

Retired Public Employees of Alaska
Southeast Chapter
Minutes of September 10, 2020

Brenda Knapp brought the meeting to order at 10:01, via Zoom. The secretary had not joined the meeting, so Kim Metcalfe volunteered to take notes. Ms. Knapp stated that the meetings will continue on Zoom for the time being and noted that the Executive Board meets monthly on Zoom. She also reported that the E-Board had conducted the annual elections. Sharon Hoffbeck was retained as president, Stephanie Rhoades was elected secretary, Margaret Duggan was retained as medical information director and Bob Grove was retained as membership director.

Chair Knapp gave a recap of the RPEA lawsuits that she obtained from Brad Owens, Executive VP of RPEA. The lawsuit on retiree dental benefits is currently on appeal. The Division of Retirement and Benefits filed an opening brief after extensions were granted by the court. RPEA expects to file a response by the end of the month. Oral arguments will be scheduled in 90 to 120 days. The court will have six to twelve months to issue its opinion. The lawsuit on the diminishment of medical benefits is scheduled for trial in July of 2021. Adolph Zeman, a new trial judge was appointed in August.

The minutes of the meeting on March 12, 2020 were presented. Sam Trivette moved to approve the minutes, Kim Metcalfe seconded, and the minutes were approved.

Mike Notar presented the Treasurer's report. Sam Trivette moved to accept, Cindy Spanyers seconded, and the report was accepted.

Cindy Spanyers gave her report of legislative activities. The Alaska Retirement Management Board will meet next week. Tom Brice was replaced on the board by Dennis Moen, who is with the Public Employees Local 71 and a vice-president of the Alaska AFL-CIO. Bob Williams, a PERS member, was reappointed. Cindy also reported on the shake-up of legislative seats during the August state primary election. She also noted the dates for requesting mail-in ballots for the upcoming CBJ election and the State of Alaska general election. Cindy spoke about the issues on the CBJ ballot and the state legislative committees that continue to meet.

The chapter secretary, Alan Davis, had joined the Zoom meeting and took the minutes from this point on.

Our speaker for the meeting, State Senator Jesse Kiehl joined the meeting. He had been meeting with a group of educators, including the Juneau Superintendent, about budget issues. The price of oil has been fluctuating in the \$40 range, which means that state money for education will continue to be very tight. He noted that

production continues to decline. He estimated that, unless more revenue is found, we will drain the budget reserve account this year and we will have a budget deficit of at least \$700-800 million next fiscal year. Without additional revenue, the state budget will have to be cut from \$4.3 billion to \$2.0 billion.

He noted that there are large differences in school districts in the state. Some districts are holding school in person, while others are teaching entirely online, and yet others are doing both. Each district has its own local issues to contend with, in addition to dealing with the pandemic. Students in Anchorage speak 93 different languages. As a legislator, he is simply trying to prevent a generation of kids from losing their education, and the legislature will have to make massive changes to achieve that. We need to increase revenues, and Proposition 1 on the state ballot is a start on doing that.

Elections determine the course of the state. Advocacy by citizens can tweak the process, but who is elected really determines what happens. He feels that safety in voting is vital, and he advocates voting by mail.

Senator Kiehl then fielded questions from the membership. Kim Metcalfe asked about the future of the PFD. Jesse stated that if the legislature approves the payment of “back PFDs,” it will drain the Earnings Reserve Account and there will be no further dividends. Brenda Knapp asked about the future of the Alaska Marine Highway. The “reshaping” of the system has been a failure because of bad decisions and lack of adequate money, but he stated that it is acknowledged that the Marine Highway is vital to southeast Alaska and will not be allowed to simply die. Mike Notar asked about the oil tax credits that are still owed to producers. Senator Kiehl said that they will not disappear, but the state will most likely push them back or stretch the payments out to minimize the effect on current budgets.

Ms. Knapp thanked Senator Kiehl and he left the meeting. She reiterated that the chapter meetings will be conducted over Zoom for the time being and will be held at 10:00 AM on the second Thursday of the month. She asked participants to make suggestions of topics and/or speakers for future meetings. Sam Trivette said that he missed the candidate forums we have previously held with candidates for assembly and school board positions. He also noted that RPEA used to send monthly newsletters about what’s going on in RPEA and hoped that that could be restarted. She reminded the meeting that there will be an online candidate forum broadcast on KTOO on September 6th at 7:00 PM.

The meeting was adjourned at about 11:20 AM.

Respectfully submitted by
Alan Davis, Secretary