



season's greetings joy peace  
Happy Holidays  
HAPPY HOLIDAYS  
happy holidays love  
HAPPY HOLIDAYS  
season's greetings

## Annual Meeting in the Books – Final Recap

The 2020 Annual Meeting, a meeting like no other, is in the books. Because of the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, GSRA had to fulfill the requirements of our by-laws by holding the meeting virtually.

In mid-September, the GSRA Board held the annual business meeting via ZOOM. Between then and October 10, we received video updates from Jim Potvin, Executive Director of Employees Retirement System, from Frank Berry, Commissioner of the Department of Community Health, and from Christine Murdock, Deputy Director of the House Budget and Research Office. We also received promotional videos from our annual partners AMBA, Anthem Health Care, APCU, and United Healthcare.

Once all the videos had been received, Clay Teague, the President of the Macon GSRA chapter and a visual arts designer ([www.clayteague.com](http://www.clayteague.com)), edited the material into one seamless video entitled GSRA Virtual Meeting 2020. On October 20, Kevin Burke, our outstanding IT Director, posted the Annual Meeting video on our website ([www.mygsra.com](http://www.mygsra.com)) and on the GSRA Facebook page ([https://www.facebook.com/Georgia-State-Retirees-](https://www.facebook.com/Georgia-State-Retirees-Association)

[Association](https://www.facebook.com/Georgia-State-Retirees-Association)). At the same time, GSRA Communications sent 3814 emails to our members, as well as 800 notifications through US mail, announcing that the video was available for viewing.

Included in the notifications were instructions for voting on the three business motions: approval of the 2019 Annual Meeting minutes, the 2020 Treasurer's report, and the slate of nominations. The ballots also included the candidates for the 2021 officers and Board members to be voted upon.

By the deadline of October 27, 227 members had returned ballots, with 97% yes votes on all the ballot measures. Jim Sommerville was elected President for his third term, Harold Grindle was elected Treasurer once again, and Beverly Littlefield was elected as both Secretary and President Elect. The at-large Board members for 2021 will be Chuck Freedman, Dan Coffey, Sadie Rogers, Sam Sheppard, Melissa Belk and Cindy Tharp. Local chapter Presidents who will serve on the Board will be Bob Pollock, Lynell Hayes, David Taylor, and Allan Hill.

A special congratulations goes to Sarah Brownlee of Atlanta, who won the door prize! Sarah has been a member

of GSRA since 2007. Sarah and her husband Richard have been attending the Annual Meetings and the Legislative Days faithfully for thirteen years. Thank you and congratulations Sarah!

After recording the business meeting in September, the Annual Meeting Committee (Kip Mann, Laura Pike, Rhonda Floyd and Allan Hill) conducted a site visit to Lake Blackshear Resort and selected it as the site for our 2021 Annual Meeting. Lake Blackshear is a beautiful place in middle Georgia, with a lodge, villas, cabins, a golf course, a marina, and a scenic lakeside café that will be perfect for our Opening Reception. We anticipate that with a vaccine being available next year, we will be able to gather once again in

person. The meeting is scheduled for October 4-5, and group rates will be available two days before and after so that you can plan a bit of a vacation. And boy, we sure do hope we can get back to the way it was!

The GSRA Board thanks every member who took the time to watch the 2020 Annual Meeting and to vote. The Board also thanks every member statewide for their continued support of GSRA. Together, we can continue to advocate for State retirees and pursue our goal of strong retirement and health benefits for all.

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## State Revenues Surprisingly Strong; ERS Pension Fund Has Modest Gains

As reported by Governor Kemp, state net tax collections in October totaled nearly \$2.02 billion, for an increase of \$35.2 million, or 1.8 percent, compared to last year. Year-to-date, net tax revenue collections totaled \$8.21 billion, for an increase of \$400.2 million, or 5.1 percent, compared to October FY 2020.

Changes accounting for October's overall net tax revenue increase from October, 2019 were as follows: gross sales and use tax collections increased by 6.3 percent, while net sales and use tax increased by 9.9 percent. Motor fuel taxes increased slightly. These increases were more than enough to offset slight

decreases in individual income tax collections and motor vehicle tag and title fees, and even a major decrease of 28.8 percent in net corporate income tax collections. In the ERS board's October meeting, Executive Director Jim Potvin reported that although pension fund returns were down 2 percent in September, they were still up 6 percent for FY 2021.

