TOPEKA (AP) — Gov. Kathleen Sebelius undercut her efforts to build her credentials as a moderate problem-solver with a reception last year at her official residence with abortion provider Dr. George Tiller.

Sebelius has gained national attention for winning two terms as a Democratic governor in a traditionally Republican state. National party leaders promote her as someone who governs successfully by bridging political differences, and she’s been mentioned as a potential running mate for Barack Obama, the likely Democratic presidential nominee.

That helped make the April 9, 2007, reception with Tiller noteworthy. Last week, the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue posted photos from the event on its Web site, including one of Sebelius shaking hands with the doctor. Tiller, who operates a Wichita clinic, is one of the few U.S. physicians performing late-term abortions.

Sebelius is a strong abortion rights supporter. But like other politicians with similar views, she’s sometimes downplayed or massaged the issue to keep conservative Democrats and moderate Republicans with her. And Tiller’s business makes many legislators uncomfortable, even if they’re not considered anti-abortion stalwarts.

“I saw the photo, and it made me cringe,” said Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt, an Independence Republican.

It’s difficult to assess the effects of the reception on Sebelius’ standing with voters so soon after disclosure of Tiller’s attendance.

Democrats, even some who oppose abortion, said they weren’t upset, given what they believe is the governor’s well-known stance on abortion. Naturally, some abortion opponents were outraged, though they didn’t need additional evidence to persuade them that state government under Sebelius’ control protects abortion providers.

“I think anyone who would be upset over this is already firmly against her and her abortion policies,” said Burdett Loomis, a University of Kansas political scientist who once served on Sebelius’ staff. “What we are looking at is Sebelius becoming more and more a national figure. As you become a national figure and there’s talk about higher office like vice president, you become more of a target.”

Operation Rescue described the reception as “a lavish secret party” at the residence for Tiller, his clinic’s staff and several other abortion providers.

The governor’s office said Tiller won the right to have a reception at Cedar Crest by being the high bidder at a fundraising auction for the Greater Kansas City Women’s Political Caucus. Sebelius spokeswoman Nicole Corcoran said the governor sometimes donates her time and the use of the residence to groups she supports.

But the women’s caucus advocates the election of women who support abortion rights to public office, and in 2002, it gave Sebelius an award for being “a role model of political accomplishment.”

Also, at the time of the reception, Tiller was under investigation by the attorney general’s office over allegations that he’d performed illegal late-term abortions.

Abortion rights advocates had worked to oust Attorney General Phill Kline, an anti-abortion Republican, from office in 2006, and abortion foes believed the new attorney general wouldn’t be aggressive about prosecuting Tiller.

Less than three months after the reception, the attorney general’s office filed 19 misdemeanors against Tiller in Sedgwick County District Court. Tiller denies wrongdoing, but the complaint alleges that he failed to get a second opinion for some late-term procedures from an independent physician, as required by law.

Some opponents view that still-pending case as weak and, worse for them, unlikely to see Tiller
for them, unlikely to stop Tiller from aborting several hundred pregnancies a year after the 21st week and when the fetus can survive outside the womb.

Three of the 13 pictures Operation Rescue posted show Sebelius holding up a red T-shirt commemorating a “Trifecta 2006” — her re-election that year and the election of a like-minded lieutenant governor and attorney general.

“The fact that she was there — and from the photos, happy to be there — with Tiller does say something about the nature of their relationship,” said Rep. Lance Kinzer, an anti-abortion Olathe Republican.

As a Kansas House member in 1987-94, Sebelius was among its strongest supporters of abortion rights. In 1990, she even voted in favor of a doomed proposal to allow taxpayer-funded abortions.

As governor, she’s repeatedly vetoed legislation sought by anti-abortion groups. Last month, the Roman Catholic Archbishop for northeast Kansas called on Sebelius, who also is Catholic, to refrain from Communion until she repudiates her abortion rights stance and past actions.

