

The **ADVOCATE**

The Voice Of Oklahoma's State Employees



May 2008

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Volume 29, No. 3

Time Is Running Out

State Employee Pay Raise,

Help For State Agencies

Reaching Critical Point





MAKING A DIFFERENCE ...

New Members • The following people recently chose to get involved by joining the Oklahoma Public Employees Association.

Audrey Adams	Debra Cole	Kevin Hale	Joan Luttmer	Anthony Partsch	Christy Stockton
Nancy Adkerson	Glenn Cole	Susan Hamer	Sheila Lynch	Patti Pearce	Chanel Stuff
Ava Admire	Shelley Collins	Mike Hancock	Adam Lynn	April Pennington	Joyce Summers
Alma Alvarado	Wallace Collins	Robert Hansen	Edith Maben	Craig Percifield	Lillian Gayle Sutton
Wendy Anastasio	Brian Cook	Sonya Hardcastle	Kelli Macario	Judith Pettitt	Sterling Sutton
Katrina Anderson	Donald Cook	Felicia Harris	Olivia Mackey	Anastasia Pittman	Lori Sweeney
Tara Arbutnot	Glenda Copeland	Richard Harris	Kim Macy	Jimmy Polly	Traci Taber
Emma Arnett	Cara Cox	Christa Harrison	Amber Mangels	Melody Pool	Robert Talley
Sallie Arrington	Jennifer Cox	Anthony Hartson	Gwen Martin	Darrell Praytor	Ann Tandy
Shirley Avery	Shana Cozad	Paul Harvey	Latrica Martin	Shirley Quaid	Sandra Tannehill
Marion Bales	Mark Craig	Richard Harvey	Teresa Martinez	Audra Qualls	Jonathan Tardif
Wilbur Barbour	Steve Culp	Van Havenstrite	Jean Mathews	Charlotte Raper	Melinda Tatyrek
Michael Barnes	Elaina Culver	Teletha Hayden	Lisa May	Dan Reiss	Amy Tavernia
Norma Bartley	Constance Cunnningham	Michael Hayes	William Mayhall	Debra Rennie	Sherrilyn Taylor
Carolyn Battle	Damon Davis	Peggy Jan Helling	Glenda McCaskill	Carrie Repaci	Lavern Templeton
A.J. Beaver	Dianna Davis	Brian Hendrickson	Shana McClendon	Michael Reynolds	Tyrone Thain
Sharla Beebe	Eric Dawley	Regina Hicks	Debbie McCulley	Autumn Rice	Victoria Theapinol
Kandy Beers	Florian "Fawn" Day	Karen Hinson	Flora McDaniel	Marcus Rice	Yolanda Thomas
Vernell Bell	Jennifer Denby	Jamie Hogan	Miranda McElroy	Jennifer Ridenour	Licia Thompson
Shawna Bennett	Bonnie Devia	Richard Holcomb	Michael McLaugh	Michelle Rider	Carol Thornton
Linda Bertolini	Paula Dilts-Fregara	Phillip "Shane" Holt	Takesha McGee	Lena Riley	Brenda Tidwell
Rosy Biggs	Jocelyn Dimarucut	Andrea Hudgens	Evelyn McGinnis	Roberta Roads	Jay Trammell
Rita Bilby	Kimberley Donaldson	Cynthia Hunt	Wanda McMennamy	Joseph Robinson	Kathrine Triplett
Joseph Blakeburn	Joyce Dowty	Eara Jean Hutton	David Milcano	Celeste Rogers	Jeanne Tyler
James Blalock	Rhonda Duke	Charolette Jackson	Diana Miller	Constance Rowland	Reba Valdes
Becky Blevins	Nancy Duncan	Alice Johnson	Karmen Miller	S. Keith Sanders	Sandra Vandever
Jennifer Bouziden	Shanna Duncan	Clinton Johnson	Ronna Milligan	Stephanie Sartin	Esther Vaughn
Kimberly Braddy	LeMarlon Earl	James Johnson	Barbara Mills	Jessica Schilreff	John Vernon
Miriam Brandon	Paul Early	Laura Johnson	Dennis Mitchell	Donna Schmidt	Shannon Wade
Jesse Braun	Stephen Earnheart	Nikki Jones	Gerri Mooney	Christie Schmitt	Lori Warren
Stephen Brophy	Pat Easter	Edward Jordan	Patsy Moore	Richard Scifo	Victoria Watson
Terrell Brown	Cynthia Edwards	Linda Jorgenson	Sally Moore	Kim Scott	Nora Webb
Dawn Brunson	Douglas Egerer	Melvin Jorgenson	Logan Moreno	Anna Scribner	Rick Webb
Lisa Brunson	Amy Elledge	Tammy Joslin	Sherry Morgan	Jerahmy Serrano	Angela Welch
Carolyn Bulp	Steve Evans	Bryon Kamm	Virginia Morrow	Jennifer Shaffer	Michelle West
Carol Bullard	Lynne Eyer	Linda Keel	Ronald Morton	Carry Shamblin	Mike Wester
Eleanor Burleson	Grace Fears	Rita Killian	Michelle Mosley	Lola Yvonne Shamblin	Kimberly White
Penelope Burns	Glenda Fenimore	Andrew King	Roger Murphy	Michael Shelite	Gale Whitson
Robyn Burns	Brenda Fields	Carol King	Cynthia Murray	Tiffany Shook	Elizabeth Wilcox
Vanessa Burreis	Cheryl Ford	Kari Kirtley	Georgiana Myers	Amy Sigley	Allen Williams
Charla Bushers	Sharyn Frith	Matthias Kitchen	Margaret Myers	Debra Simmons	Mollie Williams
Paulette Bushers	Christine Gaal	Tammie Kreger	Jay Newton	Rebecca Sims	Tawana Williams
Shirley Buskey	Michelle Garibay	Robert Laing	Lehong Nguyen	Rhonda Sloan	Joe Windsor
W. Kent Bynum	Jane Garner	Kimberly Laster	Vickie Nichols	Gabrielle Smart	Debra Winn
Vickie Caldwell	Lois Gibson	Paula Lau	Holly Null	Vicki Smiddy	Donna Womack
Claudia Cale	Cherrie Gicaletto	Deborah Laughlin	Robert O'Rear	Roger Smith	Jessica Womack
Cynthia Campbell	Jerilyn Goodier	Marlyn LaVergne	Nancy Obregon	Hillary Sneed	Jason Woodfaulk
Leeandra Canann	Kendrick Goodyear	Lissa Lee	Gloria Okwufuleze	Sherri Snyder	Jerica Wortham
Vivien Carlisle	Amber Gordon	Patsy Leisering	Mary Onarsee	Billy Sommerfeld	Jackie Wright
Liberty Carter	Iona Graham	Stephanie Leistner	Miranda Paige	Janet Spaeth	La Juan Wright
Jacqueline Carter-Hill	Michael Grant	Wendy Leprich	Vickie Pannell	Kathy Spalla	Ida Yarberry
Elizabeth Cartmell	Betty Gray	Michael Linder	Doug Parent	Tracy Staten	Justin Young
Kelly Chancellor	Anthony Greasham	Michelle Littleton	Carla Parks	Vickie Staten-Ford	Leann Young
Sharon Clark	Lindsey Gross	Roger Logan	Vicki Parsons	Henry Steves	
Tara Clary	Rebecca Guess	Dominic Lomshek	April Parton	Jeanette Stewart	
Sherry Clay	Brianne Gulbranson	Linda Lowther	Jessica Partridge	Stephanie Stie	

15-Year Anniversaries • These OPEA members reached their 15th anniversary with the association during the past month.

