Probe: Bogus enrollees kept getting 'Obamacare'

By RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Phony applicants that investigators signed up last year under President Barack Obama's health care law got automatically re-enrolled for 2015. Some were rewarded with even bigger taxpayer subsidies for their insurance premiums, a congressional probe has found.

The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office says 11 counterfeit characters that its investigators created last year were automatically re-enrolled by HealthCare.gov, even though most had unresolved documentation issues. In Obama's terms, they got to keep the coverage they had.

Six of those later were flagged and sent termination notices. But GAO said it was able to get five of them reinstated by calling HealthCare.gov's consumer service center. That seemed to be a weak link in the system.

The five bogus beneficiaries who were reinstated even got their monthly subsidies bumped up a bit, although GAO did not ask for it. The case of the sixth fake enrollee who appealed was under review.

HealthCare.gov does not appear to be set up to detect fraud, GAO audits and investigations chief Seto Bagdoyan said in prepared testimony for a Senate Finance Committee hearing Thursday. A copy was provided to The Associated Press.

HealthCare.gov's document-processing contractor "is not required to seek to detect fraud," said Bagdoyan. "The contractor personnel involved in the document-verification process are not trained as fraud experts and do not perform antifraud duties."

Administration officials told GAO there has been "no indication of a meaningful level of fraud" in the program, Bagdoyan said.

Federal health care subsidies go directly to insurers, so the money does not end up in the bank accounts of individual enrollees. But health insurance is a valuable product in and of itself, with the cost of family coverage averaging close to $17,000 a year.

Finance Committee chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said the GAO's investigation reveals "negligence" by the Obama administration, which "calls into question the legitimacy of the health law's enrollment numbers and challenges the integrity of the website's security checks."

AP Photo/Don Ryan, File

This Nov. 2014 file photo shows the HealthCare.gov website, where people can buy health insurance.

Last year, when GAO first disclosed that it had succeeded in signing up fake beneficiaries, the administration said it would work to strengthen HealthCare.gov's verification checks. Administration officials had no initial comment Wednesday on GAO's latest findings.

HealthCare.gov is an online insurance marketplace used by residents of 37 states to get subsidized private coverage under the health care law.

Although the administration has terminated coverage for more than 200,000 people who could not prove their citizenship or legal immigrant status, and some 300,000 have had their subsidies changed because of discrepancies over reported income, GAO's bogus beneficiaries largely evaded that dragnet.

It's unclear whether the fictitious enrollees would have been kicked out of the program eventually. For example, no tax returns were filed on behalf of any of them. Since health insurance subsidies are income-based, tax returns are one of the main ways the government checks applicants.

GAO's investigation also uncovered a problem that bedevils millions of real people dealing with the program's new bureaucracy: confusing and inaccurate communication.

Investigators said their bogus enrollees received unclear correspondence that failed to identify the problems with their applications.

"Rather than stating a message directly, correspondence instead was conditional or nonspecific, stating the applicant may be affected by something, and then leaving it to the applicant to parse through details to see if they were indeed affected," said Bagdoyan.

The fake enrollees also got some perplexing instructions from HealthCare.gov. Eight of the 11 were asked to submit additional documentation to prove their citizenship and identity. But the list of suitable paperwork detailed documents for verifying income instead.

The 11 bogus beneficiaries were part of a larger group of 18 that GAO tried to sign up last year. They're the ones who got through and were automatically re-enrolled for 2015.

Overall, about 10 million people are getting coverage this year through HealthCare.gov and state health insurance markets. GAO said the results of its undercover testing, while illustrative, cannot be generalized to the full population of applicants and enrollees.

PUBLIC SAFETY LOG

TUESDAY

•An Echo caller at 9:12 a.m. reported vehicles "always blow the stop sign" next to her house on West Bridge Street. The caller also identified a driver who lives nearby as one culprit, and she said she would like to sign a complaint.

