

BUREAU OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIES (BOLI)
COMMISSIONER BRAD AVAKIAN

Commissioner's Message – May 10, 2011
Supporting the economy that Oregon wants

Breaking Legislative News

[House Bill 3362](#), the essential reinvestment in career and technical education in Oregon's public schools, is set for public hearing this Thursday morning before the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education. One or more public hearings must be held before a committee can move a bill forward, meaning the CTE bill may be poised to advance soon.

Dear Friends:

As we transition from spring into summer and the legislature begins to wrap up its work, BOLI is gearing up for some of the busiest months of our year. As we approach crunch time in the legislature, I am keeping in close touch with legislators on several bills critical to Oregon workers and our economy, including an important new bill to help Oregon veterans access the benefits they have earned. The latest from Salem is in our [Legislative Update](#).

My primary focus, however, remains on making BOLI the most effective agency that it can be. The Bureau of Labor and Industries has to be at the fore as we tackle the tough decisions about what kind of economy Oregon is going to have in the coming years, not only as a champion for workers rights but also as an advocate for Oregon businesses. Throughout my tenure as BOLI Commissioner, I have balanced strong enforcement of our employment laws with an open door to the concerns of employers in Oregon, as well as a helping hand to many Oregon businesses through BOLI's Technical Assistance for Employers Program (TA).

TA, with a total staff of just five, has responded to 5,999 phone and email inquiries while conducting 17 public seminars, 18 private, on-site seminars and four other presentations at employer-focused conferences to train more than 950 attendees—just from January to April. Funded overwhelmingly by just the revenue that the program generates, TA is now kicking into overdrive for its summer schedule of [employment law seminars](#), preparing to publish an [all-new handbook](#) on worker classification issues, and continuing to produce a steady stream of valuable [resources \(at low- or no cost\) to Oregon employers](#).

I don't spotlight TA here to crow about accomplishments, although they have many, or to showcase efficiency, although the program is very lean and highly productive. Instead, I want to highlight an excellent resource for employers in Oregon that should be more heavily utilized to reduce issues that can lead to legal or enforcement actions. Moreover, as Oregonians discuss the services that are most critical to us, TA stands as an example of a cost-effective, competitive advantage that the state can provide to businesses—without undercutting our strong system of worker protections.

Our priority must be what benefits all of us: healthy local businesses with access to the tools they need to be nationally and internationally competitive. That's the economy we want and need, and BOLI is committed to helping make it a reality.

Sincerely,

Brad Avakian

The Brad Tracker

With the legislative session in full swing, Brad has been in Salem often, advocating for BOLI's legislative agenda and discussing the agency's budget with legislators. In addition, in recent weeks Brad has:

- Attended the NARAL Annual Liberty Dinner;
 - Emceed the Darlene Hooley Scholarship for Oregon Veterans Gala;
 - Met with student participants in the Oregon FIRST robotics programs, activists from the Urban League of Portland and leaders of the Oregon Farm Bureau Federation during their visits to the Capitol;
 - Spoken to the Oregon Association for Career and Technical Education's annual conference in Eugene;
 - Attended the Oregon League of Conservation Voters Annual Celebration;
 - Spoken to the Marion County DemoForum and the McMinnville Lions' Club;
 - Participated in a national Education Commission of the States conference on the role of education in economic development in rural America; and
 - Accepted awards for championing his two signature issues: employment opportunity for all Oregonians and access to high-quality career and technical education options for every student (see next two items).
-

Avakian Recognized by Oregon Building Congress

Commissioner Avakian was honored to receive the "CTE Supporter of the Year Award" from the Oregon Building Congress (OBC) at their annual awards banquet on April 26th. OBC President Neil O'Connor described the organization's focus on providing "industry with a better prepared, more diverse pool of future workforce applicants." As part of that mission, OBC recognizes individuals, like Commissioner Avakian, for promoting career and technical education (CTE) for high school students in Oregon

The Commissioner's work on CTE includes both BOLI's ongoing support for youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training programs that include public schools and other local partners, as well as his leadership in advancing House Bill 3362 during this legislative session. The "CTE Bill" fosters increased access to CTE programs for Oregon students, most directly by funding a grant program to immediately jump-start CTE programs at 10 schools around the state. The Commissioner strongly believes that Oregon's economic health is fundamentally linked to the availability of a skilled

workforce, and that this program will strengthen Oregon's work force and equip students to compete in high-demand, living-wage jobs.

