

Make Your Voice Heard – Vote!

This is an important election year. Make your voice heard by voting.

Benefit Adjustments Awarded!



Some of the nearly 50 GSRA members who attended the April 19 ERS Board Meeting

On April 19, 2018, about 50 GSRA members were present as the Board of Trustees for the Employees' Retirement System (ERS) considered whether to grant post-retirement benefit adjustments to retirees and beneficiaries in FY 2019. Before this item was taken up, the Board first heard from Ed Koebel of Cavanaugh Macdonald, the firm tasked with the annual actuarial review and report. The report is or soon will be online at the ERS website: <http://www.ers.ga.gov/>.

ERS Board Chair Lonice Barrett acknowledged the GSRA members present and adjusted the agenda order to accommodate those members. ERS Director Jim Potvin set

the stage for the Board action by indicating that the Board could 1) take no action on a benefit adjustment, 2) take action by awarding a onetime, non-compounding benefit adjustment in an amount determined by the Board or 3) award a COLA in an amount determined by the Board.

Following Mr. Potvin's remarks, Board member Shawn Ryan (DOAS Commissioner) made a motion for the Board to approve two non-compounding bonus payments of 2% each, payable in July, 2018 and January, 2019 subject to essentially similar restrictions that the onetime bonus payments paid over the last two years carried. Following the motion for benefit adjustment and before the vote, one Board member commented that state employees were not receiving any salary increases this year; Mr. Ryan acknowledged that concern and indicated that ERS retirees had not received a COLA in about 10 years and felt that some adjustment should be made. Another Board member commented that recent stock market gains could not be counted on in the future and thus caution was in order in making any adjustment. After the discussion, the Board unanimously voted in favor of the bonus payments. The ERS Board approved: two 2% one-time, non-compounded payments for retirees and beneficiaries, payable on the first \$30,000 of annual pension benefit, with the following stipulations:

- non-disability retirees must be at least 45 years of age or older

- disability retirees have no age restrictions
- not available to GSEPS retirees with a membership date on or after 7/1/2009 (this group is specifically excluded by statute from receiving post retirement adjustment payments)
- Early Retirement Exception – Post retirement adjustment eligibility is based on attaining age 60, or the date 30 years would have been attained if continuous employment had continued, whichever is earlier.

The first payment will be paid during the first week of August, 2018 for eligible retirees with a retirement effective date on or before 12/1/2017 and a pension benefit in July, 2018. The second payment will be paid during the first week

of February, 2019 for eligible retirees with a retirement effective date on or before 6/1/2018 and a pension benefit in January, 2019.

The other Boards decided on post retirement adjustments for their members as follows:

The Legislative Retirement System Board approved two 2% one-time, non-compounded payments for retirees and beneficiaries. The Judicial Retirement System Board approved two 2% one-time, non-compounded payments for retirees and beneficiaries. The Public School Employees Retirement System approved a 2% monthly COLA for retirees and beneficiaries, effective July 2018.

No Disasters this General Assembly Session: Members' Participation in Action Alerts Helps Our Cause

For everyone's priority item, a COLA, the General Assembly once again failed to fund one. This cause was a long shot from the beginning because the Governor did not include COLA funding for retirees, or active employees and teachers, in his budget recommendation. After a fantastic member response to an action alert, the House Appropriations Committee inserted language recommending a one-time adjustment (essentially, the same as the last two years) in the appropriations bill, but without any money to fund the benefit. The full House passed the bill, but when it came out of the Senate, the House language had been struck and new language specifically denying an adjustment was added. So, for this and other differences, the bill went to a conference committee.

Four action alerts were issued this time: one alert for writing/calling to each house's conference committee members urging the House members to stick to the House's position, and urging the Senate members to yield to the House position; and one alert for writing/calling the remaining members in each house urging the House members to request their conference committee members to hold to the House's position, and urging the remaining Senate members to request their conference committee members to yield

to the House's position. Yes, figuring out how to respond to each of the four simultaneous alerts was confusing, but a substantial number of members did it, and did it effectively. We must have had an influence, because the final, passed bill struck through the Senate language, reinstated the House language, and ADDED a statement urging the granting of a benefit to state retirees! There is no doubt that this action, along with other member actions concerning the ERS board resulted in the ERS board granting two benefits that together are greater than the last two years.

In other legislation, the General Assembly considered no fewer than six original bills and several substitutes to prevent surprise billing for medical services from out-of-network providers. Most passed the house in which they originated. But consumers were caught in the middle of the continuing battle between providers and insurance companies. Unfortunately, we were the collateral damage as none of the bills passed.

It was well publicized that Georgia will benefit from a revenue "windfall" of several billion dollars as a consequence of changes to federal tax laws. The leadership, Governor and most members of the General Assembly could not move fast enough to pass a bill

(HB 918) that will cut state income taxes supposedly an equivalent amount plus several hundred million dollars more. This bill had such support and moved so quickly that GSRA concluded that it would be more harmful than helpful to the organization to try to stop it.