•Frightened campers at 9:51 a.m. asked the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office for help. A woman said neighboring campers threatened to shoot her and her friend and to hang her son's dog. She said they were camping at the North Fork Umatilla River and South Fork Umatilla River, and they would wait for a sheriff's deputy at Cayuse and North Cayuse roads.

•A man at 10:39 a.m. reported the theft of sprinkler heads from his farm land at Appleton Road and Highway 11, Milton-Freewater.

•If you see a white sedan with tinted windows and a black pinstripe, you might want to call police. A caller at 12:46 p.m. said the car was near the Pendleton Family Aquatic Center, 1901 N.W. Carden Ave., Pendleton, and a male driver inside was pleasuring himself. She said he left and headed eastbound on Carden; police were not able to find the car.

•A woman at 2 p.m. asked the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office to send someone to check on her friend in the Hermiston area who told her little people were in her house and took keys and broke the dishwasher.

•An employee of the accounting firm Read & Bose, 215 S.E. Dorion Ave., Pendleton, called police at 2:46 p.m. about a male in a car the business' parking lot. He did not have permission to be there, the employee said, and he was using binoculars to look at the hotel next door.

•A Pilot Rock man at 4:50 p.m. told Pendleton police he lost his Smith & Wesson EG 380 Bodyguard semiautomatic pistol in the parking lot of the Wal-Mart Supercenter, 2203 S.W. Court Ave., Pendleton.

•An employee of Rent-A-Center, Hermiston, asked for a Umatilla County sheriff's deputy at about 5:35 p.m. to force someone on North Ott Road to open their residence so he could repossess items. The sheriff's office considered this a civil problem.

•A man returning from firefighting called Stanfield police at 11:46 p.m. after his father kicked him out for refusing to buy alcohol. The firefighter asked for help and said he lived there all his life and has no where else to go.

•An Irrigon resident at 11:58 p.m. reported a drunk driver was on her yard on Southeast Fourth Street and had hit the neighbor's car. There was no indication of an arrest or citation.

ARRESTS, CITATIONS

•Pendleton police arrested Tyson Allen Wallace, 34, of 71485 Schroeder Road, Pendleton, for possession of methamphetamine.

OBITUARY POLICY

The East Oregonian publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge.

Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services.

Obituaries and notices can be submitted online at www.eastoregonian.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@eastoregonian.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the East Oregonian office.

For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, ext. 221.

DEATH NOTICES

Ronald Lee Rupe

Hermiston
Oct. 13, 1940-July 14, 2015

Ronald Lee Rupe, 74, of Hermiston died Tuesday, July 14, 2015, at his home. He was born Oct. 13, 1940, in Grand Junction, Colo. Burns Mortuary of Hermiston is in care of arrangements. Sign the online guest book at burnsmortuaryhermiston.com

UPCOMING SERVICES

THURSDAY, JULY 16

MCCOARD, MILLER — Graveside service with military honors at 10 a.m. at the Echo Cemetery.

ROBERTS, GAVIN — Private family visitation from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and visitation for friends from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Burns Mortuary, 685 W. Hermiston Ave., Hermiston.

FRIDAY, JULY 17

CULP, CARSYN — Celebration of life at 10 a.m. in the chapel at Burns Mortuary, 685 W. Hermiston Ave., Hermiston.

KELLY, BOB — Military funeral at 3 p.m. at Willamette National Cemetery, Portland.

ROBERTS, GAVIN — Visitation from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Burns Mortuary, 685 W. Hermiston Ave., Hermiston.

STEINER, RALPH — Graveside service at 10 a.m. at Olney Cemetery, Pendleton.

COMING EVENTS

THURSDAY, JULY 16

WALKING FOR WELLNESS, 8:30-9:30 a.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave. (541-276-8100).

PRESCHOOL STORY AND CRAFT TIME, 10:30 a.m., Milton-Freewater Public Library, 8 S.W. Eighth Ave., Milton-Freewater. (Lili Schmidt 541-938-8247).