But when she ran for governor in 2002, she said she’d seek no changes in Kansas’ current abortion laws. In a message to legislators this year explaining her veto of an anti-abortion bill, she noted that the number of abortions in Kansas has dropped 13 percent since 1999, describing it as a positive development.

For all that, the reception with Tiller suggests where she truly stands on the issue. The question now is whether it makes some voters too uncomfortable to stick with her.

Political Writer John Hanna has covered state government and politics for the Associated Press since 1987.
Hospital auxiliary names scholarship winners for 2008

Each year the William Newton Hospital Auxiliary awards scholarships to high school seniors or college students who are pursuing careers in healthcare fields.

For the 2008-2009 academic year, the committee has selected five applicants to receive $600 scholarships. All five young women have been active in extracurricular activities, campus organizations and sports and have maintained grades in the 3.6-4.0 range.

Two of this year’s recipients also received scholarships in 2007-2008. Students are eligible to receive scholarships for four semesters.

Whitley Spengler has again been awarded the Jean Thornton Nursing Scholarship. Whitley is a freshman at Pittsburg State University where she plans to complete a nursing degree and a master’s degree in clinical research. While at Winfield High School, she served as a Volunteer at William Newton Hospital. Whitley is a daughter of Teri Spengler and Blaine Spengler.

The Jean Thornton Scholarship was established in 1996 in memory of Jean who was a nurse for many years at William Newton Hospital. The scholarship continues to be funded by her family and awarded through the auxiliary. The Thornton scholarship is awarded to a student who plans a nursing career.

The second repeat recipient is Lisa Collar. Lisa is a daughter of James and Lori Jones of Burden and Doug and Tina Collar of Hartford. Lisa graduated from Burden High School and is currently finishing her first year in the dental hygiene program at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park. She will graduate in spring 2009 with an associate of science degree in dental hygiene.

Three Winfield High School seniors have also been awarded auxiliary scholarships. Katlin Jackson, who has been accepted at the University of Kansas, plans to major in health information management. At Winfield High, Katlin was enrolled in the Health Careers program and received her CNA and Home Health Aide License through Cowley County Community College. Katlin is a daughter of Erik and Ellen Olsson.

Also on her way to the University of Kansas is Alex Young who plans to major in physical therapy. Alex also participated in the Health Careers program and completed CNA and HHA qualifications at Cowley College. Alex worked as a Volunteer at William Newton Hospital. She is a daughter of Kim Young and Brad Young.

Megan Legako is the third Winfield senior to receive an auxiliary scholarship. Megan will be majoring in biological science and pre-pharmacy at Oklahoma State University. During her high school career, Megan was active in sports, 4-H and FFA and excelled in Honors Chemistry. She is a daughter of Mike and Jennifer Legako.
Seeliger completes KU Global Awareness Program

LAWRENCE — Ruth Leann Seeliger, Burden, daughter of Michael and Carolyn Seeliger, was among 110 University of Kansas students from 30 departments who completed the Global Awareness Program this spring.

Seeliger graduated with a bachelor of science degree in biology. She is a graduate of Winfield High School.

The Global Awareness Program recognizes students for studying abroad, taking courses with an international focus, learning foreign languages and being involved in international co-curricular activities. All undergraduates are eligible to participate. To receive certification, students are required to complete two of three requirements. This semester, 10 students completed all three requirements.

“Educating students in the context of an interconnected world gives them a much needed advantage as they set out to work in a global economy,” said Jane Irungu, program coordinator.
TOPEKA (AP) — The veep sweeps are in full buzz, and there's increasing chatter surrounding two rising Democratic stars — Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, two potential running mates who could help Barack Obama woo female voters.

Both are well-regarded within national Democratic circles for winning two terms in states that traditionally lean Republican. They're seen as serious contenders for the No. 2 spot because Democrats worry Obama’s presidential-primary victory has alienated supporters of his chief rival, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Democrats in Sebelius' and Napolitano's states have been chattering about their prospects — with trepidation in some cases — though neither governor has said much herself.

