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## Latest reason for new carpet: Duct tape

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The new boss of the state office that oversees disaster rebuilding in Iowa responded Monday to intense questioning from lawmakers and offered a new reason for the office needing \$19,000 in fresh carpeting.

The replacement of carpet in a building in Des Moines that's slated to be torn down wasn't because of a redecorating request from the lieutenant governor, environmental concerns over a crime lab that occupied the space earlier or mold - all reasons Rebuild Iowa officials have cited previously.

It was duct tape.

Last Wednesday, Rebuild Iowa's chief of staff, Emily Hajek, told lawmakers new carpet was installed because "the lieutenant governor asked that it be replaced."

The next day, after Hajek's question-and-answer session led to a firestorm of new questions from Republican lawmakers, Gov. Chet Culver chose someone else to run the day-to-day operations at the Rebuild Iowa Office.

Gen. Ron Dardis, who formerly ran Iowa's National Guard, is now in charge.

Culver refused to directly answer questions Monday about whether he was dissatisfied with Hajek's presentation. He said simply: "We have a new leader at the RIO office."

On Monday, Dardis tried his best to answer lawmakers' questions, including about the carpeting, \$11,000 in projected cell phone expenses and the \$210,000 budget for communications staff's salaries.

Hajek wasn't at the meeting, which some Republican lawmakers said was troubling.

"If transparency is our goal," said Rep. Jeff Kaufmann, a Republican from Wilton, "why didn't they put the person there who made the decisions?"

As for the carpeting, Dardis said he hadn't seen any reports citing environmental concerns or mold for that area of the Wallace State Office building, which was previously used by the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation.

"It was old. It was 30 years old. It was torn and had duct tape in places," Dardis said.

Hajek last week gave lawmakers a chart that showed six Rebuild Iowa workers would be paid between \$100,876 and \$121,888.

Dardis explained Monday that those numbers were simply estimates that included benefits and possible overtime.

The projections were "on the high side for flexibility," he said.

As for the projected budget, which showed \$11,000 for staff cell phones, Dardis said those numbers

are still "fluid."

Regarding the staff hiring, it was Hajek who sat in on all the interviews, Dardis said, but the people were selected because of their expertise.

Two former Culver campaign employees got jobs with the Rebuild Iowa Office: Hajek, who was Culver's finance director; and campaign staffer Carissa Swanstrom. Campaign volunteer Ann Poe also now works for Rebuild Iowa.

Republican Rep. Christopher Rants of Sioux City had complained about the special Rebuild Iowa sugar cookies that were consumed at a bill-signing ceremony. Rebuild Iowa spokeswoman Tina Potthoff explained that they were baked at home and donated by an office employee. There was no charge to taxpayers, she said.

Potthoff said the Rebuild Iowa Office is saving taxpayers \$6,600 a month by occupying space at the Wallace Building, where it is charged \$1,900 a month within state government. It had been renting private office space in Urbandale for \$8,500 a month.

A Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Geri Huser of Altoona, expressed frustration with the transparency of Rebuild Iowa's efforts, saying she's been asking since the first week of the session about \$1.4 billion in taxpayers' money.

**Staff writer William Petroski contributed to this report.**

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