

Major Gains at the August ERS Board Meeting!!

By Chuck Freeman

The ERS board today unanimously appointed our very own Jim Sommerville to the vacant trustee position. Jim, our former president, will serve a four year term. He is the first GSRA nominee to be so honored. We thank the screening committee of former board chair Homer Bryson, current board chair Rebecca Sullivan, and Executive Director Jim Potvin. Congratulations to Jim, and congratulations to the board for its wisdom in appointing him.



Figure 1: GSRA's former President Jim Somerville named to the ERS Board.

The board also considered the date and amount of the one-time payment or "13th check" for which \$26.75 million was appropriated for FY 2027. Jim Potvin recommended the check be distributed as soon as possible which he said will be before October 1. He also said the amount should be a little over \$500. The board unanimously approved both recommendations.

For both actions, congratulations to you too. Be assured that neither would have occurred without your sustained advocacy. These follow the board granting a 2.25% for this year, the largest by far since 2009, after several years of (admittedly lower) COLAs and one-time payments. And more legislators and administration candidates are expressing greater levels of support. With your participation, we look forward to the coming session being our best ever.

Lt. Governor Candidate Meets with GSRA to Discuss Our Legislative Goals

By Chuck Freedman

On August 13, Senator Greg Dolezal met with representatives of GSRA to discuss issues important to all of us. Attending for GSRA were Vice President Robert Riddle, Secretary Dan Coffee, law enforcement retirees' representative Keith Golden, Legislative Liaison Chuck Freedman, and Lobbyist Chuck Clay.



Figure 2: From left to right – Dan Coffee, Chuck Freeman, Sen. Dolezal, Keith Golden, and Robert Riddle

Senator Dolezal said he stands by the message he posted on our Facebook page on May 20, that he is “... committed to ensuring that the state delivers its promise to state employees.” The senator was in budget meetings when Senate added \$100 million in the FY 2027 appropriations bill to shore up the system and ensure that the state would be able to deliver the COLAs. He was not able to get all the way across the finish line, but we have his word and his commitment that when he is LG, he will deliver what Georgia promised. See his full statement at [Facebook](#). (Summary of the Facebook video: I’m committed to restoring COLAs for our state employees’ pensions. During the Great Recession, they gave them up to help stabilize Georgia’s budget. We’ve recovered and our books are strong. It’s time to keep our promise, you have my full commitment.)

Sen. Dolezal emphasized that the governor’s instruction to disregard the \$100 million angered many senators, and that many would work to overcome the disregard. Reinstating those funds in the amended FY ’27 budget was discussed.



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The senator seemed to have a true interest in understanding how ERS's actuary has determined the costs of reinstating our 3% COLAs. The actuary's estimates seemed high to him. He spent considerable time and asked many questions in this effort. We informed him that we had the same questions and few answers. At his request, we agreed to contact ERS. He said that he would like to have a meeting with ERS and that he was open to GSRA representatives participating. Overall, it was a very productive meeting, and GSRA's representatives were encouraged.

State Health Benefit Plan Update

By Beverly Littlefield

As SHBP begins releasing early details for the 2027 plan year, several key items are already taking shape—including projected premium changes, a new pharmacy benefit manager, and important dates for Open Enrollment. While more complete information will be available after the Advisory Committee meets on August 28, here's what we know so far to help members stay informed and prepared.

Active and Under-65 Rates: Premiums are expected to increase by **about 6% on average** for 2027. Actual changes will vary by vendor and plan option.

Retiree Plans: Limited information was shared, but it appears that **Anthem's Medicare Advantage Standard option may remain at the same rate for 2027**. More details will be confirmed once official documents are released.

Prescription Drug Vendor Change: SHBP will transition to Express Scripts as the Pharmacy Benefit Manager effective January 1, 2027. Members may see price changes, but copays are not expected to change. Additional guidance will be provided as details become available.

Open Enrollment 2026: Open Enrollment for the 2027 plan year will run **October 19 – November 6, 2026**.

- Members who wish to keep their current option do not need to take any action.
- Vendors for each member will remain the same in 2027 as in 2026.

The Advisory Committee meets Friday, August 28, when clearer and more complete information is expected. Updates will follow after that meeting. If SHBP follows its usual process, the Board presentation should be posted on the SHBP website by Friday.

