



Commissioner Brad Avakian
Bureau of Labor and Industries

COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE – February 22, 2010

Dear Friends:

In this issue I have a brief legislative update and an exciting note about the future of Technical Assistance, but I want to start with some thoughts about a very timely issue: jobs. As the legislature grapples with re-balancing the state budget in this difficult economic time, it seems appropriate for all of us to look at two of the most critical questions we can ask: where are we now, and where are we going?

Everyone has an opinion about where we are now and, unfortunately, a lot of those opinions are negative, reflecting disillusionment with the painfully slow economic recovery and lingering frustration at the size of the recession. The positive aspect of widespread disaffection is that we can all agree that we want to do whatever we can to prevent a return to this kind of economic morass. We have to be strategic at the same time, though. The action plan for getting out of here requires some consensus about where we want to go; “away from here” is not a road map.

The consensus that I think is building, across various interest communities and sectors of the economy, is that Oregon needs to be more proactive in its workforce development. I have talked with organized labor, open-shop training coordinators, local elected officials, community leaders, worker advocates, and executives from companies that are growing, or looking to grow, in Oregon. They all want to know: where are the workers going to come from? Besides new and emerging industries which have no established employee pool, existing industries will face increasing pressure to replace retiring baby boomers with a next generation workforce that may or may not be ready. Although the recession will delay some retirements, this limited delay in worker exodus does not solve any problems. At best, it grants us a few years to reinvigorate workforce training and better prepare for the future.

The key for us now is not to be bogged down by placing blame, but to focus on the shift to proactive workforce development. Being proactive is about getting a better return on our investment, and improving our strategic position for future economic declines. What am I talking about specifically? Three steps that Oregon can take to strengthen our workforce system and lay the foundation for a nimble, highly skilled workforce for this century:

1. Restore career and technical education (CTE) to all Oregon middle and high schools. This will take time and an investment by the legislature, but delaying job training and career skills hurts our kids by limiting their awareness of potential career paths, and it hurts our economy by delaying the availability of workers who have grown up using new technology.
2. Restructure the Oregon Workforce Investment Board. Streamlining and empowering this body, which brings together the brightest minds in workforce development from around the state, is the key to setting effective statewide workforce goals and ensuring accountability for achieving them.

The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.

3. Look at K-12 education and workforce development as one continuum. This is a strategic level culture change, but also means on-the-ground changes: injecting job awareness into non-CTE classes to provide more well-rounded students and citizens, considering the progression from K-12 through higher education and workforce training in setting state policy and priorities, and building stronger cooperation between K-12, higher education, job training programs and Oregon businesses.

That's the consensus that a host of folks have embraced in talking with me about this issue, but I also want to hear from all of my friends directly. Every Oregonian of every age has an interest in the future of our workforce and our economy, and more of us will need to share our visions in order to forge the consensus that we will start building towards in 2011.

As always, I appreciate the feedback and questions that I get from you all—please let me know what you think about Oregon's workforce future or any other issue that's on your mind.

Sincerely,



Brad Avakian
State Labor Commissioner

Coming Soon to Technical Assistance for Employers: Servicios en Español

BOLI's [Technical Assistance program](#), thanks to money restored to the agency's budget at the end of last session, is in the process of training a bilingual training coordinator. Bringing on additional bilingual staff is a goal for Comm. Avakian and agency management, and TA's first Spanish-speaking employee will be a valuable addition to the small but efficient unit.

What does a Spanish-speaking training coordinator mean for Oregon employers? Several useful things:

1. [On-site trainings can now be even more customized](#), including being done completely in Spanish. Employers who have Spanish-speaking employees or supervisors that would benefit from training regarding Civil Rights, Wage and Hour issues, leave laws, recordkeeping requirements or effective supervisory practices can contact TA at 971-673-0825 to begin discussing options.
2. [Faster answers to questions from Spanish-speaking employers](#). TA now can communicate directly with Spanish-speaking employers, rather than working through a translator. This not only increases the speed of the response from TA, but reduces the potential that an answer might be confused in translation by someone not as well-versed in the law as TA staff.

