

Preserving Oregon History. HB 2859. Testimony to Committee.

Last summer, I was provided a copy of this report, *Envisioning Oregon*, prepared by a private firm that has done work for large and small private firms including banks and manufacturers; city, state, and federal government agencies; and organizations ranging from Electrical Contractors and the National Football League to Special Olympics and The World Bank. The report was funded by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services. After reading it, I talked with one of the Project Team Members, James Fox, to get a fuller picture of what we're doing in Oregon, what we have – and what we haven't – been doing. With very limited resources.

Many of the key agencies and local organizations involved with collecting, maintaining, and providing access to Oregon's history are under severe financial stress. We're talking about nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) as well as public agencies: local institutions, like historical societies and museums, as well as local record archives and even neighborhood associations. In spite of this limitation – very limited resources - our heritage organizations are doing some very fine work.

Yet an outcome of the limited resources is that public access to documents has diminished, and both government records and private collections are at risk. Further, the lack of a coordinated grant requesting strategy decreases the federal assistance coming to Oregon compared to neighboring states. In the past five years, Oregon projects have received \$70, 493 in grant funds from the National Historical Publication and Records Commission. Washington, with twice the population, received six times the funds, and Idaho, with less than half the population, received two and a half times the funding.

I'd like to quote from the report, because it made such an impression on me: [intro p. 4]

“Given the financial instability of these and many other Oregon repositories, the Oregon historical community and the state of Oregon need to think carefully about what will happen to the state's documentary heritage if historical repositories and organizations significantly reduce access to collections or even close their doors. Adding to these dire circumstances, Oregon's records keepers know that a lack of coordination in what is collected and every-changing records keeping technologies are responsible for documentation gaps in our cultural institutions ... These issues are not unique to Oregon. Historical records organizations around the country are dealing with the same concerns. One answer that an increasing number of states and regions are exploring is that of collaboration ... ”

There are several state agencies or commissions involved in one way or another, but none has taken on the task of actively coordinating the effort to ensure that we take advantage of every opportunity, make sure the missions are aligned to minimize overlaps and to fill in the gaps that seem to have developed.

This bill has three objectives:

- Increase collaboration among all of Oregon's historical depositories to decrease costs and increase statewide access to information.
- Reduce duplication of effort in state government, and assist non-governmental organizations (NGO's) by coordinating storage and access to historical information.

Preserving Oregon History. HB 2859. Testimony to Committee.

- Attract more federal and private grants to Oregon by coordinating grant requests and awards.

This report, *Envisioning Oregon*, was published in August 2009. You will also see that the Heritage Commission published a report in January this year, with other grant funding. I would point out that the existence of two reports on virtually the same topic illustrates the current situation and the need for a more deliberate – and required - coordination among state agencies and other entities.

This bill sets the stage for – it requires - the interested parties to meet and collaborate on state historical resources to develop plans for coordination among agencies and institutions dedicated to preserving Oregon's history.

A couple of other people are here who can provide more detail and answer questions – the people in the field who really know about this work.