There were two retirement bills introduced one of which GSRA helped write (SB 101) and the other (HB 588) which GSRA supported. SB 101 would have enabled current and former employees who were originally in the state defined contribution plan to pay full actuarial cost to convert their time to the defined contribution plan – the regular ERS plan. HB 588 would have allowed ERS members to use funds from their Peach State Reserves 401k or 457 plans to purchase a supplemental guaranteed lifetime income within their ERS pension plan. Both bills were caught up in last minute wheeling and dealing between the two houses and never passed.

Finally, there was HB 624, introduced by House Retirement Committee Chairman Paul Battles, which dramatically increased pension benefits for members of the Legislative Retirement System. The greatest and by far the most costly increase would be for the Speaker of the House. There was even a \$1.1 million line item put in the appropriations bill to pay for implementing HB 624, even though the benefit increase was supposedly to be paid for from the 127% funded LRS pension fund and a sharp increase in employee contributions. Fortunately, this costly bill did not pass.

Overall, GSRA made its presence felt more than ever through active member participation from a record number of action alerts. Your leadership believes that GSRA has set the stage to be progressively more influential in future sessions. Coupled with adding more members from aggressive recruiting practices, we look forward to achieving more of our goals and objectives.

GSRA Asked to Take Part in ERS Website Focus Group

GSRA was recently invited to be the first group of external reviewers for the new Employee Retirement System of Georgia (ERSGA) website. The revised website is scheduled to roll out in June of this year.

Seven GSRA members visited the ERSGA office on April 20, 2018 for the purpose of reviewing the new website and providing feedback to the ERSGA Communication team. The public website changes focused on increasing member satisfaction through visual appeal, content organization and overall ease of use.

GSRA members were impressed with the changes and ERSGA thanked the members for their generous time and valuable insight, which will be used to further develop the new website. Representing GSRA were BJ Bennett, Beverly Littlefield, Harvey Nation, Chuck Freedman, Mike Murdock, Kevin Burke and Steve Herndon.



Steve Herndon, Mike Murdock, BJ Bennett, Chuck Freedman, Beverly Littlefield, Harvey Nation and Kevin Burke at the ERSGA website focus group meeting



Steve's View: Members' Involvement Made the Difference

We began this year at just about square one. The governor's budget did not include funds to support a COLA, and although state revenues looked very good, the prospect that we could end the session with no support for a benefit adjustment seemed very real. Meetings with legislators did not seem to yield much support other than general expressions of appreciation for our faithful service to the state and the hope for some type of benefit adjustment. Even as the appropriations bill was nearing its final form, there was not a consensus for any benefit adjustment.

Fortunately, our members rallied and made phone calls, sent letters and emails, attended our annual GSRA Day at the Capitol events and responded to several action alerts issued by GSRA. GSRA sought out statements from within our ranks, as to the difficulties some members have faced due to the loss of purchasing power over the last nine or ten years and members responded with stories of real hardship.

Members' response and advocacy helped to form consensus, though no dedicated funds, for a benefit adjustment of some type, as expressed by the final appropriations bill. In an unprecedented development, GSRA was invited to appear before the ERS Board at a special called meeting where several funding considerations were proposed and decided. Again, GSRA members turned out in numbers to support the officers who spoke in favor to the Board, for some type of benefit adjustment. And finally, on April 19, 2018 the ERS Board voted in favor of awarding

two benefit adjustments payable during fiscal 2019, one in August, 2018 and one in February, 2019, each amounting to two percent, subject to the same restrictions and limits as we saw the last two years. Again, we had about 50 members who attended to show their support.

Had there been no GSRA, nor member involvement, nor expressions by our members of how the loss of purchasing power has made their lives more difficult or more stressful, what could we all have expected? The key is that an active GSRA, supported by its members and made up of members who are involved, can make a difference. While we will still work to see COLAs restored, and other benefits protected, it is important to recognize the accomplishments that might not have occurred, had it not been for the work of so many of our members.

As a member organization, your GSRA exists solely for the benefit of its members - Georgia state retirees. As a volunteer organization, GSRA depends solely on the support and actions of its members and a few sponsor supporters. With the recent legislative session now behind us and with the annual ERS Board meeting concluded, with the decision to award ERS retirees with two bonus payments to be made during fiscal 2019, our attention now turns to the coming election season and the fall GSRA Annual Conference, which will be held in Macon in October, 2018.

Thank you for your support!
Steve

GSRA Legal Fund is Up and Running

The GSRA Legal Fund has been established and is accepting contributions. As a reminder, the GSRA Legal Fund was established to provide funds in order for GSRA to respond quickly in the event of any threat to our promised Georgia State retiree benefits, including the ERSGA pension and State Health Benefit Plan health insurance.

All contributions are strictly voluntary and may not be used for anything other than the purpose defined in the policy establishing the fund. If you are interested in making a contribution (any amount is appreciated) go to www.mygsra.com and select "Make a Donation to Legal Fund". From here you can print the contribution form and mail it to GSRA, PO Box 108, Bethlehem, GA 30620 or you can log on with your member ID and use your credit card to contribute online.

