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Deborah Tyroler

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Guatemala: U.S. Stops Payment On Health Assistance Program

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 20, Guatemalan Deputy Carlos Gonzalez, member of the chamber's Health Committee, said that the US Agency for International Development suspended payment last week on a health assistance program because some of the money is missing. AID spokespersons said suspension of the \$16.4 million is "temporary." To the present, the Guatemalan Health Ministry has used 45% of the funds. A portion of the monies was to be used for a vaccination campaign scheduled to begin in April. US embassy spokesperson John Treacy confirmed suspension in payment on March 21. He said a routine audit turned up "evidence of possible misappropriation" of some \$65,000, and that the evidence had been turned over to the Guatemalan health and justice ministries for investigation, he said. Treacy said half the aid package is handled by USAID. Guatemalan Health Minister Carlos Gehlert acknowledged on March 22 that the aid had been poorly administered, but denied his government had anything to do with it. Later, Treacy rejected Gehlert's statement that many AID funds escaped government control in Guatemala. (Basic data from Notimex, 03/20/90; Xinhua, 03/21/90; AFP, 03/22/90)

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