Ready to Vote? Time to Check Your Records

By Beverly Littlefield

The primaries and run-offs are over, and we hope everyone took the opportunity to cast their ballots in those elections. The General Election is just two months away and, especially if you didn't vote in the primaries, this would be a good time to check to make sure your records are still up to date.

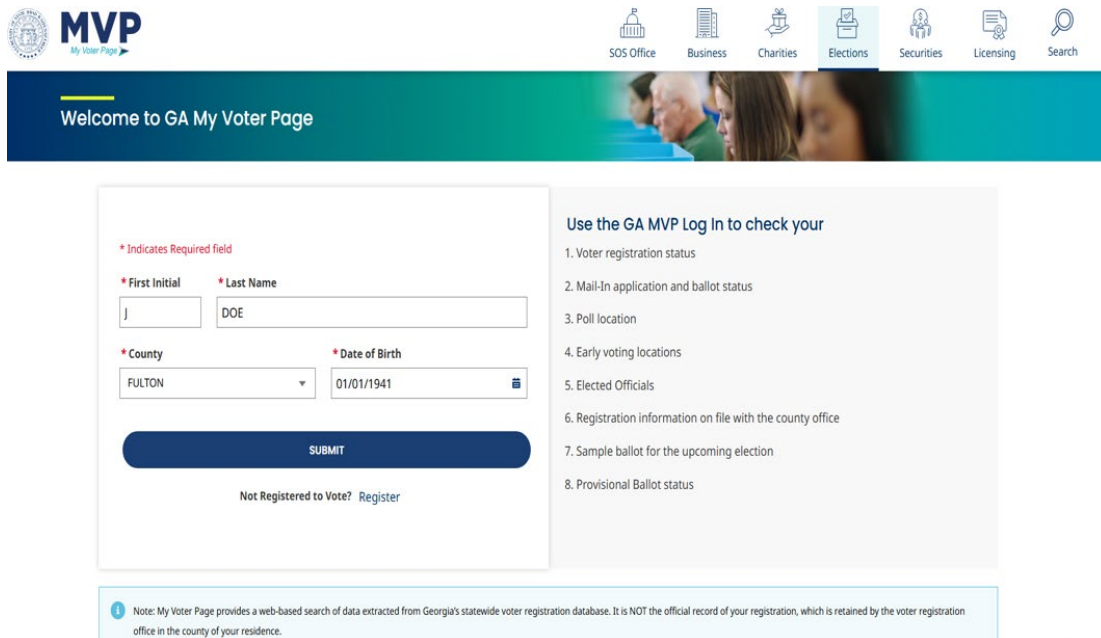
The screenshot shows the "GA My Voter Page" interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for SOS Office, Business, Charities, Elections (highlighted), Securities, Licensing, and Search. Below the navigation bar is a blue banner that says "Welcome to GA My Voter Page". The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains a registration form with fields for First Initial, Last Name, County, and Date of Birth. The right column lists eight items to check: 1. Voter registration status, 2. Mail-In application and ballot status, 3. Poll location, 4. Early voting locations, 5. Elected Officials, 6. Registration information on file with the county office, 7. Sample ballot for the upcoming election, and 8. Provisional Ballot status. At the bottom of the form, there is a "SUBMIT" button and a link to "Not Registered to Vote? Register". A note at the bottom of the page states: "Note: My Voter Page provides a web-based search of data extracted from Georgia's statewide voter registration database. It is NOT the official record of your registration, which is retained by the voter registration office in the county of your residence."

Figure 3: The GA My Voter Page is available for all registered voters to check their status.

The easiest way for *all* registered voters to check is to go to the [GA My Voter Page](#) on the Secretary of State's website. There you will enter very basic information and verify that your records are correct and current. It's also important to check your Senate and House Districts, your assigned voting precincts, and your voting locations, including early voting, as some may have changed in the last year.

If you have changed addresses/moved within the state, or are a new resident of the state, you also will need to update your records or use the link on the page to register to vote. As citizens, we not only have the right to vote, but a responsibility to do so, to fully participate in the affairs of our government. Your votes, your voices, matter.



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Great Strength, Responsible Advocacy
GSRA Annual Meeting: October 5-6, 2026
Robert F Hatcher Sr. Conference Center
We Need You!

