

"Clearly, the governor implemented a plan 30 days before the election that was a $50 million slush fund. It smacks of promises made in areas that he needed good turnout to win," Brady told the Chicago Sun-Times.

Brady, a member of the Legislative Audit Commission that later this spring will review Holland's report, said Quinn needs to appear before that body to respond to the auditor general's findings. Brady called for a federal investigation into the program.

Quinn spokesman Grant Klinzman said in a prepared statement that issues Holland raised in Tuesday's report "were resolved more than a year ago," and he defended the program as a proper response to street crimes that were spiraling out of control in the city.