

KILLER

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He contended Sputa was on the defensive all along during the conflict that led to Bartlett's death. Lynum said Bartlett was the aggressor and stabbed Sputa with a knife; Sputa, he said, cooperated with authorities at all times of the investigation; he killed Bartlett in self-defense after the stabbing and that the crime was unsophisticated, meaning he didn't plan it out and could have used any number of tools and instruments to kill her but did not.

The defense also called Sputa's brother, as well as investigator Steve Burch, to the stand to help buttress their case for mitigation. A psychiatrist also testified via phone.

Burch, who was asked to offer expert opinion in the matter, said based on his investigation of the case, he had no doubt that Bartlett was "the primary aggressor" in the altercation leading up to the homicide.

A deputy responded to the residence Sputa and Bartlett shared at 6035 N.

During interviews with investigators, Sputa admitted that he and Bartlett got into a physical altercation and that he struck and "choked her out." He also told a detective, "If she's dead, it's from my hands."

Tsala Apopka Drive, off State Road 200 in Hernando, for a welfare check in March 2011 after neighbors reported the couple's dog had been loose for several days. There, Bartlett's body was discovered significantly decomposed, lying behind a shed on the property. It was determined that she had been deceased for three to four days, during which time Sputa was reportedly inside the residence nursing a self-inflicted gunshot wound, which caused injuries to his mouth and tongue and left bullet fragments in his brain.

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dead, it's from my hands."

Assistant State Attorney Bill Catto dismissed the defense's argument that Sputa should get a lesser sentence because his actions were unsophisticated or that Bartlett was the aggressor. Catto said the maximum sentence was appropriate punishment for Sputa.

Sputa tearfully apologized to Bartlett's family, which included a daughter who listened to the proceedings via phone from New York state.

"I never meant any harm to her. I will take it all back. I loved her and her family," Sputa said before Howard announced his sentence.

Contact Chronicle reporter A.B. Sidibe at 352-564-2925 or asidibe@chronicleonline.com.

Troubled website prompts state to withhold payment

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE — After weeks of downplaying problems with the state's new unemployment claims website, Florida officials announced that they are withholding a \$3 million payment to the company that built it.

The state on Monday also plans to start fining Deloitte Consulting \$15,000 a day until the system — which helps more than 200,000 Floridians get an unemployment check — is "fully functioning."

Jesse Panuccio, executive director of the Department of Economic Opportunity, said in a letter to Deloitte executives that the "delays caused by these defects have proven to be a true hardship."

"It is simply imperative that Deloitte devote every available resource, and every expert at its disposal, to getting the remaining defects fixed, and fixed now," Panuccio wrote Friday.

The state switched over the new \$63 million system in October and since that time there has been a steady stream of complaints and media reports about unemployed Floridians frustrated at their ability to process

claims, or to get anyone on the phone to help them. The department wound up disabling the posting and comment portions of its Facebook page after people looking for help starting posting their Social Security numbers and phone numbers.

In a statement, a Deloitte spokesman said that the "vast majority" of those seeking unemployment benefits are receiving them. Jonathan Gandal added that the remaining problems with the system can only be fixed by the state or are "otherwise beyond Deloitte's control."

"We will continue to provide warranty support to DEO, in accordance with our contract, and work diligently to resolve any warranty items as they are identified," Gandal said. "We will also continue to work with DEO to clarify the true nature of the remaining issues and will hold ourselves strictly accountable for fixing anything within our control as

quickly as possible."

State officials maintained that the only way to solve the problem is for Deloitte to significantly increase the number of computer programming staff. The Department of Economic Opportunity said that if Deloitte cannot fix the problem the state may be forced to hire additional consultants and vendors.

There are roughly 240,000 people in Florida receiving unemployment benefits that are usually claimed every two weeks. The maximum payment is \$275 a week.

The new system is crucial to those seeking unemployment checks because since 2011 the state has required that people file for unemployment online. At first, state officials contended that any problems with the system were being worked on. The department has sent out daily updates noting the number of people receiving claim payments and how much money has been paid out.

JOBLESS

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had the lowest unemployment rate in the region at 5.5 percent. Hernando County was 7.7 percent, Levy County was 7.2 percent and Marion County was 7.1 percent.

"The numbers are pretty encouraging," said Don Taylor, executive director of the Citrus County Economic Development Council. "The economies of the more urban areas pick up first and trickle down later to the more rural areas."

He attributes the smaller workforce to the continuing impact of the nuclear plant shutdown as family members relocate and their working spouses follow.

Taylor noted the EDC has just completed its strategic plan, which has a marketing

component for the county. "With all this good news coming out, we're hoping to get noticed by companies looking to relocate."

The state numbers do not include jobs in agriculture, forestry and fishing. According to the U.S. Bu-

reau of Labor Statistics, for June, its most recent data, agriculture employed about 214 people in Citrus County.

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