The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.

3. [More outreach to and partnerships with the Latino community](#) are possible for BOLI. BOLI, through its enforcement divisions and TA, is committed to educating and supporting both workers and employers in Oregon, regardless of their language background. BOLI believes that greater access to bilingual services will advance the agency's mission: to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.

Legislative Update: Bills That Moved

BOLI's roles in defending civil rights, ensuring proper wages and hours and developing Oregon's skilled workforce mean that even in a special session, the agency must track a number of bills. As always, you can view all measures under consideration on [the legislature's website](#).

In a short session like this one, bills must either get enough traction to move quickly or get left behind. Several concepts got a good running start, including these bills that BOLI watched or is still watching closely:

House Bill 3686 – Repealing the ban on all religious dress for Oregon school teachers

Commissioner Avakian, House Speaker Dave Hunt (D-Gladstone) and others are working to repeal ORS 342.650, which prohibits teachers in Oregon public schools from wearing *any* religious dress in the classroom. Oregon is one of only [three states in the union](#) with a law denying teachers any right to religious expression. Oregon already has other laws on the books to preserve appropriate church/state separation. HB 3686 was overwhelmingly supported on the House floor, 51-8, and passed in the Senate Rules Committee: 4-1.

House Bill 3651 – Subjecting solar energy systems to prevailing wage rates

Worker advocates are driving a specific addition to PWR law that would require prevailing wages be paid on any solar panel construction or installation on publicly owned land or buildings, even if the construction or installation project uses no public money. Solar energy improvements and retrofits are proliferating, making this a very timely issue for the legislature to address. Winning bipartisan support, this bill was endorsed by the Oregon House 38-21 and passed by a wide margin in the Senate: 23-6.

House Bill 3652 – Expanding remote supervision of electrical apprentices

HB 3652 directs the Oregon State Apprenticeship and Training Council to provide guidance to local training committees that allows remote supervision for more electrical apprentices (only after completing three-quarters of their program). This bill passed both the House and the Senate by unanimous votes.

As February draws to a close and this session winds down, discussion is already turning to the key agenda pieces for 2011: the budget, job creation and (BOLI's primary focus) workforce development.

Upcoming BOLI Events

Date	Event Type	Location	Subject	Contact
Feb. 23	TA Seminar	Portland State Office Bldg.	Wage and Hour Laws	TA Program @ 971-673-0825
Mar. 2	TA Seminar	Portland State Office Bldg.	Civil Rights Laws and Workplace Harassment	TA Program @ 971-673-0825
Mar. 3	PWR Seminar	Hillsboro Civic Center	PWR for Contractors and Subcontractors	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838
Mar. 3	PWR Seminar	Hillsboro Civic Center	PWR for Public Agencies	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838
Mar. 16 & 17	TA Seminar	Lane Community College	Leave Laws in OR: a 2-Day Training	TA Program @ 971-673-0825
Mar. 16	PWR Seminar	ODOT HR Trng Center in Salem	PWR for Contractors and Subcontractors	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838
Mar. 16	PWR Seminar	ODOT HR Trng Center in Salem	PWR for Public Agencies	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838
Mar. 17	PWR Seminar	Portland State Office Bldg.	PWR for Contractors and Subcontractors	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838
Mar. 23	TA Seminar	Portland State Office Bldg.	Recordkeeping Requirements	TA Program @ 971-673-0825
Mar. 30	PWR Seminar	COIC in Redmond	PWR for Contractors and Subcontractors	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838
Mar. 31	PWR Seminar	COIC in Redmond	PWR for Public Agencies	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838
Mar. 31	PWR Seminar	COIC in Redmond	PWR for Contractors and Subcontractors	PWR Unit @ 971-673-0838

The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.