

## **Second Annual GSRA Day at the Capitol Scores Success**



**GSRA Members at the Capitol with Speaker David Ralston**

With near perfect weather as a backdrop, GSRA's second annual GSRA Day at the Capitol and the GSRA-GCWA Legislative Reception on January 31<sup>st</sup> registered another success. GSRA members from all over the state came together in Atlanta to honor our elected officials and make them aware of issues affecting active employees, retirees and their families. By the end of the day, GSRA members had distributed 260 bags of GSRA information and items to legislators and key staff and had actively honored the legislators who attended the evening reception. As successful as both events were, however, participation from GSRA members at the day event was down from last year's number and, perhaps most importantly, many of the legislators who came to the Legislative Reception expressed disappointment that members who invited them to attend the event did not attend themselves.

Beginning at 11:00 AM, GSRA members began convening at the State Capitol. After having a group photo with Speaker David Ralston, members were briefed about the activities by GSRA Vice-President Chuck Freedman and GSRA President, Bill Tomlinson. Working in small groups, representatives from local GSRA chapters delivered information and promotional items to all legislators in the Capitol and Legislative Office Building.

Members were encouraged to speak to their elected officials about GSRA as an organization and the specific legislation supported or opposed.

After the morning's activities, GSRA members had an open afternoon to visit with their legislators and former coworkers. Most members found it a great time to catch up with other retirees.

GSRA members who were attending the GSRA-GCWA Legislative Reception began gathering in the Empire Room of the West Floyd Tower around 4:30-5:00 p.m. GSRA and GCWA members were asked to position themselves at or near the GCWA's designated and posted districts to make it easier for legislators to find and speak with their constituents.

Sixty-Four legislators attended the reception—double the number at the 2011 reception. The great response was due, in large part, to GSRA members inviting their legislators through the new Action Alert software tool. Attending GSRA members had the opportunity to talk to their specific legislators about the issues and to express their appreciation for their dedicated public service. Of particular note, the Senate Retirement Committee Chairperson, Senator Tim Golden, and House Retirement Committee Chairperson, Representative Howard Maxwell, and Vice Chairperson, Representative Tommy Benton, attended and were also available for all members to discuss issues.

At the reception, GSRA honored its "Legislator of the Year" and GCWA presented its "Friends of Children award." GSRA President Bill Tomlinson presented the GSRA award to House Rules Chairperson, Representative John Meadows, based on his support of key legislation related to mitigating the impact on the retirement systems of the so-called "Dead Peasants Insurance" investment option. GCWA President Mary Beth Lukich presented the GCWA Friends of Children award to Toombs Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court Judge Britt Hammond.

Good weather, great fellowship and critical access to our elected officials made the second annual GSRA Day at the Capitol and the GSRA-GCWA Legislative Reception

very successful. More active participation by GSRA members would have made both events even better.

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## Legislative Update

The first 14 legislative days of the 2012 General Assembly Session were relatively quiet for legislation of broad interest to GSRA members. Our Legislative Committee was no less attentive to the activities, however. All new legislation has been reviewed for impact on our members and Legislative Committee Meetings have been attended. The full list of legislation being monitored can be viewed on [www.mygsra.com](http://www.mygsra.com) (Legislation, Status).

The three bills, HB 293, HB 297, and HB 371, regarding mitigating any “dead peasants” legislation have been passed by the House and “Favorably Reported” by the respective Senate Committee. A short summary of each of the bills is:

- HB 293 authored by Representatives Benton, Maxwell, and Meadows, amends the definition of retirement fiscal bills to include any bill that grants an insurable interest on lives of pension members for which the pension plan must obligate funds. If passed, any future “dead peasants” legislation must be introduced in the first year of the biennial session and must be studied for the financial impact.
- HB 297 authored by Representatives Maxwell, Meadows, and Benton, provides that public retirement systems shall not have an insurable interest in members nor have authority to expend or obligate funds to purchase life insurance except where all benefits are paid to the beneficiary designated by the member. If passed, this legislation prohibits establishing an insurable interest in the lives of members and, therefore, cannot be used to provide a “windfall” to any entity.
- HB 371 authored by Representatives Maxwell, Benton, and Meadows provides that public employers (including the state) may only purchase insurance on the life of active or retired public officers or employees when all benefits are paid to an officer’s or employee’s estate or to a beneficiary designated by the officer or employee. If passed, this legislation requires that any life insurance purchased for the member must be simply an employee benefit for the member.

