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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 3rd, 2023

Meeting Time: Meeting: 12:30 PM

Meeting Place: Clover Island Inn – Riverside Room (4th Floor)

Meeting Address: 435 North Clover Island Dr, Kennewick, WA 99336

Dear Fellow Chapter 21 Members,

At our August 22nd Chapter meeting, our guest speaker, Mike Gonzalez, Franklin County Administrator, educated us on the wide scope of his responsibilities.

He had our attention the entire time, thus prompting many interesting questions, which he answered with aplomb. His affable personality and excellent delivery made for an enjoyable presentation. His previous experience as a journalist came in handy with the video he made about Pasco and its economic development. If you are interested in his slide presentation, please email me.

This meeting was held at the Clover Island Inn, 435 North Clover Island Drive, Plaza Room, Fourth Floor, Kennewick, WA 99336. Members started arriving around 11:00 AM so they could buy lunch and enjoy the Eat, Meet, and Greet before the business meeting at 12:30 PM. At the end of the meeting, there was a drawing for a \$25 gift card and the lucky person was pleasantly surprised. You could be that lucky person if you join us at our next meeting.

As mentioned before, our meeting dates have been changed to avoid conflicts with the RPEC Executive Board meetings. We will now meet on the first Tuesday of each month instead of the last Tuesday. Hence, it made sense to not meet in September.

Our guest speaker for the October 3rd meeting will be Emmett Mills, Government Affairs Coordinator of the Retired Public Employees Council of Washington. He will discuss federal relations (expanding Medicare for vision, dental, and hearing benefits), PEBB health insurance plans for retirees, and restoring a recurring COLA for PERS 1/TRS 1 retirees.

Please take the time to read Laurie Weidner's Executive Director Report in this newsletter. It describes how your monthly dues are being used to protect what is near and dear to you, especially regarding pensions, Social Security, and health insurance. Read about the first 10 drugs for Medicare price negotiations. You should be aware of healthcare plan premium increases. Get updated from the comfort of your home computer through the next monthly Legislative Update call – October 6th from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM. Visit www.rpecwa.org for the login information. We are strong in our numbers, but we need to increase our membership to protect our interests. See the information in this newsletter on how to pay your annual RPEC dues with a check of \$84 for recruiting two new members.

RPEC is the only organization in the state that represents retirees on the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP), the Washington State Investment Board (WSIB), the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB), the Health Care is a Human Right Coalition, and at the federal level, with lobbyists working to protect Social Security and Medicare.

If you have comments or suggestions, please contact me at 253-370-9899 or rarego1213@gmail.com.

In Solidarity,

Robin Rego, RPEC Chapter 21 President

Guest Speaker: Emmett Mills, RPEC Government Affairs Coordinator

Emmett Mills is Government Affairs Coordinator of the Retired Public Employees Council of Washington. He is responsible for coordinating RPEC's legislative advocacy and political action programs.

The son of two career public employees (both recently retired), Emmett grew up in Corvallis, Oregon. He moved to Washington in 2013 to attend Western Washington University, graduating in 2017 with a bachelor's degree in political science, with an emphasis in American Politics.

His studies involved a legislative internship in the office of Senator Lynda Wilson (R. Vancouver) during the 2017 Legislative Session. Emmett joined the RPEC team in 2019, serving as Administrative Assistant and then Membership Coordinator before entering his current role in 2022.

His hobbies include hiking, skiing, playing guitar, reading presidential biographies, and visiting county courthouses across the state.



Chapter 21 Minutes August 22, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 12:30 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Robin Rego.

After self-introductions with three new attendees, President Rego introduced Mike Gonzalez, Franklin County Administrator. Mike provides fiscal and budgetary services, makes reports and recommendations to the Board, supervises all non-elected department heads, coordinates, and provides liaison between the Board and others, is chief negotiator for all affiliated unions, and a host of other duties.

Mike also reminded people of SHB 1355: expanding senior property tax exemption thresholds. Substitute House Bill 1355 addressed the housing affordability crisis that many retirees face by raising property tax exemption thresholds for people over the age of 61, as well as those who are unable to work due to disability.

The minutes from the last meeting were approved with no changes.

President Rego reminded everyone to follow the Action Alert to protect Social Security Benefits. Also pay attention to Friday's Action NewsFlash about the scams that are being pulled on people these days.

Treasurer's report: President Rego reported that at the end of July there was a balance of \$11,775.87 with a deposit of \$417.64 for a balance of \$12,193.51. The expenses were not recorded in time for the bank statement. It was moved and seconded to accept the report. Motion carried.

