

Be Vigilant of Scammers

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Senator Smith outlines the most common consumer complaints from DATCP and reinforces the importance of protecting personal information from professional scammers.

MADISON - Constituents visit the Capitol every week to lobby their Senators and Representatives on topics they care deeply about. Last week, hundreds of people came to Madison for Ag Day at the Capitol, the Credit Union League and the Rural Electric Cooperatives. I always enjoy the opportunity to meet with folks from western Wisconsin to learn more about their trade and how decisions made in Madison affect all of us back home.

A strong contingent of credit union members from the 31st Senate District came to the Capitol to discuss a variety of issues affecting credit unions and their members. Topics ranged from financial literacy to childcare needs and elder abuse. While I have written and spoken often on the subject of childcare as well as financial literacy, I thought more awareness was needed to stop scammers.

Elderly family members and friends are often the most targeted. Elder abuse takes on many

forms – physical, emotional, psychological and financial. During my conversations with credit union members, I heard stories that made me shudder. Consumer protection against scammers is important to prevent financial elder abuse.



While Credit Unions and Banks train their employees to recognize the warning signs when a client withdraws large amounts of money, they can't stop every case. How does it happen? Why would someone transfer their savings to a stranger? Of course the targets are more often elderly and alone. There have been instances of scammers keeping their targeted person on the phone for 6 or 7 hours to wear them down. These thieves often get away with tens of thousands of dollars with no chance of tracking them down.

These stories are truly heartbreaking. It reminds us all that we must protect vulnerable family and friends from these scams. We need to make sure our loved ones know how to respond to someone who calls with questionable stories asking for or demanding money. Instruct them to call you or someone else they trust before continuing any conversation that seems suspicious.

Coincidentally, our Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) released their annual list of the top ten consumer complaints that give us some indication of what to look out for.

As usual landlord issues top the list with security deposit returns, evictions, unauthorized entries, inadequate disclosures, and unsatisfactory service being common complaints.

Telemarketing complaints came in a close second – many of which are scammers preying on the elderly. These complaints involved robocalls, phishing and spoofing, imposter scams, and

Wisconsin Do Not Call Registry issues.

Fortunately there are things happening to prevent these unwanted criminal calls. Last year, DATCP teamed up with the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) to join the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and agencies from all the other 49 states and the District of Columbia to create the Operation Stop Scam Calls initiative. This group is tasked with cracking down on illegal telemarketing operations responsible for billions of unwanted calls to U.S. consumers. This group successfully started a lawsuit against a company that allegedly sent or transmitted approximately 157 million calls to Wisconsin phone numbers on the National Do Not Call Registry.



Other complaints that topped the list include some familiar cases. Fly by night home improvement services, telecommunication companies, medical services companies, motor vehicle companies and many more.

Sometimes, we hear these stories about people who are conned out of thousands of dollars and we think to ourselves, "I'm smart enough to know better." Just remember, these people are professionals. We need treat them that way. Don't let your guard down. Protect your personal information and always verify with someone before sending any money, especially when someone tells you the opportunity is too good to pass up or you are in trouble if you don't do what they want.

There is much to be vigilant about so we are not taken advantage of. Looking out for ourselves and the elderly is something we can all do to protect ourselves from abusers who attempt to scam us at every turn.

Senator Smith represents District 31 in the Wisconsin State Senate. The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo, Pepin and Trempealeau counties and portions of Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson and St. Croix counties.

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