If revenue collections and pension fund returns hold up, GSRA leadership is optimistic that we might obtain some kind of benefit adjustment for the coming year.

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## What's in Store in 2021 for GSRA

2020 was a mixed bag for GSRA. The headwinds of the pandemic significantly impacted our ability to attain some of our goals and objectives that we had set for 2020. Even with the adverse impact of the pandemic, we were still able to achieve some of our goals and made some progress on meeting those goals that were ultimately unmet.

Now that 2021 is right around the corner, it is time to talk about the goals and objectives for 2021 that have been set by the GSRA Board.

- The restoration of the annual 3% across the board cost of living adjustment (COLA). Even though we have been unable to attain this goal in prior years, we have made progress in establishing valuable

working relationships with key members of the General Assembly, the Governor’s Office and with ERS Board members. The one time “bonus” payments that we received over the past few years are an indication that we are making progress towards meeting this goal. We have already begun to seek out meetings with the Governor and key legislators to continue our efforts to have restored what was promised to us by the State of Georgia;

- Legislation to remove the prohibition of COLAs from all retirement systems. Last year, GSRA was successful in getting legislation introduced and passed by the House that would have removed the prohibition from all retirement systems. While the legislation made it to the Senate before crossover day, the bill was never voted out of the Senate Rules Committee.
- Greater input into the selection of ERS Board Members. We believe it important to be able to provide the Governor and the ERS Board with a list of GSRA members for consideration whenever an

applicable ERS Board position is to be filled. We will be seeking a sponsor to introduce a bill we had drafted for last session.

In addition to the above main goals, we will be working with the Department of Community Health to ensure that we have adequate and timely input into matters relating to our health insurance.

While we will be working very hard to attain the above goals, we hope to also begin the process of developing a Strategic Plan for GSRA. We had intentions of initiating this activity last year but with the pandemic and its related issues, we put it on the back burner. We hope that once life returns to as normal as possible, we will be able to restart this effort. Every organization needs a strategic plan that serves as a roadmap to a more successful and viable organization. It is long overdue for GSRA to have a strategic Plan.

We realize this is an ambitious set of goals and objectives and it will take a lot of work to attain all of them. But with your continued support, we think they are attainable goals.

## GSRA Represents for Long Time Annual Partner

Our long time Annual Partner, APCU, recently opened two branches of its subsidiary Center Parc Credit Union in the Savannah area, one in the Walmart in Pooler and the other in the Walmart on Ogeechee Rd. Savannah Coastal Chapter President Allan Hill (back row, 2nd from left) was proud to represent GSRA at both ribbon cutting ceremonies. GSRA appreciated the invitation to be there and we value our relationship with APCU.





## Jim's View: Thank You and Happy Holidays!

I want to thank you for your continued support of GSRA during this time of the pandemic. These last several months I am sure have been very trying and stressful for you. Most of our members are in the group for which catching the virus can be extremely dangerous even life threatening. I pray that you and your loved ones are staying safe and healthy. For those who have lost friends or loved ones to the virus, please accept our deepest sympathies on your loss.

With all of the preventative adjustments to your lives you have had to make, support of GSRA could have very easily been the last thing on your mind. Thankfully that has not been the case.

You responded to our calls for action, you logged on to watch our virtual annual meeting, and you even took the time to vote for the new slate of officers. For all of your efforts on GSRA's behalf, I am very thankful.

I am honored to serve as President of GSRA for 2021. GSRA is blessed with a very hard working and effective Board. I look forward to working with the Board on the goals and objectives outlined for 2021.

We are going to need your support in 2021 even more than we did in 2020. We need you to spread the word about GSRA to your former coworkers who may not be GSRA members. We need you to encourage them to join. There is strength in numbers and we need our membership numbers to increase as much as possible.

To that end, we have partnered with the staff at ERS on some initiatives to spread our message to as many active and retired state employees as possible. These initiatives have resulted in a significant increase in new members. I am thankful to Jim Potvin, Danielle Templeton, and other ERS staff for their willingness to work with us to help get our message out to active and retired state employees who are not currently GSRA members. I look forward to working with them in 2021 to identify other measures that we may partner with them on to further increase the scope of our outreach.