HB 293 was “Favorably Reported” by the Senate Retirement Committee on January 25, 2012, HB 297 was “Favorably Reported” by the Senate Retirement Committee on January 25, 2012, and HB 371 was “Favorably Reported” by the Senate Insurance & Labor Committee on February 3, 2012. GSRA thanks the authors of the bills and the Chairpersons of the Senate Retirement Committee, Senator Tim Golden, and of the Insurance & Labor Committee, Senator Gregg Coggins.

Representatives Maxwell, Benton, and Meadows have also introduced HB 295, which provides a method of calculating accrued benefits for persons subject to the Georgia State Employees’ Pension and Savings Plan (GSEPS) when transferring service between GSEPS and the Employees Retirement System or Teachers Retirement System. HB 295 was passed by the House on January 24, 2012 and subsequently assigned to the Senate Retirement Committee on January 25, 2012.

All of the tax reform bills were recommitted to the Special Joint Committee on Georgia Revenue Structure at the end of the 2011 Session. These bills, HB 385, HB 386, HB 387, and HB 388, are dormant at this time, but can be reenergized at any time. Members should watch the news about any tax reform proposals.

On the last day of the 2011 Session, HB 642 authored by Representatives Collins, Hamilton, and England was introduced. A substitute for the bill passed the House on Feb. 7. The substitute bill eliminates the position of Commissioner of Personnel Administration and transfers all State Personnel Administration functions that have not heretofore been removed from the department to the Department of Administrative Services. In this transfer, several of the legislative authorizations for functions, i.e. statewide training, employee relations confidentiality, and development of applicant selections devices, have been removed.

HB 805, authored by Representative Collins, was first read on January 25, 2012 and passed the House immediately after the passage of HB 642 on Feb 7. The bill is a companion to HB 642 in that it eliminates in the Employees Retirement System code (Title 47) all references to the State Personnel Administration and institutes the new language “the state system of personnel

administration created by Chapter 20 of Title 45.” HB 805 replaces the Commissioner of Personnel Administration with the Commissioner of the Department of Administrative Services on the ERS Board of Trustees and transfers all pension related duties to the Commissioner of DOAS. HB 805 also returns the representation and administration of Georgia’s statewide social security program from the State Personnel Administration to the ERS. If HB 642 becomes law, HB 805 is needed so that the ERS Board of Trustees will continue to have seven members.

HB 801, authored by Representatives Gardner, James, Dobbs, et al., establishes the Georgia Health Insurance Marketplace Authority to facilitate the purchase and sale of qualified health plans. The bill would install Georgia’s healthcare exchange as provided for by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The bill was assigned to the House Insurance Committee.

SB 223, entitled the "Georgia Government Accountability Act," creates a Legislative Sunset Advisory Committee to review and evaluate state agencies' productivity, efficiency, and responsiveness. It also provides for the automatic abolition of certain state

agencies contingent upon adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly. SB passed in conference committee.

HB 831 would transfer the Division of Rehabilitation Services, including the disability adjudication section and the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation, from the Department of Labor to the Department of Human Services. It would also transfer supervision of Georgia Industries for the Blind to the DHS. HB 831 is in the House Human Resources Committee.

