

Legislation tackles access to personal information

Controlling criminal access to the addresses, e-mails and phone numbers of public officers is a priority

BY CHARLES E. BEGGS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALEM — Legislators are considering at least a half-dozen new bills that would make more information exempt from Oregon's Public Records Law, and backers are facing opposition on at least two of them.

Those two bills would require that personal information on trial witnesses, accusers and others be deleted from criminal records before the records are made public.

Criminals can find out such things as Social Security numbers, birth dates and addresses of people involved in their cases because police put that information in reports, said Mary Botkin, a lobbyist for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The open records law, passed in 1973 during the Watergate scandal, says government records are presumed open to the public except for those specifically exempted. The Legislature has passed more than 300 exemptions over the past three decades.

Identity theft along with public concern about privacy rights has led to many of the recently proposed exemptions.

Botkin's union, which represents many state corrections workers, proposed the two bills partly because of the story of John Merrill, a state prison counselor who was the victim of a burglary in which his personal information was stolen.

A man was convicted of burglarizing Merrill's house and sent to prison. Merrill said he found out the convict was able to see personal information on himself as well as find information on other people involved because of access to records used in the case.

Merrill said at least two other criminals now in prison were also found to have his identifying information. He said his only losses so far were from several forged checks, but that he has no way of knowing how many people may have information about him.

A news organization is opposing the legislation that would exempt personal details in criminal records from the open records law, saying it is too broad.

Tom Gallagher, lobbyist for the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association, said the legislation would make it difficult, for example, for the press to get enough information to contact witnesses in major cases.

Gallagher is trying to find a way to prevent convicts but not the public from getting identifying information in criminal records.

"We need to restrict the right of criminals to get the personal ID of people. Don't take away the rights of everybody," he said.

Botkin said she agrees.

"We want to draw this as narrowly as we can without catching everybody," she said.

Andi Miller, director of Oregon

Common Cause, a citizens' government watchdog group, said the criminal records exemption may well be justified.

But, she said, the public needs to be wary of creating new loopholes in the open records law.

"If you keep chipping away at things, sometimes you end up with nothing," she said.

Some other bills to make records confidential are narrow and have drawn no major opposition. The House is due to vote on two of them in the coming week.

One bill would make confidential the addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of police, prison guards and some other public safety employees, on grounds that would lessen chances of harassment or threats to their safety by disgruntled offenders.

Another measure would forbid disclosure of personal information about customers of public water utilities.

Gallagher said from what he can see, that bill would not be a serious infringement on public access to government documents.

He said the exemption likely wouldn't prevent the public or news media from getting information to use to contact individual water customers if, for example, water became so polluted that it threatened public health.

Gallagher said that's because the law has a "balancing test" that says even otherwise confidential records have to be disclosed when the public interest outweighs individual rights to privacy.

Job prospects still grim despite rebound of Oregon economy

While industries with average wages below \$30,000 have added jobs, middle-wage positions are still sparse

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND — The statistics say that Oregon's economy is on the rebound after a painful recession.

But the recovery has been fueled in large part by low-wage industries, according to data from the Oregon Employment Department.

Nearly half the jobs created in Oregon between the second half of 2003 and the same period in 2004 were in industry sectors with an average annual wage of less than \$30,000, like restaurants and bars, social assistance agencies and temporary employment services.

For some Oregonians, that's translated into a world of reduced wages and benefits, decreased job security and diminished prospects.

Meanwhile, many of the industries hardest hit by the economic downturn, including manufacturing and high tech, are recovering but still not back up to full speed in overall job counts.

While the employment picture is improving, those who keep their finger on the pulse of the job market say the economy's heartbeat is still irregular.

"What I see is that companies are still hunkered down," said Jean Erickson Walker, executive vice president in the Portland office of the career management firm Pathways/OI Partners. "Companies are not positioning themselves for

growth, which is not the sign of a confident economy."

For example, tech companies are looking for more flexibility with their manufacturing and engineering teams. While they used to offer signing bonuses and other perks to lure workers from competitors, many now start workers in temporary jobs. That diminishes benefit costs and makes it easier for companies to trim payroll if demand falls off.

Take the case of Paul Chirton, the former director of information technology for Hillsboro-based TriQuint Semiconductor, who left when his company went through a merger.

Chirton spent \$8,500 to hire an executive recruiting firm for placement assistance, to no avail.

He told The Oregonian that when he managed to wangle an interview, he was often far more experienced than the manager interviewing him.

In two years looking for a permanent position, Chirton said he found not a single company that was aggressively increasing its in-house IT staff.

The picture in the manufacturing sector is not much brighter. Oregon's manufacturers shed 30,000 workers between 2000 and 2003.

The average annual wage in the manufacturing sector in 2003 was \$45,000.

Many industrial employers are in hiring mode again, and the sector has

added back 8,000 employees since 2003, but there's a long way to go.

"It's still an employers' market," said Bob Tackett, who was laid off in 2000 when Reynolds Metals closed its Troutdale aluminum smelter and now manages a manufacturing workers support group for the dislocated workers program at Mt. Hood Community College.

McGough said what Oregonians are experiencing is a long-term stratification of the labor market. The region's economy is able to produce many low-wage jobs and a goodly number of relatively well-paid jobs for skilled workers. What's missing is the middle-wage positions for semi- and low-skilled workers.

Oregon does retain its strong lifestyle draw, which inevitably figures into its employment picture. People move here without jobs, and those who are here don't want to leave when they lose one.

Steve Bruns used to make \$75,000 a year at Wilsonville-based Mentor Graphics. Now he makes \$15 an hour for custodial work and managing a rudimentary computer lab at Southwest Christian School in Beaverton.

He has no intention of leaving, even though he is skeptical of stories he reads saying the state has surpassed its pre-recession employment levels.

"I'm just looking for something that's paying \$40,000 a year and benefits," he said, "something so I don't have to tell my kids they can't go out for track and soccer."

ESPN PLUS ESPN Plus ESPN PLUS

2005 Summer Internship

ESPN Plus at the University of Oregon Athletic Department is looking for a **full time summer intern**. The internship will focus on sports sponsorship with an emphasis on web and graphic design. This internship is a paid position and has an anticipated start date of May 10th.

Applicants must have knowledge and experience with web and graphic design.

Please e-mail resumes and any questions to Courtney Oversby with ESPN Plus at courtney.j.oversby@espn.com

O

Specializing in the Care of
**German, Swedish
& Japanese
Automobiles.**

Courtesy
Van Service

Bosch Authorized
Service

ASE Master
Certified Technicians

Since 1975

EURO ASIAN
AUTOMOTIVE

485-8226

1917 Franklin Blvd., Eugene
www.euro-asian.com

Rapid Refill Ink

Tired of paying too much for inkjet & laser toner cartridges?

Reuse your empty cartridge!
Save 40-70%

Drop Box Locations on Campus

- U of O Book Store
- Digital Duck
- EMU
- Law school



Visit one of our four locations or use any of the over one hundred Drop Boxes around town.

830 Willamette St. Valley River Center 1925 River Road 3570 West 11th
541.334.4465 541.345.4465 541.689.3513 541.686.4651

www.RapidRefillInk.com