

## New Chairs for Retirement Committees; Slow Start to Session for Retirees

Senator Randy Robertson of Cataula, and Representative John Carson of Marietta, are the new chairs of the Senate and House Retirement Committees, respectively. Sen. Robertson served on the Senate Retirement Committee last session, during which he was quite supportive of ERS retirees and our issues. Rep. Carson is new to the House Retirement Committee, so we welcome the opportunity to acquaint him with our issues and obtain his support. Rep. Debbie Buckner and past chair Tommy Benton, who have supported us so well in the past, remain on the House committee.

The House Retirement Committee has several new members besides the new chair. They are: Cris Erwin of Homer, Stacey Evans of Atlanta, Sharon Henderson of Covington, Marvin Lim of Norcross, Derek Mallow of Savannah and Mary Frances Williams of Marietta. The Senate Retirement Committee's new members are Carden Summers of Cordele, Michelle Au of Johns Creek, Sally Harrell of Atlanta, and Billy Hickman of Statesboro.

As of Jan. 27, no bills had been introduced which directly affect ERS retirees. However, Governor Kemp submitted his FY 2021 budget recommendations, and the House passed a bill with minor changes. Neither of these included any mention of, let alone funding for, a "post-retirement benefit adjustment" – i.e., a bonus or a COLA. While this was not a surprise because no amended budget in memory has had that provision, GSRA also noted that the Governor's FY2022 budget recommendations also have no provision for a post-retirement benefit adjustment. GSRA once again will be working with the Administration, General Assembly, and ERS to have an adjustment considered favorably.

Governor Kemp did address many other budgetary needs when he delivered the annual State of the State address on Thursday, January 14, 2021. He began the address by reflecting on the negative situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. He announced that in addition to

last year's \$250M to CARES Act funds, the state will be allocating an additional \$70M in early March. The current unemployment rate in Georgia is below the national average at 5.7%. Georgia economic development numbers are still shattering records as we have witnessed a 40% increase in jobs created and a 47% increase in economic development compared to the first six months of FY20. Unlike New York and California, Georgia will not be facing budget cuts this year.

The Governor proposed budget priorities for a new Rural Innovation Fund, for assisting rural Georgia in obtaining high speed internet, for improving access to quality healthcare, and for Medicaid and Peachcare. Teachers and other school employees will be given a \$1,000 bonus. Other priorities include additional emergency educational relief funds, more funding for transportation infrastructure, and funding to help 10,000 college juniors and seniors currently enrolled in post-secondary education to complete their degrees and contribute to Georgia's workforce.

To further protect lives and livelihoods against the virus in the coming months, the Governor also laid out some of his top legislative priorities of the year, which include expanding the new PPE tax credit to include pharmaceutical and medical equipment manufacturers. After highlighting the Hate Crime Law that was passed last year, the Governor pledged to make Georgia a safer place for everyone. He announced his intent to introduce significant reforms to the state's citizen arrest statute, and working with legislative leaders from both parties.

First Lady Marty Kemp announced two bills that will be introduced to combat human trafficking. One will create an exception to Georgia's name change statute to protect survivors' privacy and safety; the second will create a state cause of action by which survivors may file a civil suit against their traffickers and others who knowingly profit from their victimization.

## 2021 GSRA Day at the Capitol Cancelled

At its January meeting, the GSRA Board voted to cancel this year's *GSRA Day at the Capitol* activities, including the joint *GSRA/GPHSA Legislative Reception*. This decision was not made lightly. After evaluating other options and alternative ways to get our message in front of the legislators, the Board reached the conclusion that, due to the Covid-19 measures in place in and around the Capitol, there was no feasible way to hold an event at the Capitol this year. In addition, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, whose office has authority over the use of the Capitol, decided not to allow outside groups to hold events inside the Capitol.

While we are all disappointed that we had to cancel, we're hoping that conditions will be greatly different next year and we can once again show up at the Capitol to make our voices heard in person. We hope to see you next year!

