



Retired Public Employees Council of WA Chapter 22 – Jefferson County April 2021 Newsletter

Mike Marston, President 360-821-1211

Chapter President's Message

We are so close to resuming our in-person membership meetings, but for our April meeting we will be using the Zoom meeting platform again. If you have not yet experienced the joy of “Zooming”, you had better tune in!

It has been a full year since we cancelled our first meeting due to the pandemic last April.

And yes, last year I was looking forward to a return to normality with our 2020 Picnic Meeting. Just did not know this thing would last this long. As you all know well, 2020 was no Picnic!

Come July, we are tentatively planning to resume in-person meetings, beginning with our much-loved Annual Chapter 22 Picnic Meeting at HJ Carroll Park.

Please mark your calendars and plan to join us at noon on July 13th.

As for the April 13th Zoom meeting, we will present the latest news of concern to retirees from both Washingtons. And if you have something you would like to share, please do! We will have a segment of open discussion.

The Chapter needs a dedicated Treasurer. Also, we need three members to audit and approve the Chapter's 2020 financial records. This should not take long since we made very few expenditures over the past year as we were hunkered down at home due to COVID. If you can help, please call or text me, Mike Marston, at (360) 821-1211. Leave a voicemail message if you call as my spam call blocker is usually on.

We will have a random give away of a \$25 gift certificate of your choice at this meeting. The prize winner will be determined by the web based Pickerwheel.

Chapter 22 Virtual Membership Meeting

Tuesday – April 13, 2021 at 12:00 PM

To Join the Meeting Online using a computer, tablet, or smartphone:

Go to: <http://zoom.us>

Click on: “**Join a Meeting**”

Enter Meeting ID: **899 6731 6113**

Enter Passcode: **101123**

To Join the Meeting by Telephone:

Dial: **1-253-215-8782**

Enter Meeting ID: **899 6731 6113**

Enter Passcode: **101123**

Special Note for Telephone Participants

To mute/unmute your phone, press * 6
To “raise your hand” press * 9

I hope to see and/or hear from all who can make the meeting. You can log in by computer, tablet, smartphone, or regular old touch-tone phone. If you are unfamiliar with Zoom do not worry. It is easy to use, and we can walk you through any problems.

-Mike Marston, RPEC Chapter 22 President

DRS COLA Rates for 2021 Established

Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) for DRS-administered retirement systems and plans that receive a COLA have been established for 2021. LEOFF Plan 1 COLAs will take effect April 1 and will be reflected in end-of-April benefit payments. For all other plans that are eligible for a COLA, the COLA will take effect July 1 and will be reflected in end-of-July benefit payments. To view the 2021 COLA percentages by retirement date and plan, go to: <https://www.drs.wa.gov/retirees/information/cola/>

Post COVID Vaccine Guidance

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is adopting the guidance released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding post-vaccine behavior. If someone has been fully vaccinated, they can:

- Gather indoors with fully vaccinated people in private residences without wearing a mask and,
- Gather indoors with unvaccinated people from one other household in private residences (for example, visiting with relatives who all live together) without masks, unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

The CDC is quite clear that vaccinated people should continue to wear masks when out in public, avoid crowds and take other precautions when gathering with unvaccinated people who are at high risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

If a vaccinated person has been around someone with COVID-19, they do not need to stay away from others or get tested unless they have symptoms. However, if a vaccinated person lives in a group setting and is around someone who has COVID-19, they should still stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even if without symptoms.

Regardless of vaccination status, people should still take steps to protect themselves and others while in public settings. This includes wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces.

So, We've Been Thrice Phased - Can We Have an In-Person Chapter Meeting Now?

Unfortunately, not so fast. Washington State's Four Phase Approach to Reopening advises that at Phase 3, high risk populations should continue to "Stay home, stay healthy". High risk populations are currently defined as:

"Persons over 65 years of age or older, people of all ages with underlying medical conditions (particularly not well controlled), including person with moderate lung disease or chronic to severe asthma, people who have serious heart conditions, people who are immunocompromised, people with severe obesity, people with severe diabetes, people with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, people with liver disease, and people who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility."

