McEntee: After data breach, I’ll long be looking over my shoulder

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A couple of weeks ago, I returned home from vacation to learn my personal health information had been hacked. So I signed up for the free credit monitoring that lasts a year.

On Monday, not having heard about my Social Security number, I called the state’s data breach hotline and was told yes, your number is out in the wind.

So, on the state’s advice, on Tuesday I set about to order a credit freeze on my accounts through TransUnion, one of the big three credit bureaus.

It seemed simple enough — just go in, enter your info and that’s that. In reality, the program kept kicking me back to re-enter my password, for example, or my Social Security number or my date of birth, for crying out loud.

Finally, after 50 minutes and 10 bucks (on my credit card, naturally), I was finished and took a walk to calm down.

About that time, news came that Gov. Gary Herbert had, as I hoped, kicked some butt over all this. He fired Stephen Fletcher, director of the Department of Technology Services, and said two other employees’ jobs are also on the line.

Herbert also has named Sheila Walsh-McDonald as health data security ombudsman. She’s charged with helping victims make their way through the information-protection systems.

More than six weeks after the breach was discovered, it’s about time.

Still, systemic and personal problems remain. Unlike me, a lot of people don’t have or even want a computer, making it tough to get a credit freeze or fraud alert. They may include refugees, people with cognitive disabilities, residents of nursing homes, other seniors and more.

People who don’t speak English will have a hard time, and the majority of those who speak only Spanish won’t be able to use many of the online tools to protect their credit, says Judi Hilman, of the Utah Health Policy Project. Add in the dozens of other languages spoken in our state, and the outlook is pretty grim for a lot of people.

Hilman is counting on Walsh-McDonald, who has long worked with low-income, homeless and other disparate populations, to get things on the right track to help everyone whose personal information was exposed.

“Sheila’s good,” Hilman says. “She’ll make this happen.”

All of this tells me that my difficulty doesn’t come close to that of many of my co-afflicted.

Still, I take some umbrage at Senate President Michael Waddoups, who said Tuesday that there’s “probably an exaggeration to the impact this could have on the public, since there’s no credit card numbers out there.”

Obviously, Waddoups isn’t one of the 780,000 whose personal information was stolen, and certainly not among the 280,000 of us whose Social Security numbers are out there somewhere.

All I can do is pay another $20 to the other credit bureaus for credit freezes, add a fraud alert and hope for the best — looking over my shoulder all the while.

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