BOARDMAN SENIOR MEAL SERVICE, 12 noon, Boardman Senior Center, 100 Tatone St., Boardman. Costs $4 for seniors 55 and older and $5 for adults. (541-481-3257).

HERMISTON SENIOR MEAL SERVICE, 12 noon, Hermiston Senior Center, 435 W. Orchard Ave. Costs $4 for adults, children over 10 and Meals on Wheels home delivery; free for children under 10. Extra 50 cents if center provides table service or dishes. Transportation can be arranged by donation. (541-567-3582).

PENDLETON SENIOR MEAL SERVICE, 12 noon, Pendleton Senior Center, 510 S.W. 10th St. Costs $3.50 for seniors, $6 for those under 60. Includes pool, puzzles, crafts, snacks, Second Time Around thrift store 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For Meals On Wheels call CAPECO at 541-276-1926. (541-276-7101).

SEAHAWKS 12TH MAN FLAG CEREMONY, 12 noon gates open, 12:30 ceremony begins, Pendleton Round-Up Grounds, 1205 S.W. Court Ave. Celebrate the Seahawks with the raising of the 12th Man flag with wide receivers Ricardo Lockette and B.J. Daniels, the Sea Gals and the Blue Thunder Band.

SKILLS FOR LIFE, 3-5 p.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave. Includes gym activities and life skills for middle and high school students. Free, but registration requested. (Danny Bane 541-379-4250).

MAKERSPACE, 4-5 p.m., Pendleton Public Library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave. Children ages 3 and up create, design and experiment with a variety of tools, STEM challenges and educational games.

GIRL POWER: LADY HEROES OF HISTORY, 4 p.m., Pendleton Public Library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave. For ages 3-12. Come dressed as your favorite hero and learn about wicked awesome ladies of history. Prize drawing for lady scientist LEGO kit and one Goldie Blocks set. Free, but registration required. (541-966-0380).

THE ARC UMATILLA COUNTY BINGO, 6 p.m. doors open, bingo starts at 7 p.m. 215 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston. (541-567-7615).

REVISED FOREST PLAN PUBLIC WORKSHOP, 6-9 p.m., Ukiah School gymnasium, 201 Hill St. Representatives from the Umatilla National Forest and High Desert Partnership will discuss forest access and how it should be addressed in the Revised Forest Plan. (Jack Southworth 541-542-2558, Peter Fargo 541-523-1231 or Joani Bosworth 541-278-3722).

FIDDLER'S NIGHT, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Hermiston Terrace Assisted Living, 980 W. Highland Ave. Join jam session or just listen. Refreshments served. (541-567-3141).

FIRST DRAFT WRITERS' SERIES, 7 p.m., Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St., Pendleton. Gathering features readings by Ki Russell and Shaindel Beers; participants can sign up for open mic time of 3-5 minutes. (541-278-9201).

EO file photo

There will be a goathead roundup Saturday at Olney Cemetery in Pendleton from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Bring a grocery bag full of puncture vine (goathads) with the roots and receive $1 per bag

FRIDAY, JULY 17

WALKING FOR WELLNESS, 8:30-9:30 a.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave. (541-276-8100).

BOARDMAN SPLASH PAD GRAND OPENING AND RIBBON CUTTING, 10 a.m., N.E. Front St., Boardman. New splash pad will be dedicated and snow cones will be served.

HEPPNER FARMER'S MARKET, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Heppner City Park. Food, craft and garden vendors. (541-676-8957).

STORY TIME, 10:15-11 a.m., Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave. (541-567-2882).

TODDLER STORY TIME, 10:15-10:45 a.m., Pendleton Public Library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave. (541-966-0380).

PENDLETON FARMERS MARKET, 4 p.m. to dusk, 300 block South Main Street, Pendleton. Browse fresh produce, meats, baked goods and plants, locally crafted jewelry and items for the home. EBT, debit and credit cards welcome. (pendletonfarmersmarket.net).