For the time being, RPEC staff advises that we should continue to meet virtually for the time being. The good news is that things are starting to move in the right direction more rapidly now, and that is very encouraging indeed.

IRS Extends Federal Tax Filing Deadline to May 17

On St. Patrick's Day, the IRS announced it is delaying the federal tax filing deadline, giving taxpayers more time to prepare their filings amid the slew of pandemic-related tax changes. The Treasury Department and the IRS said "the federal income tax filing due date for individuals for the 2020 tax year will be automatically extended from April 15, 2021, to May 17, 2021.

"Individual taxpayers can also postpone federal income tax payments for the 2020 tax year to May 17, 2021, without penalties and interest, regardless of the amount owed," the IRS said.

These changes do not apply to state tax returns and payments, and the relief does not apply to estimated tax payments that are still due on April 15, 2021.

Congressmen Richard Neal (D-MA) and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) said in a joint statement, "Under titanic stress and strain, American taxpayers and tax preparers must have more time to file tax returns. And the IRS itself started the filing season late, continues to be behind schedule, and now must implement changes from the American Rescue Plan."

Tax-Aide Kicks Off Free Local Tax Preparation

The AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Program began taking appointments for its free tax preparation and e-filing services on February 12th. Due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional face-to-face preparation with a Tax-Aide counselor is being replaced with a Contact-Free approach.

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide Program is an all-volunteer organization whose tax counselors are trained and IRS-certified every year to ensure they understand the latest changes to the U.S. Tax Code. All tax preparation interaction with taxpayers will take place via telephone and video conferencing. **The service is free and will be offered through May 17.**

Appointments for taxpayers living in Washington can be requested by calling 888-OUR-AARP (888-687-2277) and leaving a voicemail. A volunteer will call back to set up an appointment. Assistance may also be requested through the AARP Foundation Tax-

Aide website at www.aarpfoundation.org/taxaide.

RPEC Executive Director's Report

Legislative Bill Update: The state Senate has taken the first step towards addressing the state's upside-down tax code. **SB 5096**, which would tax high-end capital gains for the top 2% of Washingtonians passed out of the Senate by a 25-24 vote on March 6th. The House is expected to quickly approve the bill and send it to the Governor.

This bill takes a forward leap to address the issues with our current tax code and raises over 550 million dollars in revenue for important programs. Legislators are beginning to understand that funding the state by taxing the average retiree 7 times more than the wealthiest and large corporations is not sustainable.

The emergency clause was removed. However, opponents of the legislation will have time to perfect their arguments and legal briefs with the expected court action taking a detour this fall for a referendum vote.

As retirees, RPEC members have an important role in the discussion around the tax code and it is important that your Legislators continue to hear from you. A full list of the bills we are tracking, and their status can be found on the RPEC website at: www.rpecwa.org.

We encourage our members to join our weekly Legislative Update Zoom Meeting every Friday at 1:00 PM. To join us via computer or tablet visit: www.zoom.us/join and enter the Meeting ID: **828 6634 6713, then enter the Passcode: **205507**. You can also dial in by telephone at **1-253-215-8782** and enter the same Meeting ID and Passcode.**

Federal Update: The U.S. Senate approved their version of American Rescue Act in early March. This legislation includes \$1,400 in direct checks for Americans making under \$75,000, a \$300 per week supplemental unemployment bonus, money for vaccine distribution, and funding to aid schools and state and local governments which will help ease the pressure on their budgets.

The legislation was subsequently approved by Congress and was signed into law by President Biden on March 11th. The sweeping domestic policy injects hundreds of billions into the ailing economy at this most critical time in our nation. Distribution of this third round of stimulus checks to taxpayers began on Saturday, March 13th.

Sincerely,

James Cockburn
Executive Director
RPEC of WA

Important Dates - All events held virtually

April 13, 2021	Chapter 22 Membership Meeting
April 22, 2021	Legislative Committee Meeting
April 26, 2021	Finance Committee Meeting
April 27, 2021	Membership Committee Meeting
May 6, 2021	Executive Board Meeting
May 24, 2021	Chapter Treasurer's Training
June 14, 2021	RPEC Leadership Training