



## Retired Public Employees Council SPOKANE AREA CHAPTER 13 NEWS FEBRUARY 2024

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**CHAPTER MEETING:** Spokane Area meets the second Thursday of every month except July and January when there is no meeting. February 8 is our first meeting of 2024. Our regular meeting place is The Longhorn BBQ at 7611 W. Sunset Highway, Spokane. We gather at 11 am for lunch and conversation, the meeting begins at 12 noon. Our speaker at the February meeting will be Michelle Larson, of the Washington Alzheimer's Association. She will speak for about 30 minutes with a short time for questions afterward. Our speaker at our meeting on March 14, 2024, will be Jennifer Ballentyne, Elder Law Attorney. Jennifer will speak on common needs and issues of seniors followed by a short time for questions.

December brought sad news, our long-time Chapter Treasurer, Dean Treichel passed away on December 27. We will miss him in many ways, as Treasurer, as friend, and a calming voice and presence. In accordance with our Constitution, our Executive Board met on January 9, 2024, at which we voted to fill this unexpired term ending in April of 2025, with Althea (Lee) Malinda, who has volunteered to fill the position. Lee is an experienced past officer of her Federation's Union Local 573 and we welcome and thank her for contributing her time and skills.

**LEGISLATURE:** During 2023 we hosted two state legislators: Jennifer Graham, Republican, Representative 6<sup>th</sup> District, and Suzanne Schmidt, Republican, Representative, 4<sup>th</sup> District. They both gave us their background and we discussed our concerns and goals, such as a permanent COLA for Plan 1 PERS and TRS retirees and an increase in the subsidy for our (PEBB) health care premiums. While both agreed these were understandable/fair goals neither gave us a commitment to support legislation to make the improvements. As I write this in January, several pieces of Legislation have been introduced which are of importance to our members: HB 1985 which would give a one-time 3% increase (COLA) for PERS and TRS Plan 1 retirees with a cap of \$125; HB 2188 to increase the health insurance subsidy for PEBB plans from 50% to 60%, with a cap of \$193, whichever is less; and HB 2013 to eliminate the situation where on death of a beneficiary the health premium could exceed the benefit and leave the family with a debt to the state.

The RPEC Council Office has a way to follow bills of special interest to our members, known as a bill tracker. You can access it at [www.rpecwa.org/legislative-bill-tracker-2024](http://www.rpecwa.org/legislative-bill-tracker-2024). Also, not to be missed is the Weekly NewsFlash, distributed every Friday via email, with an emphasis on legislative updates during the Legislative Session. It appears on the

page when you go online to our [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org) site. Also, from there you can access the Zoom information for the Weekly Legislative Update Call which takes place every Friday from 2pm – 3pm during session. Legislation and its progress changes, so using these sites can keep you informed and let you know what you can do to make a difference.

If you do not use the internet: you may still call 1-800-562-6000, and ask about a bill by number, title, or issue. The person will also take a message for your legislator, even if you do not know your district. These helpful people will look up your district if you give them your address. They are super helpful. During the Legislative session their hours are M-F, 8 am to 7 pm, and when the legislature is not in session the hours are M-F, 8 am to 4:30 pm. These times and hours are current.

**P.S.** The Chapter December Holiday Party on December 14 was good fun with great music of a harp, violin, and flute, good food and conversation.

Sincerely and in Solidarity,

Gail Spaeth, President Spokane Area Chapter 13

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### **January 2024 Executive Director's Report**

This monthly letter summarizes some of RPEC's noteworthy achievements in 2023 and includes a few priorities for the month of January.

#### **2023 Highlights**

- Adoption of RPEC's strategic plan by the Executive Board. The organization has not had a strategic plan in over 5 years.

#### **Awards**

- Awarded the Washington State Labor Council's (WSLC) Mother Jones Group Award, along with partner organizations, for our legislative successes regarding healthcare access and affordability.
- Awarded Senior Champion of the Year with the Washington Education Association-Retired (WEA-R) for our healthcare advocacy work.
- Awarded Advocate of the Year by WEA-R for our healthcare advocacy leadership.

#### **Legislative Efforts**

- Passage of SB 5350, which provided a one-time 3% cost of living adjustment for retirees vested in Plans 1.
- Passage of a proviso that increased accountability for the Health Care Authority (HCA) and required that they provide reports to the Legislature. The proviso also required the agency to explore plan options with benefits greater than or equal to UMP Classic Medicare but more affordable.
- Safeguarded the UMP Classic Medicare healthcare plan, offered by the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB).
- Coordinated 60 listening sessions with retirees and HCA to glean insights to inform policy decisions and improve services to retirees. RPEC, with partners, recruited more than 170 retirees to participate.

