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OPINION



NORTH EAST
INDEPENDENT

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EDITORIAL

Be smart, vigilant protecting your personal data

A data breach at the University of Rhode Island recently compromised the email accounts and personal information of about 3,000 current and former students. It's yet another reminder of how sensitive personal information is in today's digital age – and how important it is to take safeguards to protect your identity and the security of your mobile and personal computing devices.

URI officials announced Aug. 20 that an individual – who is not a student or employee of the university – allegedly collected and possibly used non-public information of current and former students, including student names, URI email addresses, passwords and students' dates of birth. A spokeswoman confirmed the students are mostly female, and included more than 1,100 students who are enrolled this fall. The remaining students were enrolled at URI dating to 2006.

Officials said they do not believe Social Security numbers, credit card or other financial information were involved in the incident, but in several cases, one or more of the students' personal non-URI email addresses, social media accounts and passwords associated with those accounts were obtained.

Whether it's debit and credit card information stolen from Target, Home Depot or Staples servers, health insurance data stolen from Anthem Inc. or private profile information stolen from the website Ashley Madison and dumped into dark corners of the Internet for hackers to exploit, data breaches have become increasingly common.

According to the state Office of the Attorney General, nearly 5,000 data breaches since 2005 have compromised more than 815 million records containing sensitive financial, medical and personal information. It's fair to say there's very little – or no such thing – as privacy online anymore.

Rhode Island lawmakers recently passed legislation, the Identity Theft Protection Act of 2015, to help protect the public from identity theft. It requires anyone who collects information – including businesses and state agencies – to implement "reasonable security procedures and practices" to protect personal information from unauthorized access.

It also requires notification within 45 days whenever there is a data breach involving Rhode Islanders' personal information, and in the event of a large-scale breach, immediate notification to the attorney general's office and major credit reporting agencies. The bill will take effect next year.

"We live in a world

where so much, if not all, of our personal information floats around in cyberspace, often with completely inadequate protections. This is the reality of our times," said state Sen. Louis DiPalma (D-Dist. 12) of Middletown, Newport, Little Compton and Tiverton, a bill sponsor, during a ceremony in which Gov. Gina Raimondo signed the legislation last month.

Data theft is oftentimes a crime of opportunity, and according to various online security sources, a few simple measures can help protect your personal privacy:

- **Change passwords regularly.** Keep them private, dynamic and don't use the same few passwords for numerous websites. Some programs, such as 1Password, create unique, complex passwords that are difficult to crack.

- **Turn off or limit "cookie" tracking in Web browsers,** and clear them periodically. Cookies store passwords and user names so that accessing websites is easy, but they also can track activity online – usually for marketing purposes. Also, review how mobile apps, such as Facebook, track your whereabouts under the "Location History" setting.

- **Password protect all your devices,** and sign out of logged-in accounts when you're done using them, even on mobile devices.

- **Avoid public Wi-Fi networks.** Security experts say using public networks, such as those at airports or coffee shops that require no password log-in, are particularly vulnerable to prying eyes. Also, keep home networks secure and password protected.

- **Use security software,** and don't click links in suspicious emails – particularly on a PC – even if they appear to be legitimate or sent from a reputable financial institution. Opening an attachment could expose your computer to a virus or spyware. Also, keep operating systems like Windows and Mac OS up to date.

- **Don't give out your email, phone number or zip code** when asked at a retail store.

Other more aggressive steps include encrypting all of the data on your computer, and setting up a secure virtual private network, or VPN, when using public Wi-Fi on a laptop, tablet or smartphone.

URI says it's committed to putting measures in place to protect student information, and we have no doubt it will. Officials have asked those affected to change all of their email and social media passwords, and report any suspicious online activity to law enforcement. An online FAQ regarding the incident has been posted at web.uri.edu/public-safety/data-security-issue.

News item: Brown University says students perform better when they start school later and get more sleep.



Charlie Hall

INDEPENDENT VIEW

Women still battling for equal opportunity

By Jenn Steinfield

"American women have been fighting to have their voices included in our electorate for nearly 200 years, and yet female leadership is still greatly lagging."

Women have been able to cast their vote and voice their opinion in elections for nearly a century; it took almost that long to make this right a reality. Activists and reformers fought for women's suffrage for nearly 100 years, overcoming many pitfalls and disagreements that threatened to destroy the movement. The 19th Amendment to the Constitution was finally ratified Aug. 26, 1920, enfranchising all American women and recognizing that, being created equal, women should be given a fair say in the bodies that design and support the framework of our society, and our nation's place in the world.

It is no surprise that major reform takes time. Social change seems to be happening faster than ever before, but we still have work to do to demolish the disproportionate barriers women face in our state and in this country. From unequal pay to sexual violence, from hurdles for necessary health care to the burdens of heading a household without workplace protections, the battle for gender equality is not over. Women of color, immigrant women, older women and LGBTQ

women face additional barriers. While the 19th Amendment was an initial step at granting women equal rights and responsibilities of citizenship, we need more diverse electorate that includes more female representation to ensure that the interests of all citizens are fairly addressed.