By Allan Hill

Our theme for the 2026 GSRA Annual Meeting is *Great Strength, Responsible Advocacy*. To make that theme a reality, we need you. We need strength in numbers, and we need advocacy in a respectful, thoughtful manner. Hopefully you'll be able to advocate personally with the candidates for Governor and Lt. Governor. Our legislative liaisons, Chuck Freedman and Chuck Clay, have spoken to representatives of Keisha Lance Bottoms, Rick Jackson, Greg Dolezal, and Josh McLaurin and have invited them to address our members at the opening session on Monday afternoon. As of the publication date, the candidates were still working on their October calendar, so we do not have commitments from them; they have, however, been receptive to the invitations. This is going to be very close election, and every vote will count. By September 4th, we want to be able to say to the candidates, "we have over 300 members registered, and this is a chance for you to directly address voters from all over Georgia in one place." For us to be able to say that, we need you to register and to be there.

2026 has been one of GSRA's most successful years ever. We've achieved the first meaningful COLA since 2008. We've seen the Governor add significant money to the ERS fund to reduce the unfunded liability. We've seen the Legislature add \$100 million to the budget for ongoing COLA's, and even though the Governor disregarded it, it was a major legislative victory. Perhaps most importantly, we have seen our very own past President, Jim Sommerville, appointed to the ERS Board. We need to celebrate these achievements, while continuing the struggle for even more. A show of force at the Annual Meeting is crucial to that struggle.

We have some very exciting and informative workshops lined up for this year's meeting. Two of the workshops from last year were so popular and well-received that we've brought them back, along with three others. Each attendee will choose two workshops. They are:

Think Before You Click - *AI, Online Safety, and Protecting Yourself in a Changing Digital World*, with Dr. Alan Stines and Prof. Tina Ashford of MGA.

Crime and Personal Safety – *Protecting Yourself in the Real World*, with retired GBI agent Keith Golden.

Legal/Financial Affairs - *Wills, Trusts, Advance Directives and Estate Planning*, with Kim Stroup, attorney with the Law Offices of James Bates Bannon Grover.



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Breast Cancer/Prostate Cancer – Signs, Symptoms and Treatment; What You Need to Know, with Christian Sorensen and Dionne Spears of Anthem Blue Cross/Blue Shield.

AMBA – Discounts Through Passport; So Many Ways to Save, AMBA.

We will meet at the Robert F. Hatcher Center in Macon again this year. We will gather at the venue at Middle Georgia State University on Monday and Tuesday, October 5-6, 2026, with the opening session beginning at 12:15 on Monday. We will adjourn at 2:30 on Tuesday. We'll have a hot buffet lunch, and updates from SHBP and ERS. We'll have a Monday afternoon reception with hors d'oeuvres, music, and a cash bar with beer, wine, and music. Workshops are scheduled for Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning.

Registration for this year's meeting will be \$40 (\$50 after September 4th), which includes the opening reception (with a cash bar) and a buffet lunch on Tuesday. The registration form at the end of the newsletter can be printed and mailed or here's the link for the Annual Meeting registration:

<https://gsra.memberclicks.net/2026-annual-meeting-registration#/>

Each registrant shall pick two workshops to attend.

Mark your calendars for October 5-6, 2026, at the Robert F. Hatcher Center on the campus of Middle Georgia State University. We are excited for what will be another fun, successful Annual Meeting. Come join us and celebrate our strength and successful advocacy. See you there!

This year, GSRA has contracted with the two hotels at the I-475/Hwy 80 (Eisenhower Parkway) exit for special rates.

Hotel	Negotiated Rates	Contact Information
Holiday Inn Express & Suites– I-475 4970 Harrison Rd. Macon, GA, 31206	\$129.00 a night for a 2 Queen Standard or a 1 King Standard, \$154 for a 2 Queen Suite (taxes are extra)	Click her for the GSRA rate: https://www.ihg.com/holidayinnexpress/hotels/us/en/find-hotels/select-roomrate?fromRedirect=true&qSrt=sBR&qSIH=MCNEP&qRms=1&qAdlt=1&qCiD=4&qCiMy=092026&qCoD=7&qCoMy=092026&qGrpCd=ML9&setPMCookies=true&qSHBrC=EX&qDest=4970%20Harrison%20Rd,%20Macon,%20GA,%20US&showApp=true&adjustMonth=false&srb_u=1&qRmFltr= Hotel front desk at 478/803-0033 but if you call please ask for the GSRA group rate.
Comfort Inn and Suites Hotel	\$109 for 2 Queen beds or 1	Click here for the GSRA rate: https://www.choicehotels.com/reservations/groups/ht11m2?checkInDate=2026



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Hotel	Negotiated Rates	Contact Information
5000 Harrison Rd, Macon, 31206	King bed (taxes are extra)	-10-04&checkOutDate=2026-10-06&ratePlanCode=BYIPGW . The group's name is GSRA Conference Group, and the group # is BYIPGW.

