

[Ill. lieutenant gov. has battled with Blagojevich](#)

[JIM SUHR and TAMMY WEBBER](#) | December 10, 2008 06:44 PM EST | 

CHICAGO — Lt. Gov. Patrick Quinn doesn't like Gov. Rod Blagojevich, and the feeling is mutual.

The two haven't spoken in more than a year. Quinn has called Blagojevich "petty and vindictive" for slashing money to the offices of state officials who've disagreed with him. He's pushed for an amendment to allow the recall of constitutional officers, aimed at the governor.

And now, he says Blagojevich _ arrested Tuesday on federal corruption charges _ should step aside or be removed by the courts or lawmakers "for the good of the people."

That would propel Quinn into Illinois' highest office, and most political watchers say it couldn't happen soon enough.

"Is Pat Quinn an improvement over Rod Blagojevich? Of course he is. That's an understatement," said Jay Stewart, executive director of Illinois' Better Government Association. "But we're not talking about succeeding a superstar governor. We're talking about succeeding Rod Blagojevich.

"Anyone who can demonstrate any leadership and govern in a competent fashion is a massive upgrade over what we have now. I'm fully confident Pat Quinn can do that."

Quinn has been known in state political circles for decades _ starting as a reform-pushing gadfly. He helped create the consumer watchdog group Citizens Utility Board in 1983 to challenge the price of electricity and natural gas, and led a successful effort to cut the size of the Illinois House by one-third, to 118 members.

He served a term as state treasurer, from 1991-1995, and unsuccessfully challenged then-Secretary of State George Ryan in 1994. He returned to public office in 2002, as Blagojevich's lieutenant governor, and was re-elected in 2006.

Along the way, he's earned a reputation as a populist with a soft spot for military veterans. He fought for better health coverage, helped start a program to provide money to military families and has attended services for almost all of Illinois' fallen soldiers.

But he's also been seen as a shameless self-promoter _ "the king of the Friday afternoon press conference," perhaps to guarantee headlines on slow news days, said Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois in Springfield.

Redfield suspects that Quinn's crusades against rough-and-tumble Chicago-style politics _ and by extension, Blagojevich _ helped sour their relationship. Quinn essentially has been shunned by the governor but hasn't seemed to mind.

"This was a marriage of convenience," Redfield said. "Really, other than sharing a little bit of rhetoric, their experiences are very different. So they really didn't have a lot to talk about."

During his first term as lieutenant governor, Quinn played down any disagreements with Blagojevich. When he was re-elected, he began speaking out, holding news conferences to publicly bash the governor's one-time proposed \$7.6 billion business tax and accusing the governor of standing by while skyrocketing electric rates hurt working people.

For his part, Blagojevich has not acknowledged disagreements with Quinn, and in a radio interview last year essentially dismissed him, insisting Quinn wasn't part of his administration and saying his reputation as a gadfly was "one of his charming qualities."

But now Quinn is closer than ever to the governor's office. If Blagojevich quits or is forced out, Quinn would be the incumbent in the 2010 statewide elections.

He insisted at a news conference Tuesday that he is ready, saying he's worked "every day for the public interest" and would do the same as governor. His office did not return a phone message Wednesday.

But his effectiveness remains to be seen, Redfield said. Quinn has little executive experience and would inherit a mess _ a \$2 billion hole in the current state budget and an even bigger problem next year, he said.

What's more, Quinn has never been totally embraced by politicians in either party because he has basically stuck to his outsider persona instead of building alliances.

Stewart, from the Better Government Association, said Quinn has ample experience, often as a tell-it-like-it-is, bare-knuckle politician with a bona fide record of reform and a "populist flavor."

"He's certainly an established public identity," said Stewart, Quinn's general counsel in 2003. "He hasn't been talking about these issues in the last year; he's been speaking about government reform and transparency for a long time."

Associated Press Writers Deanna Bellandi in Chicago and Christopher Wills in Springfield contributed to this story.