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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, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

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

**Meeting Place: Round Table Pizza**

**Meeting Address: 3300 W Clearwater Ave, Kennewick, WA 99336**

Dear Fellow Chapter 21 Members,

At our May 7 chapter meeting, our guest speaker was Chris Haughee, Donor Development Manager, Mirror Ministries. His presentation “Sex Trafficking: Here in Our Community” pulls the curtain back on one of the greatest challenges before us as neighbors, families, and concerned citizens. We learned about the problem as it presents itself locally, the “faces” of traffickers, and how to identify and help victims. We were given practical “next steps” in how to respond so that together we can end the evil of exploitation and trafficking in our midst. Chris is a good speaker, who held our attention and gave us a copy of his slides along with informative handouts.

This meeting was held at the at the Round Table Pizza Restaurant, 3300 West Clearwater Avenue, Kennewick, WA 99336. Members started arriving around 11 AM, so they could buy lunch and enjoy the “Eat, Meet and Greet” before the business meeting at 12 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. The meeting location changed was due to the Clover Island Inn being sold and the new owner not planning on having a kitchen. We hope to continue meeting at the new location.

Our guest speaker for the June 4 meeting will be Michele Gerber. When her son died of addiction, she founded the Benton Franklin Recovery Coalition, the largest organization of its kind in Washington State. Her new book is “Witness to Addiction: My Son’s Journey and How Each Person Can Fight America’s Opioid Epidemic.” She is helping to build the Columbia Valley Center for Recovery for treatment of addiction and mental illness in Kennewick. You will not want to miss her presentation.

Please take the time to read the Executive Director, Laurie Weidner's letter 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 and engagement to protect our interests.

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

### **Guest Speakers: Michele Gerber, PhD**

A researcher, writer, and presenter who has won multiple awards and honors, and wrote a bestselling book on American nuclear history. She retired from the Hanford Site in 2011, having performed research for every cleanup project on the site.

When her son died of addiction, she founded the Benton Franklin Recovery Coalition, the largest such organization in Washington State. She has researched and studied the disease of addiction; advocated for recovery programs to local, state, and federal officials; testified at the Washington State legislature; organized classes for families of addicted persons; appeared on television and radio, written several guest editorials about addiction, and raised millions of dollars for treatment. She is helping to build the Columbia Valley Center for Recovery for treatment of addiction and mental illness in Kennewick.



### **RPEC Chapter 21 Meeting Minutes – May 7, 2024**

The meeting was called to order at 12:02 PM.

The flag salute was led by Robin Rego.

There were 15 members in attendance. Following self-introductions, Robin introduced our guest speaker, Chris Haughee (pronounced Hoy). He is the Donor Development Manager for Mirror Ministries, an agency whose mission is to respond to domestic minor sex trafficking. During his powerful presentation, Mr. Haughee defined sex trafficking and gave a summary of the alarming statistics of the known and estimated minor victims of sex trafficking in the Tri-Cities region. He also gave a list of items that can be donated. The Mirror Ministries website has a wish list for donations.

M/S/C to approve the April 2, 2024, minutes, as printed in the May 2024 newsletter.

**President's Report:** Robin thanked Carolyn and John Lawson for recommending Round Table Pizza as our meeting venue. The room can be expanded as attendance increases.

The State RPEC Convention in Wenatchee will be held on September 24-26. Our Chapter is allowed 15 delegates and so far, we have seven confirmed attendees. Costs of registration, meals, mileage, and hotel are covered by the chapter. The Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) will meet on May 21; one of the topics will be a permanent COLA for Plan 1

retirees. Robin encouraged members to read the NewsFlash, published every Friday on the RPEC website.

**Treasurer's Report:** Steve Gamble, Treasurer, reported our balance at the end of April was \$14,378.32 and dues of \$331.25 were deposited. There were no expenses, leaving a balance of \$14,709.55. M/S/C to approve the Treasurer's Report.

**Committee Reports:** Steve reported that **RPEC's Strategic Plan** has been developed to increase membership and member engagement. He noted there are 170 million potential voters in Gens X, Y, and Z. There are 75,000 Baby Boomers; hence the need to reach younger retirees, as well as retain our current retirees. RPEC sends blind mailings to retirees; chapters receive lists of new members monthly. Carolyn Lawson and Susan Leschinski have been appointed to a Strategic Plan Special Task Force to review RPEC's governance and financial structures and make recommendations to increase member involvement.