"I have an interest in being governor of Arizona," Napolitano said Wednesday. "He'll look, I'm sure, at a number of possibilities. The Democratic bench is a very deep one."

Sebelius was in her Statehouse office Wednesday, interviewing judge candidates and holding meetings. In a statement, she acknowledged she's had regular contacts with Obama's campaign and the candidate himself.

But she said, "There has been no discussion from the Obama campaign with me or anyone else on my team about serving as vice president."

Both governors have downsides, including that each would have a tough time drawing her state into the Democrats' column come November.

Peter Fenn, a Democratic media consultant in Washington, said Obama also would face a natural question from Clinton's supporters if he considers putting Sebelius, Napolitano or another woman on the ticket: "Why didn't you take Hillary?"

Obama's campaign wasn't dropping any hints Wednesday about who his running mate might be. Clinton said in a conference call with her congressional delegation Tuesday that she is "open to it" if it helps Democrats.


Sebelius, 60, and Napolitano, 50, won their first terms as governor in 2002, and there's been buzz about both in party circles ever since.

Sebelius has had a higher profile than Napolitano. She served a year as chairwoman of the Democratic Governors Association — a group Bill Clinton once led — and gave the party's response in January to President Bush's last State of the Union address. She was profiled in the February issue of Vogue and even photographed for it in an Oscar de la Renta dress.

Obama won Kansas' caucuses handily. Sebelius has campaigned for him since then, most notably in Ohio, where her father, John Gilligan, was governor from 1971-75.

Larry Gates, chairman of the Kansas Democratic Party, said Sebelius hasn't been pursuing the vice presidency.

"She's always been extremely interested in completing her term," Gates said. "No one could ever say 'no' to an invitation. She hasn't told me that, but I just think no one in her right mind could say no to that invitation, if offered."

Party leaders have portrayed Sebelius as successful in courting moderate GOP and independent voters, but she has drawn vocal opposition in Kansas over her support for abortion rights.

Last month, the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue posted pictures on its Web site of her shaking hands with Dr. George Tiller, among the few U.S. physicians to perform late-term procedures, at the governor's official residence. The governor's office said Tiller bought the reception at a political group's fundraiser.

The top Roman Catholic prelate for northeast Kansas has urged Sebelius, who also is Catholic, to refrain from taking Communion until she repudiates her support for abortion rights.

Burdeitt Loomis, a University of Kansas political scientist who once advised Sebelius, said she's an attractive candidate for working and low-income women and, because of her background, understands the politics of Rust Belt states.

"On the other hand, she probably can't deliver her own state and has no track record for making the big speech," Loomis said.
 Plenty happened on health care this year

By Senator Derek Schmidt

To hear some folks tell it, you’d think that the 2008 legislature did little on health care. I disagree.

There is no magic bullet answer to the “health care problem” in our state or our country. In fact, there really isn’t even agreement on exactly what a “problem” it is that needs to be solved. For some, the problem is the high cost of prescription drugs. For others, it’s the high cost of health care generally, or the absence of sufficient medical professionals in smaller communities, or the inability to get insurance, or the number of uninsured people who need to costly emergency room care, or the lack of consumer education and healthy lifestyle choices, or any one of dozens of others.

Truth is, all of these things are problems. And all need attention. But there isn’t going to be one package of legislation, or other reforms, that we can vote for and solve them all.

So health care reform has been, and probably will continue to be, a process of incremental changes and improvements. That’s especially true at the state level because so much of the existing health care financing infrastructure - programs such as Medicare and Medicaid - are established by federal law and deal with problems that do not respect state lines.

Against that backdrop, here are the key changes and reforms the 2008 legislature enacted:

1. Gave full and fair consideration to the 21 specific recommendations for reform put forward by the Kansas Health Policy Authority. About one third of those were adopted, some were rejected, and still others were referred for further study and later consideration. One that was enacted that I find particularly good is the expansion of prenatal health care to more low-income women.