The supplemental appropriations bill, HB 741, has passed the House and is now in the Senate Appropriations Committee. The general appropriations bill, HB 742, is in the House Appropriations Committee awaiting disposition of HB 741. The Governor’s budget recommendations included about \$146 million to fully fund the ERS and TRS annual required contributions to maintain the funding levels of both pension funds. The Governor also recommended about \$46 million for the State Health Benefit Plan. While this amount is considerably less than the reserves required to meet all liabilities, it is an improvement over recent years.

The Legislative Committee will continue to review legislation and provide information as it becomes available.

## Letter from GSRA President Bill Tomlinson

Dear GSRA Members,

By most measures, our GSRA Day at the Capitol and our joint reception were great achievements. Congratulations to those of you who traveled--often great distances--participated, and made these events so successful. In addition to the stirring outcomes described in the lead article, we were able to improve on some logistical issues from last year. Using the Empire Room for the reception made it easier for both legislators and our members to park and to attend. And our refined processes for preparing our promotional items and getting them into members’ hands for delivery to legislators reduced both the time it took and the amount of associated confusion.

But at least two areas stand out as improvable for next year. First, it is disappointing that our day-time participation dropped. I believe this greatly reduced our potential impact as a group. We missed a great opportunity for attracting many more legislators to the reception and letting them know of our interest. Our continued visibility will result in legislators being more attentive at our local

chapter meetings and listening more intently to the issues.

The second area of improvement, touched on in the lead article, is that some of the legislators who came to the reception expected to see the constituents who invited them and found none there. In such a case, we may create ill will that is very difficult to reverse. For next year, we will review the wording of our invitations to see if we can reduce this problem for members who want to send invitations but do not plan to attend.

Notwithstanding these issues, your officers and board thank you and congratulate those who attended either or both of these events. Your spirit, your attentiveness, your interaction with legislators had great impact and certainly justified the efforts of those who worked so hard to organize and execute the day’s events.

*Bill*

## GSRA Day at the Capitol in Pictures





## Local Chapter News

### Georgia Retired Educators

The GA Retired Educators Chapter of GSRA met on January 16, 2012. President John Arrington welcomed 36 members and guests. Among the guests was Gail Belton, Human Resources Director, GA Piedmont Technical College (DeKalb Tech) who was visiting to gather information about GSRA and the GRE Chapter that she could share with a GA Technical College System Human Resources peer group.

Arrington reported that an intensive telephone campaign had generated seven commitments to renew or join GSRA. A membership committee is being formed to proactively engage active and retired Department of Education employees and other prospective members in GSRA.

Arrington provided an update on the GSRA Day at the Capitol and GSRA operational improvements, including upgrades to the membership data base, acquisition of the Advocacy System software, and expanded contract labor services. Vice President Janie Smith reported on the ease of using the GSRA website for membership renewal and the Advocacy System for communicating with members of the General Assembly. Several members commented on the user-friendly features of these new systems and that they had used the recent Action Alert to invite their legislators to the GSRA reception.

The guest speaker, GSRA President Bill Tomlinson, focused on the anticipated legislative issues that impact retirees in both ERS and TRS in the 2012 Georgia General Assembly.



GSRA President, Bill Tomlinson, addresses GRE chapter meeting

### Other Georgia Retired Educators News

GRE Chapter President John Arrington also traveled to Central Georgia Technical College in Macon where he addressed Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) Human Resource Directors and HR staff from colleges all over the state. The theater style room was filled with about 40 interested participants, as well as recently retired TCSG HR director and current GSRA Membership Committee chairperson Mike Sorrells.

### Coosa Valley Area

At the request of Nicholle Harrison, District Training Officer, and Debbie Neighbors, District Personnel Manager, on January 26, 2012, the Coosa Valley Area Chapter of GSRA conducted a Lunch N Learn event at the Department of Public Health District 1-1 office in Rome.

