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## Retired Public Employees Council Chapter 21 – Tri-Cities Area

**Robin Rego, President: (253) 370-9899, [rarego1213@gmail.com](mailto:rarego1213@gmail.com)**

**Meeting Date: Tuesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

**Meeting Time: Meeting: 12:30 PM**

**Meeting Place: Clover Island Inn – Riverside Room (4<sup>th</sup> Floor)**

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

Dear fellow Chapter 21 members,

At our February 6<sup>th</sup> chapter meeting, our guest speaker was Rick Dunn, Benton PUD General Manager. His presentation was “Planning for 100 Percent Electricity in Washington State.” The timeliness of this presentation could not have been better, given the concerns about dam breaching, renewable resources, rolling blackouts, and the like. If electricity is essential for health, safety, and well-being, then it is important to remember the three-legged stool – it has to be reliable, affordable, and environmentally responsible.

The conclusions were:

- ✓ 100% Clean Electricity Mandates
  - What does it look like when we get there?
  - Deepening dependence on hydro capacity & flexibility
  - (Increasing blackout risk) = (drought + cold/hot weather)
  - Risks 'de-industrializing' Washington & Oregon
- ✓ We need every drop of hydropower we can get!
- ✓ Need to make room for some new natural gas in the Pacific Northwest
- ✓ We need small footprint advanced nuclear technology to provide dependable carbon-free electricity near where people live

Rick made his presentation available in advance. He adroitly answered the many questions asked and stayed late to do so. If you need his presentation, please contact 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. Your dues give you the opportunity to attend this monthly event, meet your fellow members, learn how RPEC is diligently protecting your interests, and perhaps even win the \$25 drawing.

Our guest speaker for the March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting will be Michael Alvarez, Benton County Commissioner. Mike will talk about the duties and responsibilities of a County Commissioner, his personal accomplishments since he has been in office, and 2024's county projects.

Please take the time to read Executive Director Laurie Weidner's report in this newsletter. You can well see how your RPEC dues are working to protect what is “near and dear” to you.

Get updated from the comfort of your home computer through many virtual meetings as shown on the "Upcoming Events" calendar at the end of the newsletter. We are strong in our numbers, but we need to increase our membership to protect our interests. Per the Recruit 2, Get Your Dues recruitment incentive program, you can get a check for \$84 for recruiting two new members.

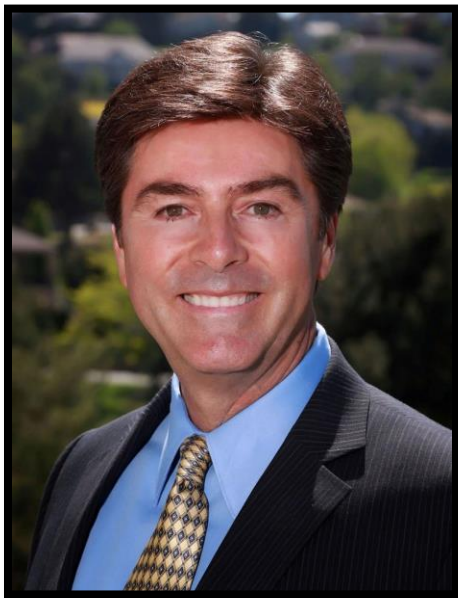
RPEC is the only organization in the state that represents retirees on the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP), the Washington State Investment Board (WSIB), the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB), the Health Care is a Human Right Coalition, and at the federal level, with lobbyists working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

If you have comments or suggestions, please contact me at 253-370-9899 or [rarego1213@gmail.com](mailto:rarego1213@gmail.com).

Robin Rego, RPEC Chapter 21 President

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### **Guest Speakers: Commissioner Michael Alvarez – District 2**



Commissioner Michael Alvarez was elected to the Board on January 1, 2023, to represent District 2, which includes Prosser, Benton City, and portions of Richland, Kennewick, Paterson, and the Horse Heaven Hills area. He previously served as Mayor of the City of Richland and served on the Richland City Council from 2018 to January 1, 2023. Michael is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and is now currently serving as an active member of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary under the Dept. of Homeland Security.

**Community Service:** Has included serving as a Commissioner for Richland Parks and Recreation Commission, Board Member for Blue Mountain Council Boy Scouts of America, National Child Identification Program volunteer, Richland Parks and Recreation youth baseball coach, Richland National Little League baseball coach, and charity organizer and fundraiser for Safe Harbor/My Friends Place and other local charities.

**Education:** Bachelor of Business Administration – Human Resource Management. He is also a Washington State licensed instructor teaching Code of Ethics, Finance, Business Management, and Advanced Business Management to professional associations throughout Washington State.

Michael and his wife moved to Richland in 1992 after both graduating from New Mexico State University. Their children were born in Richland and are graduates of Richland High and WSU. Michael and his wife of more than 33 years currently own and operate a successful local financial company in Tri-Cities for almost three decades.

Michael's hobbies include fishing, archery, hiking, boating, biking, golfing, and running.

