



Retired Public Employees Council Chapter 11 – Walla Walla County

Barry Jenkins, President

(509) 529-6372 – barryjenkins53@yahoo.com

Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 8th, 2025
Meeting Time: 11:30 AM
Meeting Place: Denny's
Meeting Address: 814 W Chestnut St, Walla Walla, WA 99362

Spring is finally here and so is **our next meeting of your Walla Walla Chapter of the Retired Public Employees Council on April 8th at Denny's located at 9th & Chestnut.** Look for the private meeting room to your left as you enter. Their menu has affordable selections for 55+ and a 15% senior discount if you show your AARP card! **We recommend you arrive for our RPEC lunch meeting at 11:00 AM in order to receive your food before the meeting.** Come and enjoy lunch and the stimulating conversation of your fellow retirees, including spouses and prospective members.

Our speaker for the April meeting will be **Byron Burres, County Assessor.** He will talk to us about property assessments and senior exemptions. Please bring your questions.

It's never too late to invite other retired public employees that you know. *If they sign up, you'll both get a free lunch!* **NEW MEMBERS,** we'd love to have you join us for a free lunch at your first meeting.

NEWS OF YOUR CHAPTER:

We had our second meeting at Denny's in the meeting room and were welcomed with good service and good food and the room to ourselves. At our March meeting **Shelly McDiarmid, Chief Executive of Walla Walla Community Hospice,** explained that their mission is to provide compassionate care for patients in the final stages of life (typically when doctors agree the person has 6 months or less) and support for their loved ones and caregivers. The care is usually done by Hospice staff in the patient's home, and it is paid for by Medicare, Medicaid, or VA benefits. The program also provides 13-month bereavement support for loved ones. For more information: wwhospice.org or (509) 525-5561.

IMPORTANT: Per our chapter's constitution, we plan to hold nominations and elections for our 2025-2026 officers at the April 8th meeting. In the meantime, please consider whether you would like to serve as an officer in our RPEC chapter. Let President Barry know if you have questions about the process or are interested in being nominated or in volunteering to chair a program. WE NEED YOUR VOTE

We are continuing our mailed and emailed newsletter distribution. Please keep us notified if you need to update your email or other contact information.

*******Also, if you are unable to attend a meeting due to lack of transportation, let me know and we will help you get a ride.**

Call or text Barry at 509-240-2844 or email at barryjenkins53@yahoo.com.

As a reminder, whenever you have knowledge of the passing of a member, please bring it to my attention so that our State RPEC Office may be notified, and so that we can recognize their career of public service. If anyone has any questions regarding canceling a person's membership after their passing or regarding pension-related issues, we can help.

APRIL 2025 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Why did you join RPEC? Most of our members tell us that they joined RPEC because they recognize the need to have an organization as their advocate for retirement security with state legislators, state policy leaders, members of Congress, and on federal issues.

RPEC is a non-partisan organization. We exist to advocate for your retirement security. Thus, we actively work to expand relationships with all state and federal legislators, regardless of their party affiliation. When state legislators, Congressional leaders, and state or federal agency heads or leaders take steps to harm your retirement security, we act on your behalf. Sometimes that action takes the form of meetings with key policy makers. Other times it translates into a formal letter of concern. We also ask our members to mobilize with us through "calls to action", which come to you through the weekly NewsFlash.

When you receive an email from us or from AFSCME Retirees about taking action, it is because we believe that proactive engagement is needed to stop potentially detrimental policies from being enacted into law. This April report includes an example of our work to prevent a potential policy decision from negatively impacting your retirement security. Every action we take together aligns with the Legislative Priorities, which have been crafted and approved by members. Our sources for information, which frame the content of the emails to you, are drawn from insights provided by our state and federal lobbyists and from reputable retiree organizations and unbiased news sources.

Thank you for joining us in preserving your retirement security at state and federal levels. We stand together to ensure your hard-earned benefits are available to you and future generations of retirees.

