

# the **advocate** **UPDATE**

VOICE OF OKLAHOMA'S STATE EMPLOYEES

APRIL 2010

## Troopers Association Joins Forces With OPEA In Fight To Keep Employees' Information Private

The Oklahoma State Troopers Association has joined the Oklahoma Public Employees Association's battle

joined OPEA at a joint press conference at the state Capitol March 29.

"We are very fortunate to have the

Troopers Association with us in this fight," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "This issue affects every single state employee, and we will not back down from our stance."

The issue surrounds Senate Bill 1753, authored by Sen. Debbe Leftwich, which seeks to make the date of birth of state employees a private matter. *The Oklahoman* is adamant that those confidential records be released.

"I was a state administrator for 16 years," Leftwich said. "Back in the early '80s, we had a similar situation here at the Capitol with state employees' Social Security numbers. There were those who

thought because you are a public employee, everything about you is an open book.

I am here to tell you that's not the case."

Another vocal proponent of SB 1753, Rep. Randy Terrill, added: "Just because you become a public employee doesn't mean your life history is a matter of open record. This is a witch hunt, plain and simple."

On Feb. 19, *Oklahoman* reporter John Estus submitted a batch request to the state Office of Personnel Management, seeking all information on state employees, including

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• OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley



Russell Knoke, president of the Oklahoma Troopers Association, speaks at the March 29 press conference. With him are State Sen. Debbe Leftwich, left, State Rep. Randy Terrill and OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley.

with the state's leading newspaper.

OPEA has been embroiled in a recent fight with *The Oklahoman* over legislation that would protect the privacy of state employees. The Troopers Association

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## Members Rally Around The Association

OPEA members from across the state have been bombarding the Association this week with letters of support in our fight against *The Oklahoman*. Many of you are telling us to keep up the good work, and "don't let the bullies win." Just as many messages are coming in supporting our stance on SB 1753, saying you don't want your private information opened up as a matter of public record.

We appreciate each and every one of you who have taken the time to respond because OPEA is your Association. Here's what you've been saying:

"Thank you for spearheading this fight. Just because *The Oklahoman* wants to construct a database of state employees

with all of their information doesn't mean that A) they are entitled to do so, or B) they will be good custodians of said information from hackers, etc. If I were an employee of *The Oklahoman*, they would be privy to such information. But I am not and they are not entitled." - ODOT employee

"*The Oklahoman* doesn't need to know my date of birth any more than they need to know my weight. They don't care about me one whit. It's just a way of bullying, and I appreciate OPEA helping us. Thank you for all you do for us." - OKDHS employee

"Thank you for the great work

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# Setting The Record Straight

A great deal of misinformation has been circulated recently by *The Oklahoman* and the *Tulsa World*, which claim that OPEA has gained access to state employees' personal information.

A bill passed during the 2009 legislative session does allow associations such as OPEA to mail information directly to the homes of state employees. However, OPEA does not see your information, and we haven't asked to see it.

Any association that has more than 2,000 members and is eligible for payroll deduction can indeed send information to you. But by law, the mailing list remains private. The Office of State Finance sends the list to a mail house, which then mails materials directly to employees. When the mailing is complete, the list is destroyed. At no time does OPEA or any association see your confidential information.

To the right is a letter from Comtech, which OPEA regularly uses for mailing *The Advocate* and other direct-mail pieces, outlining the process the company follows. OPEA adheres strictly to the law, and our members and all state employees can rest assured we are dedicated to protecting your privacy.

March 30, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

At Comtech, we receive a member mailing list directly from the Office of State Finance. We sign a confidentiality agreement, and, if our clients request that list to be destroyed, we immediately comply with that request once the mailing is complete.

At no time does the list leave our offices. We are required by law to keep that information private, and we adhere strictly to that law.

Comtech strives for honesty and integrity in our work. Our clients may rest assured we provide the best service and respect all rights to privacy.

Thank you,

Stacia Morrison  
Account Executive  
Comtech Design, Print and Mail

## Members Rally (Continued From Page 1)

you do, OPEA!" - *Health Department employee*

"I appreciate what all of you and the Association are doing for all of the state employees. Keep up the good work and a big thank you to all of the staff. I really appreciate the direction OPEA is going!" - *OJA employee*

"My mom gets the paper. I just called for her to cancel it. I told them I heard what they're trying to do to the state employees and I think it's pathetic and I never want their paper again. Cancel it immediately. They acted like they never heard what I'm talking about. I said 'You know what I'm talking about, and you should escalate this to the top because you're going to lose more and more people getting your paper.'" - *OKDHS employee*

"You go, Sterling! We are blessed that OPEA gets out there and fights for our rights." - *ODVA employee*

"Thank you so much for working on my behalf. I do not want my date of birth or any other personal information to be released on me. I have already been a victim of identity theft, and it has been a complete nightmare for me. I urge you to do everything within your powers to keep this from happening. Lastly, are we as state employees going to be able to receive this same information on the requesters? If so, I am requesting to have this same information on them for my personal records. Thanks again for working on my behalf." - *OESC employee*

"Every employer has the right and responsibility to protect their employees, even if that employer is a state agency. Would *The Oklahoman* give out this info about their employees? The relationship between an employer and an employee is private. If anyone wants to go fishing, go buy a boat!" - *State Election Board employee*

## Troopers (Continued From Page 1)

their date of birth. OPEA believes *The Oklahoman* will use that information to compare against databases to reveal state employees' tax warrants, bankruptcies, divorces, traffic tickets and anything else that might potentially embarrass them.

OPEA has filed an injunction to keep the birth date of

**"They are going on a witch hunt after every state employee, and we are saying we will protect those employees' rights to privacy."**

**• State Rep. Randy Terrill**

state employees sealed. Representatives of OPEA and the Troopers Association briefed reporters at the March 29 press conference and welcomed both Leftwich and Terrill to explain the need for confidentiality.

"We believe in transparency in state government," Terrill said. "If there is a person on the state's payroll who has committed a crime, we want that person exposed. That's not what *The Oklahoman* is doing. They are going on a witch hunt after every state employee, and we are saying we will protect those employ-

ees' rights to privacy."

"I authored this bill because, as a former state administrator, I was always very careful with what information I released," Leftwich said. "If there is an issue about a particular employee, all it takes is one phone call to answer a question. There is no need to release private information on all 40,000 state employees."