Carolyn Lawson reported that the **Membership Committee** tabled the discussion of the "Recruit 2, Get your Dues" until July. RPEC's search for assistance to input the large amount of membership data into RPEC records is ongoing. Carolyn will report additional information on June 4.

Susan Leschinski reported: **Healthcare Workgroup** is working on legislative priorities for RPEC to consider. The overall goals are to reduce health care costs, help members navigate health care enrollment, and strengthen Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. **Legislative Update** meeting: Executive Director Laurie Weidner stated, "The critical mission and one of the most important functions of RPEC is to develop relationships with our legislators...to garner support for retiree benefits and pensions." We need stories and testimonies from ALL Plan 1 members in support of the permanent Plan 1 COLA. The "biggest item" (of many) on the two-day **Executive Board Meeting** Agenda was the recommendations for RPEC endorsements and contributions to candidates, as well as the initiatives in the 2024 election. See attached list of recommendations made to the Executive Board.

**Old Business:** None

**New Business:** None

**Good of the Order:** None

**Winner** of the \$25 drawing was Donna Seely

Next meeting will be June 4, 2024, with Guest Speaker Michelle Gerber

Respectfully submitted: Susan Leschinski, for Carol Travis, Secretary

### **Executive Board Meeting: 5/6/2024**

o Action 1: approve the 2024 RPEC Legislative Champion Award to be presented to Representative Joe Timmons, Representative Joe Fitzgibbon, and Representative Mari Leavitt.

Political Action Committee & Endorsements – Bev Hermanson

o Action 1: approve revised PAC Policies & Procedures.

o Action 2: approve and authorize spending for Plan 1 fundraising mailing.

o Action 3: approve and authorize spending for Plans 2 & 3 fundraising mailing.

o Action 4: endorse Denny Heck for Lieutenant Governor.

o Action 5: endorse Steve Hobbs for Secretary of State.

o Action 6: endorse Mike Pellicciotti for Treasurer.

- o Action 7: endorse Pat McCarthy for Auditor.
- o Action 8: contribute \$2,400 to the Governor's race.
- o Action 9: contribute \$2,400 to the Lieutenant Governor's race.
- o Action 10: contribute \$2,400 to the Attorney General's race.
- o Action 11: contribute \$2,400 to the Secretary of State's race.
- o Action 12: contribute \$600 to Auditor's race.
- o Action 13: contribute \$600 to Public Lands Commissioner's race.
- o Action 14: contribute \$2,400 to Insurance Commissioner's race.
- o Action 15: contribute \$600 to Superintendent of Public Instruction's race.
- o Action 16: endorse Steve Gonzalez for State Supreme Court Position 8.
- o Action 17: endorse Sheryl Gordon McCloud for State Supreme Court Position 9.
- o Action 18: endorse Maria Cantwell for U.S. Senate.
- o Action 19: endorse Suzanne DelBene for CD 1.
- o Action 20: endorse Rick Larsen for CD 2.
- o Action 21: endorse Marie Gluesenkamp Perez for CD 3.
- o Action 22: endorse Pramila Jayapal for CD 7.
- o Action 23: endorse Kim Schrier for CD 8.
- o Action 24: endorse Adam Smith for CD 9.
- o Action 25: endorse Marilyn Strickland for CD 10.
- o Action 26: oppose Initiative 2109.
- o Action 27: oppose Initiative 2117.
- o Action 28: oppose Initiative 2124.
- o Action 29: immediate education on all three Initiatives

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

### **Extend a warm welcome to newcomers**

Each year, RPEC works in tandem with AFSCME Retirees on a mass mailing to retirees who have yet to join RPEC. We are beginning to process the new member applications and expect that new members may be joining your chapter's summertime activities. Extend a warm welcome to new members and help plug them into your local advocacy efforts. In addition, we welcome members to attend the Zoom meetings held this month for RPEC's statewide committees, workgroups, and Executive Board. (See events below. Also see calendar at [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org).)