Theresa Buckmaster	Glenda Gay	Texanna James	Laura Mullins	Caprice Tyner
Katherine Dean	Sherri Graves	Michelle Kirby	Valorie Nagy	Jack Waymire
Dorothy DeVore	Charles Gray	Brenda Linker	Cynthia Schnell	Kristi Weaver
Charles Foreman	Linda Henderson	Mary McGrath	Cheryl Tucker	Tommy Welch



IN THIS MONTH'S ADVOCATE ...

Making A Difference

A list of new OPEA members and those who have been with the association for 15 years. . . 2

Many Agencies But One Association

The President's Pen
By OPEA Acting President Connie Stockton . . . 4

Here's How You Can Return The Fire

Frontlines
By OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley 4

The Truth About

The Consequences 5

New Board Members Sworn In 6

Wright Will Be OPEA

Liaison To DOC Council 6

Pay Raise Should Carry More Weight

Than Tax Breaks, State Rep Says 8

Stories From The Workforce 9

Association Strengthens Staff With

Addition Of Grievance Consultant 14

DHS Office Launches

New OPEA Chapter 15

Who Are You Going To Call? 16

OPEA Will Elect A President

And Two Board Members 16

The OPEA Board

. 18

Unclassified Employees

Also Have Rights. 19

DHS Employees Tell Their Side Of The Story

A strong delegation of Department of Human Services employees met with legislators, media and DHS Director Howard Hendrick to tell their side of the story at OPEA's DHS Lobby Day April 16.

Page 7



OPEA Members Rally For A State Employee Pay Raise

With hopes as bright as the clear March sunshine, approximately 1,000 members of the Oklahoma Public Employees Association took to the south steps of the state Capitol March 11 to rally for a state employee pay raise.

Page 12



OPEA Discusses State Employee Pay Raise With Governor Henry

OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley met with Gov. Brad Henry and State Treasurer Scott Meacham April 7 to discuss state employee pay, and the news was disappointing.

Page 15



OPEA Warns Of DOC Staffing Crisis

Saying that "workers in the Department of Corrections are warning that the system has reached a breaking point," the Oklahoma Public Employees Association has called for pay raises for all state employees and additional funding to fill staffing shortages and address the agency's infrastructure needs.

Page 17



The Advocate

The Advocate is published by the Oklahoma Public Employees Association • 13 N.E. 28th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105 • (405) 524-6764 • (800) 880-OPEA • Fax: (405) 524-4671 • E-mail: general@opea.org • Web Site: www.opea.org

OPEA Board Of Directors

Connie Stockton - Acting President • Christie Biggs - Veterans Council • Kenneth Burrow - GRDA Council • Carrie Croy - DOC Council • Patricia Dill - DHS Council • Jann Ensz - DHS Council • Darren Francis - Natural Resources/Safety and Security Council • Royce Harder - OJA Council • Glenn Hightower - Retiree Council • Dixie Jackson - Department of Mental Health Council • Patricia Naifeh-Parker - Education Services/Human Resources Council • Fred Martin - Transportation/Transportation Authority Council • Tom McDonald - DHS Council • Mark Rainville - DHS Council • Mike Rogers - DOC Council • Forrest Rush - Education Services/Human Resources Council • Betty Weber - Department of Health Council

OPEA Staff

Executive Director - Sterling Zearley (sterlingz@opea.org); Deputy Director - Scott Barger (scottb@opea.org); Policy and Agency Relations Director - Trish Frazier, MPA (trishf@opea.org); Executive Assistant - Nancy Hughes (nancyh@opea.org); Communications Director and Special Projects - Bud Elder (bude@opea.org); Employee Relations Coordinator - Clyde McLendon (cmac@opea.org); Membership Representative - Alicia Wright (aliciawright@opea.org); Administrative Assistant - Rachelle Johnson (rachellej@opea.org).

The Advocate (USPS 016-153) is published bimonthly by the Oklahoma Public Employees Association. Periodicals postage paid at Oklahoma City, Okla. 73125. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Advocate, Oklahoma Public Employees Association, 13 N.E. 28th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105. Subscriptions: \$4 per year, included as part of OPEA membership. Reproduction in whole or part prohibited without written permission. Advertising rates upon request. Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertising.



Many Agencies But One Association

Since this is my first column as the acting president of OPEA, I thought long and hard about what I wanted to say.

First of all, your association is in great shape. We have money in



the bank, our membership is energized and people are hearing our message. This year's Lobby Day was perhaps the best I've ever experienced. We counted some 1,000 of you fighting for your rights.

During Lobby Day, I was thinking about all the people OPEA represents.

They come from all over the state, from Broken Bow to Guymon and all spots in

between. We are nurses and groundskeepers and cooks and accountants and correctional officers and child welfare workers. I have heard our executive director, Sterling Zearley, say that sometimes it's hard for the association to paint a picture of a typical state employee – because there isn't

The President's Pen

By Connie Stockton
OPEA Acting President

one.

OPEA is not just DHS or corrections. Our members come from probation and parole to the Lottery Commission, from Labor Department employees to Tourism park managers (that's me).

In short, there isn't an agency in the state that doesn't have at least a few OPEA members. That diversity is what makes us strong. That's why we will not be denied.

As the cover of this month's *Advocate* implies, this state and its employees and facilities are a ticking time bomb. We need a pay raise now, and we have one more month to get it done.

Keep on your legislators. Remind them that this is an election year and that state employees are going to vote in big numbers.

And no matter what agency you work for, tell your lawmakers that OPEA is about unity and tolerance and that it's time for them to do the right thing. This is not just about state employees – it's also about taxpayers and their right to the services they deserve.

Here's How You Can Return The Fire

As the clock ticks down on the 2008 legislative session, OPEA members will have an increasingly shrinking time frame to get their points and issues across to their elected officials – and less



time to hear pat and meaningless answers in return.

To save time, here are some potential answers to questions regarding a state employee pay raise, along with some ammo you can use to return the fire.

"There's not enough money this year."

There's some truth in this statement, and the state's lack of money might eventually prove to be an insurmountable hurdle for state employees, but, until the final budget is written, this answer could appear to be no more than a cop-out. If this is the answer you get from one of your lawmakers, you can ask about alternative means of funding, such as the Rainy Day Fund or other sources. Don't forget to bring up the irony of the state being in a financial hole despite its recent prosperity. You can most certainly thank the tax cuts for the current budget situation.

"Only the governor can authorize the use of money from the

Frontlines

By Sterling Zearley
OPEA Executive Director

"Rainy Day Fund."

If it came to tapping the Rainy Day Fund for a state employee pay raise, would your senator or representative give

the governor enough support and cover to make it happen? Ask this question if you want to find out what your legislator really thinks of state employees.

"We have to wait until the end of the session."

This often is the case with a general appropriations bill. However, there is no law that says mechanisms can't be put in place right now. The Legislature and governor have already gotten together to hand out early supplementals to the Department of Corrections and other agencies.

"It's the other party's fault."

This is an ancient and overused shell

(Continued On Page 5)

"Don't forget to bring up the irony of the state being in a financial hole despite its recent prosperity. You can most certainly thank the tax cuts for the current budget situation."

