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GOP's Schultheis on phone-subsidy snafu: Let buck stop with the governor—not a 'faceless computer'

Colorado Springs Republican state Sen. Dave Schultheis rejected an attempt this week by state welfare officials in the Ritter administration to blame faulty computer software for granting some \$7.9 million in telephone subsidies to nearly 10,000 ineligible welfare recipients over the past four years.

The statehouse veteran and noted budget hawk is demanding an accounting and will request that the state Department of Human Services Agency, which administers the subsidy, come before the Legislative Audit Committee and explain itself. Schultheis sits on the panel.

“The department's explanation is an insult to the intelligence of Colorado taxpayers,” Schultheis said today. “It seems like every time something goes wrong with the state's welfare system, they blame a faceless computer rather than standing up and taking responsibility. It's getting old, and I want to see some accountability for a change.”

As reported in Wednesday's Denver Post, the subsidized discount on welfare recipients' phone bills is supposed to end once a recipient leaves welfare rolls. However, that hasn't happened for thousands of beneficiaries—despite no longer being on welfare—because the Human Service

department has failed to cross-check the names with updated welfare rolls since at least 2005. State and federal taxes on telephone customers fund the subsidy of monthly phone service for low-income welfare recipients.

Human Services officials blamed the state's computerized Colorado Benefits Management System for the breakdown in cross-checking for phone-subsidy recipients who no longer are eligible.

“It makes you wonder who is really in charge over there,” Schultheis said. “Ultimately, it is supposed to be the governor. As the captain of the ship, he should step in, take names, and demand accountability.”

Added Schultheis, “If Bill Ritter won't, we will.”

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