- Successful mobilizations on both state and federal legislation. State mobilizations have averaged 1,000 PRO sign-ins. More than 500 members signed onto the RPEC's Call-to-Action regarding federal government funding.
- Successful Legislative Day which included 143 members who participated in 70 meetings with legislators/staff.
- Expansion of federal advocacy efforts to include meetings with healthcare policy staff working for members of Washington's Congressional Legislation.
- Launch of the RPEC Speakers' Series featuring Congresswoman Maria Gluesenkamp Perez.

### **Membership**

- Recruitment of the highest number of new members in more than a decade. The Council Office's efforts this spring added 1,600 new members to RPEC!
- Significant growth in member contributions to the RPEC Political Action Committee, totaling \$85,880.18 – a more than 25% increase from 2022.
- Implementation of an all-member written survey.

### **Communications & Engagement**

- Launch of the weekly NewsFlash reports.
- High levels of digital engagement by members through increased content generation on the RPEC website, social media, and through the weekly NewsFlash.
- Developed a three-part webinar series with Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) about navigating open enrollment and the plans available by the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB).
- Led well attended webinars initiated by RPEC with DRS and HCA, and hosted a first ever "Members-Only Benefits Webinar."

### **Labor**

- Secured RPEC President Clair Olivers as a presenter at the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE) Policy Meeting and RPEC at the AFSCME Council 2 Executive Board meeting– both firsts!
- Expanded relationships with the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE), AFSCME Council 2, and the Teamsters.
- Standing-room only presentations by RPEC Membership Coordinator at the WFSE and Council 2 Conventions.

### **Federal Relations**

#### **Fiscal Stability Act Poses Threat to Social Security and Medicare Funding**

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Retirees and the Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA) have concern about a new piece of bi-partisan legislation introduced in the Senate in November. The Fiscal Stability Act (S. 3262) would create a fiscal commission that will produce a plan to improve the nation's fiscal trajectory and decrease the national debt. Retiree organizations fear the real agenda is to slash funding for Social Security and Medicare for seniors. RPEC will work, in concert with other AFSCME Retiree chapters nationwide, to oppose the bill and the companion legislation (H.R. 5779) introduced in the House. A detailed [position paper](#) about the proposed debt commission is available at <https://retiredamericans.org>.

Keep apprised of RPEC's work at a federal level by reading the weekly NewsFlash and visiting [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org).

## **State Relations & Advocacy**

### **Two priorities emerge for Legislative Day, January 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Through the advocacy efforts of RPEC and our retiree organization partners, the Select Committee on Pension Policy will advance a bill next legislative session that not only provides another one-time cost-of-living adjustment to retirees vested in Plans 1, but also expands the maximum cap to \$125 per month.

Moreover, RPEC, in concert with the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) Stakeholders' Medicare Coalition (which RPEC formed and leads), has initiated a budget proviso that will increase the Medicare Explicit Subsidy provided to Medicare-eligible retirees who obtain their healthcare benefits from the Health Care Authority (HCA)/PEBB. The Medicare Explicit Subsidy reduces the monthly premium costs for the most expensive healthcare plans offered and managed by HCA/PEBB.

### **HCA Update**

In the last legislative session, RPEC, in concert with the PEBB Stakeholders' Medicare Coalition, initiated a proviso requiring the HCA to hold listening sessions with retirees to ascertain their needs and to use this information to inform policy and to improve communication and services. The proviso also required the agency to report the findings to the Legislature. The report will be available soon on the HCA website at [www.hca.wa.gov](http://www.hca.wa.gov). The report will be available under About HCA, Data/Reports. The Coalition will study the report and will be referencing it throughout the 2024 legislative session to ensure HCA honors the input of retirees moving forward.

### **Legislative Update Calls Begin Weekly in January**

This month marks the end of the monthly Legislative Update Calls. The calls are held weekly each Friday at 2 p.m. and will extend through the end of the legislative session in late March.

### **Executive Board approves Strategic Plan**

The Executive Board approved RPEC's strategic plan at its November meeting. The plan will guide RPEC's priorities through 2027. The five goal areas relate to: organizational sustainability, member recruitment, member retention and engagement, member communications, and federal advocacy. The plan was informed by research conducted in Spring 2023 by AFSCME Retirees and data gathered by the Council Office.

The Board also appointed the Strategic Plan Ad Hoc Committee to outline potential next steps for the Board to implement the plan. The Committee is chaired by **Maurice Garrott**, Vice President and Chair of the Membership Committee, and includes President **Clair Olivers**, District 1 Representative **Cheryl Moser**, District 3 Representative **Kandy Kraig**, District 9 Representative **Alma-jean Marion**, and me.

A backgrounding document will be available at [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org) in January. Executive Board members will be sharing more information about the plan in the coming months at regional meetings.

### **Upcoming Events:**

*Please refer to our calendar page for more information for each event.*

Feb. 2 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)  
Feb. 8 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)  
Feb. 9 – Legislative Committee Meeting (10:00 am)  
Feb. 9 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)

Feb. 16 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)  
Feb. 19 – Council Office closed, Presidents' Day  
Feb. 22 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)  
Feb. 23 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)