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Retired Public Employees Council
Chapter 21 – Tri-Cities Area
Robin Rego, President: (253) 370-9899, rarego1213@gmail.com

Meeting Date: Tuesday, October 7th, 2025
Meeting Time: 12:00 PM
Meeting Place: Red Lion Hotel
Meeting Address: 2525 N 20th Ave, Pasco, WA 99301

Hello to our Chapter 21 Members!

We, as RPEC members, have a lot to be grateful for! Our dues help all of us as we continue to make our voices heard. Our mission is to develop relationships with our State Legislators to maintain and strengthen our State Retirement Benefits and Healthcare. We also have opportunities to make our voices heard as we fight to maintain our Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Please be sure to read our Executive Director's Report at the end of this newsletter! Laurie Weidner has shared her immense expertise, knowledge, and dedication while working alongside all of us. Our next meeting will be on **Tuesday, October 7**, at the Pasco Red Lion, 2525 N 20th Ave. Our Guest Speakers will be Jakob Canup, RPEC's Membership Coordinator, and Susan Leschinski, member of the Chapter 21 Membership Committee. They will present important "inside" information about the many ways that the Membership Committee benefits all of us. Members are the lifeblood of RPEC! All who attend will receive a **Medicare Toolkit** that was developed by the Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors. The Toolkit is "hot off the press" so please come and get your copy!

Our guest speaker at the September meeting was **David Reeploeg**, Vice President for Federal Programs of the Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC) and Executive Director of Hanford Communities. The **Hanford Communities** were established in 1994. The objectives regarding Hanford issues are: Coordinate local government involvement, increase public awareness, Advocate for community policies, and provide technical and analytical resources to review, evaluate, and monitor conditions and policies. Dave provided much detailed information about Hanford Cleanup. The cleanup should be completed by 2086 with an estimated cost of \$364 - \$589 billion. Dave's presentation was interesting and enlightening, with so much information that we have invited him to return to present **Hanford Communities Part Two** in early 2026. Be on the lookout for the exact date; we hope to see all of you at this important event!

All are invited to meet **Kathryn Leathers**, the New Director of the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS) on October 20, 2025, from 10:00 – 11:00 AM, via Zoom. Kathryn has an extensive background in public service and Legal Expertise. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet her and learn more about our pensions.

Please consider attending **Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP)** meetings. They are held virtually and on TV Washington (TVW) at 10:00 AM on October 21, November 18, and December 16, at 10:00. To access these meetings virtually, go to <https://leg.wa.gov/committees/joint/scpp> or simply search SCPP WA. All meetings are recorded, so if you miss a meeting, you may view the recording later. The actions by the

SCPP are especially important as RPEC strives to restore and retain PLAN 1 COLAS and make them permanent. **About the SCPP:** The committee studies issues and policies that affect the state's public employee retirement systems and makes recommendations to the Legislature. It is comprised of 20 members, including legislators, members appointed by the Governor, and the Directors of the Department of Retirement Systems and the Office of Financial Management. If you need more information, would like to testify at a meeting to tell your story, and/or write a letter to the committee, please contact me at 509-308-4594 or gmasusan.retired@gmail.com.

Susan Leschinski, Chapter 21 Vice President.

Guest Speakers: Jakob Canup, RPEC Membership Coordinator and Susan Leschinski, Chapter 21 Membership Committee Member & Vice President

Jakob Canup has served as Membership Coordinator for RPEC for just over 3 years. His background is in working with vulnerable populations, having previously worked as direct care staff and management for an organization that provided assisted living for individuals with developmental disabilities. Jakob grew up in Idaho and went on to get a Bachelor of Science in Business Marketing from the University of Idaho.

Susan Leschinski has been an RPEC member for a little more than 3 years and has become an active and dedicated member. She is a member of the Statewide and Chapter Membership Committees, as well as a member of the Statewide Political Action Committee (PAC) and Chair of the Chapter 21 PAC. For the past two years, Susan has served on the Statewide Special Task Force, which has been reviewing the RPEC Strategic Plan. When asked about her level of activity, Susan readily responds, "My favorite role is Vice President of Chapter 21. I enjoy everything I do with, and for, RPEC. If I didn't love it, I wouldn't do it!" This workshop is designed to help us explore the many facets of RPEC Membership and how we can be involved. As a member, you have a voice at all levels – Chapter Meetings & Committees, Statewide Committees, and Professional Staff. Be sure to attend our workshop and let your voice be heard! And... pick up your free Medicare Toolkit, produced by Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA).

RPEC Chapter 21 Meeting Minutes for September 2, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. by President Robin Rego.
The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Rego.