The Truth About The Consequences

Tax Cuts Prove Costly For The Citizens Of Oklahoma

“There is no money” is the reply many state employees receive from their legislators when they call or e-mail about the need for a pay raise or funding for critical staffing needs. In a time when state employees are paying record

prices for gas and food, how is it that the state doesn't have any energy and sales tax to help those who serve the people of Oklahoma?

The answer is tax cuts. Since the economy recovered from a downturn in

2006, the list of deferred maintenance needs throughout state government was \$498 million.

Many of the challenges state employees face every day could be addressed with the funds that have been taken from state coffers in the tax cuts passed by state legislators in a race to give away more money than their election year opponents.

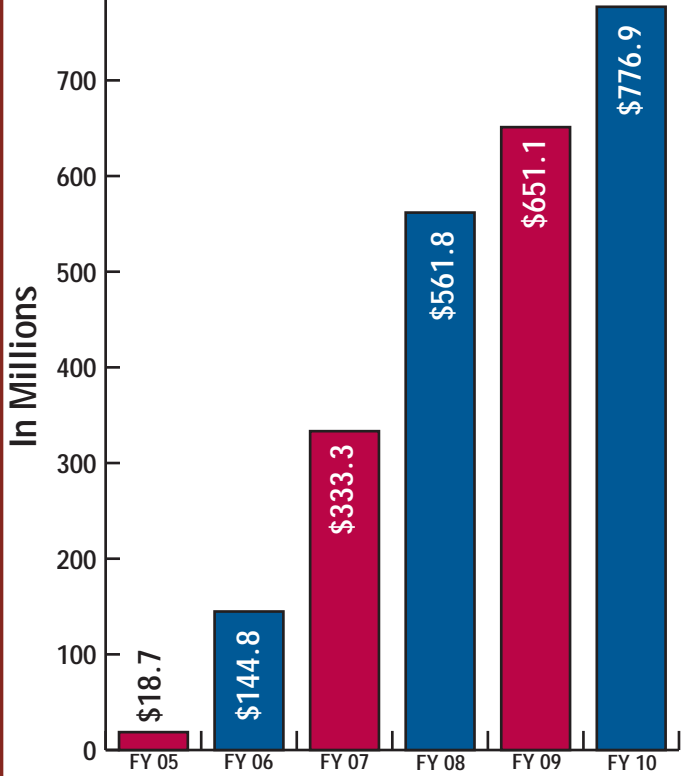
Some legislators say that state agencies need to cut the fat and tighten their belts, just like any family household does in troubled economic times. As we all know, state agencies have been cut to the bone and have not recovered from the budget shortfalls in 2002 and 2003. Legislators have forced agencies to do more with less by refusing to fund more than \$200 million in state employee retirement and health insurance increases. In addition, the important services state employees provide are often more in demand when the economy softens.

What's The Answer?

Tell your legislator to utilize the Rainy Day Fund, which has reserves of \$572 million. According to the Constitution, state leaders could appropriate \$143 million this year to help with the pressing

(Continued On Page 6)

Table 1
Lost Revenues From Select Tax Cuts Enacted 2004-2006



the early part of this decade, the Legislature and the governor have been on a tax-cut spree. Between 2004 and 2006, our state leaders passed tax cuts that are just now taking effect.

As you can see in Table 1, the cost to this year's budget is more than \$651 million. In comparison, the OPEA \$2,700 pay increase for state employees would cost \$114 million. The price tag for the new facility to house youthful offenders, which the Office of Juvenile Affairs desperately needs, is \$20 million. Additional child welfare workers to bring case-loads to the national average would cost the state \$10.9 million. In

Frontlines *(Continued From Page 4)*

game. OPEA has worked diligently with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle this session and will take the same approach during the election cycle. It will take leadership from both parties to ensure that state employees come away with some financial reward.

“State employees will have a better chance at a raise next year.”

Wrong. With the economy on a downward slide and continued tax cuts on the horizon, 2009 could be a very lean year. Even if we could be certain that the state coffers will be rolling in money next year, the time for a salary increase is now. With only two pay raises in the past seven years, state employees and their families are unable to keep up with inflation, especially

with recent increases in the cost of food and fuel.

Now here is my favorite. ...

“I support a state employee pay raise and will vote for one.”

In most cases, here is how this statement can be interpreted: “If someone else steps up and authors a bill, and if my leadership supports it, and if I'm on the floor at the time, I'll vote for it.” This is not good enough. We need champions in party caucuses and leadership meetings and speaking out to lawmakers in both Houses and both parties. The headline on the cover of our March *Advocate* screamed: “Who'll Step Up For State Employees?” It's time for someone to do just that.

Before we run out of time.

New Board Members Sworn In

Carrie Croy and Mike Rogers, both Department of Corrections employees, were sworn in by Acting President Connie Stockton before the Board's regular meeting April 6.

Croy launched her probation and parole career at Central District Community Corrections in 2003. In January 2005 she began supervising sex offenders. She served in the U.S. Navy from 1992 to 2001 and in the U.S. Navy Reserves from 2001 to 2007. She is working on a master's in the management of nonprofit organizations and is

active in victims' rights programs. Croy is working on establishing a survivors' group for adults who were sexually abused as children.

Rogers is OPEA's current Corrections Council chair and an 18-year veteran of the Department of Corrections, current serving as a unit manager at the James Crabtree Correctional Center.

He served for 24 years in the Oklahoma Army National Guard and is currently an instructor at the Oklahoma Regional Training Institute.



OPEA Interim President Connie Stockton, right, gives the oath of office to new Board members Carrie Croy and Mike Rogers.

Wright Will Be OPEA Liaison To DOC Council

Oklahoma Public Employees Association Membership Representative Alicia Wright will serve as the association's liaison to the Department of Corrections Council.

"Alicia is a natural for this position," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "Her experience in DOC plus her coalition-building abilities will be an asset during this critical time for our employees in corrections."



OPEA Membership Representative Alicia Wright and Department of Corrections Director Justin Jones.

Wright came to OPEA after serving as a probation and parole officer. She holds a bachelor's in Criminal Justice from Oklahoma City University and an A.A.S. in Criminal Science from Oklahoma State University.

"Both my parents were longtime correctional employ-

ees, so, with my service in the agency, I feel I have the skills necessary to help the DOC Council accomplish great things for our members," Wright said.

"We are very glad to have the opportunity to work with Alicia," DOC Council Chair Mike Rogers commented. "In her brief time with OPEA, she has already made a great impact."

DOC Council members can contact Alicia at (405) 371-4156.

The Truth (Continued From Page 5)

needs of state government. The fund has been used in the past for less important needs than providing relief to the state workforce and helping to lower annual turnover costs of \$85 million in state government.

Obviously, the state cannot continue to fill the hole created by tax cuts with money from the Rainy Day Fund. After addressing the immediate crisis, the Legislature and the governor should carefully scrutinize the state's tax exemptions. Could Oklahomans pay taxes on haircuts or dry cleaning? Why are newspapers and magazines exempt from the state sales tax? Legislative leaders have responded positively to reviewing and possibly eliminating some tax exemptions.

