

Complaints to government waste hotline at five-year high

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Secretary of State's Office is on track to receive more complaints this year to the government waste, fraud and abuse hotline than in any of the previous five years.

As of Nov. 10, the agency had received 235 complaints, according to audit manager V. Dale Bond at the Secretary of State's Audits Division. Employees still have to go back to remove any duplicate complaints, but the highest number of complaints in the last five years was 184 complaints in 2010, according to an email from Bond. The lowest number of complaints during that period was 145 complaints in 2012.

Molly Woon, a spokeswoman for the Secretary of State's Office, said employees believe the increase in complaints to the hotline might be connected to Gov. Kate Brown's message to state employees in March, in which the governor asked employees to speak up if they observe problems. Brown included a link to the web page for the government waste, fraud and abuse hotline.

"We think this is at least in part due to the Governor's introductory email to state employees in March ... and her highlighting the hotline program in her new role," Woon wrote in an email.

In her message to employees in March, Brown highlighted the response of employees at the state data center who questioned a request from a staffer in former Gov. John Kitzhaber's office to delete Kitzhaber's emails.

"I believe the staff members at (Department of Administrative Services) who were not comfortable with what they believed they were being asked to do by Gov. Kitzhaber's office responded correctly by notifying their supervisors, and the agency's decision to suspend further action was appropriate," Brown wrote. "I appreciate the good judgment these individuals demonstrated as well as the investigative work that is bringing important information regarding these events to light."

Statistics on the outcomes of the complaints were not available on Wednesday, but they can vary widely depending upon the incident.

For example, a 2014 complaint that Oregon Parks and Recreation Department employees had not properly recorded work absences was referred to the parks department for an internal investigation. The inquiry revealed that two employees specifically identified in the complaint — HR director Tasha Petersen and HR analyst Susan Kirschenmann — had recorded on their timesheets that they worked hours when they were actually out of the office for vacation or sick leave.

Earlier this year, a complaint to the hotline prompted auditors at the Secretary of State's Office to investigate the Department of Energy's handling of renewable energy and efficiency tax credits. Auditors ultimately concluded that the Department of Energy never publicized a 2012 decision to allow people to ignore price regulations on the sale of energy tax credits, so few finance firms knew they could negotiate such deals. Brown responded to the findings by calling for a review of the Department of Energy.

"Our hotline team works diligently to triage urgent complaints and concerns, forward calls to other state agencies when appropriate, and investigate cases when necessary," Woon wrote in an email.

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REUNION: Missed her job as a communicable disease nurse

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hour, she got into her car and headed toward home.

During the trip back to Athena, Roggiero needed frequent breaks to deal with all that water going through her system.

"It was a five-and-a-half hour drive," said Roggiero, laughing. "I plotted out all the rest stops."

She took care to keep her distance from others. At each rest area, she waited until the coast was clear, then used a paper towel to open restroom doors. Afterward she cleaned any surfaces she touched.

Reaching her house in Athena, Roggiero walked inside her unusually quiet abode and settled in. Following a list of precautions, she washed the same few dishes over and over. Her television remote control went into a plastic bag. Normally a fitness fanatic, she chose to forgo her aerobics routine

in order not to sweat, something doctors advised her to minimize in order to reduce radiation spread. She bagged all garbage for one month of storage before sending to the landfill.

To pass the time, she became one of Netflix's most ardent movie watchers, viewing about four videos every day. Her faves, she said, included "Silver Linings Playbook," "The Interview," "Revenge of the Bridesmaids" and the entire "Left Behind" series.

During the siege, Roggiero missed her job as a communicable disease nurse with the Umatilla County Public Health Department, but not as much as hugs from her four children. Sebastian and Sean, 9, Whitney, 15, and Charlie, 5, called frequently to cheer their mom, but she longed to hold them. Her mother dropped by with the children for five-minute visits from afar. As Roggiero stood in her

bedroom doorway and the children in the living room, they exchanged air hugs.

"It's hard," she said earlier this week. "I've had my tears, but I know there's an end to it. It's not forever."