GSRA Vice-President Chuck Freedman presented an overview of GSRA, how and when the organization started and the mission and goals of GSRA. The presentation included describing several current issues of concern in the general assembly, briefly described the new advocacy software and Facebook presence and encouraged 28 active and retired employees of the district to join. The group was so enthused that twelve people joined at the conclusion of the presentation and two others have joined since. Ms. Harrison asked for presentations at the eleven clinics in the District (that covers ten NW Georgia counties) and for more GSRA brochures to be included in the New Employee Orientation packages. It is expected that many more active employees from DPH will join as the result of these efforts.

### GSRA Day at the Capitol By the Numbers

- 85** GSRA members at the day event
- 64** GSRA members at the Legislative Reception
- 18** Local chapters represented between both events
- 35** Counties represented at the day event
- 31** Counties represented at the Legislative Reception
- 42** Total counties represented between both events
- 64** Legislators attended the Legislative Reception
- 260** Bags of GSRA info/promotional items distributed

## GSRA New Members in January

Name	County	Name	County	Name	County
Beth Arnow	Dekalb	Don Hogan	Jackson	Jack F. Scott	Habersham
Kenneth Athon	Troup	David Hoitt	Floyd	Wilma Sexton	Gordon
Stanley Bernknopf	Hall	Mary Jackson	Baldwin	Linda Shores	Floyd
Carol Blair	(Tenn)	Joan Jones	Muscogee	Alice Smith	Glynn
Harvey Booker	Spalding	Lucille Jordan	Dekalb	Audrey Smith	Appling
Bobby Brantley	Washington	Rachel Keith	Meriwether	Cheryl Smith	Dekalb
Wanda Brown	Dekalb	Margaret Kendrick	Talbot	Diane Smith	Coweta
Lynn Chapman	Floyd	Lyn Kirkland	Fulton	Janie Smith	Dekalb
Gloria Chen	Dekalb	Clifford Knowlton	Pierce	Ramona Smith	Bibb
Patricia Cochran	Floyd	Tony Kreimborg	Glynn	Wendy Stephenson	Floyd
Paul Cogsdill	(Florida)	James Magnus	Fulton	Al Stoerzinger	Dekalb
Joann Collins	Coweta	Agnes Mainor	Camden	Gary Sullivan	Lumpkin
Patricia Collins	Floyd	Janie McDaniel	Meriwether	Gene Wallace, Jr.	Gwinnett
Jim Conkwright	Cobb	Elizabeth McGill	Bartow	Barbara Wood	Dekalb
Lydia Cooper	Floyd	Florence McGlamery	Bulloch	LuAnne Worley	Henry
Josephine Cowart	Ware	Ronald Mercer	Wayne	James Zachry	Rockdale
Jane Fricks	Floyd	Russell Merritt	Hancock		
Bill Gambill	Bartow	Sarah Moore	Fulton		
Karen Garrett	Floyd	Mickie Muroff	Fulton		
Eleanor Gasset	Cobb	Debra Neighbors	Floyd		
Charles Griffin	Ware	G. Robert Prater	Meriwether		
Dianne Hagin	Bulloch	Tina Proffitt	Floyd		
Brenda Harris	Coweta	Virginia Reeves	Thomas		
James Hawkins, Jr.	Laurens	Gail Reyes	Floyd		
Paul Heppner	Gwinnett	Jean Roets	Gwinnett		

**Does GSRA Have Your Correct Contact Information?**

Please be sure to update your **email address** with GSRA when it changes. Simply log in to [www.mygsra.com](http://www.mygsra.com) using your old email address and password; select "Our Members" and "My Profile", and then change your information using the "edit" feature.

If your **mailing address** changes, and you do not use a computer, please notify us of your new address by sending a card or letter to the address at the bottom of this page.

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**GSRA would like to thank the *GSRA Day at the Capitol Planning Committee*:**

Chuck Freedman, Chair, BJ Bennett, Donna Buffum, Beverly Littlefield, Ernie Melton, Beth Morgan, Deborah Moore, Harvey Nation, Bill Tomlinson and Wayne Drummond, GCWA Executive Director

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