After self-introductions, President Rego introduced guest speaker **David Reeploeg**, Vice President for Federal Programs of the Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC) and Executive Director of Hanford Communities. The **Hanford Communities** were established in 1994, and Dave discussed the objectives and policies of Hanford issues much detailed information about cleanup efforts. Lastly, he discussed long-term and short-term Priorities. The cleanup should be completed by 2086 with an estimated cost of \$364 to \$589 Billion. Dave's presentation was interesting and enlightening, with so much information that we have

invited him to return to present **Hanford Communities Part Two** in early 2026 – more details to come.

Roll call: President Robin Rego-present, Vice President Susan Leschinski-present, Secretary Carol Travis-present, Treasurer Steve Gamble-excused, Trustees Dave Hopper, Dave Hanson-present, John Lawson-excused.

The Approval of the Minutes from the July 1, 2015 Chapter Meeting was M/S/C.

There was a Moment of Silence for Deceased Members:

Ernie de la Bretone - retired from the City of Richland on May 1, 2005; joined RPEC on March 27, 2014; passed away on July 27, 2025, at the age of 83.

Kristi Wold - retired from the Dept of Ecology on January 1, 2019; joined RPEC on August 14, 2023; passed away the weekend of August 1, 2025, at the age of 75.

President's Report: **Robin Rego** – Executive Director Laurie Weidner has resigned as of the end of 2025. The Hiring Committee has been tasked to conduct and interview of Associate Director Derek VanSpoor and bring a recommendation to the Executive Board to either approve or do a broader search and allow Derek VanSpoor to compete in the broader search. RPEC has been operating in the red and is looking at ways to reduce costs.

Treasurer Report: President Rego presented the treasurer's report in the absence of **Steve Gamble**. The August 2025 Certificate of Deposit balance is 10,127.77. Checking balance is \$4,101.21 This includes a deposit of \$307.96; as well as Meeting Expense checks for \$105.83, and \$79.75. Total balance is \$14,228.98. The Approval of the Treasurer's Report was M/S/C.

Membership Committee: President **Robin Rego** reported that Chapters will complete a new Biannual Report to submit to the Council Office. Susan Leschinski completed the Report for Chapter 21 on July 8. Each Membership Committee member has been assigned to three Chapter leaders to follow up on these reports and conduct periodic contacts.

The Associate Membership Program has been revised to increase membership by encouraging employees who are within 18 months of Retirement to explore RPEC membership. The initial fee is \$21, which will cover dues for the first three months when the associate member joins RPEC. The program will be officially introduced by early Fall. The final Membership meeting for the year will be on September 25.

There was a Treasury Procedures Refresher Meeting on August 25. Jane Hewitt, Finance & Operations Specialist reported that funds were stolen from an RPEC Chapter by hackers, and in another Chapter, funds were lost in a bank change of ownership. The funds lost in both cases have been recovered, and the affected chapters have been made whole. Chapter 21 funds were not involved.

Legislative Committee: **Melinda Summerlund** reported that the committee is working diligently to restore and retain a recurring Plan 1 COLA. Some of the bills from the 2025 Legislative Session can be revised and refiled in the 2026 Legislative Session. All members are encouraged to attend the **Legislative Update Meetings** on the first Friday of every month. These meetings include vital Federal and State updates that cover actions that we in RPEC and our partner organizations are doing to strengthen our pensions and reduce health care costs. For more information, contact Melinda at 509-302-4063.

Political Action Committee: **Susan Leschinski** reported that the PAC has completed all endorsements for the November 4, 2025 election. There will be a meeting in December to begin working on endorsements for 2027. All members are encouraged to attend meetings of the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP). They will be held virtually on October 21, November 18, and December 16. The SCPP will make decisions that affect all of us and you may even testify at meetings and make your voices heard.

Health Care Work Group: **Susan Leschinski** reported that the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will implement a 6-year pilot project that allows Medicare to require Prior Authorizations (PA) for several services. Six states are involved in this pilot, including Washington. CMS will use Artificial Intelligence metrics to determine approvals or denials. This is concerning because PAs are often denied. It is vitally important to appeal all denials! Fewer than 15 % of all denials are appealed, but of those that are appealed, up to 75% are approved.

Old Business – none

New Business – none

Good of the Order – there is a FED EX text scam going on so be careful.

Robin let us know that there is an AI program called Co-pilot that is free, helpful easy to use.

Teresa Alldredge won the \$25.00 cash prize

The next meeting will be October 7, 2025, with guest speakers Jakob Canup RPEC Membership Coordinator and Susan Leschinski Chapter 21 Vice President.