Committee Reports: Trustee Susan Leschinski attended the Healthcare Workgroup meeting on July 27. She said that the SHIBA has been thinking of adding Medicare Benefits. Susan also said that there was some talk of a government shut down in September.

Old Business: None

New Business: After discussion about changing our meeting date it was moved and seconded that our meetings take place on the first Tuesday of the month due to schedule conflict with the RPEC Executive Board meetings. Motion carried.

It was moved and seconded that we skip the January 2, 2024 meeting since it is so close to the New Year's Day holiday. Motion carried.

Good of the Order: Robin stated that the Lawsons will be at the Benton Franklin County Fair with at the information booth. The Knights of Columbus will be selling ice cream as a fund raiser as in past years.

The \$25.00 cash drawing winner was Dave Hansen.

There will not be a meeting in September, and the October 3 meeting will be at 12:30 PM at the Clover Island Inn with guest speaker Emmett Mills, RPEC Government Affairs Coordinator.

Meeting Adjourned 2:12 PM.

Carol Travis, Secretary

September 2023 Executive Director's Report

Thank you for the excellent work you have been doing all summer to strengthen your relationships with state legislators. Summer is the ideal time to work on relationship building – thanking legislators for their support of RPEC's legislative priorities and talking to them about our ongoing priorities for the coming legislative session. We also thank you for taking the time to update the Council Office on your meetings with legislators. After each meeting, please take a few minutes to fill out the Legislator Meeting Report Form. The form is available at www.rpecwa.org. You can access it through the drop-down under "Other" in the top menu or through this link: <https://rpecwa.org/legislator-meeting-report-form/>.

Strategic Planning

Executive Board completes final strategic planning work session

The Executive Board convened in person at RPEC headquarters in Olympia from August 20-22 to continue strategic planning. The work session included a review of the data and learnings gleaned from the scientific telephone poll administered in February, the strategic planning listening session which took place in April, and the all-member written survey which was tallied in May and June. The Board used this information to identify member priorities for RPEC and themes relating to communication preferences, areas of interest, etc. This information was used by the Board to identify broad goals that RPEC's professional team will use as the foundation for the draft strategic plan. The Board will review the draft strategic plan at its regularly scheduled November meeting, which will be held via Zoom on November 13th. The strategic plan will include short-term and long-term goals and is designed to guide the organization for the next three-to-five years.

Federal Relations

RPEC Leaders to Meet with Washington Delegation Healthcare Policy Staffers

The week of September 25th, President Clair Olivers, Secretary Nancy Heley (also chair of the Legislative Committee), and I will be in Washington, D.C. for the AFSCME Retirees annual meeting. To ensure that our federal lawmakers are aware of our concerns about the escalating premium cost for Uniform Medical Plan (UMP) Classic Medicare and the need to expand existing federal prescription drug subsidies to include healthcare plans, like UMP Classic Medicare, our RPEC delegation will be meeting with the healthcare policy staffers for Senator Maria Cantwell, Representative Kim Schrier, Representative Marilyn Strickland, and Representative Dan Newhouse. In addition to seeking the expansion of the federal subsidies (which will require a legislative change by Congress), the delegation will also be urging the Washington State Congressional delegation to advocate for the expansion of Medicare benefits to include hearing, vision, and dental benefits.

Requests have also been made for virtual meetings with other healthcare staffers who support the other members of the Washington delegation. In June, RPEC leaders met with the Washington State Director for Senator Patty Murray regarding these issues.

U.S. Announces First 10 Drugs for Medicare Price Negotiations

Ahead of its September 1st deadline, the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](https://www.cms.gov/medicare/medicaid-support/medicaid-services) released a list of the first 10 prescription drugs that Medicare can negotiate prices with the drug manufacturers. This historic precedent was the result of the Inflation Reduction Act passed into law last year. This law finally allows Medicare to negotiate prices on some of the more costly drugs that seniors use, just as the Medicare Advantage program has been able

to do since its inception. This is one small step in making traditional Medicare equitable with its competing Medicare Advantage plans. The drugs selected for this first round of negotiations are as follows:

- **Eliquis** - blood thinner
- **Enbrel** - rheumatoid arthritis
- **Entresto** - heart failure
- **Farxiga** - diabetes, heart failure, & chronic kidney disease
- **Fiasp & NovoLog** - diabetes
- **Imbruvica** - leukemia
- **Januvia** - diabetes
- **Jardiance** - diabetes
- **Stelara** - arthritis, psoriasis, & Crohn's disease
- **Xarelto** - blood thinner

The drugs listed above accounted for approximately 20% of total cost of drugs in the Medicare Prescription drug program (Part D). The new prices are scheduled to go into effect in 2026. This will benefit about 9 million seniors who currently pay as much as \$6,497 in out-of-pocket costs for these prescription medications. Another 15 drugs will be selected in 2027 for price negotiations, followed by another 15 drugs in 2028 and 20 more in each subsequent year. Many drug manufacturers are reluctant to comply but face stiff penalties or removal from the Medicare prescription drug program if they do not agree to the negotiations.