Raising taxes is almost impossible in Oklahoma because of the political climate and the provisions of SQ 640, which prohibits tax hikes without a vote of the people. However, state employees can educate their friends and neighbors about the cost of the state's tax-cut spree. In 2005, the last year for which there are official figures, Oklahoma spent less on state and local government than any state in the nation. Oklahoma spent \$6,223 for each person, compared to the national average of \$8,017. Don't let anyone tell you we are a poor state and therefore should be last in government expenditures. Oklahoma is 43rd in the nation in the percentage we spend of our personal income on state and local taxes.

"After addressing the immediate crisis, the Legislature and the governor should carefully scrutinize the state's tax exemptions."

Some of the information for this article came from "Tax Cuts and Consequences" and "Options for Addressing State Budget Shortfalls," by David Blatt of the Oklahoma Policy Institute and chair of the Alliance for Oklahoma's Future. For more information on Oklahoma tax and expenditure policies, visit www.oklahomabudgetalliance.org. OPEA is a member of the Alliance, which is a coalition of organizations working to ensure adequate funding for Oklahoma government.

DHS Employees Tell Their Side Of The Story

Despite rumblings at the Capitol that a legislative agreement flat-lining agency budgets had been finalized, a strong delegation of Department of Human Services employees met with legislators, media and DHS Director Howard Hendrick to tell their side of the story concerning employee turnover, caseloads and salaries at OPEA's DHS Lobby Day April 16.

"With caseloads increasing and paychecks eroding, more and more workers are leaving public service in order to care for their families," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "Those who are left behind are forced to carry the load and train new workers until they leave through the revolving door and the process begins again."

DHS Council Chair Jim Darst explained that Lobby Day is an important opportunity for those who work in the state's largest agency to have their voices heard.

"No matter the job classification, we all work for DHS," he said. "We found by and large that the legislators with



Sen. Patrick Anderson, center, met with OPEA Board Member Jann Ensz and 55H Chapter President Brandon Watkins during OPEA's DHS Lobby Day.

which we spoke understood the challenges we face in our agency."

After gathering in a legislative conference room, the group took to the halls of the Capitol, making their case to lawmakers.

First to address the group was Sen. Nancy Riley, D-Tulsa, co-chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services.

"I am very concerned about the funding of DHS," she said. "The final appropriations bill did not make up for losses in federal funds and will only squeeze the agency's budget tighter."

Sen. Patrick Anderson, R-Enid, the other co-chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, also spoke to the group.

"Sen. Anderson recently authored a bill that was not heard that attempted to cut the caseloads of child welfare workers," Darst said. "He is very knowledgeable about DHS and was very interested in what we all had to say."

Sen. Judy Eason McIntyre, D-Tulsa, a former DHS employee, also spoke to the group.

"Sen. McIntyre told us to be very specific with what we needed," Darst said. "As a former employee of DHS, she understands our daily battles."

It was then on to the House side, where DHS workers took their case to members of the House DHS Human Services Committee.

"We were able to talk to Rep. Al McAffrey, D-Oklahoma City, and Rep. Anastasia Pittman, D-Oklahoma City," Darst said. "Both were concerned about workers at DHS and each said they would support a dip in the Rainy Day Fund for a state employee pay raise."

Rep. Lisa Billy, R-Purcell, was also contacted by the group. After Lobby Day, the group held a media conference, describing their workplace concerns to the press.

First up was Craig Mahl, a DHS county director from Beckham and Roger Mills counties, who told the group about the fierce competition for jobs in his area and high employee turnover at DHS.

"I've been director for two years and, in that time, have replaced nine of 11 child welfare workers and am still trying to fill the two final slots," he said.

Mahl displayed a recent newspaper ad for DHS workers that was placed next to a similar call for help at a nearby private prison.

(Continued On Page 8)

Doing More With Less

Since 2001, state funding for the Department of Human Services has increased by 42 percent, or \$166 million. Most of the additional money has been put into services and programs, with staff receiving an increase of only 4 percent. DHS workers are stretched to the breaking point, doing more with less.

➤ Advantage Waiver recipients increased by 88 percent, from 11,333 to 21,324, between FY 2000 and 2007. This important program helps elderly and disabled Oklahomans remain at home and avoid institutionalized care.

➤ The monthly average of food stamp recipients increased by 42 percent, from 298,204 to 423,084, between 2002 and 2007. Most food stamp recipients are families of the working poor who have low-paying jobs or are between jobs.

➤ Medicaid recipients have increased by 51 percent since 2000, from 396,526 to 600,930. Medicaid participation is limited to children, pregnant women, the disabled and the elderly.

➤ Adult Protective Services referrals have increased by 19 percent per year, or 2,861, since 2002.

➤ Child Welfare referrals per year have increased by 74 percent, or 8,254, since 2001.

➤ The Child Support Enforcement monthly average case count increased by 25 percent between FY 2003 and 2007. During that time, collections for Oklahoma's children increased by \$85.5 million, or 55.7 percent.

DHS Employees (Continued From Page 7)

"The child welfare position is one of the best-paying in my office," he said. "However, the private prison job was almost \$1,500 per year more to start, and employees do not have to have a degree. School teachers start at almost \$31,600, which is another draw away from DHS employment."

Mahl said his office once had 17 family support workers, who oversaw food stamps and medical needs, but now it has only 11.

Also speaking at the press conference were DHS employees Tom Dunning of the Aging Services Division and Brandon

Watkins, who is with Family Support.

From the press conference, the group adjourned to the OPEA office for a DHS Council meeting before a quarterly meeting with Hendrick. The director began the meeting by thanking employees for the job they do.

"We don't tell you enough how much we appreciate your work," he said.

Hendrick told the group that his budget is about the same as last year.

"Actually, with the rise in costs for fuel and other commodities, this represents a 7-percent cut to the agency," he said.

Hendrick discussed topics ranging

from building a new shelter in Tulsa to job classification pay raises to student loan repayments to future plans for the agency.

"The meeting lasted nearly two hours," Darst said. "Director Hendrick was very candid with us about the status of the agency."

The DHS Council will meet with Hendrick again in July.

"We want to thank all who came to take part in this very important event," Darst said. "We must continue to present a unified front to our state leaders to let them know firsthand the challenges we face as employees of DHS."

State Employee Pay Raise Should Carry More Weight Than Tax Breaks For Professional Basketball Team, State Rep Says

A state representative thinks it's more important to provide a pay raise for state employees than to entice a National Basketball Association team to locate in Oklahoma City.



Renegar

A measure that would offer massive tax incentives to help bring an NBA franchise to Oklahoma City has met with resistance from State Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester, who feels legislators should instead focus on a state employee pay raise.

"State employees have had only two pay raises in the past seven years," Renegar said. "The cost of living is skyrocketing for these dedicated public servants, and the entire Legislature seems to say 'there isn't enough money.' I say there's not enough money because of corporate welfare such as this."

At stake, according to Renegar, is a revision of the Quality Jobs Act that would grant the potential pro basketball franchise a 15-year break from state taxes, compared to the usual 10 years.

"This team's ownership spent almost \$400,000 to fund an ad campaign in Oklahoma City that granted them \$120 million in tax money to relocate," Renegar pointed out. "When is enough enough?"

Renegar said the measure is especially frustrating in light of the plight of state agencies and their employees.

"This state lost more than \$80 million last year in state employee turnover," he said. "This happens because this state does not pay a decent wage for those who provide services to our taxpayers."

Renegar said factors other than corporate subsidies should be on the minds of lawmakers.