Meeting adjourned at 2:15 PM

Respectfully submitted

Carol Travis, Secretary

OCTOBER 2025 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Are you ready to get to work helping us to protect your retirement security? Our union is fueled by each of you – your talents, strengths and commitment to service. We ask each of you to join with the members of your chapter to meet with state and federal legislators. RPEC's mission is to protect your retirement benefits. We can only do that by being visible with elected officials who are entrusted with legislative authority. We are specifically looking for members who are willing to work with us this fall and in the new legislative session to offer testimony. To that end, we will be hosting a Zoom educational program for all those who would like to gain experience in developing written and verbal testimony. We are looking for members who have not done this before or those who have not been involved in providing testimony for some time. Legislators need to meet as many new RPEC members as possible from their legislative and congressional districts. Everyone is welcome. See details below.

One of the many things I love about RPEC is the spirit of our members. RPEC members are expectant – ready and willing to engage in a worthy fight. Protecting your retirement benefits is worthy of your time and talents. Please join us. If you have very little time to give,

we'll find a place for you to contribute. If you would like to learn more about how to get more involved in our legislative work, please reach out to me and Associate Director Derek VanSpoor at the Council Office or via email at info@rpecwa.org.

Strategic Plan Update – Strategic Plan Special Task Force Delivers Report, Oct. 17

Two years ago, the Executive Board appointed about a dozen members-at-large from across the state to serve on the Strategic Plan Special Task Force. The Task Force was formed to evaluate the governance structures of RPEC with the goal of making recommendations to the Board to strengthen the organization. The Task Force met in 2024 to develop checklists that could be used for the evaluations. The checklists emerged from months of meetings and research. The checklists detail the “gold standard” attributes that are evident in high-functioning membership-driven organizations/unions. The checklists were then reviewed and approved by the Executive Board in November 2024. At that Board meeting, additional Task Force members were appointed (to replace those who for various reasons were unable to continue service) to serve in 2025.

In January, the Task Force formed into smaller groups to begin the evaluation process using the approved checklists. The small groups have been meeting 2-3 times per month to evaluate the effectiveness of RPEC's governance structures (overall statewide governance, chapter governance and fiscal governance).

The Task Force will share its final report with recommendations to the Executive Board at an Executive Board Work Session on Friday, October 17th from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The work session is an educational opportunity for the Board. Members are welcome to attend as guests. The log-in for the work session is available on the RPEC website at www.rpecwa.org.

Guests will be asked to submit questions via the Chat feature in Zoom. When a meeting summary is developed for record-keeping purposes, it will include the questions submitted by meeting guests and the answers to each question.

Associate Membership Program Now Available

RPEC has revised the Associate Membership program, and information about the updated program is now available on the website. Public sector employees who are within 18 months of retirement are eligible to join RPEC as Associate Members. To elevate the value of Associate membership and to increase the number of members who transition from Associate to full membership upon retirement, Associate members will pay a nominal fee to cover production and mailing costs for the resources they receive from RPEC, and in return they will receive their first 3 months of full membership for free when they become a dues paying member. Do you have friends who are still working and will be retiring soon? Please invite them to join as Associate Members. Please meet with union locals in your area to ask them to provide gifted memberships to those poised for retirement. Associate members can sign up on the website at www.rpecwa.org.

Registration Now Open for Written & Verbal Testimony Educational Webinar, October 24, 10-11 AM

Did you know that one of the best ways to strengthen mental processing in retirement is by trying something new? Would you like to learn how to provide written and verbal testimony

for legislative hearings? Please register to attend a special member-only, one-hour program to learn the basics of providing written and verbal testimony. The session will be taught by RPEC members, as well as members of RPEC's professional team. Register at www.rpecwa.org.

New Resources for PEBB & Medicare Open Enrollment Periods

RPEC has launched a special resource page on the website to help members navigate PEBB Open Enrollment (Oct. 27-Nov. 24) and Medicare Open Enrollment (Oct. 15 through Dec. 7). The new resource page includes recorded webinars covering the PEBB plans, as well as the [new Medicare Open Enrollment Jumpstart Tool Kit](#) from the Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA).

Registration is still open for a member-only informational Zoom program on November 7th to help members understand the differences among the healthcare plans available through Medicare Open Enrollment. Register at www.rpecwa.org.

Important Dates

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

- Oct. 3: Legislative Update Call (2:00 p.m.)
- Oct. 10: Legislative Committee (10:00 a.m.)
- Oct. 16: Virtual Senior Lobby Fall Conference (9:00 a.m.)
- Oct. 17: Executive Board Work Session (10:00 a.m.)
- Oct. 20: Meet the New DRS Director (10:00 a.m.)
- Oct. 21: Select Committee on Pension Policy (10:00 a.m.)
- Oct. 23: Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 p.m.)
- Oct 24: Written & Verbal Testimony Educational Webinar (10:00 a.m.)
- Oct. 29: WSARA Annual Convention (9:00--3:00 p.m.)