Local Chapter News

Central Metro

Central Metro local chapter held a meeting March 29, 2018. Guest speaker for the meeting was Agent Bloodworth of the Secret Service. Agent Bloodworth gave a very interesting and timely presentation on cyber security, ATM/gas pump security and senior scams. Also on the program was GSRA's Legislative Committee Chair, Chuck Freedman, who updated members on the session and legislation of interest as well as what GSRA's focus will be for the rest of the year.



Agent Bloodworth addresses Central Metro chapter meeting

Golden Isles

Golden Isles local chapter held its second quarter meeting April 26, 2018. Local Representative Jeff Jones was the guest speaker and provided members with his perspective on the 2018 session and on legislation of interest to members. The lunch meeting was well attended and featured grilled pork chops, red beans and rice, sweet potato soufflé, turnip greens, cornbread and several desserts.



Golden Isles members listen to Representative Jeff Jones

2018 Annual Meeting - Save the Date!

GSRA is hard at work planning the 2018 Annual Meeting, scheduled for October 15-16, 2018. Because this is an election year, the 2018 Annual Meeting will be held at the central location of the Anderson Center in Macon, Georgia. While the meeting agenda is still being fleshed out, GSRA intends to do its best to have the final candidates for Governor attend and address us. GSRA, with member involvement, has made great strides this year. Help us keep the momentum going and please mark your calendars now to attend!

2018 Annual Meeting
October 15-16, 2018
Anderson Center
Macon, Georgia

GSRA at ERS WRAP Sessions

GSRA has been afforded a rare opportunity to set up a table to recruit new members at WRAP (Workshop for Retirement Answers and Preparation) sessions conducted by ERS. We view this as a wonderful opportunity to educate pre-retirees about GSRA and assist them in navigating their retirement years, and we are most appreciative of ERS management and staff allowing us this opportunity.

Volunteers are needed to assist us in this worthwhile and important endeavor. If you would like to be a part of this exciting project or simply would like additional information, please contact Janet Blackmon at bljfinch95@outlook.com.



Glenda Saleem, Janet Blackmon and Ernie Melton at an ERS WRAP Session

Georgia Election Dates for 2018

(From the Sec of State website)

Elections	Voter Registration Deadline	Election Date
Special Election Date	February 20, 2018	March 20, 2018
Special Election Runoff Date	February 20, 2018	April 17, 2018
General Primary, Nonpartisan General Election and Special Election Date	April 24, 2018	May 22, 2018
General Primary, Nonpartisan General Election and Special Election Runoff Date	April 24, 2018	July 24, 2018
General Primary Runoff Date for Federal Races	June 25, 2018	July 24, 2018
General Election/Special Election Date	October 9, 2018	November 6, 2018
General Election/Special Election Runoff Date	October 9, 2018	December 4, 2018
General Election Runoff Date for Federal Races	December 10, 2018	January 8, 2019



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Endorsed GSRA Benefits

The Georgia State Retirees Association (GSRA) makes many member only benefits available to its members. GSRA endorses the following member benefits:

- Long Term Care / Home Health Care Policy
- Life Insurance
- Medical Air Services Association (MASA)
- Travel Discounts
- Car Rental Discounts
- Tax-Deferred Annuity
- Cancer Treatment Policy
- Medicare Supplement Insurance
- Identity Theft Protection
- Hotel Discounts
- Computer Discounts

Review your benefits at: www.myAMBAbenefits.info/gsra

Benefit made available through

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OUR MEMBERS FORM **THE FOUNDATION** OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Since 1920, we've guided ourselves on helping members build a solid financial foundation for their own families.

We're not salespeople, we're solutions people. That's why nobody can serve our members like we can.

APCU serves State and Federal workers, retirees and their families in Georgia. Visit APCU's website today at GSRA. For more information, visit apcu.com, or call us at (404) 768-4125 or Toll-free at (800) 848-8431.



APCU
Atlanta Postal Credit Union
A Member of Services

SERVING U.S. Postal Service Employees • State & Federal Employees in GA • Retirees & Their Family Members

This credit union is federally insured by the National Credit Union Administration.

APCU partners with Members Wealth Management, a financial services program, to help our members with financial planning, investments, insurance, as well as retirement and estate planning strategies.

APCU has invited Shweta Ramani, a Managing Associate with Members Wealth Management, to offer a great workshop, "Money Talk 101," at GSRA. This seminar is designed to facilitate conversations around financial milestones for retirees.

Topics will include:

- ★ The importance of setting financial goals
- ★ Understanding your current financial position
- ★ Preparing for a successful retirement
- ★ Income tax considerations
- ★ What your loved ones need to know

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Medicare Advantage Plans from UnitedHealthcare®

UnitedHealthcare® Medicare Advantage plans achieve over 97% satisfaction* with SHBP retirees.

UnitedHealthcare continues to be a proud sponsor of the GSRA Annual Meeting for 2018.



*2015 UnitedHealthcare Customer Experience Survey scores for Group Medicare Advantage plan members. Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare.
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