

Statistics in ad debated by OPEU

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Oregon Daily Emerald

Public employees, the state and a group of angry taxpayers are at a disagreement over statistics used in an advertisement that ran in Oregon newspapers last Monday.

Each side says the other used statistics that were inappropriate, creating a disparity between not only the political arguments, but economic figures being used as well.

The full-page advertisement was paid for by the Oregon Taxpayers United, a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to "forcefully stand against unwarranted tax increases and over-zealous government," according to their mission statement.

The advertisement claimed the average salary of all public employees was approximately \$29,000, while the average salary of all private sector employees was approximately \$23,000. Average salaries of state workers, according to these statistics, were 26 percent above the average salary of private sector employees.

Jim McIntosh, a manager of personnel services in the state department of administrative services, said the statistics used in the OTU advertisement were "correct, but not the right kind of data to use to compare salaries of similar jobs in the private and public sector."

"In terms of determining whether you should pay an accountant X amount of money based on the market rate, we wouldn't use these sort of statistics and neither would businesses," McIntosh said.

Data from the Governor's Task Force on State Employees Compensation states that the statewide benchmark average of a total of 515 job classifications (out of 1,094) and 13,594 employees (out of

36,389) are below a 95 percent market ratio.

The Oregon Public Employees Union stated in a press conference Wednesday that the ad makes an "apples to oranges" comparison and is not an honest comparison of state employee wages and benefits. The OPEU also said the private sector salary figures used in the ad omit other types of income found in the private sector, but not available in the public sector, such as profit-sharing and stock options.

Bill Sizemore of the OTU said only 1.5 percent of private sector workers receive income from profit-sharing and stock options.

"If we include state employees' fringe benefits, the distance goes from 26 percent to 43 percent," Sizemore said.

Bentley Gilbert, spokesperson for the Oregon Public Employees Union, said the union was very concerned about "misrepresentation and misinformation about the salaries of public employees."

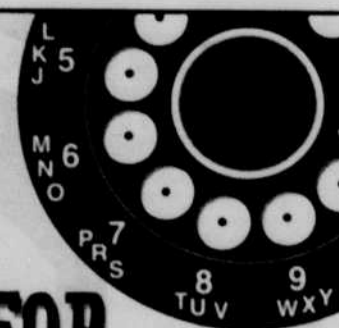
"This is almost a no-brainer for us, it's the same argument the OTU has used before," Gilbert said.

However, Sizemore said the state department of administrative services "only chooses handpicked large employers for their statistics" and "absolutely refuses to include the 70 percent of Oregon workers who work for small businesses."

"The OPEU made a \$60,000 contribution to Gov. Kitzhaber's campaign, and now Kitzhaber is negotiating (their salary)" Sizemore said. "It would be a real stretch to say that does not create a conflict of interest."

Sizemore also claimed the department of administrative services was looking for statistics to justify the pay raise for state employees, not "is this pay raise justified."

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