NIGHT AT THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM, 5-8:30 p.m., Children's Museum of Eastern Oregon, 400 S. Main St., Pendleton. Parents get a night out and kids get dinner, games, crafts and a movie. Costs $20 members/$25 non-members, $10 for each additional child. Preregistration required. (541-276-1066).

GOSPEL CONCERT, 7 p.m., Columbia View Community Church, 1230 E. Highway 730, Irrigon. Chrysta and Brandon Beene will perform. Free, but a free-will offering will be taken. (Marilyn 541-922-3319).

MUSIC IN THE PARK, 7-9 p.m., McKenzie Park, 320 S. First St., Hermiston. Featured performer: Brass Fire Band. Bring a chair or blanket.

MOVIES IN THE PARK, 8:30 p.m. (dusk), Bard Park, Stanfield. Enjoy a family-friendly movie for free. Bring lawn chairs or a blanket.

SATURDAY, JULY 18

GREENFIELD GRANGE BREAKFAST, 7-10 a.m., 209 N.W. First St., Boardman. Cost is $5 for adults, $2.50 for children under 10. (541-720-7267).

GOATHEAD ROUNDUP, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Olney Cemetery, 865 Tutuilla Road, Pendleton. Bring a grocery bag full of puncture vine (goatheads) WITH the roots and receive $1 per bag. (Sue Petersen 541-377-0752).

HERMISTON'S OWN FARMERS MARKET, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., McKenzie Park, 300 S. First St., Hermiston. Food, crafts, live music, art.

RHYTHMIC MODE CAR WASH FUNDRAISER, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Dave's Chevron, 220 S.W. 12th St., Pendleton. Cost is by donation. (Joni 541-377-1333).

KIDS' ART IN THE PARK, 9 a.m. to noon, McKenzie Park, 320 S. First St., Hermiston. Free kids' art activities for ages 6-17. All supplies provided, drop in, make it and take it home.

LINE DANCING WORKSHOP, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St. Learn several dances, musical genres and rhythms including waltz, cha-cha, swing and salsa. One-hour break for lunch; bring your own or submit to-go orders through the center. Cost is $25 if registered by July 10, $30 at the door. Water will be provided, drinks and other items will be available for purchase. All ability levels welcome, partner not necessary. (541-278-9201).

FREE FOR ALL, 9:30-10:15 a.m. Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St., Pendleton. Family art experience for children up to age 12. Children under 8 should be accompanied by an adult. (541-278-9201).

LIVING CULTURE VILLAGE AT TAMASTSLIKT, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tamastslikt Cultural Institute, 47106 Wildhorse Blvd., Mission. View replicas of traditional and prehistoric Plateau Indian people and participate in cultural activities. Free with admission. (541-429-7700).

"ROBBERS, REPROBATES AND THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT" WALKING TOUR, 10:30 a.m., beginning at MaySon's Old Fashioned General Store, 369 S. Main St., Pendleton. Learn about Pendleton's 18 bordellos and 32 saloons in a four-block area of downtown. Cost is $5 for adults, $4 for children under 12. Tour takes about an hour. (541-276-8206).

FROM BRANCH TO BOTTLE TOUR, 11 a.m., Blue Mountain Cider Company, 235 E. Broadway Ave., Milton-Freewater. Follow cider from crush to fermentation and bottling. Adults may sample ciders at the end of the tour. Costs $10 for adults, free for children and students, registration required. (www.bmlt.org/from-branch-to-bottle.html)

HIP & HANDMADE, 11 a.m. to noon, Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St., Pendleton. Free drop-in art project class for adults. (541-278-9201).

PEPSI PRIMETIME: ALCATRAZ OCCUPATION, 1-3 p.m., Tamastslikt Cultural Institute, 47106 Wildhorse Blvd., Pendleton. Documentary about the 35th anniversary of the Native occupation of Alcatraz Island will be followed by discussion and complimentary refreshments. Free. (www.tamastslikt.org).

STRAIGHT TALK WITH BECKY MARKS, 2-4 p.m., Prodigal Son Pub & Brewery, 230 E. Court Ave., Pendleton. Share thoughts with Ward 1 councilwoman. (541-276-9147).