2. Debated the proposal to establish and then expand a new state-level health care entitlement program, called “premium assistance” to help pay for insurance for some uninsured Kansans. It was a good debate, but ultimately the projected cost estimated at more than $100 million per year was more than a majority of us were willing to commit. We rejected this proposal as getting too little “bang for the buck.” The idea will be studied in more detail this summer and fall to see if there is a way to improve it.

3. Instead of creating a new state-level entitlement program, we expanded eligibility for the existing federal State Children’s Health Insurance Program, which helps provide health insurance to low-income families with children. More than 8,000 more Kansas kids will be able to get health coverage under this approach, but the cost is spread across the nation rather than being borne entirely by Kansas taxpayers. That’s a lot of “bang for the buck” for Kansans.

4. Provided incentives for more employers to provide health savings accounts to their employees.

5. Strengthened the ability of people who lose their jobs to get COBRA coverage while they are between jobs.

6. Overhauled the state Board of Healing Arts to improve the regulation and oversight of the health care profession in Kansas. This was prompted by concerns from several specific instances, including a high profile case in Wichita, where the board’s approach to regulating health care fell short of protecting the public.

Another key focus this year was strengthening the health care infrastructure in our state. In our rural communities, it’s increasingly difficult to get doctors, dentists, pharmacists and other health care professionals. To that end, we funded expansion of the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy in order to train more pharmacists, some of whom will serve rural communities where their skills are particularly needed. We also increased funding for the Wichita Center for Graduate Medical Education, which trains many of the rural doctors in Kansas, with the same, goals in mind. The Senate also approved legislation to help train more dentists, but that measure did not win approval in the House of Representatives.

We provided more funds this year to help our low-income safety net clinics reach out to help more Kansans. The safety net clinics are important medical assets in many of our communities, and they provide health care to many Kansans who otherwise would not receive it.

On the whole, I think it was a pretty good year for health care.
care reform in Kansas. Some of the ideas proposed but not approved, such as a statewide ban on smoking in public places, no doubt will return to the agenda in coming years. And there will be new ideas put forward as well.

That’s as it should be. We’ll keep listening to folks back home, trying to sort through the various problems in our health care system, and taking action where we can to try to improve the situation. Thanks for all your suggestions and input. Keep it coming!

As always, I appreciate knowing what’s on your mind. The best way to reach me is through my Topeka office at the State Capitol, Room 390-E, Topeka, Kansas 66612 or by phone at (785) 296-2497. You also can e-mail me through my Website at www.DerekSchmidt.com.
Janae Lynn Maher received her Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Kansas School of Medicine at the Hooding and Awards Ceremony held Saturday, May 17, in Lawrence. Dr. Maher is the wife of Ryan Maher and daughter of Philip and Karen Jarred of Chanute. Her grandparents are Dorrall and Vaughn De Lee Jarred and Jack and Anna Mae Works, all of Humboldt.

She was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha, a national honor medical society, her junior year. She was also the recipient of the Merck Manual Award for Academic Achievement presented to a graduating senior from the Wichita campus for superior academic performance.

She will be residing in Temple, TX, with her husband where she will complete her residency training in plastic surgery at the Texas A&M-Scott & White program.
Johnson County to seek tax for research triangle

By The Associated Press

OLATHE — Johnson County voters will be asked to approve a sales tax increase to finance projects designed to enhance the Kansas City area's efforts to become a leader in life sciences.

The Johnson County Commission voted Thursday to put an eighth-cent sales tax on the November ballot. If approved, it would raise an estimated $15 million every year.

The tax would last forever. It would leverage state and federal dollars into a $1.4 billion economic boost in Johnson County in the next two decades, according to the County Economic Research Institute.

