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Oregon State Board of
Tax Practitioners

PRESS RELEASE

To: News Media
From: Oregon State Board of Tax Practitioners
Date: February 23, 2010
Re: Statesman Journal guest editorial for Ron Wagner

Taxes are one of life's certainties; being defrauded shouldn't be

Let's assume that the number of Oregonians who can sing "Oregon, My Oregon" from start to finish from memory is about the same number that know paid income-tax preparers have to be licensed in this state. That is, probably not very many.

We at the Oregon Board of Tax Practitioners want to change that because, every year, unlicensed income-tax preparers and consultants prey on taxpayers.

- They may promise outstanding refunds. (*Remember. If it sounds too good to be true... it is.*)
- They may take nonexistent deductions that come back to haunt taxpayers, who must repay incorrect refunds with interest and penalties.
- They have had refunds directed to themselves instead of the taxpayer, which is illegal.
- They can harvest Social Security numbers, birthdates and other information from your records to use or sell.
- Older Oregonians and non-English-speaking residents may be particularly vulnerable to harm from unlicensed tax preparers and consultants.

With the help of the public and other state agencies, the Oregon Board of Tax Practitioners investigates as many of these abuses as we hear about. But, often, by the time fraud becomes apparent, taxpayers' refunds are long gone – as the unlicensed tax preparer may also be.

Please ensure that your tax preparer is licensed before you hand over files containing personal information. It's simple – go to www.oregon.gov/OTPB and click on "Licensee Look-Up." Or call the Board at 503-378-4733.

If you're a caretaker for an older person who wants to hire a tax practitioner, do it for him or her.

The license is the best insurance you can get that your tax preparer is indeed an expert – professional, knowledgeable and ethical. Oregon licensees have studied income-tax law, passed a rigorous state exam, and earned a license that we renew each year only after the licensee completes further tax-law courses. With the exception of the public seat, our Board is made up of licensed income-tax consultants.

We're a tiny-but-tough state Board that has licensed income-tax preparers and consultants since 1973.

Because of the reputation earned by our Board and the licensed tax preparers and consultants of this state, I was invited to Washington, D.C., last fall to share information about our outstanding licensing program with IRS Commissioner Doug Shulman and others working on a nationwide licensing program for tax preparers and consultants.

Yes, income-tax season is here, again. And we understand that you are not jumping for joy about that. But if you hire a licensed preparer or consultant, be assured that, as an Oregonian, you have more consumer protection in that regard than you would have in any other state.

Ron Wagner is the Executive Director of the Oregon State Board of Tax Practitioners, in Salem. Contact him at ron.a.wagner@state.or.us or call (503) 378-4733.

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