Note: By going directly to the hotel's websites, it is possible one can get a cheaper rate than what's being offered to GSRA if there is availability. As of July 27, the website for HEI shows rooms beginning at \$121 a night; the website for the Comfort Inn and Suites shows rooms beginning at \$69 a night. There are a limited number of those rooms at both hotels.

There are several other hotels at that exit, including:

The Hampton Inn (<https://www.hilton.com/en/book/reservation/rooms/?ctyhocn=MCNEPHX&arrivalDate=2026-10-04&departureDate=2026-10-06&room1NumAdults=1>) showing rooms for \$150 a night at the time reviewed.

The LaQuinta (https://www.wyndhamhotels.com/laquinta/macon-georgia/la-quinta-macon-west/rooms-rates?brand_id=LQ&checkInDate=10/4/2026&checkOutDate=10/5/2026&useWRPoints=false&children=0&adults=1&rooms=1&loc=ChIJDeOBiEv484gRoas_8Tx9se4&sessionId=1781552660) at \$108 a night at the time reviewed.

AMBA/GSRA Webinars

By Allan Hill

GSRA and AMBA offer monthly webinars that provide members with a wide range of important information, including financial, health, travel, recreational, lifestyle, and safety topics. The webinars are held on the third Wednesday of every month at 10:00 A.M., except in December, when it's the first Wednesday. All webinars are free to join, but registration is required. The webinars last between 30-45 minutes.

Join us for the next webinar on September 16, 2026, "Life Insurance Basics for Retirees" with your host Jon Green of AMBA. All members will receive an email from "GSRA Webinar" in early September with details and instructions on registering.

Looking ahead, the October 21, 2026, webinar will be "Medicare Made Easy: Your Guide to Annual Enrollment."

If you've missed any of the previous webinars, you can find recordings of all of them on the GSRA homepage at www.mygsra.com. See you at 10:00 on September 16, 2026!

Note: The August Webinar, Senior Scams and Election Season Fraud, was an excellent workshop that we all need to see. I encourage everyone to view the recording of it once it is posted.



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From the Banks of the Chattahoochee River

By Judy Bryson

Hello GSRA Members,

As we prepare to gather for our annual conference on October 5–6 in Macon, this year's theme—**Great Strength, Responsible Advocacy**—could not be more fitting. It reflects not only who we are as an organization, but also how GSRA has worked throughout the past year: with determination, unity, and a steady commitment to advancing the interests of our membership.

Because of that collective strength and responsible advocacy, we have seen meaningful progress. This year brought a 2.25 percent cost-of-living adjustment, additional dollars added during the legislative session, and continued progress on legislation in our favor. These gains did not happen by accident. They are the result of consistent engagement, strong relationships, and the willingness of our members and leaders to keep showing up on behalf of retirees across Georgia.



We are also encouraged by movement from the ERS Board to grant a one-time payment for eligible retirees by October 1. In addition, we celebrate the election of GSRA's past president, Jim Somerville, to the ERS Board. His appointment is especially significant because it means that a consumer representative will serve in a role as a trustee. This shows a major step forward for representation and accountability.

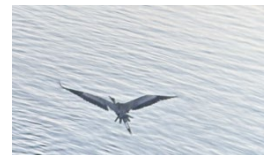
Our advocacy work continues. GSRA has been meeting with candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, and those candidates have been invited to speak with us at the annual conference. These conversations are an important opportunity for our members to hear directly from leaders seeking statewide office and to ensure state retiree issues remain part of the public discussion.

This conference will also be a time to welcome new board leadership for GSRA and to celebrate the achievements we have made together. Our success depends on members who stay informed, stay involved, and continue to lend their voices to the work ahead.

