



Newsletter

Vol. 18, Number 2

www.MyGSRA.com

February 2024

Amended FY 2024 Budget Passed, No Bills of Consequence Good or Bad Passed

By Chuck Freedman

The FY 2024 Amended Budget has been passed and sent to Governor Kemp for signature. It retains the governor's recommended \$500 million to pay off unfunded liabilities and increase the funding percentage by about 2.5% to around 74%. We continue to hear that the governor and leadership intend to add another \$500 million in each of the next two years to hopefully raise the funding percentage to 80%, so long as that money is "available."

As reported last month, these huge amounts are good in the long run. They will ensure the continued viability of the fund's ability to pay retirees their **current** benefits. But these \$500 million investments **WILL NOT HELP** retirees in the short run in that they will not fund COLAs. Furthermore, as noticed by GSRA earlier this month, the \$500 million is being appropriated in such a way that it is not likely to draw down matching federal dollars the same as is being done by the governor's funding for average 1% COLAs and by the ADEC (actuarially determined employer's contribution. This will result in Georgia **MISSING OUT ON** roughly an additional **\$183 MILLION in FEDERAL FUNDS**. This would fund upwards of one-time additional **1.3% COLA** depending on the results of the ERS board's formula for granting COLAs. While several key legislators expressed interest in GSRA's recommendation, they were unable to make it happen for various reasons.

GSRA only found out about the method of appropriation last month and we were unable to change enough minds in such a short time frame. We will begin our advocacy for next year as soon as possible.

The governor's recommended \$26.75 million for one-time benefit adjustments this year has also been retained.

As of day 26, no further action has been taken on HB 824 (create new law enforcement retirement system) which would cost just under \$200 million total, nor HB 746 (redefine "earnable compensation") which would cost the retirement system just under \$150 million total.

No new bills impacting us have been introduced since last month's reports. "Crossover Day" will coincide with "Leap Day," Thursday February 29, 2024.



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It's an Election Year: What You Need to Know

By Dan Coffee

Georgia voters will head to the polls at least three times in 2024, possibly five times, if runoffs are needed.

Voters first head to the polls for the **Presidential Preference Primary**, which will be March 12th, to select presidential candidates to be placed on the November ballot. You must declare a party preference to vote in the Presidential Primary. Advance voting began on February 19th and runs through March 8th. Absentee ballots may be requested through March 1st.

Voters will head to the polls again on May 21st for the **General Primary / Nonpartisan Election**. This election includes local positions, state and federal representatives, and party questions. A party preference must be declared in the General Primary. If a non-partisan ballot is requested, only the local Judicial Circuit Judges will appear on the ballot. Qualifying for local positions, regardless of party, is March 4th through March 8th. Advance voting for the General Primary is April 29th to May 17th.

The **General Election** will be Tuesday, November 5th. Advance voting for the General Election will be October 15th through November 1st.

ELECTION	ELECTION DATE	ADVANCE VOTING DATES	REGISTRATION DEADLINE
Presidential Preference Primary (PPP) Special Election - County/Municipal Contests	March 12, 2024	February 19 – March 8	02/12/2024
Special Election Runoff For Local Offices	April 9, 2024	As soon as possible, but no later than April 1 – April 5	02/12/2024
General Primary / Nonpartisan Election	May 21, 2024	April 29 – May 17	04/22/2024
General Primary / Nonpartisan Runoff	June 18, 2024	As soon as possible, but no later than June 10 – June 14	04/22/2024
General Runoff for Federal Offices			05/20/2024
General Election	November 5, 2024	October 15 – November 1	10/07/2024
General Runoff	December 3, 2024	As soon as possible, but no later than November 25 – November 27	10/07/2024
General Runoff for Federal Offices			11/04/2024

Figure 1: Georgia Secretary of State Election Calendar.

For more information, visit the Georgia Secretary of State website at <https://sos.ga.gov/>.

