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Retired Public Employees Council
Chapter 35 – King County/Metro Retirees
Vicki Schmitz, President | Olympia Office (360) 352-8262
www.rpecwa.org

Date: Tuesday, November 7th, 2023
Time: 1:00 PM
Location: Swedish Club
Address: 1920 Dexter Ave. N, Seattle, WA 98109

CHAPTER 35 MEET & GREET

Come to the Chapter 35 member gathering at the **Swedish Club** on **November 7th from 1PM to 3PM**. Emmett Mills from the RPEC Office in Olympia will be there to tell us about what is happening in Olympia and our continuing support of the PERS 1 COLA. Pastries and coffee/tea will be served, and you will have an opportunity to meet new members after the long hiatus. The **Swedish Club is located at: 1920 Dexter Ave. N. Seattle**. There is plenty of free parking behind the building. We will meet in the 3 Crowns Room on the 2nd floor with a beautiful view of Lake Union.

This is a private space reserved for our event, so there won't be interruptions from competing groups. We are all looking forward to meeting together again, so please come and join us.

An RSVP to our President Vicki Schmitz would be appreciated. Call/Text 206-235-6105.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

At last, we are returning to one of our best traditions..... Getting together in-person, in delightful surroundings, to share some refreshments in the company of each other. This has surely been a long dry spell via Covid. Yikes!!

Please join us for our launch party, or relaunch, of the good ship RPEC Chapter 35. We need all of you to join us as we celebrate getting back to business, the business of protecting our pension funds, and ensuring that our PERS 1 retirees receive an annual COLA increase, like everyone else.

The Swedish Club is easily accessible with plenty of free parking. I'm really pumped to get going and to see you on November 7th.

Vicki Schmitz Block, "Madam President"
206-235-6105

October 2023 Executive Director's Report

October in the PNW is a time of transitioning to what I call "sweater weather." It is also the time that we too are transitioning, accelerating our plans for the impending legislative session. Below is a summary of our federal and state legislative advocacy efforts, including an update on new informational webinars and tools exclusively for our valued members. Each week, keep abreast of RPEC news by reviewing the NewsFlash. Or visit our website at www.rpecwa.org and follow us on Facebook.

Federal Relations

Member legislative advocacy

Thank you for taking the time to respond to our recent “call to action” to our Congressional leaders about the importance of averting a government shutdown. All told, 505 RPEC members responded to the Council’s call to action. Moving forward, we will provide more ways for you to engage with our Congressional leaders on matters that impact your hard-earned retirement benefits, including Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. As you know from news reports, a temporary funding bill has been passed that will fund federal government operations through November 17th. We continue to work closely with AFSCME Retirees on our collective next steps.

RPEC leaders lobby Washington’s congressional delegation

RPEC President Clair Olivers, Secretary Nancy Heley (who also chairs the Legislative Committee) and Associate Director Derek VanSpoor represented our members in Washington D.C. for a Day on the Hill coordinated by AFSCME Retirees. RPEC’s delegation met with members of Washington’s congressional delegation to urge support for legislation to strengthen Social Security and to communicate concerns about discussions to reduce federal funding for this program and others benefiting seniors, including Medicare and Medicaid. In addition, the three also met independently with health policy staff working with Congressman Dan Newhouse, Senator Maria Cantwell, and Congresswomen Marilyn Strickland and Kim Schrier regarding support for the expansion of the federal pharmaceutical subsidies to Uniform Medical Plan (UMP) Classic Medicare. The subsidies are already afforded to Medicare Advantage Plans and Plan D prescription drug plans but are not currently available to government self-insured plans like UMP Classic Medicare. RPEC’s team also conveyed the importance of “leveling the playing field” by expanding Medicare benefits to include vision, dental and hearing. This priority is consistent with a resolution, co-sponsored by RPEC, which was unanimously approved by delegates to the 2023 Washington State Labor Council Convention. Read more about our delegation’s successes in D.C. in the fall issue of the Council’s membership newsletter.

State Relations & Advocacy

New Guide to Open Enrollment now available on RPEC website

Do you receive your healthcare insurance through the Health Care Authority’s (HCA) Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB)? If so, you may change healthcare plans in November during open enrollment. To help our members navigate the state’s complex healthcare landscape, RPEC partnered with SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors) to produce a three-part webinar series to help you understand your options. The three-part series features Tim Smolen of SHIBA and is facilitated by Matt Groshong (Chapter 3 President and Chair of the Healthcare Workgroup). The Guide to Open Enrollment includes the webinar links, resources provided by HCA, and more. Visit www.rpecwa.org.