Please make plans to join us in Macon on October 5–6. Register soon, come ready to celebrate our progress, and help us continue our work. We look forward to seeing you there!

Take care,

Judy



Local GSRA Chapter News

CSRA-GSRA Chapter

The CSRA-GSRA group met on August 18, 2026, at Miyako's Restaurant in Grovetown, where we enjoyed a delicious lunch. The group discussed the one-time bonus timeline and the nomination of past GSRA president Jim Sommerville to the ERS Board and its implications. The group was also presented with information about the upcoming annual conference in October. The next meeting will be held on October 20, 2026, at 1 pm at the Columbia County Health Department, at which time those who attended the conference will share information learned at the conference. Refreshments will be provided so please join us for fellowship and a chance to win a gift card.

West Georgia/Columbus Chapter

The West Georgia/Columbus Chapter held its annual Legislative Forum on Tuesday, August 18, 2026, at the Columbus Public Library. Legislators present included: Representatives Debbie Buckner, Teddy Reese, Carmen Rice, Vance Smith, and Senator Randy Robertson. Each took the opportunity to speak with our membership about the previous legislative session, bills of potential impact to retirees in the upcoming session and their support of GSRA's goal to restore an annual COLA. It was a great privilege to have so many of our local legislators present.



Figure 4: Five legislators attended the August meeting.

We also updated the membership on the Annual Meeting and the upcoming ERS Board Meeting. We had 36 people in attendance today. Our next meeting will be held at Epworth United Methodist Church on Tuesday, November 17, 2026.

Valdosta Chapter

The Valdosta GSRA Chapter met on August 25, 2026, at Mama June's in Valdosta, Georgia. We discussed the recent COLA, the upcoming Annual Meeting in Macon to be held on October 5-6, and the appointment of Jim Somerville to the ERS Board. Our program was presented by Kim Harmon, Chief Operation Officer of Citizens National Bank of Quitman, Georgia. The topic was Elder and Teenage Financial Exploitation and Fraud.



Figure 5: Kim Harmon presented a presentation on Elder and Teenage Financial Exploitation and Fraud.

The program was well received by the 23 members in attendance.



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July 2026 New GSRA Members, Welcome!

Name	County	Name	County
JT Rabun	Fayette	Richard Miller	Newton
Brian Marlowe	Tift	Kimberly Phillips	Jones
Michael Phillips	Jones	Zeddie Perry	Fulton
David Fry	Gordon	Evie Wilk	Richmond
Gary Hooper	Towns	Paul Medders	Glynn
Melinda Goble	Gordon		

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GEORGIA STATE RETIREES ASSOCIATION

GSRA 2026 ANNUAL MEETING-OCTOBER 5th-6th, 2026

"Great Strength, Responsible Advocacy"

**Robert F Hatcher Jr. Conference Center on the campus of Middle Georgia State in
Macon, GA**

REGISTRATION – COMPLETE ONE PER PERSON – GSRA MEMBERS CAN LOG IN AND REGISTER ONLINE AT
WWW.MYGSRA.COM WITH CREDIT CARD UNTIL 9-04-26 – NON MEMBERS PLEASE COMPLETE AND MAIL THIS FORM

Early Registration Received by 9/04/2026: \$40 After 9/04/26 & On-site Registration: \$50

Name:

Phone:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Email Address:

GSRA Chapter:

PLEASE PICK TWO (2) WORKSHOPS TO ATTEND – Click or Circle Your Top 2 CHOICES:

A – **Crime and Personal Safety** – *Protecting Yourself in the Real World*

B – **Think Before You Click** - *AI, Online Safety, and Protecting Yourself in a Changing Digital World*

C – **Legal/Financial Affairs** - *Wills, Trusts, Advance Directives and Estate Planning*

D – **Breast Cancer/Prostate Cancer** – *Signs, Symptoms and Treatment; What You Need to Know*

E – **AMBA** - *Discounts Through Passport; So Many Ways to Save*

Buffet Lunch Provided on Tuesday, October 6, 2026

**Complete One Form per person - mail with check payable to:
GSRA, P.O. Box 6308, Elberton, GA 30635**

PLEASE SEE THE 2026 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Questions? help@mygsra.com or 770/312-2799

For the Schedule of the Annual Meeting, please visit the website: www.mygsra.com