Planning for This Years Annual Meeting Underway

By GSRA Annual Meeting Committee

GSRA's Annual Meeting is planned for October 7-8, 2024, at the Robert F. Hatcher, Sr. Conference Center on the campus of Middle Georgia State University located at 100 University Parkway off Eisenhower Parkway, Macon, Georgia.



Figure 2: Robert F. Hatcher, Sr. Conference Center is the location for the 2024 GSRA Annual Meeting.

The planning committee started the planning process early to allow time for input from members. We covet your ideas to make this the best and most attended GSRA meeting ever. A questionnaire is being created to solicit input regarding topics of personal interest for the informational workshops to be presented.

GSRA's objectives are for the meeting to be interesting and informative to our members, while containing the cost of attendance. The committee has chosen Macon due to its geographically central location in the state. Additional sponsors and vendors are being solicited to reduce the cost of registration fees. The agenda is tailored to make it easier to drive to the meeting the morning of the first day rather than requiring a hotel stay the night before. A selection of moderately priced hotels balancing price, convenience, and comfort have been identified. On the second day, a variety of boxed lunch selections will be available.

As we try to do every year during this meeting, we will bring you the latest information from the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Employee Retirement System, and the Department of Community Health which oversees the State Health Benefit Plan. This year is no exception. We are providing a panel discussion made up of state budget officials to discuss: 1) the budget outlook for retirees in the coming state budget process; 2) an in-depth look at our retirement system, aggregate profiles of current employees and retirees and the system's ability to provide inflation proof retirement for all of us; and 3) our health plans continuing ability to provide quality healthcare at a reasonable cost.

GSRA will continue to bring you monthly updates, in the GSRA Newsletter, as we get ready for the Annual Meeting. We look forward to your participation in this process and at the annual meeting we all create. Thank you.

Member Spotlight



Cindy Tharpe is a proud military “brat” raised in Columbus Georgia just outside of Fort Moore (Benning). She would be the first to tell you that she lived an idyllic childhood, growing up at the stables, experiencing countless adventures as an accomplished equestrian and being blessed with a strong, loving and supportive family. She obtained a bachelor’s degree in health science and master’s degree in public administration both from Columbus College (now University).

She began her career in state government in 1980 at the Muscogee County Department of Family and Children’s Services, initially as an Eligibility Worker and then was promoted six months later to Child Protective Services. In 1986, Cindy transferred to the Office of Fraud and Abuse as an Investigator. Her final career stop was with Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. She began there as a Child Care Consultant in 1998 and retired in 2013 as the Regional Director for Southwest Georgia.

Cindy has volunteered numerous years and in various capacities at her church, St. Anne Catholic Church, at Edgewood Senior Center where her mother attended, and as a Deputy Registrar for Muscogee County. She has been the Columbus/West Georgia GSRA’s secretary since 2015 and also served on the GSRA Board as a Board member and a Chapter Representative.

Cindy and her late husband Danny have three adult children and five grandchildren. When she is not enjoying time with her children and grandchildren, Cindy enjoys traveling and spending time with friends.

From the Home Office

By Robert Riddle

Hello everyone,

I hope everyone's new year is off to a good start and y'all are keeping your new year's resolutions better than me!

I want to tell you all about some of GSRA's Superheroes. They do not wear suits of invincible armor or have Xray vision.

- Their superpowers are tied to keyboards and calculators. You have probably guessed that I am referring to our Treasurer, Harold Grindle and GSRA's IT expert Kevin Burke. They showed off their Superhero powers recently when hackers tried to use stolen and fake credit card information to access our credit card processor and MemberClicks, the software we use to keep track of GSRA members and do mailings of materials to you. Scammers were able to create a user ID and password that took them to our payment membership screen and then allowed them to jump directly to other payment transactions where our homepage has links.

Kevin and Harold spent many hours and Zoom calls to work with MemberClicks and our payment processor to insure they developed solutions that prevented the scammers from potentially accessing your information or doing damage to GSRA by using stolen credit card information. Due to their diligent efforts behind the scenes, your information and GSRA data was kept secure.