## GSRA Pension Deduction is the Easy Way to Go

Did you know that you can authorize your GSRA Dues to be deducted from your Retirement pension each month and never have to worry about your renewal date again?

For just \$1.67 per month, your dues will be paid, and you will not receive any more of those pesky renewal reminders. Just submit a Pension Deduction Authorization Form, which you can get off our website at [www.mygsra.com](http://www.mygsra.com) or you can call our office at (770) 312-2799 and we will be glad to put one in the mail to you.

Once you complete and mail it to the GSRA office, your membership profile is updated to reflect pension deduction

to start at the time of your next renewal. Your information is securely stored on the Employees Retirement System Server. If for any reason you would like to discontinue your pension deduction, just email us, or give us a call and we will be glad to take care of that for you also. It is just that simple.

We encourage you to take advantage of this great benefit of your GSRA Membership. If you still have questions or concerns, please give us a call at the number above.



### Jim's View: We're Reaching Out to State Leaders

Greetings my fellow retirees. I hope everyone had a happy New Year.

As you have read elsewhere in the newsletter, our annual *GSRA Day at the Capitol* regrettably had to be cancelled. We did explore the feasibility of holding some type of event in the Capitol that would provide us with high visibility and opportunities to interact with the legislators. However, the Speaker of the House, whose office manages the Capitol, decided to bar any outside groups from holding events in the Capitol, so we had no choice but to cancel the event altogether.

However, to keep from losing all interaction with the legislature, we have decided to do two things. First, we will be sending a short letter to all new Representatives and Senators welcoming them to the legislature and providing them with a copy of our legislative goals and objectives. This letter should have already gone out by the time you read this newsletter.

The second thing we are going to do is send each legislator a short video message stating our case for the restoration of the annual COLA. The video should also have gone out by the time you read this newsletter. We will likely

put a copy of the video on our webpage and Facebook page. So I invite you to log on and see the video. Hopefully, you will approve of the video.

In addition to all of the above, the MVP of our legislative efforts, Chuck Clay, our Legislative Liaison, has been busy making the political circles (Governor's Office, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House, etc.) and making the case why the restoration of the annual COLA makes good political sense. Because of his political connections, Chuck is able to get behind closed doors with the political leaders in a way that GSRA's Legislative Committee members are not able to do. This is why I often say that hiring Chuck Clay was a grand slam homerun hire for GSRA.

Before I stop writing about the legislature, I do want to mention that our good friend Senator Randy Robertson has been named the new Chair of the Senate Retirement Committee. In addition, the new Chair of the House Retirement Committee is Representative John Carson from Cobb County. Representative Carson has attended our legislative receptions in past years. We will be reaching out to him very soon to set up a Zoom meeting with him.

As for the ERS Board, we are approaching the first of two very important meetings that they will hold. As you may

recall, I have requested to be placed on the agenda for the February 18th ERS Board meeting. I made that request in a letter that I wrote to the ERS Board in December. A copy of that letter was also shared with the Governor's Office. In addition, we have reached out to several ERS Board members requesting to meet with them. So far, we had a very productive conversation with one of the ERS Board members. We hope to meet with more board members prior to February 18th.

While the ERS Board will not vote on awarding a COLA at their February Board meeting (that will be done at the April meeting), it is the last opportunity we will have to state our case before they vote in April. So, please be on the lookout for any Action Alerts you receive from GSRA. Since visitors are not allowed at the ERS Board meetings because of Covid-19 restrictions, the Action Alerts are the only way we have of "showing up". We will need you to show up!! You have always showed up when asked in the past and I am sure you will do so this year as well.

Take care, be safe, and stay healthy. I want to see all of you, God willing, later this year at our Annual Meeting at Lake Blackshear.

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, Dan Coffee, GSRA Legislative Committee Member, is featured.



