

August 14, 2008
Wiggins e-mail list cracked
Neal Ross | Sonoma Valley Sun

When politicians ask for money, they don't usually misspell their own names. But the person who hacked into a private e-mail list last week for supporters of state Sen. Pat Wiggins, whose 2nd District includes Sonoma and the North Coast, apparently didn't know that. The Aug. 6 e-mail reads: "i am sorry that i did not inform you about my traveling to England for a program called Empowering youth to fight racism, Hiv/Aids, and lack of education. I need a favour from you as soon as you recieve this e-mail because I misplaced my wallet on my way to the hotel where my money, and other valuable things were kept i will like you to assist me with a soft loan urgently with the sum of \$2,500 US Dollars to sort-out my hotel bills and get myself back home."

The email, which was sent from the senator's private Hotmail account, concludes, "Regards, Patrica Wiggins."

"Yes, that is a hoax email," Wiggin's district director Michael Allen said. "Our senator is in Sacramento working on the budget, and hoping to get one passed."

Support staff at Hotmail's parent company Microsoft traced the email to "somewhere in Africa," according to Wiggins press secretary David Miller, who said the scammers stole Wiggins' password and locked her out of her account.

Miler said that Microsoft wouldn't disclose how many people were on Wiggins' email list – "It's a personal account, so she's got things in there we don't know about" – adding that if the senator experienced an actual fiscal emergency, "backup measures are available to her. She has people she can contact."

When The Sun attempted to verify the email address, the hoaxer replied, "Hello Neal Rose, Yes i sent out the distress email because i need the favor. I would sincerely be glad if you can afford to send me the fund through western union as soon as possible with the details below," and listed a London, England contact address. A subsequent inquiry was returned with a "mailbox unavailable" message.

Miler said a number of sympathetic telephone calls were fielded from list members in the Sonoma area.

"This really can happen to anybody," Miller said. "We did get one call from somebody that was concerned it might have been legitimate, but they had the presence of mind to call her office to ask first."