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## State not paid back quickly for Tiller reception

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Taxpayers were on the hook for more than a year for food and wine from a reception with abortion provider Dr. George Tiller at Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' official residence.

A top Sebelius aide acknowledged Monday the state wasn't reimbursed for \$848 in costs by the Greater Kansas City Women's Political Caucus until May 23. The event at Cedar Crest was April 9, 2007.

The governor's office has said Tiller won the right to have the reception by being the highest bidder at a fundraising auction for the caucus. Sebelius donated her time and the use of the residence, which she sometimes does for groups she supports.

The reimbursement came almost a month after the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue filed an open records request for documents relating to events in March and April 2007 at Cedar Crest. Troy Newman, its president, continued to question the explanations offered by the governor's office.

"She's a liar, and she's being found out," Newman said. "She's having to manufacture evidence to get her story straight."

Sebelius spokeswoman Nicole Corcoran said the delay in the reimbursement occurred because of a turnover of staff in the governor's office. Also, she said, Tiller purchased the right to have the reception in September 2005, a year and seven months before the actual event.

The caucus has an annual fundraising dinner and auction each fall, and a campaign finance report it filed with the state shows a \$2,500 donation at the 2005 dinner from ProKanDo, a political action committee Tiller formed. Photos on the women's caucus Web site show that both Sebelius and Tiller attended the dinner.

Corcoran said Sebelius has a policy of having political groups like the caucus reimburse the state for its costs, but that policy was not followed with the Tiller reception.

She said Sebelius' staff is reviewing all past political events to make sure the policy was followed. It also will have a staff person review future billings to make sure such mistakes do not occur again, she said.

"All we can do in this instance is correct the problem, make sure other political events were properly reimbursed and implement steps to prevent this from occurring in the future," Corcoran said.

Operation Rescue has described the event as a "lavish secret party" for Tiller, the staff of his Wichita clinic and other abortion providers. Tiller is among a few U.S. physicians who perform late-term abortions.

Sebelius is a strong abortion rights supporter who's received national attention for winning two terms as a Democrat in a traditionally Republican state. She's been mentioned as a potential running mate for Barack Obama, the likely Democratic presidential nominee.

At the time of the Cedar Crest reception, Tiller was under investigation by the attorney general's office over allegations that he'd performed illegal late-term abortions. His attorneys have denied all wrongdoing.

Less than three months after the reception, the attorney general's office filed 19 misdemeanors against Tiller in Sedgwick County. The complaint alleges Tiller failed to get a second opinion for some late-term abortions from an independent physician, as required by law.

The reception didn't become public until last week, when Operation Rescue posted 13 photos on its Web site, including two showing Sebelius shaking hands with Tiller. The group said it obtained the photos from someone at the event, whom it won't identify.

"This is all about going back and trying to figure out your story after it's happened," Newman said of Monday's disclosure.

Operation Rescue said the governor's office received its open records request April 29.

The Associated Press filed its own request on May 9. It sought copies of the governor's schedule and the schedule of events at Cedar Crest for the first half of 2007, as well as e-mails between Sebelius and her staff, and Tiller and his staff.

Corcoran said several open records requests led to a closer examination of the reception. The governor's staff then discovered the state hadn't been reimbursed and asked the caucus to do so. The bill was \$761 for food and \$87 for wine.

On the same day the state received a check from the caucus, it replied to Operation Rescue's open records request.

A schedule of events listed the reception - without mentioning Tiller. It contained a note: "(reimbursed by the Greater Kansas City Women's Political Caucus)" That note was not on a schedule later provided to The AP.

Five days after the governor's office answered Operation Rescue's open records request, it posted its photos.

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