Revenue from the tax would be divided among three campuses in the Johnson County Education Research Triangle:

- The University of Kansas Edwards Campus in south Overland Park, where the university would build a 75,000-square-foot Business, Engineering and Technology Center. The center would offer 10 new degree programs and add 1,000 students a year.
- The KU Clinical Research Center in the Fairway Office Park, which would help the university's efforts to become a national cancer center.
- Kansas State University's Olathe Innovation Campus, where the first initiative would be a National Food and Animal Health Institute.

The commission approved the ballot measure 6-1, although some expressed concern that the tax would not expire and wondered why local taxpayers should provide what was once a state responsibility.
Topeka readies for its closeup

French film crew plans documentary about election, life in ‘typical’ city

By Jan Biles
THE CAPITAL-JOURNAL

A French film crew is coming to Topeka to document the presidential election as seen through the eyes of small-town Americans.

Jill Towsley, who grew up in Topeka and is assistant director and co-author for the project, said the film crew is working with France 5, a government-run public television network, and is under the direction of Serge Moati, a respected political analyst who formerly served as public relations manager for French president Francois Mitterrand.

The film crew — two camera operators, a sound engineer, Moati and Towsley — will arrive in Topeka on June 28 and return to Paris on July 7. In addition to talking to individuals and families, the documentarians hope to attend the Independence Day parade in the Collins Park neighborhood in Topeka and a Republican Party rally on July 4 in Wamego.

“The climax is the Fourth of July. It’s an important election year, and it makes people think about their country,” Towsley said. “We really have no agenda. We want to know what Topekans think.”

Towsley, a graduate of Topeka West High School, the University of Kansas and the Sorbonne in Paris, has worked for Image et Compagnie — Moati’s company — since September 2006. She said she often has talked to co-workers about doing a documentary about Topeka.

While the film crew could have chosen to travel to large cities in New York, California or Texas to do the project, she said that wouldn’t have given “a true picture of typical” United States.

Towsley said the French citizenry is interested in the U.S. presidential election because there is no incumbent and the next commander in chief will have a “huge impact on what happens in the rest of the world.”

“The rest of the world is watching,” she said.

Towsley said the documentary won’t be televised in the United States but will be shown in France before the presidential election in conjunction with other documentaries about the United States. The subjects of the other films include Hillary and Bill Clinton; people who live in the abandoned subway tunnels in New York City; and the families and soldiers of the Big Red One after the troops have returned from Iraq to Fort Riley.

Jan Biles can be reached at (785) 205-1292 or jan.biles@cjonline.com.
The University of Kansas hosted a state recognition program at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, June 1, at the Lied Center for about 400 academically talented seventh-grade students selected for the 2008 Duke University Talent Identification Program.

Each Duke TIP student receives a medallion. The state recognition ceremonies honor seventh graders who have earned scores above the average scores of college-bound high school seniors. Of more than 74,000 applicants this year, 21,115 students qualified and have been invited to state recognition events, including 876 students being recognized at KU.

The Duke program is in its 28th year, and this is the 10th year KU has hosted the Kansas recognition program. In addition to Kansans, additional students taking part in the activities are Missouri residents from the Kansas City metropolitan area or towns near the Kansas-Missouri state line. Information tables to answer students' and parents' questions about various KU programs and activities will be available in the Lied Center Lobby during the recognition event.

Local Haysville students selected for this honor were Brady M. Byers and Chalon Roberts.
Greensburg project draws national honor

An arts center in Greensburg designed and built by University of Kansas architecture students is the first structure in the state certified as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum, an environmental designation.

The U.S. Green Building Council certified the 5-4-7 Arts Center, named for the May 4, 2007, tornado that leveled much of Greensburg, at the highest level of green building.

Students in the Studio 804 class at KU earned the certification through the use of wind turbines, photovoltaic panels, geothermal climate control, recycled building materials and other environmentally friendly features.

There are 66 other buildings in the country certified as LEED Platinum.