

GSRA Leaders Meet with Governor

With the hustle and bustle of the session over, most political types take a break, but not your GSRA leaders. They have been hard at work meeting and/or talking with as many legislators and government leaders as they can about restoring the annual COLAs and other issues of importance to state retirees.

In recent weeks they have met or talked with two members of the Senate Retirement Committee. GSRA Legislative Committee Chair Chuck Freedman and GSRA President Jim Sommerville travelled to the lovely town of Pine Mountain to meet with State Senator (R-29) Randy Robertson. For over two hours, they discussed strategies for getting the COLA restored for state retirees. Senator Robertson is a strong supporter of active and retired state employees, and GSRA will be working closely with Senator Robertson in the coming months as we work to get legislation in place to restore our COLAs. Please reach out to Senator Robertson and thank him for his willingness to work to restore the benefits promised to us.

Another State Senator GSRA has been talking with is Senator Tonya Anderson (D-43). Senator Anderson has reached out to the Legislative Counsel's Office for assistance in drafting a proposed bill that would legislatively require the awarding of an annual COLA to retired state employees. Senator Robertson has reached out to Senator Anderson to offer his assistance in her efforts. We have talked with Senator Anderson and are arranging a meeting for later this summer to discuss her efforts and how we can assist her.

GSRA's Legislative Liaison Chuck Clay and Jim Sommerville recently met with Representative Bert Reeves (R-34). Representative Reeves is one of Governor Kemp's floor leaders. The meeting was productive, and we look forward to a continuing dialogue with Representative Reeves.

In perhaps the most exciting news, through the efforts of Representative Houston Gaines (R-117), Chuck Freedman, Chuck Clay and Jim Sommerville

recently met with Governor Brian Kemp in his office at the Capitol. Please reach out and thank Representative Gaines for his help in obtaining the meeting with Governor Kemp.



GSRA President Jim Sommerville, Governor Brian Kemp, GSRA Legislative Chair Chuck Freedman, GSRA Legislative Liaison Chuck Clay

GSRA leaders had a productive meeting with Governor Kemp. They were able to discuss a path forward on restoring the COLAs with the Governor and his policy advisor Grant Thomas. The Governor seemed receptive to GSRA's ideas and expressed a willingness to include the restoration of the COLA as part of their

upcoming discussions as they begin the process of preparing the 2020 Mid-Year Budget and the 2021 Budget. No commitments were made, and none were expected. However, GSRA does look forward to having a continuing dialogue with key members of the Governor's staff in the upcoming months.

Use the following link to access contact information for Senator Randy Robertson: www.senate.ga.gov/senators/en-US/member.aspx?Member=4926&Session=27

Use the following link to access contact information for Senator Tonya Anderson: www.senate.ga.gov/senators/en-US/member.aspx?Member=807&Session=27

Use the following link to access contact information for Rep. Gaines: www.house.ga.gov/Representatives/en-US/member.aspx?Member=4955&Session=27



GSRA 2019 Annual Meeting
Unicoi State Park & Lodge
October 7-8
[Information](#)

Bills with Fiscal Impact Update

The Senate Retirement Committee met on May 6 to consider several bills which had potential fiscal impact. In order for the committee to pass any of these bills onto the full Senate for a vote, the committee had to first decide whether to refer them for an actuarial analysis between now and the 2020 session to determine their cost, if any. Legislative Liaison Chuck Clay and Legislative Committee Chair Chuck Freedman attended for GSRA.

SB 26, SB 47 and SB 262 would impact ERS retirees. With the exception of SB 129, all bills on the committee's agenda were passed on for actuarial analysis.

SB 14 by Seay would increase monthly employee deductions and retirement benefits for legislators. It appeared that there was some confusion as to how much the benefits would increase and under what circumstances, but the committee referred the bill anyway.

SB 26 by Ligon is GSRA's bill with ERS support to allow certain members of the ERS defined contribution

plan to convert that plan to the ERS defined benefit plan for which the members are eligible.

SB 47 would allow ERS members to buy up to 60 months of service for active military service performed on or after January 1, 1990.

SB 248 and SB 249 by Albers would increase monthly employee deductions and retirement benefits for firefighters and peace officers respectively.

SB 259 by Black would increase monthly employee contributions and retirement benefits for legislators in much the same manner as SB 14.

SB 260 by Black is similar to HB 667 by Rep. Martin in that for the TRS it would drop to 6% the maximum return on investment that actuaries could use in determining the annual actuarially determined employer contribution (ADEC) the state would have to budget for. It would also reduce the amortization period for retiring unfunded liability to 15 years. Chairman Black said he intends this bill to convey a message to TRS. He said further that he wants to amend it by

adding a provision that would change the amount of COLAs from the present 3% annually to an amount equivalent to the increase in inflation. During the discussion of SB 260, Sen. Randy Robertson spoke up for retired state employees. Sen. Black agreed that the committee needs to provide for ERS retirees. However, no action was taken in regard to ERS retirees. Sen. Black added that his amendment would also change the amortization period to 25 years.

