

Looking Back and Moving Forward

2020 was an up and down year for GSRA. At first glance, it would seem that 2020 was a complete down year for GSRA. However, when you start examining 2020 closely, you see that there were a lot of positives for GSRA in 2020.

Legislatively, we had the milestone event of having a bill that we lobbied long and hard for become law. I am speaking of the surprise medical bill law. Chuck Freedman, Joseph Drolet and Chuck Clay among others spent countless hours lobbying for the passage of this bill.

GSRA was also successful in getting Senate Bill 26 passed and signed into law. This bill allows ERS members to purchase Georgia Defined Compensation Plan (GDCP) service that was immediately prior to their ERS membership. As of November 2020, 149 ERS members have inquired into purchasing this service. 106 of those 149 members were deemed to be eligible to purchase their GDCP service.

We were able to get one of our two other high priority bills (authorizing COLAs for GSEPS retirees) through the House but it was sidelined in the Senate because of the Covid-19 pandemic. We also made progress and formed new relationships with key legislators on our other priority bill (providing for GSRA input into the selection process for certain ERS Board positions). We are optimistic that we can be successful in getting both bills passed in 2021.

Another legislative milestone of sorts was that GSRA was sought out by lobbyists concerning the proposed legislation addressing pharmacy benefit managers. This demonstrates that GSRA is a known and respected organization within the halls of the State Capitol. There are far too many folks to list here that had a hand in GSRA reaching this milestone.

2020 also saw GSRA successfully work with ERS staff on implementing the Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) relating to availability of retirees' contact information. We have seen some very positive results from the implementation of the MOU. We have recorded very significant membership increases the months following the implementation of an action item contained in the MOU.

So while we did have some disappointments in 2020, we were still able to achieve some very significant goals and objectives in 2020. In spite of the pandemic, GSRA is in a stronger position heading into 2021 than it was heading into 2020.

So what can you look forward to from GSRA in 2021?

The Legislative Committee has already developed a plan of action for the upcoming legislative session. We have begun reaching out to our friends in the legislature to gain their valuable advice and assistance. We are also waiting to hear from the Governor's Office about a potential meeting with Governor Kemp. We are working to arrange meetings with key representatives and senators.

Due to the impact of the pandemic, the annual "GSRA Day at the Capitol" will not be held in 2021. However, GSRA is exploring alternative means for putting GSRA and its issues in front of the legislature. We do not want to lose a valuable opportunity to interact with the legislators.

We will also be working with our friends in the legislature to determine the best means to refile the bills that we supported last session but that were not passed.

GSRA will not face the headwinds that it faced in 2020 so that there will be fewer downs and more ups for GSRA in 2021.

Happy New Year - 2021!

Unprecedented Times for GSRA

These are unprecedented times that we are currently experiencing. Kip Mann's wife received a Christmas card from a friend that contained a folded note inside with the following

poem that describes these times very well. We took the liberty of modifying it a little so it will fit the GSRA's experience this year. Please read below.

The Year – 2020

The year was 2020, in hindsight should've been left out!
One for the record books, viewed clearly, of that there is no doubt!
With COVID this, and COVID that, our lives were quite undone
And most of us are hoping we don't end up weighing a ton!

With politics, and riots all over this fair land...
All we can do is beg and plead for shelter in God's hands.
Perhaps it would have been quite fine to sleep thru the whole year...
But we would've had 12 full months of partner's snoring in our ear!

Every day's a gift... of that we're sure!
We're oft surprised by what we can endure!
Though we've not quite finished this trip we've had to own!
We hope most of us survive to see COVID **gone!**

Our Hearts do grieve for all those lost...we'll stay in constant prayer...
And to all those Essentials, on the front lines God Bless for being there!
To all of you, we send our love, and though not face to face,
Let's all agree to leave this year, and make the world a better place!

Sending Seasons Greetings and Good Tidings to you and yours,
And wishing health, joy, healing and happiness to All in 2021!!!

-Your GSRA Board

For all of us in GSRA this year has been a struggle in our personal lives, and in our organizational lives just to remain in contact with you, our members. Through it all we have worked together as a team to achieve our goals and objectives both at the state-wide level and in your local chapters. GSRA continues to grow its membership during

this time in spite of the passing of some of our members due to COVID.

