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By TUCKER MITCHELL

COLUMBIA, S.C. – The South Carolina Senate has formed a special committee to look into the hacking of the South Carolina Department of Revenue (SCDOR) computer system that exposed more than 4 million state tax returns – including millions of Social Security numbers – to possible theft.

Sens. Kevin Bryant, R-Anderson, and William O'Dell, R-Abbeville, will co-chair the committee. Other members include Sens. John W. Matthews, D-Orangeburg, and Darrell Jackson, D-Richland. The committee was formed after SCDOR chief James Etter offered less than what the Senate Finance Committee was seeking during a special hearing last week.

"There were more questions than there were answers," said Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, the finance committee's chair.

Mike Shealy, the Senate Finance Committee staffer who'll be supporting the committee, said Leatherman has charged the committee with discovering "what happened, how it happened, what's being done to make sure it doesn't happen again and what is the state's liability and obligation" to the millions of citizens whose personal information has been at risk, essentially for the rest of their lives.

The state has contracted with the credit reporting agency Experian to provide free credit monitoring services for affected citizens. The offer is good forever, but some experts say the service is too limited in scope. For instance it does not address the issue of hacked Social Security numbers.

For Shealy a significant question will deal with how the overall structure of state government affects the security question. In particular Leatherman wants to know if the S.C. Budget Control Board could have, or should have, played a greater role.

The Division of State Information Technology (DSIT), a subgroup of the Budget Control Board, oversees the

hardware purchases and installation for all state government. Some state agencies also use the DSIT to coordinate their security and monitoring functions.

Shealy said about half the state's cabinet level agencies do use the DSIT. SCDOR did not.

"So I think it's safe to say some questions will be asked about that," Shealy said.

Gov. Nikki Haley signed an executive order Wednesday directing cabinet agencies to work with state DSIT to implement network monitoring to include 24-hour-a-day monitoring as well as intervention and interrupting of unusual events or viruses. The governor also encouraged all noncabinet agencies to work with DSIT to identify weaknesses in current network monitoring and implement stronger monitoring services where needed.

Shealy said the cyber hacking subcommittee would begin meeting in about two weeks. It will hear extensive testimony and hopefully have preliminary recommendations available before the end of the year, so that the information gleaned can be factored into what Shealy believes will be a "flurry" of legislation introduced addressing the problem prior to the start of the January legislative session.

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