We urge you to view the three-part webinar series right away. And, if you still need support, register to attend the “live” informational webinar hosted by the HCA on October 20th from 10 a.m. to noon. To attend this event, [please register through Zoom here](#).

Save the Date for Legislative Day – January 22, 2024

RPEC's annual Legislative Day, held in concert with the Washington Education Association-Retired, will take place on January 22nd in Olympia. The event is open to all active RPEC members. The annual event gives RPEC members a chance to meet with their state legislators from their legislative districts in their offices on the Capitol campus. Registration details will be available soon at www.rpecwa.org

RPEC dominates WSARA Convention

At the September 12th Convention of the Washington Alliance for Retired American's (WSARA), RPEC was honored with the Senior Champion Award for leadership of the Public Employee Benefits Board (PEBB) Stakeholders Medicare Coalition and spearheading successful legislative advocacy efforts to preserve traditional Medicare and UMP Classic Medicare. This is the third award RPEC has garnered in recent months. In June, WEA-R honored us with the Advocate of the Year Award. In July, RPEC and Coalition partners earned the coveted Mother Jones Group Award from the Washington State Labor Council.

Moreover, delegates unanimously supported RPEC's two resolutions. One called for support to restore a permanent cost of living adjustment to retirees vested in Plans 1. The second focused on the need for employers (state, counties, and cities) to bear more of the costs associated with retiree healthcare insurance available through the Health Care Authority Public Employees Benefits Board.

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

HCA Update

The PEBB Stakeholders Medicare Coalition continues to meet regularly with HCA staff regarding outcomes from the listening sessions held this spring to improve service to retirees. Here are some new areas of focus for HCA:

- The agency has submitted a request for additional staff specifically assigned to support Medicare-eligible retirees. If the budget request is approved by the Governor, HCA will be adding three new staffers – a Medicare program manager, a communications officer specifically assigned to improve outreach and

communication to retirees, and an accountant. The communications officer will be dedicated to customizing and improving the communications tools targeting Medicare-eligible retirees.

- Because of the overwhelming feedback about the need for the agency to improve its communications tools for retirees, HCA will launch retiree-only newsletters by February 2024.
- The agency is working to improve its website. Some RPEC members, who graciously took part in the listening sessions, were also invited to test the new website. It is encouraging that HCA is trying to seek input from stakeholders before rolling out new technology tools.
- The agency is exploring introducing a managed Plan D prescription drug plan, and reconfiguring UMP Classic Medicare to be a medical-only policy. This option is being researched and may be presented at the PEB Board's January 2024 retreat, which is open to the public.

Select Committee on Pension Policy Update

RPEC Council and chapter leaders met throughout the summer with key legislators serving on the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP). All signs are pointing to potential legislation, sponsored by the SCPP, for another one-time 3% cost of living adjustment (COLA) in 2024 while the Committee researches and works to draft a proposal for the 2025 legislative session that will fund a recurring COLA. If you are vested in one of the Plan 1 retirement plans and are willing to share your personal story with us, please reach out to Government Affairs Coordinator Emmett Mills at emmitt.mills@rpecwa.org. We need more Plan 1 members stepping forward to share how the lack of a recurring COLA has impacted their purchasing power and quality of life.

As you continue to meet with state legislators this fall, let them know that all retirees deserve a recurring COLA.

Membership

DRS webinar, Nov. 3, 1 p.m.

One of the benefits of membership in RPEC is our ability to gain access to top agency decision makers. If you have questions about your retirement benefits from the Department of Retirement Services (DRS), want to learn more about how to get help for specific questions or would like to be more informed about the agency and its pending agency request legislation, join us on November 3rd at 1 p.m. for a presentation by DRS leaders.

Register in advance for this meeting at <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcrcumgqDkjEtSTFcGFh1SE3Ur15LsLERpK>. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Upcoming Events

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

- Oct. 26 – Membership Committee Meeting (10:00 am)
- Oct. 26 – Healthcare Workgroup Meeting (3:30 pm)
- Nov. 1 – 2024 Legislative Day Registration Opens
- Nov. 3 – DRS Webinar (1:00 pm)
- Nov. 3 – Monthly Legislative Update Call (2:00 pm)
- Nov. 9 – Healthcare Workgroup (3:30 pm)
- Nov. 10 – Council Office Closed, Veterans Day (observance)
- Nov. 13 – Executive Board Meeting (10:00 am)
- Nov. 14 – Select Committee on Pension Policy Meeting (10:00 am)

Best,
Laurie

Questions or comments about this newsletter? Contact Andrea Torland at andrea@msn.com or Bill Ziegler at flzwez@hotmail.com , or call (206) 713-1879