"State facilities, especially those within the Department of Corrections, are ready to crumble at any minute," he said. "The

state prison in my district has already had its centennial."

Renegar called on House and Senate leaders to find solutions to the state employee salary crisis.

"It's time for someone in leadership to take a stand on this issue," he said. "This should not be a partisan issue but one where lawmakers come together to do the right thing."



OVER 70,000 ACRES

PERFECT FOR LARGE GROUPS

There's no better setting for group gatherings (of any size) than an Oklahoma State Park. They're the perfect place to relax, unwind and enjoy a little quality time with Mother Nature. Call today for more information and reservations.

OKLAHOMA
STATE PARKS

800-654-8240 • TravelOK.com

405-230-8390 • sales@OklahomaParks.com

Stories From The Workforce

Over the past few weeks, OPEA has been collecting information from DHS workers regarding how their increasing caseloads and high turnover has affected the services they provide and their own families. The stories tell of workers who stand between the working poor and despair, who rescue abused children and rock them to sleep, who help the elderly left behind by mobile families and bring dignity to the disabled in homes or in facilities. They are keeping the promise for the citizens of Oklahoma that we will be a compassionate people. But what about the promise to them that they will receive adequate pay for a long day and often night of work?

These stories were provided to OPEA on the promise of anonymity.

Challenging Jobs And Dedication

There are times when my family goes places and I have to stay home because I am required to be within 30 minutes of my work county. My job takes me into homes that require the presence of law enforcement. I have been chased back to my car by vicious dogs. I have gone into homes that were so infested with roaches I had to undress at my back door and immediately put my clothes into the washer. Every time I go out on an investigation or assessment my life is at risk.”

First and foremost, I love my job as a CWS, but I see problems. I feel most of the problems stem from lack of funding. Someone needs to tell the press that we need more money so people will have to pay more taxes. I wish someone would ask the press: Whose fault is it? It is the parents and abusers, not DHS. If parents treated their children right in the first place, we wouldn't even have a job.”

We put our lives on the line every time we knock on a door because we do not know what is on the other side. We are on 24-hour call and go out any time it is necessary. We can't tell people they will have to wait until morning. When we go out in the middle of the night, our families are left to fend for themselves, because it could be two hours or 20 hours before we return.”

Compensation

I have been employed by OKDHS for a little over 18 years. I also am a foster mom. I have adopted two girls that have been in my care for four years. I am in the process of adopting two more. We have received three raises in the last 10 years. The price of everything has gone up; it's not just the cost of gas. My check does not go near as far as it went four years ago. We have to be more selective in the things we choose to do.”

This afternoon, I will be missing my son's soccer practice, as well as another family dinner. I have never realized the amount of time that I have to spend away from my family. Even worse, the time that I am with them is filled with distractions (a cell phone that does not stop ringing or a pile of paperwork). I would expect this kind of stress and time to be dedicated to a business owner, a lawyer or a doctor. The only

difference is that I only receive \$31,000 per year to carry a similar burden. My husband and I both have to work, and our son is raised in school and daycare. The rising costs are hitting us hard. I went to college because I believed that I would be compensated for my degree and my time.”

We have to be able to pay our mortgage and we are trying to pay off student loan debt to the tune of \$39,000. I put myself in this situation, but I could not work at this job without a college degree. A pay raise would make an eternal difference to our family. If my wife cannot stay home, we will have to put my son in daycare, which is extremely costly.”

Lack Of Staff And Worker Turnover

We are expected to do more work because when employees leave they are not being replaced. The office I work in is probably one of the best in the state, but up until now we have had an adequate amount of workers. I don't know what will happen since we are short one worker. My biggest concern or issue with this is that we have to make decisions that highly impact the lives of children and families. If I am stressed to the maximum, how is that going to affect my decision-making abilities?”

I've worked for Developmental Disability Services for the past five-and-a-half years. We work every day to help Oklahoma's citizens with constant needs. These are people who, in many cases, cannot care for themselves. Just this month we had three workers leave. I've seen others leave to go on to better-paying jobs or because of increased demands. I myself have interviewed four times for other better-paying jobs. There are some workers in my group who are going to have to carry as many as 37 cases to cover for those who left. The most I have ever carried was 29.”

Perhaps this quote best sums up the situation:

Every day I see people in trouble; every day I hear people in need; every day I work hard to help them; every day I watch my co-workers do the same. If I were cavalier, I could work for a private company and make more money, but I care about the people of Oklahoma in need. Does our Oklahoma government care about us?”

OPEA Lobby Day

March 11, 2008



Above: Rep. Scott Martin talks with state employees. Left: House Speaker Chris Bengtson speaks with OPEA member Wally Ogonioki, an OJA employee at the Rader Center.



Left: Lt. Gov. Jari Askins and OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger address the crowd. Above: State employees found many ways to voice their opinion. Right: Geneva Martens discusses state employee issues with Rep. Mike Jackson.





Among those who spoke to OPEA members on the south steps of the Capitol were, clockwise, starting at top left: Rep. Andrew Rice, Gov. Brad Henry, Sen. Kenneth Corn and Sen. Glenn Coffee, co-president pro tempore of the Senate.

Above: Reps. Jerry Shoemaker and Jerry McPeak talk with OPEA members, including Carol Miller.



Above: House Minority Leader Rep. Danny Morgan, right, talks with OPEA member Tom Dunning. Left: Sen. Sean Burrage discusses issues with OPEA Board Member Christie Biggs.



Above: OPEA Board member Dixie Jackson distributed T-shirts to her legislators, including Sen. Jonathan Nichols. Left: Rep. Tad Jones speaks to OPEA members.



OPEA Members Rally For A State Employee Pay Raise

With hopes as bright as the clear March sunshine, approximately 1,000 members of the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, many wearing green T-shirts that read, "No Benefit Cut," took to the south steps of the state Capitol March 11 to rally for a state employee pay raise.

After a morning of lobbying around the Capitol, OPEA members, some who arrived on buses from towns such as Sand Springs, Tulsa and Claremore, went outside, armed with signs that

read "\$2,700 Pay Raise," and "Don't Cut Our Benefit Allowance."

OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger started off by asking those assembled if they were "sick and tired of being sick and tired?"

"If you are, it's time you took destiny in your own hands and do something about it," he said.

Barger added that state employees are the "heart, hands and feet" of Oklahoma.

"You care for the sick and the elderly.

You lift up children from abuse and neglect and you walk the corridors of our correctional facilities and alongside our roads, bridges and highways," he said.

Barger referred to the Oklahoma Legislature as the state's Board of Directors.

"Sometimes it seems as though all they care about is getting re-elected," he said. "We are here today to remind them of their responsibilities to the taxpayers of Oklahoma."

After Barger's opening and an introduction by OPEA Vice President Connie Stockton, Executive Director Sterling Zearley took to the podium.

"HB 3108 is dead," Zearley said, and later he and Barger would say goodbye to the bill by leading the crowd in a rendition of "Na na na, na na na, hey hey, goodbye."

Zearley went on to put some rumors to rest.

"There has been some wild talk that OPEA wrote HB 3108," he said. "That could not be further from the truth. This association has fought the bill since the interim study last summer."

After his remarks, Zearley introduced "the best lieutenant governor in Oklahoma history" – Jari Askins. Referred to many times as one of OPEA's greatest friends, Askins began her speech by thanking state employees for their hard work.