So please join me in thanking Harold and Kevin for being real Superheroes and knowing they are always working for you and GSRA even when you do not know it.

Finally, I would also like to express my continued appreciation to Chuck Freedman for his diligence in staying in touch with legislative leadership and their staffs. He is constantly looking out for your best interest in the Legislatures appropriation process and continually keeping the focus on your need for meaningful COLAs.



Local Chapter News

CSRA-GSRA



Figure 3: Romell Cooks of AARP speaks to CSRA-GSRA Chapter members in February.

The CSRA-GSRA Chapter met on February 20, 2024, at Richmond County Health Department in Augusta, Georgia. Mrs. Romell Cooks from AARP provided an overview of their services focusing mainly on educational presentations that they provide free of charge. In addition to sharing Mrs. Cooks bio, Clara Brown shared that Mrs. Cooks was recently bestowed with AARP's highest honor, the 2023 Andrus Award, a tribute that signifies the pinnacle of volunteerism within AARP.

The chapter also gained a permanent secretary, Mrs. Barbara Johnson, who has attended all meetings and events since the emergence of the chapter.

While Clara is unable to attend the GPACS Mid-Winter Conference 2/21-2/23, the GPACS Retiree Liaison Mrs. Pamela Gould (State of Georgia Retiree) will be sharing GSRA brochures with attendees. This is huge as ALL COUNTIES are represented at this conference. A big shout out to Pam for her continued support.

Our next meeting date: (3rd Tuesday monthly) 03/19/2024 @ 1:00 pm back at Richmond County Health Department at 950 Laney Walker Blvd, Augusta, GA 30901. Next quarterly breakfast meeting/membership drive is tentatively scheduled for Saturday March 9, 2024, 9:30-11:30 a.m. at the Golden Corral on Bobby Jones Expressway.

Savannah Coastal Chapter Learns about Scams

The Savannah Coastal Chapter of GSRA had an excellent meeting on February 1st at the Garden City Library. Chatham County Sheriff John Wilcher and his staff gave a presentation on phone scams, how to spot them and how to avoid them. They also gave us an overview of the Sheriff's Office and its services.



Figure 4: Chatham County Sheriff's Office gave a presentation on phone scams.

Following the Sheriff's presentation, Lorr Elias and Jody Lane gave a legislative update. We had a lively discussion of the session and what we can do to help effect a COLA. As Lorr explained, the most impactful thing we can do is increase our membership. We produced some good ideas for expanding our outreach. Our next target is the Glynn and Bulloch County areas. Any retirees who live in Brunswick or Statesboro who want to help revive their local chapter, contact Lorr Elias at savannahgsra@gmail.com.



Figure 5: Chatham Coastal Chapter discuss outreach to expand GSRA.

Columbus-West Georgia Chapter

The Columbus/West Georgia Chapter held its quarterly meeting on February 13, 2024, at B. Merrell's Restaurant in Columbus. There were 23 members in attendance. Members were welcomed by President Gloria Coker and given a small Valentine gift of candy, chocolate and cookies. She thanked them for their continued support of the chapter and the GSRA Board.



Figure 6: Columbus-West Georgia Chapter members enjoyed lunch and a special gift from President Coker.

Vice President and President-Elect, Judy Bryson gave a legislative overview as well as updates from the latest Board meeting. She encouraged members to be sure and vote, if eligible, for in the special election for the seat vacated after the passing of Representative Richard Smith. Our next chapter meeting will be on Tuesday, May 14th at Epworth United Methodist Church where we will be hosting our Legislative Forum.