In addition, as we work to reach our goals and objectives, we will need you to respond to our Call to Action alerts. These alerts are an effective tool to get our message across to ERS Board Members, the Governor's Office and to legislators. You can make your voice heard and make a difference by responding in your own words to our Call to Action alerts.

I assure you that I along with the GSRA Board will work very hard to achieve all of our Goals and Objectives for 2021. I know that I can count on your support of our efforts to attain the dignified and comfortable retirement that you deserve and that was promised to you by the State of Georgia.

I want to wish all our members and their families Happy Holidays and Season's Greetings!

Jim

## Get to Know Your GSRA Organization Members

In an effort to provide membership more information about the various GSRA Board and Operating Committee members who perform the ongoing work of the organization, we will feature one or more board and/or committee members in the newsletter each month. This month, Harold Grindle, GSRA Treasurer, is featured.



**Harold Grindle**  
GSRA Treasurer

Harold has been involved with GSRA continuously since the

first organizational/exploratory meeting at Manual's Tavern in December 2006. He has served on the Board of Directors and later on the Policy and Operations Committee which is the committee handling the day-to-day operations of the association. Following a

number of years of service on these two components of GSRA, he was asked to run for the position of Treasurer in 2015. Realizing the importance of GSRA to state retirees and local school system retirees in Georgia, he agreed to stand for election to the position of treasurer, was elected and has served in that position since 2016.

Grindle is a native of north Georgia. He was born in northeast Forsyth County just a few years before Buford Dam was completed and Lake Sidney Lanier began filling. He lived in that area until 1987 when he moved to the Austell are. He has two sons, a granddaughter, and three grandsons, all of whom continue to live in the Cumming area.

Grindle received his Accounting Degree from North Georgia College in 1970 and was immediately employed by the Fulton County School System as an accountant. Grindle worked in various areas of the Financial Services Department for the next thirty-five + years, retiring in August 2005. For the last twenty years of his career he served as the Chief Financial Officer for the school system.

In addition to his duties regarding the finances of the school system, he also served as the treasurer of the Fulton County School Employees' Pension Fund which covered all employees of the Fulton County School System. The pension system continues to exist today; however, in the mid-80s all eligible employees became members of the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRS) by state law. Remaining in the local retirement system were those employees (mostly service workers) who could not be members of TRS.

Grindle says that GSRA members often ask him why he has been involved with GSRA since its beginning days in 2006 (the association was actually incorporated as a non-profit in 2007) since he is retired under TRS rather than ERS and does not have the issue with COLAs that ERS members have faced. He says that he reminds them that the burning issue for ERS and TRS in 2006 was a threat to retirees' health insurance which would have affected members of both retirement plans. He feels that at least partly thanks to the efforts of the newly formed GSRA, the threat to the health insurance for retirees was defeated and retirees continue to have an excellent insurance plan in Georgia. It was not until a few years later that the ERS Board was convinced to begin withholding COLAs from ERS retirees, a penalty that GSRA is working to have rectified.

Harold says that he reminds ERS and TRS retirees that GSRA constantly monitors both of these issues – health insurance for retirees and COLAs for retirees of both retirement systems. What was done to state retirees when ERS stopped its practice of granting COLAs to its retirees was absolutely wrong and I hope to be able to continue working with GSRA to convince the state to reinstate the earned and much deserved COLAs for ERS members, and continue the health insurance coverage also earned by ERS and TRS retirees.

### Keep Yourself and Others Safe During Holiday Events and Gatherings

For important information about keeping yourself and others safe at holiday celebrations and gatherings, click on the link below to the Centers for Disease Control.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>





## *Links to Holiday Events Around Georgia*

While certainly the prudent thing to do this year is stay home, most holiday events around Georgia will be all about taking Covid-19 precautions to make them as safe as they can be under the current conditions. The following links provide information for holiday events occurring all over the state.

<https://www.exploregeorgia.org/things-to-do/article/georgias-signature-holiday-events>

<https://discoveratlanta.com/events/seasonal/christmas/>

<https://www.visitathensga.com/events/holiday/>

<https://gosouthsavannah.com/things-to-do/savannah-in-december.html>

<https://www.goldenisles.com/events/signature-holiday-events/>

<https://visitcolumbusga.com/events/madelines-christmas-1>

<https://www.maconga.org/things-to-do/holidays/>

<https://www.visitaugusta.com/christmas-in-augusta/>

<https://www.eventbrite.com/d/ga--valdosta/holiday--events/>



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