"As lieutenant governor, I spend a great deal of my time traveling across Oklahoma roads every day," she said. "I know that it is state employees that make those roads safe for all of us."

Next on the lieutenant governor's agenda was the state's poor record involving mental health issues.

"Oklahoma is so behind in the money we spend on mental health," she said. "When we don't take care of some



of our most vulnerable citizens, they can eventually end up within our correctional facilities.”

“We have all worked very hard to make sure that HB 3108 never reached the floor of the House. However, as it has never been voted upon, it could return at any time,” she warned. “You must be careful not to let it come back.”

State Sen. Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, author of the state employee pay raise bill in the Senate, also addressed the crowd.

“For too long state employees have been at the back of the line when it comes to receiving the compensation they deserve,” he said. “It’s time state employees are a priority. You are going to hear over and over this year that there’s not enough money. When a legislator tells you this, ask them whether or not they voted for tax cuts.”

“Hold your Legislature accountable for what they do or what they don’t do,” Corn said.

“Welcome to your house,” House Minority Leader Danny Morgan, D-Prague, said. “It’s great that you are here and ready to fight for what you deserve, which is a pay raise.”

Morgan said he is especially troubled by skyrocketing costs associated with personnel turnover in state government.

“As a small business owner, I know how much it costs to recruit and retain new employees,” he said. “With \$85 million in turnover costs flying out the window every year, Oklahoma is not managing its resources very well.”

“I know that while you are serving the public, you are thinking of buying your next tank of gas, of sending your children to college,” he added. “You need a \$2,700 pay raise now.”

After brief remarks from Senate Co-President Pro Tempore Glenn Coffee, Rep. Brian Renegar, D-McAlester, who was the first House member to publicly endorse a state employee pay raise, told a story regarding the media reaction to his stance.

“I was talking to a radio reporter who asked, ‘Isn’t \$2,700 too much for a state employee pay raise?’ I can’t repeat my answer to him in polite society,” he commented.

Sen. Andrew Rice, D-Oklahoma City, represented Senate Co-President Pro Tempore Mike Morgan.

“I want to ask you seriously if you are better off than you were four years ago?” he said.

Rice continued by saying that a recent study showed the futility of the tax cuts enacted by the Legislature last

“I want to tell you right now that I am going to do everything I can to get you the pay raise you deserve,” he said.

Batting cleanup at the rally was Gov. Brad Henry.

After praising Oklahoma’s state employees as the best in the country, Henry quieted the crowd by adding “Unfortunately,” and finishing the sentence with



session.

“Oklahoma taxpayers averaged less than \$100 per year because of the tax cuts,” he said. “And state employees have to do more with less and have gone too long without salary increases.”

With his constituents from the Rader Center in Sand Springs by his side, newly elected House Speaker Chris Bengé took the microphone.

“We are very early in the session,” he said. “And, with our budget situation as it is, we are going to have to make tough decisions.”

Bengé went on to tell OPEA members that they have highly qualified representation at the Capitol.

“We have found Sterling and Scott excellent to work with,” he said. “You have a very, very effective lobby team.”

The final legislator to speak to OPEA members was Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman.

“you are not paid what you’re worth.”

Henry went on to discuss the market compensation study put in place last year by his executive order.

“State employee pay is not competitive,” he said. “And we lose them every day. I am today committing to you my support for a long-term compensation plan for state employees. I will fight with you until the end.”

Also attending the rally were Reps. Scott BigHorse, D-Pawhuska; Neil Brannon, D-Arkoma; Ed Cannaday, D-Whitefield; Al Lindley, D-Oklahoma City; Ray McCarter, D-Marlow; Al McAffrey, D-Oklahoma City; Scott Inman, D-Del City; Eric Proctor, D-Tulsa; Mike Shelton, D-Oklahoma City; Dale Turner, D-Holdenville; Chuck Hoskins, D-Vinita; Jerry McPeak, D-Muskogee; Larry Glenn, D-Miami; and Jerry Shoemake, D-Morris; and Sen. Constance Johnson, D-Oklahoma City.

Association Strengthens Staff With Addition Of Grievance Consultant

Clyde "C-Mac" McLendon, long-time deputy director of the Oklahoma Merit Protection Commission, has been added to the staff of the Oklahoma Public Employees Association as a grievance consultant.



Clyde McLendon and OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley.

ance consultant.

McLendon, who spent almost 20 years handling grievances for MPC, is a perfect addition to the OPEA staff, according to Executive Director Sterling Zearley.

"When C-Mac announced his retirement from MPC, we jumped at the opportunity to bring him aboard to help our members through the grievance process," Zearley said. "He will be working three days a week and is very anxious to help our members."

A 20-year veteran of the U. S. Air Force, McLendon joined the Merit Board in 1988.

"It will be C-Mac's duties to assist OPEA members in the grievance process,

"When C-Mac announced his retirement from MPC, we jumped at the opportunity to bring him aboard to help our members through the grievance process."

- OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley

to assist the OPEA attorney in research and development of cases, to assist the lobbying team on personnel laws and rules, provide grievance training

employment and regulations that affect state employees and update OPEA policies and procedures," Zearley pointed out. "Who better to help our members with their grievances than someone from the Merit Board?"

Did you know that Oklahoma Public Employees could save up to \$327.96 or more a year on auto insurance?



You may already know that Oklahoma Public Employees can get a special group discount on auto insurance through Liberty Mutual's Group Savings Plus® program.* But did you know that Group Savings Plus offers many other discounts on both auto and home insurance? In fact, you could save up to \$327.96 or more a year on auto insurance alone.** And you could save even more by insuring your home as well.

To learn more about all the valuable savings and benefits available through Group Savings Plus, call today.

Call **1-800-225-8281** for the Liberty Mutual office nearest you or visit www.libertymutual.com/lm/opea.

*Discounts and credits are available where state laws and regulations allow, and may vary by state. Certain discounts apply to specific coverages only. To the extent permitted by law, applicants are individually underwritten; not all applicants may qualify. **Figures based on a March 2006 sample of auto policyholder savings when comparing their former premium with those of Liberty Mutual's group auto and home program. Individual premiums and savings will vary. Coverage provided and underwritten by Liberty Mutual Insurance Company and its affiliates, 173 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA. A consumer report from a consumer reporting agency and/or a motor vehicle report, on all drivers listed on your policy, may be obtained where state laws and regulations allow. ©2006 Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. All Rights Reserved.

OPEA Discusses State Employee Pay Raise With Governor Henry

OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley met with Gov. Brad Henry and State Treasurer Scott Meacham April 7 to discuss state employee pay, and the news was disappointing.

"We have had a very frank discussion about state employees and the growing crisis in state government," said Zearley



Gov. Brad Henry, left, and OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley, right, talk about state employee pay.

after the meeting. "The governor recommitted to a long-term compensation plan for state employees."

Henry told Zearley, who was accompanied by Oklahoma State Penitentiary Chapter President

Randy Lopez and OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger, that he meant what he said to state employees on the Capitol steps during OPEA's Lobby Day March 11.

"I meant it when I told state employees that we should have a long-term compensation plan for state employees, similar to the one I championed for teachers," he reiterated.

Henry and Meacham agreed that the state's revenue picture remained bleak, with budget negotiations seeking first to hold agency budgets stagnant without the loss of programs or employees.