### **Get to know your legislators and those running for office**

This summer, your chapter will be holding outdoor events and will be scheduling meetings with current state and federal legislators and those who are running for office. If you are new to RPEC or have never taken the opportunity to get involved in our advocacy work, now's your chance! The summertime events and meetings are an ideal time for you to build critical relationships that will help us achieve our legislative priorities (available in PDF form at [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org)). If you have never met with a legislator, don't worry. Many members of your chapter have been doing legislative advocacy around RPEC's priorities for years. They will help you and can answer your questions. In retirement, we have opportunities to grow and learn new skills. Many seasoned RPEC members, and our staff at the Council Office, are available to help you gain confidence in communicating with legislators. We need all our members joining our advocacy efforts, so that we can be successful in expanding and preserving your retirement benefits at state and federal levels.

## **Federal Advocacy**

**Call to action on the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82):** If you have not already done so, please join your fellow RPEC members and AFSCME Retiree chapters nationwide in urging Congress to pass this important piece of legislation, which repeals the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). These two provisions have unfairly penalized public service retirees for decades. RPEC's legislative priorities are consistent with this legislation. AFSCME Retirees has created an [easy form](#) that will send a letter of support for this legislation to members of the Washington state congressional delegation. Learn more at: <https://act.afscme.org/letters/tell-your-representative-repeal-gpo-and-wep>.

## **Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) Approves New Pharmacy Benefit for UMP Classic Medicare**

On April 11<sup>th</sup>, the PEB Board approved a change to the pharmacy benefit for Uniform Medical Plan (UMP) Classic Medicare. Beginning in January 2025, the pharmacy benefit will be a PEBB-managed Part D plan. This change is expected to lower premiums by several hundred dollars per month for many retirees. You can read more about the new benefit in RPEC's spring membership newsletter, which members will receive by mail very soon. RPEC will be partnering with the Health Care Authority (HCA) on an extensive member education effort in advance of open enrollment, which is held November 1-30. Visit [www.hca.wa.gov](http://www.hca.wa.gov) for more details.

## **Convention 2024, Sept. 24-26, Wenatchee Convention Center**

Are you interested in serving as a chapter delegate to RPEC's biennial Convention in September? You do not need to be an officer or chapter committee leader to attend. Any member in good standing is eligible to serve as a delegate. If you are interested in being considered for your chapter's delegation, contact your chapter president. Delegates are chosen by election at a chapter meeting. The registration deadline is July 1. If you are selected to represent your chapter, your Convention registration fee, travel, and lodging will be covered by your chapter. Guests may also attend at their own expense. Visit [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org) for more details or contact your chapter president.

## **State Advocacy**

The Legislative Update Calls are held monthly through December. The calls are held the first Friday of the month from 2-3 p.m. Details are available at [www.rpecwa.org](http://www.rpecwa.org).

## **Partner Events**

The Alliance for Retired Americans (ARA) is hosting a [regional meeting](#) in Las Vegas on Wednesday, June 5 through Thursday, June 6. The \$150 registration fee covers attendance at informational workshops and plenaries, a reception, one lunch and one breakfast. The regional meeting will take place at the Westgate Hotel. ARA has negotiated an \$89 nightly room rate at the host hotel with a special meeting code. More details are available at <https://retiredamericans.org/2024-regionals/>.

AFSCME Retirees will be hosting its annual meeting in Los Angeles at the Biltmore Hotel from Saturday, August 10 through Monday, August 12. The annual meeting aligns with the AFSCME International Convention, which will take place August 12-16. RPEC is entitled to send two Executive Committee officers as delegates. Chapters may send members as guests at the

chapter's expense. Guests may attend the International Convention as observers. The annual meeting and Convention call details will be available next month. Save these dates!

### **Upcoming Events**

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

- May 23 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)
- May 27 – Council Office closed, Memorial Day
- June 7 – Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)
- June 10 – Leadership Training Part A (9:30 am)
- June 13 – Public Employees Benefits Board (9:00 am)
- June 13 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)
- June 14 – Leadership Training Part B: AFSCME Financial Standards (10:00 am)
- June 18 – Select Committee on Pension Policy (10:00 am)
- June 19 – Council Office closed, Juneteenth