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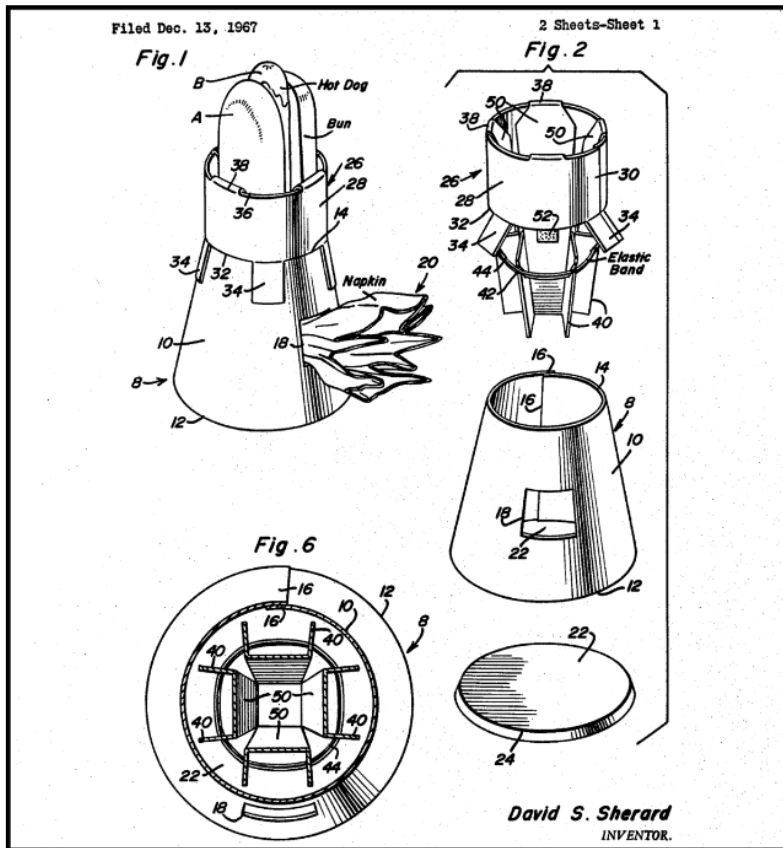
Welcome New Members!

Name	County	Name	County
Sheila Betts	Glynn	Brenda McCray	Dekalb
Larry Brown	Richmond	Tony Adams	Catoosa
Aisha Caul	Henry	Fred Richmond	Sumter
Susan Deason	Baldwin	Patrick Hallisy	Richmond
Mark Dickerson	Pickens	Ronald Ellington	Upson
Gladys Evans	Warren	Sylvester Royal	Cobb
Joel Owens	Wilcox	Kathy Stocum	Clarke
Melanie Register	Cobb	Melanie Browning	Laurens
Mena West-Vonier	Crisp	Cynthia Johnson	Cobb
Jacqueline Johnson	Bibb	Victoria Silas	Fulton
John Tebeau	Lincoln	William Cromer	Fulton
Raymond Sapp	Chatham	Francine Johnson	Gwinnett
Terry Jones	Bibb	Barbara Bowers	Fulton
Laura Russell	Baldwin	Carolyn Hopps	Fulton
Cynthia Nelson	Dekalb	Lonia Willaims	Fayette
Penelope Gaynor	Gwinnett		

Something Extra

From the Hustle Newsletter, <https://thehustle.co/>, something all retirees need!

WEIRD PATENTS




We have all been there: you take the glorious first bite of a hot dog only to feel a dollop of mustard hit your jeans mere seconds after. David Sherard of Jackson, Mississippi, clearly also experienced this, since he patented a hot dog holder in 1970. The holder, made for restaurants, "...provides a receptacle capable of trapping surplus mustard, catsup, juices and drippings in a manner to keep the same from trickling on the user's hands or clothing." The contraption even has openings so you don't miss out on clasp that soft bun, and a slot for shoving your napkins — although you won't need them, since your hands will be *so* clean.

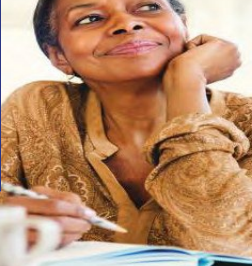


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