Despite encompassing more than half of the U.S. population, women continue to represent less than a quarter of state and national legislative seats. A study by Pew Research Center ranked the U.S. 33rd out of 49 "high income" countries for number of women in the national legislature. Even in Rhode Island, where our government has unprecedented women's leadership in the office of governor, secretary of state and Senate president, just 30 of 113 members of our General Assembly are women. Studies suggest that a possible reason more women don't envision themselves as elected officials is that they don't see women whose lives they relate to in those roles.

Also, many women are unfamiliar with the mechanics of policy and, thus, are apprehensive to take a more active role. Women's issues are everyone's issues, but there are challenges and inequities that men are often blind to. Women must participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making – private, public, local and global.

The Women's Fund of Rhode Island is working to engage more women in our public sphere by creating an environment in which women can learn and gain hands-on experience while working within a supportive network of diverse, but like-minded, female colleagues. Since 2008, the fund has been offering a Women's Policy Institute to develop and encourage women to engage with our government. This program covers a wide array of essential skills for effective policy involvement, including communications, public speaking, message development,

community organizing, research and legislation drafting. The Women's Policy Institute has already had a tremendous impact here in Rhode Island, placing Rhode Island on a vanguard of a national movement for paid family leave and workplace pregnancy protections. Many graduates have gone on to serve as leaders in the public and private sectors and as community organizers. The Women's Fund of Rhode Island offers this program to all Rhode Island women, free of any charge.

On Aug. 26, we marked Women's Equality Day, the 95th anniversary of the day Congress stopped denying women the right to vote. We celebrated, but we also rallied for the unfinished fight. American women have been fighting to have their voices included in our electorate for nearly 200 years, and yet female leadership is still greatly lagging. It is through equal say in our legislative agendas that women will see true freedom, and only then will we be given equal opportunity of the pursuit of happiness.

The author is the executive director for Women's Fund of Rhode Island.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shame on our senators for supporting Iran deal

Collectively, the concerned Rhode Islanders who have stepped up to make their voices heard in opposition to the Iran Nuclear Deal (called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) are deeply disappointed in our senators' announcements of support for the deal. There are two fundamental objections, the first of which concerns the actual substance of the agreement, and the second, the weakening of the democratic process here in Rhode Island.

As to the substance of the agreement, whether or not through conscious intent, we have been sold a bill of goods. The objective of negotiating with Iran was plainly announced by the administration as prevention: dismantling of Iran's nuclear infrastructure, barring Iran from the right to enrich uranium, shutting down installations at Arak and Fordow, which were built in defiance of United Nations sanction-backed Security Council resolutions – in sum, to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear threshold state. In fact, these were laudable goals, and if in fact the negotiations had achieved them, we could have expected a relaxation of tensions in the Middle East, especially on the part of our allies, Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

But the deal was actually cut with a radically different objective: containment. That is, it legitimizes Iran as a threshold nuclear power. When the deal expires in 10-15 years, there will be no constraints to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the "phased sanctions relief" we were promised morphed into a \$150 billion "signing bonus," a blank check which Iran's leaders publicly boast will be used to further its regional terrorism.

In itself, the uncontrolled release of \$150 billion is cause for major concern. Here in Rhode Island, there is particular sensitivity to that aspect due to the Aug. 7 killing of First Sgt. Andrew McKenna of Bristol. He was killed by the Taliban, whose arms and funding are supplied by Iran.

So as to content, while there are a myriad of other questions and details about this deal, everyday people are asking, "Senators, how can you justify arming an enemy that swears 'Death to America?'"

The ideology currently in fashion in Washington says, "Maybe they'll change." That is the underlying theory of the deal: treat these terrorists who rule Iran like they're civilized, and they'll become civilized. In effect we will all be held hostage to

a global social experiment. The understated risks to our own people as well as our military, and to those of our allies, are breathtaking. Another word for this ideology is appeasement. Sen. Reed especially, with his military background, should know better.

The most pointed criticism of this deal casts doubt on its underlying premise. Critics point out that President Obama came into office with a vision of bringing Iran into the "family of nations". Blinded by his own vision, wanting Iran to reform, does he fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the regime?

The second fundamental objection, as mentioned above, has to do with process. At the national level, the administration has cleverly constructed an end-run around Congress by labeling the deal an "executive agreement," thus bypassing the need for two-thirds Senate confirmation. On the top of that, the submission of the deal to the Security Council prior to Congressional review added another layer of insulation from the will of the American public.

As a free people, we might well question the administration's intentions. But as Rhode Islanders we expect something more from our elected representatives. The

fact is that at the grassroots our concerned citizens have been clamoring for face-to-face answers to their questions about the deal. Neither of our senators has faced the public prior to making their public announcement of support. As a small state, we expect our elected representatives to respect our opinions and concerns.

Sen. Reed has refused to directly respond to repeated demands from his constituents for a public meeting to discuss the Iran deal. Sen. Whitehouse's announcement came weeks before his scheduled town hall meeting this week.

In the end, the vote on the deal will be political. That being the case, there's no immediate recourse available, other than a massive march on Washington. But there will be Senate elections (for Sen. Whitehouse in 2018 and Sen. Reed in 2020). We expect they will be more willing to face the people then.

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The authors are representatives of the group StopIran-Now-RI.