

Los Angeles Times

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From the Los Angeles Times

Bogus e-mail seeks contributions for fire victims

The plea uses lines from a recent radio address by an assemblywoman.

By **Steve Chawkins**

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Internet scammers have lifted a speech from the Assembly member representing Malibu and used it in a widely distributed e-mail to solicit donations supposedly bound for victims of the Southern California fires.

An aide to Assemblywoman Julia Brownley (D-Santa Monica) said Tuesday that legislative computer specialists had determined that the bogus plea -- contained in an e-mail message purporting to be from the Internal Revenue Service -- originated outside the United States.

"My immediate goal is to do everything possible to get the word out that the e-mail did not come from me or anyone associated with me, and that no one should open the 'IRS' link," Brownley said in a news release, calling the solicitation "another ugly side to the tragedy."

Brownley's office has fielded inquiries about the e-mail from people in New York and Florida.

In San Diego, Michelle P. Fischer, who was forced to evacuate for three days with her husband and four children, said she was wary when she received the e-mail Monday. It contained a brief radio address Brownley had made about the fires, in which she called for a recovery fueled by "the creative skill and generosity of a united country."

A few sentences at the end of the e-mail fueled Fischer's suspicions:

"If you chose [sic] to take part in our program (initiated by IRS & U.S. GOVERNMENT) click on the link below and make a small contribution. Together we can rebuild California! BE HUMAN GET INVOLVED! BE AMERICAN! CALIFORNIA NEEDS YOUR HELP!"

"It upset me," said Fischer, whose home was undamaged but stood just two or three miles from many that were destroyed. "I'm from San Diego and here I am, getting this."

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