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Final Edition

**Gov renews vow; Pledges to get Pilgrim Baptist its money after $1 million went to 'wrong place'**

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Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Blagojevich's administration sent $1 million to "the wrong place" last year in a move that failed to live up to his promise to help fire-ravaged Pilgrim Baptist Church rise from the ashes, the governor said Monday.

Blagojevich attributed the $1 million "bureaucratic mix-up" to the work of a couple of ex-staffers and pledged another $1 million --on top of what was erroneously spent -- to help the Bronzeville architectural gem recover from a devastating 2006 fire.

Facing re-election, Blagojevich promised Pilgrim Baptist state cash immediately after its January 2006 blaze to help rebuild part of its destroyed complex. But instead, the $1 million went to a private school last March that is trying to reopen downtown and has no link to Pilgrim Baptist, other than renting church space before the fire, the Chicago Sun-Times reported Monday.

"I woke up this morning to discover . . . the million dollars went to the wrong place; not to the church community, as it was intended to go. And so we're here to make that right," said Blagojevich, who canceled other plans Monday to confront the embarrassing disclosure.

''I'm as frustrated as you are," he told reporters at Pilgrim's satellite worship space at 33rd and Indiana. "I'm angry about those who work for me who allowed this to happen. We've identified a couple of people involved, and they no longer work for us, but I think they made an honest mistake."

Told by the governor the church would get its money, a top Pilgrim Baptist official was happy to see the commitment back on track.

"I don't think the governor really knew. He really didn't know the money went to the wrong place," said Robert Vaughn, who chairs the church's board of trustees. "It was just a great blunder."

Blagojevich aides said the administration doled out money to Loop Lab School under the mistaken impression the private school was part of Pilgrim Baptist, rather than simply a renter, and that the money would be used to rebuild its charred classroom space.

For now, there are no plans to recover the money that was sent to Loop Lab School by mistake "if they haven't done anything improper and if they've fulfilled the terms of the agreement," Blagojevich spokeswoman Abby Ottenhoff said.

The school entered into an agreement with Blagojevich's administration to use the state cash to prepare space at 318 W. Adams for a school, but no classes have been held at the site and there is no firm timetable of when that will happen, said Chandra Gill, the school's director.

The governor's mea culpa drew ridicule from legislative critics who said this demonstrates an administration asleep at the wheel.

"This really takes the cake. Of all the dumb things the governor has done, this one has to be way up there," said Rep. Jack Franks (D-Woodstock), who intends to seek hearings on the matter before a House panel he chairs. "The man has to be stopped."