"The task force indicated that the state needed to move to a more predictable and consistent model of compensation," said Meacham, referring to the Governor's Task Force on State

Employee Compensation, which met last fall.

"We cannot leave this session without doing everything possible to help state employees," said Zearley. "They have gone way past above and beyond and are rewarded with shrinking paychecks."

Meacham agreed that the state has not done a very good job in compensating employees.

Lopez gave the governor a firsthand account of the conditions facing staff at OSP.

"We are working without 35 percent of the workforce, mandatory double shifts every week and staff are tired," he said. "We have had an employee wreck his car on the way home from a double shift, which really is an indicator that staff are past the breaking point."

Henry agreed that staffing issues must be resolved and agreed to talk with Department of Corrections Director Justin Jones and the Office of Personnel Management about granting DOC direct hiring authority.

"We did not get good news about a state employee pay raise," said Zearley. "We are going to continue to meet with legislative leaders as budget discussions continue. State employees must receive a raise this year."

OPEA will be sending out action alerts asking state employees to continue to e-mail and call their legislators.

"We have sent e-mails and we are going to send more," Zearley said. "We are also starting a series of press conferences over the next three weeks that will expose how low pay for state employees directly affects services. Let's all get busy where we can, e-mailing, calling and meeting locally with legislators to make certain state employees are not left out this year."

DHS Office Launches New OPEA Chapter

Oklahoma City's DHS office, 55H, launched its new OPEA chapter with a bang when a group of some 25 OPEA members met for lunch April 10 to elect officers and make plans for their future.

OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley and Public Affairs Director Bud Elder attended the meeting.

Officers elected at the meeting were:

Brandon Watkins, president; Thomas Burgess, vice president; Bonnie Mitchell, secretary; and Virginia Morrow, treasurer.

"This chapter is still in its very early phase. They haven't even given themselves a name yet. However, they are anxious to use their local influence and knowledge to help all DHS employees," Zearley commented.



Officers of the new OPEA chapter at the Oklahoma City DHS office include, left to right: Brandon Watkins, Virginia Morrow, OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley, Bonnie Mitchell and Thomas Burgess.

The OPEA Mission Statement

OPEA unites public employees in Oklahoma to improve the quality of state employment.

The OPEA Vision Statement

OPEA will be a catalyst to make Oklahoma a better place to live and work.

OPEA Platform Amendment Form

Name _____

Agency _____

Work location _____

E-mail _____

Phone _____

Specific language proposed:

Signature _____

Send to Trish Frazier:

Fax: (405) 524-6764

Mail: OPEA, 13 N.E. 28th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Platform Process About To Begin

Do you have an idea about improving your working conditions, benefits or compensation? With the Legislature preparing to adjourn for the second year of the biennium, it is once again time to begin the OPEA platform process. The association will be working on the 2009-2010 Platform over the summer. June 6 is the deadline for planks and ideas from the membership.

To submit an idea or plank to be included in the OPEA Platform for 2009-2010, fill out the form above, download a form from the OPEA Web site (www.opea.org) or call Trish at the OPEA office at (405) 524-6764 or (800) 880-6732. You can also e-mail your ideas to trishf@opea.org.

The Platform Committee will meet in June to consolidate the recommendations into the proposed Platform, which will be published in the July *Advocate*.

OPEA Will Elect A President And Two Board Members

OPEA members will elect a president and two retiree Board representatives in July. The president and one retiree will serve two-year terms, beginning in January 2009, while the second retiree seat will be for a one-year term.

The OPEA president presides at the Board of Directors meetings and often serves as the spokesperson for the association. The two board members represent retirees. Both jobs require attendance at Saturday Board meetings eight to 10 times per year.

OPEA members seeking leadership positions must be in good standing for the immediate preceding year and not a member of a competing organization for two years.

All members of the association are eligible to vote in the presidential election. Retiree representatives are elected by OPEA retirees only. Information about each candidate will be published in the July *Advocate*, and OPEA members will receive their ballots in July. More information about the voting process will be published in the next *Advocate*.

If you are interested in running for any of the three positions, call or e-mail Trish Frazier at the OPEA office at (405) 524-6764, (800) 880-6732 or trishf@opea.org for a filing form. The filing deadline is June 6 at 5 p.m. When they file, candidates will be required to submit a biography, platform and photos for *The Advocate* and the OPEA Web site.

www.opea.org
**Your Source For News
That Affects State Employees**

Breaking Point

OPEA Warns Of DOC Staffing Crisis

In mid April, OPEA began a series of press conferences highlighting state services from those who know it best: the frontline workers who serve the citizens of Oklahoma.

Saying that “workers in the Department of Corrections are warning that the system has reached a breaking point,” the Oklahoma Public Employees Association has

called for pay raises for all state employees and additional funding to fill staffing shortages and address the

“Members of OPEA who work in the Department of Corrections are warning us the system has reached a breaking point.”

– OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley

agency’s infrastructure needs.

“Members of OPEA who work in the Department of Corrections are warning us the system has reached a breaking point,” said OPEA Executive

Director Sterling Zearley. “The agency’s resources no longer meet the needs of the important mission ‘to protect the

public, protect employees and protect inmates.”

Mike Rogers, an 18-year DOC veteran who currently works as a unit manager at James Crabtree Correctional Center, spoke for the Association’s DOC Council, which represents more than 1,400 members.

“We have studied and audited the problem long enough,” said Rogers. “It is time for action.

Oklahoma’s prison system is a ticking time bomb. The safety of our communities and our lives hang in the balance.”

The Department of Corrections has more than 600 vacant positions, and the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, which houses the state’s most dangerous inmates, has a 35-percent vacancy rate in security staff. An audit conducted by MGT of America, Inc., a national management research and consulting firm, reported that OSP needs a minimum of 342 officers to run the prison safely. According to OSP staff, on a recent Friday, only 268 officers were on the job. (Continued On Page 18)

Vacancy Rates for Correctional Employees

(Security and Support)

Facility	Authorized FTEs	Filled FTEs	Percent Filled
Oklahoma State Penitentiary	526	355.50	67.59%
Dick Conner CC	246	170.83	69.44%
Oklahoma State Reformatory	262	185.00	70.61%
James Crabtree CC	212	150.50	70.99%
Lexington Assessment/Reception Center	298	219.00	73.49%

FY 2007 Turnover Rates

Correctional Security Officer A (first year) - 32 percent

Correctional Security Officer B - 27 percent

The OPEA Board



Connie Stockton
Acting President
cstockton@
oklahomaparks.com



Christie Biggs
Veterans Council
cbiggs@
odva.state.ok.us



Kenneth Burrow
GRDA Council
kenmarcia1@
yahoo.com



Carrie Croy
DOC Council
carrie.croy@
doc.state.ok.us



Patricia Dill
DHS Council
patricia.dill
@okdhs.org



Jann Ensz
DHS Council
jann.ensz@
okdhs.org



Darren Francis
Natural
Resources/Safety
and Security
Council
fmplans@
fire.state.ok.us



Royce Harder
OJA Council
lil_royce@
hotmail.com



Glenn Hightower
Retiree Council
hightower@
cox.net



Dixie Jackson
Department of
Mental Health
Council
dljackso
@odmhsas.org



**Patricia
Naifeh-Parker**
Education
Services/Human
Resources Council
tparker@
sib.state.ok.us



Fred Martin
Transportation/
Transportation
Authority Council
fmartin@
odot.org



Tom McDonald
DHS Council
oddfellow69@
yahoo.com



Mark Rainville
DHS Council
mark.rainville
@okdhs.org



Mike Rogers
DOC Council
mike.rogers@
doc.state.ok.us



Forrest Rush
Education
Services/Human
Resources Council
frush@
sib.state.ok.us



Betty Weber
Department of
Health Council
bettw@
health.state.ok.us

Breaking Point

(Continued From Page 17)

“Correctional staff are being forced to work excessive overtime hours, as many as three double shifts per week,” Rogers reported. “Employees working double shifts are too often exhausted and in a job where alertness is a matter of life or death. That is a dangerous situation. Aggression among inmates is rising, with five stabbing incidents at OSP since the first of the year. Staff are being injured when they intervene to break up disturbances. There is little or no backup to call so injuries are more likely to be serious.”