To learn more, read the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services press release on our website at: <https://rpecwa.org/hhs-selects-the-first-drugs-for-medicare-drug-price-negotiation/>

State Relations & Advocacy

Executive Board approves resolutions for consideration at the WSARA annual convention

At the August meeting of RPEC's Executive Board, the Board took unanimous action to approve two resolutions for consideration by delegates attending the September 12th annual convention of the Washington State Alliance for Retired Americans (WSARA). The first resolution, modeled after the resolution unanimously approved last summer at the annual convention of the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC), calls for the restoration of an annual cost-of-living adjustment for retirees vested in Plan 1. The second calls for the Legislature to remove the \$183 cap on the explicit subsidy that the state provides to Medicare-eligible retirees to lower healthcare premiums for plans offered and overseen by the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB). The current statute states that the explicit subsidy is either 50% of the premium or up to \$183. While that monthly offset is helpful, plans like the Uniform Medical Plan (UMP) Classic Medicare have soared by 46% over the last two years with the single-payer amount exceeding \$500 in 2024. The resolution calls for the removal of the \$183 cap and an equal cost-sharing between employers (the state, counties, cities, and municipalities) and retirees. Maurice Garrott, RPEC Vice President, and I will speak in favor of both resolutions at the WSARA Convention, as will other RPEC delegates.

Plan 1 COLA Resolution

https://rpecwa.org/wp-content/uploads/WSARA_Resolution_2023_Plan_1_COLA.pdf

PEBB Resolution

https://rpecwa.org/wp-content/uploads/WSARA_Resolution_2023_Increase_Employer_Support_to_PEBB_Retiree_Health_Care_Costs.pdf

RPEC is non-partisan

Some years ago, in a conversation with a long-time friend, I recall touting the record of a state legislator and praising his ability as a statesman. As she listened, she became terribly angry with me. As a lifelong advocate for public education, I was only referencing the legislator's record on public education priorities. Whereas my friend's focus was on his voting record on law enforcement and crime. I'm sharing this personal story to underscore a point ... legislators take positions (and do not take positions) on a variety of issues. You might like a legislator's stance on one issue and disagree with others. Please remember as we inch toward 2024, which is a pivotal election year in Washington, that RPEC is non-partisan. We support candidates, regardless of party, who are pro-retiree and support our legislative priorities. We do not consider their stances on other issues of importance. Our Political Action Committee (PAC) relies on input from our chapters, legislators voting records, feedback gleaned at Legislative Day, and other criteria to inform endorsements and contribution rates. In addition, we also consider the endorsements rendered by the Washington State Labor Council, the Washington Federation of State Employees, and AFSCME Council 2. Ultimately, we endorse candidates who support and will advocate for our legislative priorities. Read more about RPEC's legislative priorities at www.rpecwa.org. The legislative priorities are approved on a biennial basis at RPEC's convention. They focus exclusively on retirement security, healthcare access and affordability, and other issues of importance to retirees and seniors.

Thank you for supporting RPEC's Political Action Committee (PAC)

As noted above, 2024 is going to be a pivotal election year in Washington state. In addition to many important seats in the State Legislature, all statewide elected officials will be up for election, including the Governor. The RPEC PAC will support pro-retiree candidates by making endorsements and campaign contributions. RPEC members have stepped up to help RPEC make a difference in these races by responding to a recent fundraising mailing. Between July 15th and September 1st, 386 members signed up to automatically contribute a collective \$2,121.58 per month to the RPEC PAC via pension deduction. Moreover, an additional 70 members made one-time contributions totaling \$5,978.00. PAC contributions can be of any size. Most members donate through a monthly pension deduction. The PAC is also happy to receive one-time contributions through personal checks or cash. To learn more about RPEC's PAC or to donate, email Emmett.mills@rpecwa.org.

Recurring COLA for PERS 1/TRS 1

Efforts continue to urge the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) to pursue legislation to fund an ongoing cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Plan 1 retirees. RPEC President Clair Olivers, Government Affairs Coordinator Emmett Mills, and I have been meeting with legislators who serve on the SCPP about RPEC's priorities. We also recently met with David Schumacher, Director of the Office of Financial Management (OFM), and OFM staff about the need for a recurring COLA and RPEC's healthcare priorities for the next legislative session. The SCPP has tabled the recurring COLA/one-time COLA agenda item until its October meeting. If you would like to attend, details are on the RPEC calendar at www.rpecwa.org.