To support our members in the coming year a group of current Board Members will work together to continue our membership recruiting and support efforts. Kip Mann, Bob Pollock, Melissa Belk, Allan Hill, Laura Pike, Joy Evans,

Rhonda Floyd, and Kevin Burke and others will work to strengthen local chapter support and statewide recruiting efforts to improve our organization and all of our lives. Stay

safe and well and keep in touch! We're here to help you, but we can't unless you let us know your needs.

Thank you for your continued support!

Jim's View: Looking Forward to 2021!



I hope everyone had a very Merry Christmas and will have a Happy New Year!!

I do not know about you, but I am looking forward to saying goodbye to 2020. It has been a very trying year for everyone, including GSRA. I pray that you and your loved ones have survived 2020 being no worse for the wear as they say.

I am really looking forward to 2021. The headwinds that GSRA faced in 2020 appear to be decreasing, if not disappearing altogether. The adverse economic impact of the pandemic is decreasing with each passing month. The stock market is at an all-time high. Most importantly, there are two proven vaccines on the way.

So having said that, we will still have to work very hard to convince the powers that be that it is the right time to restore the awarding of an annual COLA and begin to reverse the declining quality of life and purchasing power of the retired state employee. I assure you that the GSRA

Board and I will work very hard on this issue. However, we will need your support in this effort as well.

While you will not be able to attend the ERS Board meetings in person, you may be called on to respond to an Action Alert. I urge you to respond to these Action Alerts in your own words and in a timely manner. We use these Action Alerts sparingly, so when you receive one you know that it is an action item that you need to respond to promptly.

I am hopeful that at some point in 2021, we will be able to resume in-person chapter meetings and in October have an in-person Annual Meeting. I miss the enjoyment of interacting with my fellow retirees at a local chapter meeting or at our Annual Meeting.

Thank you for your continuing support of GSRA during these troubling times.

Take care, stay safe and I hope to see you soon.

Jim

Longtime Member Wins Annual Meeting Door Prize

Sarah Brownlee won this year's Annual Meeting door prize, a year's free membership in GSRA. Brownlee is one of GSRA's earliest members, having joined the association a month after its official formation. Sarah and her husband, Richard, are also among GSRA's most loyal members, being a reliable fixture at member events like the *Annual Meeting* and *GSRA Day at the Capitol*.

GSRA congratulates Sarah on her win and thanks her and Richard for being such great members and advocates for GSRA.



Sarah and Richard Brownlee

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, Chuck Freedman, GSRA Legislative Committee Chair, is featured.



Chuck Freedman
GSRA Legislative Committee
Chair

Chuck Freedman is a cofounder of the Georgia State Retirees Association and has served on the Policy and Operations Committee since its formation. He was vice president for three years. He continues to chair and serve on several committees, and he represents GSRA with the Georgia General Assembly as a registered lobbyist.

Chuck began and spent the bulk of his career with the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) where he performed and managed consulting studies and program evaluations to improve government operations and citizen services, and to reduce costs. He rose through the ranks becoming division director before his departure. Chuck also managed and performed major management improvement and legislative initiatives for five governors. Chuck was instrumental in the creation and implementation of Georgia Public Broadcasting, the Technical College System of Georgia, including its Adult Literacy program, and the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA).

Chuck completed his state career with the GTA. He initiated and directed GTA's first asset management program. He then managed and performed other complex projects for the CIO and other managers.

Prior to his state employment, Chuck obtained degrees at both Georgia Tech and Georgia State, worked as an industrial engineer in private industry, and served in the U.S. Army.

Chuck continues to be active in the community. In addition to his activities with GSRA, Chuck is a long-time volunteer supervisor for the Zaban-Paradies Center for

Homeless Couples. He formerly served on two advisory committees for Jewish Family and Children's Services. He managed election precincts for two statewide elections.

Chuck coached youth, high school baseball and adult baseball. He continues to play baseball locally and in tournaments on major league spring training fields with his great friend and GSRA Webmaster Kevin Burke. He has also played in many international goodwill trips including in Russia, China, Japan and India, and on Fenway Park's field.

Chuck is married to the former Kim Tappan. They have four sons and five grandchildren

Vote January 5th!

Arguably one of Georgia's more important elections in recent years is the runoff election for both US Senate seats scheduled for January 5th, 2021. Regardless which direction you lean, the outcome of this vote is critically important, as it will determine which party controls the Senate for the next two years.

As with the General Election in November, many Georgians have already voted early. If you aren't one of them, make plans to vote January 5th!



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