NOBLE Honors Avakian with Drum Major for Justice Award

Commissioner Avakian was again honored recently, receiving the "Drum Major for Justice" Award presented by the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) on April 30th at NOBLE's Oregon Chapter regional conference in Portland. NOBLE is dedicated to equity in matters related to law enforcement; its mission is to ensure equity in the administration of justice, and its unyielding commitment is to work towards the elimination of racism and bias of any type within the law enforcement field. The award is named for the famous line from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's speech on Feb. 4, 1968, where he asks not to be remembered for possessions or awards but that he was a "drum major for justice". This is why the Drum Major for Justice Award is given to an individual who advocates justice for all, is considerate of others and sacrificing of self, and most importantly stands for equality. NOBLE's executive board voted unanimously to honor the Commissioner.

Good News on Oregon's Economy

Reinforcing the news in the [last Commissioner's Message](#), the Oregon Economic Forum's latest report on the state economy, released May 5th, strikes an optimistic note. According to the report, the [University of Oregon Index of Economic Indicators](#), "Recent trends in the UO Index continue to suggest the Oregon economy will see sustained economic improvement in the months ahead." This is the fifth straight month of growth in the index, underscoring that a slow but steady recovery is underway. More rapid progress is needed to benefit many Oregon families, but the positive signs remain encouraging as we await the next state jobs report, [due out on Tuesday](#).

BOLI Legislative Update: More wins for working Oregonians

As we transition into summer, we are encouraged by the progress our legislative agenda has made in protecting workers, ensuring agency efficiency and encouraging workforce development.

- House Bill (HB) 2034, the Apprenticeship and Training Division (ATD) modernization bill, was unanimously recommended "do pass" today in the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee. Passage of this bill is essential to maintaining Oregon's high standards for apprenticeship quality and ensuring state oversight of these programs.
- HB 2036 contains five technical changes to civil rights laws enforced by the state Civil Rights Division. This bill already passed through the House and is scheduled for a public hearing in a Senate Committee this Thursday. HB

2036 provides technical fixes and eliminates some redundancy, making statutes easier for both employers and employees to understand and comply with.

- HB 2039 protects working Oregonians from bank and overdraft fees incurred as a result of receiving an insufficient funds paycheck from an employer. Overwhelming bipartisan support passed this bill out of the House, and it had a good public hearing in the Senate last week.
- HB 2040 contains technical changes for BOLI's Wage and Hour Division. It was passed out of the House recently and had a good public hearing last week in the Senate. HB 2040 eliminates inconsistencies between statutes and increases agency efficiency by eliminating the requirement that BOLI mail a new minimum wage poster to every employer in the state each year. The poster will still be available for free [on BOLI's website](#) and will be furnished upon request to any employer who would like it mailed. This simple change will save the Bureau some \$41,000 every year.
- Senate Bill 178 recently passed out of the Senate and is set for a public hearing in the House on Wednesday. SB 178 reduces confusion for public works contractors by discontinuing the unwieldy and unusable "double-rate book." This will save agency resources in printing and staff time that are better focused on providing the clear information and technical assistance necessary for contracting agencies and contractors to comply with prevailing wage rate laws.
- BOLI's budget is set for a work session this Thursday. Taking pride in our continuously improving performance in both processing and responding to complaints, the agency is hopeful that legislators will approve a budget with no or minimal staff reductions.

For a printable PDF of the Commissioner's Message, [click here](#)

For more information and news from BOLI, visit us online [here](#)