State facing multi-year budget deficit

On March 20th, the Office of Financial Management unveiled the updated state fiscal forecast. Estimates place the overall deficit at \$12 to \$15 billion. The state's revenue collections have not recovered since the pandemic. Collections from sales, business and occupation taxes have dropped but are expected to be offset, somewhat, from capital gains and estate taxes. Governor Ferguson has called for cuts to state agency budgets and has recommended that state employees be furloughed one day per month to reduce state costs. Our union family, including the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE), is deeply opposing balancing the state's budget on the backs of state employees. We stand in solidarity with WFSE in opposing the reduction of salaries of state employees through a monthly furlough.

Proactive advocacy: RPEC helps to stop a reduction in the Medicare Explicit Subsidy

News about the looming state deficit was first reported publicly in June 2024. RPEC immediately conducted meetings with Governor Inslee's staff and policy decision makers about our policy priorities, which are set by members through the Legislative Priorities. (Those

meetings resulted in Governor Inslee maintaining the Medicare Explicit Subsidy at \$183. He also included funding for a one-time cost-of-living adjustment for PERS/TRS 1 retirees.)

In late January, Governor Ferguson asked all state agencies to freeze hiring and travel, and to make recommendations on budget cuts. The Health Care Authority (HCA), which manages the medical plans for the public sector retirees who earn their healthcare benefits from the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB), recommended cutting the Medicare Explicit Subsidy. This subsidy is used to make healthcare premiums more affordable. The subsidy is currently \$183 per month or up to 50% of the monthly premium, whichever is less.

HCA recommended cutting the subsidy to \$90 per month. Fortunately, through RPEC's advocacy efforts, Governor Ferguson rejected this budget reduction!

This example illustrates why RPEC engages in proactive advocacy on potential policy decisions. The recommendation to reduce the subsidy would have harmed our members. When we are proactive, we stand a greater likelihood of influencing policy. RPEC wields political clout. When RPEC expresses concern about a policy decision under consideration, we fulfill our commitment to you. We owe it to you to step in and communicate why a potential policy decision is a bad idea.

AFSCME PAL Program

Three RPEC members have volunteered to be part of the AFSCME PAL Program, a national effort to cultivate stronger working relationships with members of Congress. RPEC Vice President Maurice Garrott (Ch. 20), Susan Leschinski (Ch. 21), and Aruna Bhuta (Ch. 13) are working to open lines of communication in Congressional Districts 3, 4, and 5. These members will give an update on their efforts at the April 11th Legislative Committee meeting. The Zoom meeting information is available on the calendar at www.rpecwa.org.

Stay informed

The best way to stay informed is to read the weekly NewsFlash (sent via email each Friday), participate in the weekly Legislative Update Calls (held weekly at 2 p.m. on Fridays during the legislative session; see details on the calendar at www.rpecwa.org), and read your chapter newsletter.

Important Dates

Visit the RPEC website at www.rpecwa.org for the full calendar:

- April 4: Universal Healthcare Webinar (10:00 a.m.)
Legislative Update Call (2:00 p.m.)
- April 10: Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 p.m.)
- April 11: Legislative Committee (10:00 a.m.)
Legislative Update Call (2:00 p.m.)
- April 14: Finance Committee (10:00 a.m.)
- April 18: Legislative Update Call (2:00 p.m.)
- April 21: Senior Lobby (10:00 a.m.)
- April 24: Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 p.m.)
- April 25: Strategic Plan Special Task Force (10:00 a.m.)
Legislative Update Call (2:00 p.m.)
- April 27: End of the Legislative Session
- May 2: Strategic Plan Special Task Force (10:00 a.m.)
Legislative Update Call (2:00 p.m.)
- May 5: Executive Board Meeting (10:00 a.m.)
- May 6: Executive Board Meeting – Strategic Plan Review (9:00 a.m.)