We applaud the efforts underway by Executive Board members and chapter presidents to secure support for a recurring COLA by city council and county commissioners. Special thanks to Don Boxford (Chapter 27 president), Johanna Standish (RPEC Treasurer, Chapter 18 president), Claude Burfect and Alma-jean Marion (Executive Board members, District 9), Judith Frey (Chapter 46 president), and others who are actively working to secure letters of support and/or resolutions on this top RPEC legislative priority. If your chapter is interested in

getting involved with this effort, please contact Emmett Mills, Government Affairs Coordinator, at Emmett.mills@rpecwa.org.

Healthcare

As noted in the membership newsletter you received in your mailboxes in August, all healthcare plans managed by the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) will have premium increases in January 2024.

2024 PEBB Medicare retiree single subscriber premiums

Medicare Retiree plans	Single subscriber premium*	
	2023	2024
Kaiser NW Senior Advantage	\$176.13	\$193.95
Kaiser WA Medicare Advantage and Original Medicare	\$174.59	\$188.62
UMP Classic Medicare	\$438.34	\$532.94
UnitedHealthcare PEBB Complete	\$145.63	\$160.58
UnitedHealthcare PEBB Balance	\$122.94	\$135.65
Premera Medicare Supplement Plan F (Retired)	\$115.16	\$119.05
Premera Medicare Supplement Plan F (Disabled)	\$196.69	\$207.45
Premera Medicare Supplement Plan G (Retired)	\$98.53	\$101.99
Premera Medicare Supplement Plan G (Disabled)	\$164.05	\$169.20

*These premiums are **already** reduced by the legislatively mandated Medicare subsidy of \$183 per month (or 50% of the monthly premium, whichever is less) and include the HCA administrative fee of \$5.96 per month for 2024.

November 1-30 is open enrollment, the monthlong time when retirees, who earn their healthcare benefits through PEBB, may change healthcare plans. The Health Care Authority (HCA) will cover details about open enrollment in the PEBB October newsletter, which you will receive in the mail by mid- to late-October. HCA is also preparing website pages on open enrollment, which will be “live” on November 1st. In the meantime, information is available at this link to help you prepare for open enrollment. [PEBB and SEBB members: Prepare for open enrollment | Washington State Health Care Authority](#). In addition to offering information and videos on the website, HCA will host in-person benefits fairs in November. More details about the in-person benefits fairs will be available on the HCA website later this month. As of the publishing of this letter, the proposed dates/locations include:

- November 1: Vancouver & Spokane
- November 2: Centralia & Cheney
- November 3: Olympia/Lacey & Pullman
- November 6: Bellingham & Pasco
- November 7: Everett & Yakima
- November 8: Shoreline/Seattle & Ellensburg
- November 9: Tacoma/Lakewood
- November 14: Port Angeles & Bremerton

Finally, as noted in previous letters to our members, RPEC anticipates providing videotaped information from SHIBA to help our members to better understand Medicare, the PEBB plan

options, and how to navigate the PEBB open enrollment period with the least amount of stress. More details will be available in the October member letter.

Monthly Legislative Update Calls Extend through December

The Legislative Update Calls will be held monthly through December. The next calls will take place on September 1st and October 6th from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Visit www.rpecwa.org for the login information.

Membership

Recruit 2 Members, Get a Check for the Cost of Your Dues

For a limited time, RPEC is offering members a chance to earn one year's free membership. For every two new members you recruit, you will receive a check for \$84! To get credit, your name must appear in the "Recruited by" field on the new members' membership applications. Associate members do not count until they become full dues-paying members. Checks will only be issued to current members in good standing. If you recruit just two new members, you receive a check worth a year of dues! In August, Robert Devlin (Ch 10 president) earned a 'Recruit 2, Get Your Dues' reward.

Partner organization events

RPEC is fortunate to work with various retiree and senior organizations on shared policy and legislative priorities. Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA) is hosting a webinar called "We Can Reclaim Medicare from Greedy Profiteers," on September 13th at 5 p.m. Contact organizer@psara.org for more information.

Upcoming Events

Visit www.rpecwa.org for a full calendar of Council Office and chapter meetings:

- Oct. 6 – Legislative Committee Meeting (10:00 am)
- Oct. 6 – Monthly Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)
- Oct. 12 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)
- Oct. 17 – Select Committee on Pension Policy Meeting (10:00 am)
- Oct. 19 – Senior Lobby Fall Conference
- Oct. 26 – Membership Committee Meeting (10:00 am)
- Oct. 26 – Senior Lobby (10:00 am)
- Oct. 26 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)

Best,
Laurie