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Utah lawmaker seeks to combat scammers after family loses \$150K in scheme

By Mike Anderson, KSL TV | Posted - Dec 27th, 2019 @ 6:48am

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6PM: Lawmaker loses thousands to scammers
Mike Anderson, KSL TV

NORTH OGDEN — A Utah lawmaker is looking into whether changes to state laws could help protect consumers from scammers after his wife recently fell victim to a scheme.

she said she was given a frightening story.

“(He) told me that my Social Security number had been compromised and that they had found a car at the Texas/Mexico border, with blood in the car and that also my Social Security number had been used to set up multiple bank accounts from a drug cartel,” Andersen said.

Andersen said she was then told she would be transferred over to the Drug Enforcement Agency. The man on the other line identified himself as Uttam Dhillon and that she could look his name up online and see that he worked for the DEA. She Googled the name and found that name on the DEA website. However, as she would later learn, that’s not who she was talking with.

“And then he said, ‘I need you to get in your car, drive safely to your bank and transfer everything that you can think of that’s under your Social Security number into your checking, and then wire it,” Andersen explained.

She said the man used scare tactics to get her to do it.

“You need to know that your family is in danger, that this is a very powerful drug cartel, that they’ll be watching you. You need to act as normal as possible, and they know where your family is,” Andersen said about the caller.

Andersen said the man also somehow knew that she was currently watching her grandchildren. She did as she was told, pulling together funds from multiple accounts and sending over more than \$150,000.

“In hindsight, when I look at it cold, I go ‘Why? Why did I ever? How did I not know at this point or at this point?’” Andersen said.

Two days later, she said the man called her back, claiming that they would need her to come up with \$200,000 in equity from her home for the investigation.

—Rep. Kyle Andersen, R-North Ogden

“I said, ‘I’m sorry. You’ll have to come and seize the house,’” Andersen explained. “I don’t know where I’d get that kind of money.”

Rep. Kyle Andersen, R-North Ogden, said his wife told him of the incident days later. She kept the secret out of fear and said the scammers told her that if she told anyone or tried to keep any of the money, she could be suspected of working with the drug cartel.

“They made her think, ‘We are watching every move that you make, and so we’ll know if you tell your husband, and the suspicion will be on you,’” Kyle Andersen said. “He terrorized her. He knew that she was at the time, taking care of our grandchildren. He knew that and he used that, ‘They’re not safe.’”

Now, he said he’s working with Utah banks and credit unions to see if more questions could be asked before large wire transfers are sent.

“I think the thing that we were concerned about was that the only question that was really asked of me at the credit union was ‘What is this money going to be used for?’” Machel Andersen explained. “And I was told to say that I was buying electronics, and they signed off on it really simply.”

While financial institutions are under the oversight of the federal government, Rep. Andersen is looking into whether any state laws can be changed to require additional questions or require more information be given to customers requesting the transfers about possible scams.

“I’m going to be meeting with the representatives from the credit union and the representatives from the banks to talk just about this, and they know specifically what a lot of these scams are,” he said.

Andersen added that if those changes can’t be put into a bill, he and his wife at least want others to learn from their mistakes.

Andersen said he still receives a pension and their home is paid off. While their life savings is now gone, he said they will be fine.

“We don’t want anybody else to go through something like this,” Andersen said. “Machel has cried, and cried, and cried and cried. She has blamed herself. She has been to hell and back.”

Correction: A previous version of this story stated the name Machele Andersen. This story has been updated to state the correct spelling of Machel.



Mike Anderson



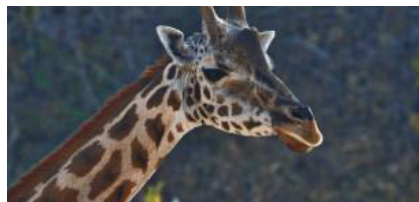
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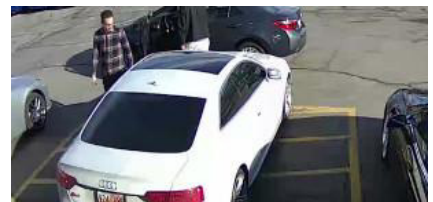
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