

Retired Public Employees of Alaska
Southeast Chapter
Minutes of November 11, 2021

Chapter chair, Brenda Knapp, brought the meeting to order at 10:05 AM. Twenty-two people were connected to the Zoom session, including our four chapter officers, plus Wendy Woolf, Chair of the Southcentral Alaska Chapter, and Randall Burns, President of Alaska RPEA.

Also present was our guest speaker for the meeting, State Senator for District Q, Jesse Kiehl. In order to conserve his time, we had Senator Kiehl speak before moving to normal chapter business. We invited him to speak and answer questions about the state redistricting process that just completed.

Since it was Veterans Day, both Ms. Knapp and Senator Kiehl made a point of thanking all service Veterans for their service to the country.

Senator Kiehl gave a brief introduction to the redistricting process that happens every ten years because of the results of the new US Census. I will not try to cover the entire presentation and will only mention interesting and pertinent points.

The Alaska Constitution gives a rather precise definition of how Alaska's House districts should be formed, which prevents much of the bizarre gerrymandering that occurs in many states. In addition, an amendment in 1998 took authority for redistricting away from the Governor and put it in the hands of a separate board, which was aimed at reducing the effect of partisan politics influencing the drawing of districts. Senator Kiehl feels the board did a better job than the last redistricting, but there are still some real problems. The board presented graphs and their raw data in 26 Alaskan communities to get public testimony. Then they convened the board and prepared the new district map. It is an incredibly complicated process to draw and redraw and shift here and there to come up with contiguous, evenly-populated districts. There will probably be court challenges to the new map, as there always are.

Senate districts are formed by combining two House districts, and that has caused some heartburn, specifically in Eagle River and Anchorage, where the pairing of districts has resulted in disenfranchising some groups and pairing dissimilar communities to dilute their voting strength. This is where partisan politics really showed and the voting on the final map was split on party lines. There is also a concern called "truncation," which results in some Senators having to run again in two years, rather than the four-year term stipulated in the Constitution. For some reason, the Senators caught in this bind are all ones that are not friendly with the Governor.

Senator Kiehl then asked for questions from the audience. One person brought up the issue of redistricting resulting in two sitting legislators ending up in one district, requiring them to run against each other for a single seat. This has happened, but Senator Kiehl felt that there didn't seem to be a partisan agenda behind it.

Sam Trivette pointed out that the last time around, lawsuits dragged the process out and the courts allowed the new map to stand, even with the major problems that were at issue. Kiehl related that in 2012, a suit went all the way to the state Supreme Court. That court allowed the existing map to be used provisionally for the election that year, but finally ruled that the map had to be changed and a new map was implemented in 2014. It's possible that may happen again. How that will play out this year is anybody's guess.

There were other questions, but the replies were too complex to report here. However, if you want to see the (currently) final redistricting map and examine the details closely, go to akredistricting.org and click on the district you want to examine.

We thanked Senator Kiehl for his presentation and his detailed observations on redistricting and then went on to the business portion of the meeting.

The minutes of the September meeting were not available, and the October meeting was cancelled. The Treasurer, Mike Notar, reported that we currently have \$1,514.54 in the checking account and \$5.00 in a savings account.

Ms. Knapp gave the Chairperson's report. She is considering holding an in-person Christmas potluck luncheon. It would be at St. Paul's Social Hall on December 9 at 11:00 AM. She wants input from the membership, so she'll send out a notice and wait to see if there is sufficient interest.

Cindy Spanyers is traveling, so there is no Legislative Committee report today. Wendy Woolf made a quick announcement that the Southcentral Chapter meeting on December 7 will be open for anyone interested. The speaker will be representatives from the Division of Retirement and Benefits to talk about the changes in health coverage that will happen in January. There are changes requiring prior approval for "specialty medications." Also, the state is adding coverage for some preventative care. An RSVP email will be going out to gauge interest to make sure their Zoom account can accommodate the load.

Nancy Shima gave a report from the Medical Information Committee. AlaskaCare will cover all the cost of COVID vaccinations and testing. They will waive the deductible expense and any coinsurance. Also, for flu and pneumonia shots, if you go to an in-network provider or pharmacist, there should be no out-of-pocket expense. The Telemedicine coverage is still available, but the Tele-Doc coverage

expired this summer. OptumRX needs to have your physical address available, so make sure that they have that in your record. Specialty medications will need to be pre-approved after January 1, 2022. OptumRX should notify you if your medication is in that category. Also, DRB has added a new member liaison, Chris Murray, to help you with any problems or questions you may have and help with appeals.

Randall Burns announced that the RPEA Executive Board will be meeting in-person in Anchorage on November 21 and 22. Except for some executive-session portions, the meetings will be available on Zoom to anyone interested.

Mrs. Knapp adjourned the meeting at 11:23.

Respectfully submitted by
Alan Davis, Secretary