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Scandal-Mired Charity to Shell Out $6M

By Alexey Eremenko

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A scandal-mired charity for which Prime Minister Vladimir Putin sang "Blueberry Hill" has promised to donate $6 million in equipment to three hospitals in an effort to end the controversy.

But Vladimir Kiselyov, a former Kremlin official whose ties with Putin apparently convinced the prime minister to sing at a private party in December, stirred more controversy Friday by making nationalist remarks at a news conference meant to smooth matters over.

Kiselyov is a board member of the St. Petersburg-based Federation charity, which staged the party attended by Putin and Hollywood stars like Sharon Stone and Kevin Costner.

A mother of a child with cancer complained to President Dmitry Medvedev earlier this month that the charity had promised to raise funds for ill children but failed to send any money or equipment to hospitals.

Kiselyov released a letter Friday pledging $6 million worth of equipment to three unspecified

hospitals "as a result of the fact that guests, including ... Vladimir Putin, participated in our event," Interfax reported.

Kiselyov's letter did not specify a time frame for shipping the equipment nor explicitly say where the money to acquire the equipment would come from.

But Kiselyov told reporters on Friday that the money was not raised at the December event.

Federation representatives have denied that the private party was a fundraiser, saying it only aimed to raise awareness of ill Russian children. As the controversy grew, they said assistance had been sent to several hospitals, although the hospitals in question said they had received little or no help.

Kiselyov refused to answer several questions at Friday's news conference, including one about a contradictory statement from Federation's press service that directly described the private party as a fundraiser. The question prompted him to take a jab at the nationality of the journalist, Alexandra Garmazhapova, who asked it.

"I don't know which nationality you belong to, but I'm a Russian and I live in this country. I've got no right to criticize my people," he said, according to RIA-Novosti.

Angered by Kiselyov's remarks, several reporters walked out in protest.

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