MOVIES IN THE PARK, 8-10 p.m., Community Park, 1000 S.W. 37th St., Pendleton. Family-friendly movie and concessions. All ages; free.

SUNDAY, JULY 19

MARCIA WHITEHEAD WORSHIP PRESENTATION, 11 a.m., First United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston. Multi-media presentation incorporates story, film and song. Free, but a free-will offering will be taken. Everyone welcome. (541-567-3002).

KBLU-FM CITIZENS ADVISORY GROUP, 3 p.m., Bowman Building Suite 352, 17 S.W. Frazer Ave., Pendleton. Share ideas on format of Pendleton area's newest radio station. (Vicki 541-566-2744 or Gary 541-566-0131).

MUSIC IN THE PARK, 5-7 p.m., Heppner City Park, 444 N. Main St. Tailgate Trio is the featured performer. Bring blanket, lawn chairs and a picnic. In case of inclement weather the concert will move to the Heppner Elementary School gym, 235 E. Stansbury. Free.

ADULT OPEN GYM, 7-9 p.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave. Free access for ages 16 and up. (541-276-8100).

LOTTERY

Tuesday, July 14

Mega Millions
19-24-30-35-72
Mega Ball: 5
Megaplier: 3
Estimated jackpot: $123 million

Lucky Lines
03-05-12-14-FREE-18-23-25-32
Estimated jackpot: $36,000

Pick 4
1 p.m.: 5-1-6-6
4 p.m.: 5-2-0-5
7 p.m.: 4-1-9-3
10 p.m.: 6-8-0-7

Wednesday, July 15

Pick 4
1 p.m.: 9-6-4-2

MEETINGS

THURSDAY, JULY 16

HERMISTON IRRIGATION DISTRICT, 4:30 p.m., district office conference room, 366 E. Hurlburt Ave.

UMATILLA COUNTY SPECIAL LIBRARY DISTRICT, 5:15 p.m., Pendleton City Hall second floor jury room, 501 S.W. Emigrant Ave.

EASTERN OREGON REGIONAL AIRPORT COMMISSION, 6 p.m., airport terminal/administration building, 2016 Airport Road, Pendleton.

PENDLETON PLANNING COMMISSION, 7 p.m., Pendleton City Hall council chambers, 501 S.W. Emigrant Ave.

ECHO CITY COUNCIL, 7:30 p.m., 20 S. Bonanza St.

FRIDAY, JULY 17

No meetings scheduled

MONDAY, JULY 20

WEST EXTENSION IRRIGATION DISTRICT, 9 a.m., Irrigon Fire Department, 705 N.E. Main St. (541-922-3814).

WESTLAND IRRIGATION DISTRICT, 1 p.m., district office, 77096 Highway 207, Echo.

ECHO SCHOOL DISTRICT, 6 p.m., Echo School, 600 Gerone St.

UMATILLA-MORROW HEAD START, 6:30-8:30 p.m., 110 N.E. Fourth St., Hermiston. (Leanna 541-564-6878).

PENDLETON YOUTH COMMISSION, 7 p.m., Intermountain ESD office, 2001 S.W. Nye Ave.

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TRAINWRECK (R-17)
MINIONS (PG)
SELF/LESS (PG-13)
TERMINATOR: GENISYS (PG-13)
MAGIC MIKE XXL (R-17)
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Check ONLINE for more information!

WILDHORSE RESORT & CASINO
7/16
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$5 Classic Movie
7/22 12:00 PM
SHADOW OF A DOUBT
MINIONS (PG)
2D: 4:30 9:30
3D: 6:40
JURASSIC WORLD (PG13)
2D: 4:20 7:10 9:50
TERMINATOR GENISYS (PG13)
2D: 6:50
3D: 4:00 9:40
INSIDE OUT (PG)
2D: 4:40
ANT MAN (PG13)
2D: 7:00
3D: 10:00
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