SB 262 by Harbison would allow an ERS retiree to either choose a new beneficiary or a new retirement option if the retiree's beneficiary dies before the retiree does.

SB 270 and SB 271 by Kennedy make changes to JRS.

SB 129 by Hufstetler would allow regents employees who made "irrevocable" decisions to convert from TRS to the then new Regents Retirement System to "revoke" their "irrevocable" decisions and convert back to TRS. Sen. Hufstetler was unable to make the meeting and no one else was prepared to speak for the bill.

After the meeting, Freedman was able to approach Sen. Robertson and Sen. Anderson individually. Both expressed their support for ERS retirees generally, and for obtaining COLAs specifically. They both offered to meet with GSRA representatives (see the article above which explains GSRA's meeting with Sen. Robertson) and help in any way they could. Deputy Legislative Counsel Blake Travis participated in the discussion with Sen. Anderson, and he offered his assistance as well.



Jim's View: Focus on the Governor is Key

As you know, the Employees Retirement System (ERS) Board at its April meeting voted to grant two one-time 3% payments up to a maximum of \$900.00 per payment based on 3% of the first \$30,000 in yearly benefit payment.

While we appreciate the one-time bonus payments granted by the ERS Board this year and for each of the past couple of years, they are not Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) and do very little to help the long term financial needs of state retirees and their beneficiaries. In addition, the one-time payments do nothing to address the inequity between how the State of Georgia is treating members of TRS versus how it treats members of ERS. This inequity is not right and must be addressed. Even the State Auditor (who is a member of both ERS and TRS Boards) pointed out the inequity in his latest audit of the retirement systems.

The GSRA Board worked very hard to state our case before the ERS Board, The Governor's Office (although not the Governor personally), and the legislature. We thought we had a good strategy and plan for achieving our goal of the restoration of annual COLAs.

So what went wrong?

A few days after the April ERS Board meeting, we met with Jim Potvin, Executive Director of ERS, for a frank off the record discussion of where do we go from here in order to get the COLAs restored. We appreciate Mr. Potvin's frankness in his discussions with us. It was very helpful to us in developing our next moves in our efforts to get the annual COLA restored.

Among the things we learned is that while our strategy was good and well planned, we were hampered by our inability to meet with the Governor's Office early enough to have any impact on the budget process.

We are working to make sure that is not an issue this year. As the article above shows, we have already met with the Governor after reaching out to our friends in the legislature for their assistance in obtaining a meeting with him. Also, a member of his administration has already met with our legislative lobbyist, Chuck Clay, to discuss GSRA and the issues of importance to its members.

I share in your disappointment of having another year pass without a COLA. However, I urge you to not become discouraged or give up. I assure you that GSRA will continue to fight until the State lives up to its promises and commitments that it made to its employees as part of what Speaker of the House Ralston said was a covenant the State

has with its employees. Thank you for your past support of GSRA and I know that we can count on your support of

GSRA in the future.

Jim

Local Chapter News

Columbus Area-West Georgia

Columbus Area-West Georgia local chapter held a meeting May 21. Susan Wood with House of Heroes, an organization assisting military veterans with minor home repairs, presented the program. Refreshments for the meeting were provided by Gloria Coker.



Susan Wood, House of Heroes, presents

East Metro

The East Metro local chapter held a meeting April 30. Senator Tonya Anderson of District 43 was the guest speaker for the meeting.



East Metro President David Taylor and Senator Tonya Anderson address the East Metro meeting

Golden Isles

The Golden Isles local chapter met May 15 at the Brunswick First United Methodist Church for a fish fry and meeting. John Lennox of GSRA partner Association Member Benefits Advisors (AMBA) was guest speaker and provided a look at the benefits GSRA members have access to with AMBA.

NE Metro

The NE Metro local chapter met on May 9 at the Bethesda Park Senior Center in Lawrenceville with thirty-two members present. Sergeant Scott Kannigiser, who oversees the Gang Task Force Unit for Gwinnett County Police Department, and Detective Timothy Sims, also of the Gang Task Force Unit, gave a fascinating presentation which incorporated the history of gangs, current activity, and signs of gang activity to look for and report.

It was an informative meeting which held everyone's interest, and Sergeant Kannigiser and Detective Sims both stayed after the session to talk with chapter members individually.



Detective Timothy Sims presents at NE Metro meeting

Macon-Middle Georgia

After a successful organizing effort, GSRA's newest chapter, the Macon-Middle Georgia local chapter, met May 9 and elected officers. Officers are as follows; President, Richard Guerreiro, President-Elect, Sheilah Feagin, Treasurer, Bobbie Joe Carver, Secretary, Susan Joanis, and Membership Chair, Melissa Belk. Twenty people from the Macon Area attended, including 16 GSRA members and four other ERS retirees, two of whom joined GSRA at the meeting. The officers met after the meeting to plan the next meeting.

