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Senator may be investigated

SALEM (AP) — A decision on whether to proceed with a formal investigation of sexual harassment complaints by two former aides to State Sen. Rod Johnson likely will be made "within days," Sen. Tricia Smith said.

Smith, D-Salem, is chairwoman of the new Committee on Sexual Harassment, to which both complaints were referred. The panel was created by the Senate to look into complaints about conduct of senators, Senate employees or lobbyists.

Johnson, R-Roseburg, said Friday that he was bewildered and shattered by the accusations made by former legislative assistant Michelle Mitchell.

Johnson said he had been unaware of the second complaint and declined immediate comment. The 39-year-old attorney said he would schedule a news conference for early next week in Salem to more fully respond to the charges.

Mitchell, 25, who filed her complaint with the Senate president's office, quit her job with Johnson March 16 and now works as a page in the House.

Meanwhile, a second woman, also a former aide who was transferred to another legislative job on March 17, filed her complaint directly with the comWe're going to move as swiftly as possible through this whole process.'

— Sen. Tricia Smith, chairwoman of the Committee on Sexual Harassment

mittee. The woman's name and the nature of her complaint was kept confidential, Smith said.

Smith said the panel will meet Monday to adopt procedural rules and begin a preliminary investigation. Smith said she will recommend to Senate President Bill Bradbury, D-Bandon, that an independent investigator be hired to do the initial fact-finding.

After an investigators' report is made, she said, it would be up to either party in the matter to decide whether to proceed to a formal investigation.

"We're going to move as swiftly as possible through this whole process," Smith said.

Tainted restaurant closes down grill

GRANTS PASS (AP) — A Sizzler restaurant where five people ate before becoming ill with a bacterial infection was closed by the company, despite clearance from health officials to stay open.

All five who reported feeling sick after eating at the Sizzler March 13 and 14, were infected with the E. coli bacteria, Gwen Bowman, administrator of the Josephine County Health Department, said Friday.

The restaurant was closely inspected last Thursday night as state and county health officials investigated a possible cause, then allowed to remain open.

"We didn't have any information indicating that it was anything other than a transient problem, lasting only those two days," said Dr. William Keene, epidemiologist with the Oregon Health Division.

Sizzler International Inc., however, decided Friday night to close the restaurant until executives could review operations.

Dick Bermingham, chief executive officer of the Los Angelesbased company, and several other company executives were en route to Grants Pass Friday night.

"It appears that this was an isolated incident, and there is not any conclusive evidence linking the Grants Pass Sizzler to this occurrence," the company said in a news release.

Four of the confirmed victims were hospitalized, but all have been released.

Bowman said several more suspected victims have been hospitalized, although it hasn't been confirmed they had the E. coli bacteria.

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