“Case managers and other support staff, who are responsible for monitoring offender case files, parole eligibility and release dates, are diverted to filling security positions and fall behind in their work,” Rogers added. “In addition, support staff who are required to fill in are sometimes not trained in security techniques and processes.”

“Fewer staff are working towers and perimeters, increasing the possibility of escapes,” he went on to say.

“This puts the communities in which you and I live at risk during a disturbance or an escape. More and more of my co-workers are finding it easier to take a position in the private sector such as the railroad, casino or oil field rather than put their lives at risk, with little or no prospect of it getting better.”

OPEA is asking that Gov. Brad Henry and the Legislature take the following measures:

- Provide a pay raise for all state employees;
- Increase the hiring rate for correctional employees;
- Invest in the corrections infrastructure by funding deferred maintenance needs and building a new 1,200-bed prison.

“The critical needs of the citizens of this great state and public safety of our communities are not partisan issues to be used as bargaining chips,” Rogers concluded. “State leaders on both sides of the aisle must come together and help us face these challenges.”

“Fewer staff are working towers and perimeters, increasing the possibility of escapes. This puts the communities in which you and I live at risk during a disturbance or an escape. More and more of my co-workers are finding it easier to take a position in the private sector.”

– Mike Rogers • Unit Manager • James Crabtree Correctional Center

Unclassified Employees Also Have Rights

One of the most misconstrued and misinformed statements heard from state employees is that unclassified employees have no rights or benefits granted to them under the Oklahoma Personnel Act (Title 74 O.S., Section 840-1.1 through Section 840-6.9).

Nothing could be further from the truth. While it may be true that classified employees are vested with certain rights and benefits not afforded to unclassified employees, both classes enjoy many of the same rights and benefits.

What rights and benefits do unclassified employees have and what grants them these rights and benefits? Title 74 O.S., Section 840-5.1 states that unless otherwise provided, the Oklahoma Personnel Act does not apply to unclassified employees. With this in mind, you must read each section of the Oklahoma Personnel Act carefully to determine whether that section applies to unclassified employees.

Along those same lines, one of the most commonly asked questions is, "As an unclassified employee, can I file a grievance with my agency?"

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-6.2, states that the agency grievance procedure applies to classified state employees. The Oklahoma Merit Protection Commission has adopted rules for agencies to use in administering the grievance process. One of the rules promulgated by the Commission, Merit Rule 455-10:19-2(b), states that an agency may use the grievance procedure adopted by the Commission or adopt other procedures to address disputes of employees not in the classified service. So the answer is "yes," as an unclassified employee, you may file a grievance with your agency if that agency has adopted a procedure to address disputes of unclassified employees.

If your agency has not adopted such a procedure, you may file an appeal directly with the Commission if the dispute surrounds an issue over which that agency has jurisdiction. The juris-

diction of the Commission does include the provisions of the Oklahoma Personnel and the Merit System of Personnel Administration rules.

Here are the provisions of the Oklahoma Personnel Act that apply to unclassified employees.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.5 - commonly known as the "Whistleblower Act." This section of law prohibits retaliation against state employees for reporting wrongful governmental activities.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.9(A)(E) - Section A prohibits favoritism and discrimination in state service. Section E prohibits payment for any appointment, promotion or advantage in a position.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.11 - State employee home addresses, home telephone numbers and Social Security numbers may not be open to public inspection or disclosure.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.15 - addresses the payment of overtime and the accrual and usage of compensatory time.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.18 - covers longevity pay for state employees.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.19 - addresses underpayments and overpayments of salaries and wages.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.20 - addresses sick and annual leave accumulations and usage.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.20A - addresses the status of state employees when an agency is closed because of imminent peril threatening the public health, safety or welfare of state employees or the public.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.20B - addresses leave of absence for a state employee serving as a bone marrow donor or human organ donor.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.21 - addresses the absence of a state employee because of an illness or injury arising out of and sustained in the course of state employment and for

which workers' compensation benefits have been filed.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.21A - addresses the inability of a member of the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Retirement System, in certain positions, to perform duties.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.22 - addresses the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.23 - addresses the eligibility and usage of the state leave sharing program.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.23A - addresses the eligibility and usage of leave with pay to a state employee who is affected by a presidentially declared national disaster.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.24 - addresses the eligibility and usage of leave to participate in specialized disaster relief services.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.25 - addresses the eligibility and usage of leave to attend meetings of job-related professional organizations.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.26 - addresses flextime attendance policies and alternative work schedules.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-2.27A through Section 840-2.28 - addresses reduction-in-force provisions.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-3.1 - addresses training programs for supervisory personnel.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-4.6(D) - addresses salary schedules for unclassified employees.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-4.17 - addresses the requirements of the performance management system.

Title 74 O.S., Section 840-4.19 - addresses the designation of place of employment and appeals to the Commission.

This knowledge could help an unclassified employee receive the rights and benefits of his or her state employment.

For questions regarding grievance procedures, call OPEA Employee Relations Coordinator Clyde McLendon.



Wally Ogonoiki



Randy Lopez



Carol Miller

**THESE STATE EMPLOYEES HAVE DONE
THEIR PART BY SIGNING UP NEW MEMBERS.**

Have you done your part lately?

Oklahoma Public Employees Association Membership Application



Please return to: OPEA, 13 N.E. 28th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105 or visit www.opea.org.

First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Home Phone () _____ Work Phone () _____
 Home E-mail _____ Work E-mail _____
 Agency _____ Work Location _____ Position _____
 Work Location Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Work Fax Number () _____ Who introduced you to OPEA? _____

Payroll Deduction Authorization

I hereby authorize the state of Oklahoma to deduct from my pay the amount checked below required to purchase dues in the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, subject to my right to revoke this order by written notice to my employer.

Dues Options:

\$15 \$15 _____ + _____ (Members may choose to pay more to help the Association further its goals.)

Signature _____ SS# _____ - _____ - _____ Birth Date _____
 OPEA's standard dues are \$15 per month. Annual dues: state employees - \$180; retirees - \$60; associates - \$20; corporate affiliates - \$300. Contributions or gifts to OPEA are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. However, dues payments are deductible as a miscellaneous itemized deduction. Dues include your annual subscription to *The Advocate* (a \$4 value). Your \$15 monthly dues payment includes a \$2.25 contribution to OPEAPAC.

I do not want \$2.25 per month of my dues to go to OPEAPAC.

Office use only: _____Amt _____Proc _____Tran _____CC _____WLC _____NMP

Periodicals Postage Paid - Oklahoma City, Oklahoma