Savannah Coastal

GSRA President Jim Sommerville addressed twenty-four members of the Savannah Coastal local chapter at the SW



Jim Sommerville addresses Savannah Coastal members

Chatham Library on May 16. Jim gave a detailed presentation of the recent actions of the Legislature and the ERS Board. He reviewed the history of how ERS members have lost their COLAs and what we, as GSRA members, must do to change that history. The members appreciated Jim's knowledge and his plans for moving forward.

Help Grow Our Legal Fund

As a reminder, GSRA members voted to establish a legal fund in the event that GSRA, on behalf of its members, ever has to retain legal counsel and/or cover all appropriate legal fees related to ensuring that retiree benefits are not abridged or abolished. If you are interested in more information and/or would like to donate to this important fund, please click on the link below.

[GSRA Legal Fund](#)

August-October, 2018 New Members

Name	County	Name	County	Name	County
August		Eileen Jackson	Bryan	Janice Vickory	Hart
Stan Adams	Coffee	James Jackson	Bryan	Dorothy Waddell	Meriwether
Tommy Baker	Thomas	Wanda Kangeter	Chatham	Sandra Walden	Henry
Teresa Giles	Lowndes	Samuel Keith	Meriwether	Brenda Walker	Bulloch
Clifford Meeks	Troup	Brenda Lane	Meriwether	Louise Wills	(Florida)
Patricia Montarella	Muscogee	Dorothy Lee	Fayette	Kay Wimpy	Spalding
John Overstreet	Ware	Jason Machen	Elbert	Barbara Wise	Talbot
Lisa Pratt	Meriwether	Dwayne Massey	Coffee	LaVerne Wright	Chattahoochee
Nancy Ragsdale	Cherokee	Anita McCoy	Evans	Nicol Yi	Fulton
Virgil Seagle	Haralson	Dorothy McCurtis	Troup	October	
Samuel Snipes	Coffee	James McDaniel	Meriwether	Wesley Belcher	Barrow
Lennard Thompson	Colquitt	Jenny McIver	Coffee	June Bishop	Pike
Robert Vaughn	Cobb	Jonathon McMichael	Oglethorpe	John Cherry	DeKalb
September		Elizabeth Melton	(Alabama)	Rebecca East	Henry
Jon Anderson	Gwinnett	Otus Miliner	Houston	Rhonda Floyd	Elbert
Stephanie Argo	Paulding	Linda Minter	Putnam	Nancy Harrison	Talbot
Patsy Bailey	Upton	Patricia Mitchell	Henry	Janet Haygood	Pickens
Linda Bean	Coweta	Lizabeth Moulder	Franklin	Carole Jackson	Fulton
Melissa Belk	Peach	Elsie Napier	Lowndes	Gregory Jacobs	Chatham
Jerry Bennett	Walton	Betty Nix	Hall	Sidney Johnson	Clarke
Carlos Bentley	Henry	Betty Oneal	Lamar	Susan Martin	Franklin
Dianne Jackson	Jackson	Bettye Patterson	Troup	John McCann	Baldwin
Carleena Brown	Spalding	Colleen Phillips	Hart	Rebecca McCants	Oconee
Donald Carter	Fulton	John Pike	Thomas	Anne Murphy	Bartow
Linda Caudell	Banks	Sheree Powers	(Florida)	Charles Payne	Cherokee
Pete Chambers	Crisp	Jan Prescott	Brantley	Kimball Peed	Coweta
Harold Clack	Columbia	James Raymond	Gwinnett	Gwendolynn Porchea	DeKalb
Dawn Criss	Walton	Margarette Redding	Henry	Bobby Robbins	Stephens
Cheryl Davis	Clarke	Lori Reeves	Irwin	Richard Roberts	Walton
Gregory Davis	Whitfield	Barbara Runyan	(New York)	Lucinda Rown	Thomas
Elfie Early	Cherokee	Mathew Sanders	Paulding	Shirley Sneed	Bibb
Phyllis Easton-Barkle	Spalding	Cathy Sells	Barrow	Larry Webb	Putnam
Dominic Eubanks	Richmond	Duane Shearer	Glynn		
Betty Fitts	Lumpkin	Tiffany Shorter	Muscogee		
Rachel Floyd	Hart	Kathy Sidwell	DeKalb		
Petula Gomillion	Liberty	Andrea Smith	Hall		
Jacqueline Harris	DeKalb	Emory Smith	Meriwether		
Charlene Harrod	Heard	Jane Smith	Fayette		
Linda Hazinski	Madison	Carmen Staley	DeKalb		
Lynn Heard	Decatur	Betty Strickland	Meriwether		
Sharon Hopper	Gordon	William Tanner	Lumpkin		
Patricia Hunt	Meriwether	Jane Taylor	Lumpkin		

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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



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APCU serves State and Federal workers, retirees and their families in Georgia. Visit APCU's exhibitor table at GSRA. For more information, visit apcu.com, or call us at (404) 748-4329 or Toll-free at (800) 849-8431.



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

APCU has invited Steven Haman, 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 you loved (and need) to know

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