Roggiero says she tries to stay upbeat. Her cancer has a high survival rate. She has amazing support from her family and friends.

"I'm extremely blessed," she said.

On Tuesday, she drove to Seattle for a whole body scan. She returned to Athena on Thanksgiving Eve with one thing in mind — hugging her children. On Thanksgiving Eve, she slipped into the home of her parents, Robert and Barbara McLean, and waited for her children to notice. It took a moment, but they finally realized her presence and ran to their mom.

"We sat and hugged for about

30 minutes," Roggiero said. "It felt good."

Her son, Sean, said the time of being apart was tough.

"I felt like my heart was breaking into a hundred pieces," he said.

On Thanksgiving Day, they returned to the McLean home to enjoy turkey with family and friends. Roggiero reveled in the togetherness. They laughed and talked. Everyone shared something for which they were especially thankful by writing it on a piece of paper.

Roggiero couldn't choose just one.

"I am thankful for the gift of life and the opportunity to start fresh every day," she wrote. She gave thanks for God and modern medicine and "my babies."

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

DODD: 'It's going to be a very difficult hardship for her financially and physically'

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help from nurses. But she knows her strength will return with therapy. Her goal is to return home in the next 10-14 days, though it will likely take several months of recovery before she is able to get back to work as a mental health associate at Lifeways in Pendleton.

"It's really hard on me," Dodd said in an interview from the hospital. "The things you take for granted, just being able to scratch your own head when it itches ... It's a hardship. It's not something I would wish on anyone to go through."

Friends and family have rallied around Dodd for support, both emotionally and financially. Dodd's best friend from Pendleton High School, Circe Verba, has started a GoFundMe account to help Dodd pay for her medical bills and expenses. The account has received \$480 and been shared 48 times on Facebook.

Verba, who lives in Albany, said

she received the call about Dodd's accident from a mutual friend, and wanted to do something to help her land back on her feet.

"She could potentially be out of work for who knows how long," Verba said. "It's going to be a very difficult hardship for her financially and physically."

Dodd currently lives in Hermiston with her uncle. She was on her way to work the evening of Tuesday, Nov. 17 when gusty winds whipped across Eastern Oregon, kicking up clouds of dirt over the highway.

Dodd made it about as far as the Echo Road exit when a truck and van in front of her slowed down. She slowed behind them, turned on her hazard lights and began looking for a place to pull off the road.

The next thing she remembers is the EMT on scene asking if she was awake.

The wreck ended in a pileup of five semi-tractors and six passenger cars. A truck driver from Idaho, 47-year-old William Hernandez, was

killed in the collision.

Dodd knows it could have been much worse for her.

"I have so many things to be thankful for," she said. "I'm still here, and I have so many people who care for me."

A nurse at St. Anthony called Dodd's mother, Paula Morris, to let her know about the accident. Morris said she was shocked to see her daughter carried away in an ambulance, but thankful Dodd is alive.

"I think some days she's down a little bit, when she can't do things to help herself," Morris said. "I try to encourage her things will get better."

Dodd has a son, 10-year-old Robert, who lives with his dad out of state. Robert has Asperger's syndrome and struggles to handle stress, Dodd said. She finally called him Wednesday, a conversation that resulted in tears.

"He just doesn't understand why I won't be able to Skype with him for a while," Dodd said. "It was really emotional."

Dodd missed Thanksgiving dinner at her mother's home, but Morris said she talks with her daughter at least 2-3 times a day. And Dodd has been close to everyone's thoughts — especially the congregation at Bethel Assembly of God, where they attend church.

Verba said it has been a couple of years since she has seen her friend, and the accident has reminded her how fleeting life can be.

"I think it teaches us to be really thankful for the people in our lives," she said. "It makes me very thankful (Dodd) is still here, and I haven't lost her."

Likewise, Dodd said she is thankful to have such a great support group behind her.

"I know I'll get through this because of them," she said.

To donate to Dodd's recovery, visit www.gofundme.com/ddodd.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

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