## **RPEC Chapter 21 Meeting Minutes – February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

- Meeting was called to order by President Robin Rego at 12:36 p.m.
- The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Robin Rego.
- After self-introductions, the guest speaker, Rick Dunn, Benton PUD General Manager was introduced.
- The December 2023 minutes were approved as listed in the newsletter.
- President's Report: Robin stated that our speaker for April will be Matt Boehnke. We will have a COLA for PERS 1 AND TRS 1 this year. There has not been a COLA for these retirees, from 2010 to 2018. John and Carolyn Lawson met with Senator Dozier, and he is very supportive of our issues.
- Treasurer's Report: Steve Gamble reported that at the end of December 2023, we had a starting balance of \$3,554.70, a deposit of \$488.60, and a withdrawal of \$47.00, for an ending balance of \$13,996.30. It was moved and seconded that the report be accepted. Motion carried.
- Committee Reports: Steve Gamble reported on the Membership Committee. RPEC is struggling to get new members. The Olympia office will be doing blind mailing to potential members. It was also mentioned that survivors of members who are deceased can become members through the pension of the deceased member. It was also stated that a person can receive a year's membership if they have two people sign up.
- Old Business: none
- New Business: none
- Good of the Order: none
- Betsy Austin won the \$25.00 drawing.
- Speaker Rick Dunn then spoke on planning for 100% clean electricity.
- After his presentation the conclusion is 100% Clean Electricity Mandates:
  1. What does it look like when we get there?
  2. Deepening dependence on hydro Capacity & flexibility
  3. Increasing blackout risk = (drought + cold/hot weather)
  4. Risk 'de-industrializing' Washington & Oregon
  5. We need every drop of hydropower we can get
  6. Need to make room for some new natural gas in the Pacific Northwest
  7. We need a small footprint, advanced nuclear technology to provide dependable carbon-free electricity, near where people live.
- The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Carol Travis, Secretary

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## **Chapter 21 RPEC Board Meeting February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

The meeting was called to order 2:37 PM. by President Robin Rego. This is a special meeting as we have had two (2) Trustees resign this past month. The trustees who resigned were Izzy Rodriguez and Bob Koshman. With approval from Dave Hopper and Dave Hanson, they were nominated as their replacements. With no other names listed, they were elected by acclamation.

The meeting adjourned at 2:42 PM

Carol Travis, Secretary

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

We are now about 1/3 of the way through the short, 60-day legislative session. Thanks to your individual and collective efforts, our priorities are known by legislators and are moving through the legislative process.

### **Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) Update**

In response to our budget proviso from the 2023 legislative session, the Health Care Authority (HCA) released the findings of a study highlighting healthcare plan options that would have the same excellent benefits available through the Uniform Medical Plan (UMP) Classic Medicare but would have more affordable premiums. The report will be discussed by the PEBB Board at its annual retreat on February 1<sup>st</sup>. HCA is recommending the adoption of a new configuration of UMP Classic Medicare. The medical benefits will remain unchanged in the new configuration. The pharmacy benefit would shift to an employer-managed Plan D pharmacy plan that nearly mirrors what is currently available in UMP Classic Medicare. HCA estimates this change will save retirees upwards of \$200 per month on premium costs. The new configuration is more affordable because the Plan D pharmacy benefit would be eligible for federal pharmaceutical drug subsidies. HCA will be hosting three virtual public forums and one in-person public forum in February to give retirees an opportunity to share feedback on this proposed new configuration. Details about how to register for the public forums will be available at [www.hca.wa.gov](http://www.hca.wa.gov). Information will also be published in the weekly NewsFlash and at [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org).

### **State Advocacy**

*Legislative Day 2024:* Eighty-three meetings were conducted with legislators and staff. All told, nearly 200 RPEC and WEA-R members participated. We appreciate the excellent meeting summaries provided by attendees. This information will be useful in the spring as RPEC's Political Action Committee (PAC) considers endorsements for those seeking reelection.

*Ad Hoc COLA for PERS/TRS 1:* Thanks to your efforts and meetings that we have also coordinated with top fiscal policy decision-makers, Substitute HB 1985 is poised for a House floor vote. The bill will provide a one-time 3% COLA for retirees vested in Plans 1 with a cap of \$110 per month. Please reach out to your legislators and urge them to continue to support this bill.

*Slightly lower premiums for the priciest PEBB healthcare plans:* Through our efforts with the Office of Fiscal Management and fiscal policy leaders, the Governor provided a \$10 increase to the Medicare Explicit Subsidy in his preliminary operating budget. The state provides the subsidy to lower monthly premium costs. Those who have chosen the more expensive healthcare plans will benefit from the increase. As budget negotiations begin in February, we will be advocating for this increase to remain in the final budget act.

*Weekly Legislative Update & bill tracker:* All members are invited to attend the weekly Legislative Update held each Friday via Zoom from 2-3 p.m. The bill tracker is also updated each Friday. The tracker and Zoom link for the Friday Legislative Update are available at [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org).

## **Federal Advocacy**

*Fiscal Commission Act of 2023 Moves to House Vote:* Your federal retirement benefits are, again, at risk thanks to legislation that was approved in January in the House Budget Committee and is poised for a full House vote. The [Fiscal Commission Act of 2023 \(H.R. 5779\)](#) will create a 16-member fiscal commission to search for ways to reduce the national deficit and balance the national budget. Retiree and senior advocacy organizations fear the Commission will prioritize Social Security and Medicare funding cuts over other federal expenditures. RPEC is sending official communication to House delegation members urging them to protect Social Security and Medicare benefits. A detailed [position paper](#) about the proposed debt commission is available at <https://retiredamericans.org>.

## **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 plan was informed by research conducted in spring 2023 by AFSCME Retirees and data gathered by the Council Office. A background document, summarizing the strategic plan goals, is available at [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org).

## **Upcoming Events**

Visit [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org) for a full calendar of Council Office and chapter meetings.

Feb. 22 – PEBB UMP Classic Medicare Town Hall (2:00 pm, virtual)

Feb. 22 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)

Feb. 23 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)

Feb. 26 – Executive Board Meeting (9:00 am)

Feb. 29 – PEBB UMP Classic Medicare Town Hall, in-person in Olympia (10:00 am)

Mar. 1 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)

Mar. 7 – Sine Die (end of Legislative Session)

Mar. 8 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)

Mar. 14 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)

Mar. 15 – Legislative Committee Meeting (10:00 am)

Mar. 21 – Public Employees Benefits Board (9:00 am)

Mar. 28 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)