Biennial Report to the General Assembly
by RPEA President, Al Darby
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Over the past two years, RPEA has made great strides toward a more stable organization with respect to membership growth, budget control, advocacy successes and overall mission accomplishments. We suffered a great loss when our President, George Linn, passed away near the end of his second term. George had led RPEA to much greater financial stability, improved office efficiency and staff cohesion and expanded association advocacy efforts in the legislature, at CalPERS, and in other forums and in our relationship with statewide advocacy coalitions: SCORE, and Californians for Retirement Security (CRS). In addition, RPEA is supporting amicus briefs at the State Supreme Court to support retiree interests in their deliberations around the "California Rule." I worked closely with George on these initiatives during his illness and led the efforts on many occasions when George was unable to participate in these activities.

Membership has grown from 22,500 in July of 2016 to 24,500 in July of 2018. AMBIA continues to be the main contributor to membership growth, but our own efforts at chapter level and a recent statewide recruiting campaign brought in about half of the new members. Plans to enhance these efforts are in late-stage development—digital marketing from AMBIA is expected to be introduced soon. Our website is scheduled to be updated within the next few months, along with an automated new member data entry system.

During this period, advocacy attention shifted from ballot initiative pension threats to court decisions that have placed public pensions in jeopardy. We have joined with our coalition allies at CRS in working to preserve our pensions. As RPEA grows its membership, we must expand our influence, reach and clout as a major force in public pension defense. We have seen a potential change of heart in the press with a recent San Jose Mercury News report that says public pensions are vital to attract people to public service and public safety because it is the equalizer between higher private sector pay and retirement security for public workers. There is more work to be done in the area of public relations to raise public awareness about this issue. Our PR firm is busy finding

ways to use this Mercury News article to improve the public's image of public workers and school employees. RPEA's lobbyist is always working to support RPEA objectives in the legislature and at CalPERS.

We continue to struggle to improve chapter meeting attendance. Many external factors contribute to the lack of interest in meetings, such as traffic, infirmity and malaise related to pension security. Too many retirees believe their pension is safe and no advocacy work is needed.

To improve chapter meeting attendance, assistance will be provided by the Director of Membership, Area Directors and their Assistants to "spread the word" regarding programs and speakers that draw members to meetings. Success stories in other chapters are good guides for struggling chapters.

RPEA is growing again at a healthy rate. Our voice is heard at CalPERS and at the legislature. We must continue our strong efforts to build this Association into a force that gets even more attention at CalPERS and in the legislature to keep our pensions and health care safe. We must also support efforts at the national level to retain Social Security and Medicare at current benefit levels and improve benefits where possible.

Internally, RPEA will continue to incorporate technological advances into the processes that support our administrative systems. Cost-saving work inside the office related to marketing and public relations will be enhanced through the expanded use of our graphics machinery. Our office is far more self-sufficient than at any time in the past.