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## Rossi denies ties to questioned fundraising

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OLYMPIA, Wash. -- Republican gubernatorial candidate Dino Rossi on Tuesday rejected liberal activists' attempts to tie him to a building industry fundraising effort that's being sued by the state over bookkeeping violations.

Legal activist Knoll Lowney and other liberal interests on Tuesday implied that Rossi was tainted because of possible involvement in the Building Industry Association of Washington's 2008 political fundraising efforts.

Rossi, a Republican former state senator, is challenging Democratic Gov. Chris Gregoire, who beat him by just 133 votes in 2004 after three vote tallies and an unsuccessful Republican court challenge.

Documents Lowney gleaned from a lawsuit against building industry groups showed that Rossi called officers from the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties in early 2007, while they were considering whether to donate money to the BIAW's political fund.

That fund was meant largely for the 2008 gubernatorial campaign, in which the BIAW hoped to support Rossi, the documents said. Rossi had not declared his candidacy at the time.

On Tuesday, Rossi told The Associated Press that he called the county builders officials simply to smooth over a dispute about political cooperation between the King and Snohomish group and the statewide BIAW.

The schism included fundraising, campaigning and lobbying efforts, Rossi said, but he denied ever talking to the county builders about specifics regarding political spending.

"They weren't happy with each other, and what they did beyond that was up to them," Rossi told The AP. "I never talked money or anything like that with them - the specifics of, 'You've got to put 200 grand in this account or that account.'"

King and Snohomish Master Builders Association officials also disputed the liberal activists' allegations, saying Rossi and the group did not discuss fundraising as alleged.

Asked to clarify, spokeswoman Allison Butcher said she believed Rossi "discussed his prospective candidacy, not fundraising." A subsequent AP request to speak with the three officials in question went unanswered.

Attorney General Rob McKenna sued the King and Snohomish group and a BIAW subsidiary earlier this month. The suit followed findings by state campaign finance regulators that the two groups failed to properly report their roles in directing political donations.

The state Public Disclosure Commission said the BIAW subsidiary, Member Services Corp., was improperly concealing its role in bundling about \$585,000 in workers compensation refunds for donation to the BIAW's political arm.

The PDC also said the King and Snohomish Master Builders received and spent about \$412,000 on polls, campaign contributions and political research without reporting the money's source.