**Dan Coffee**  
**GSRA Legislative Committee Member**

Dan Coffee retired from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) in 2013 after three decades of service. After graduating from Georgia Tech with a civil engineering degree, Dan began his career with GDOT in the Tifton District as an engineer trainee spending time working

in various units to gain familiarity with GDOT operations. His first permanent assignment was in the Valdosta Area Office working on I-75 and US 84 construction widening projects. In 1987 Dan transferred to the Thomaston District to oversee I-185 widening in Columbus and later served as GDOT's Area Engineer in Columbus before moving up to GDOT's General Office in Atlanta.

Dan spent eighteen years working in GDOT's Office of Construction Claims dealing with contractor claims against GDOT and coordinating with the Attorney General's Office

with the defense of claims and lawsuits. Dan assisted field staff across the state with issues that arose on construction projects. Between 2009 and 2011, during a hiring freeze period, Dan served in a dual role as acting administrator for GDOT's Office of Audits. Dan retired as the administrator for the Office of Construction Claims under GDOT's Legal Division.

GDOT is like one big family! Dan has long been active in the GDOT Employees Association (GDOTE) promoting the interests, welfare, and professionalism of GDOT employees. He recalls a meeting with Commissioner Wayne Shackleford in the mid-1990's where GDOTE officers presented a resolution seeking air-conditioning in new trucks. As high-level staff members sitting behind Mr. Shackleford were shaking their heads "No" the group could see anger building in Mr. Shackleford's face. Then, to everyone's surprise, Mr. Shackleford slammed his fist on the board room table declaring that GDOT employees were not second-class state employees and if other state agencies were buying new trucks with A/C then GDOT could too.

As Mr. Shackleford spun his chair around to address his staff, they were all quickly nodding their heads up and down "Yes" in agreement. Other significant GDOTE achievements over the years included successfully lobbying for an increase in the retirement factor for ERS New Plan members from 1.5 to 2.0 and for forfeited leave to count toward service years for retirement.

Dan grew up in northern Taylor County and lives just up the road in Talbot County. He is involved in many community activities including the Talbot County Chamber of Commerce, the Talbot Lion's Club, and the Taylor County Historical-Genealogical Society. Dan also serves on the Talbot County Board of Tax Assessors. He is a member of Wesley United Methodist Church.

Dan joined GSRA in 2008 and is active in the Tri-County Chapter. He served two terms as Chapter President and currently serves as the Chapter's Legislative Liaison.

As a new member of the GSRA Board, Dan looks forward to working with Chuck Freedman on the Legislative Committee toward promoting the association and achieving our legislative goals.

## Important - GSRA Has a New Mailing Address!

**GSRA  
P.O. Box 6308  
Elberton, GA 30635**



## Donate to GSRA Legal Fund

GSRA's Legal Fund was established as a dedicated legal fund in the event that leadership, on behalf of its members, ever has to retain legal counsel. The fund will be used to cover all appropriate legal fees related to ensuring that retiree benefits are not reduced or eliminated.

Every donation makes a difference. For more information and to donate to this fund click on the link below.

[GSRA Legal Fund](#)





**Take a new look at an old friend**  
Choose an Anthem Medicare Advantage plan.



Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield is the trade name of Blue Cross Blue Shield Healthcare Plan of Georgia, Inc. Independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. ANTHEM is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc.

Y0114\_18\_32445\_I 09/01/2017 74123GASENABS



**LIVE LIFE, UNINTERRUPTED.**

**KEEP LIVING YOUR WAY.**  
You can, with these benefits and discounts from **GSRA & AMBA**:

- Dental & Vision Insurance
- Long-Term Care
- MASA (Air and Ground Ambulance Plan)
- Cancer, Heart & Stroke Policy
- Accident Policy
- Medicare Supplement Policy
- Easy Issue Life Policy
- Hearing Benefits
- Discounts on Travel, Dining & more

**GSRA** **AMBA**  
ASSOCIATION AMERICA RETIRES ASSOCIATION

Learn more: 1-877-556-4582  
[myambabenefits.info/gsra](http://myambabenefits.info/gsra)  
GEORGIA STATE RETIREEES ASSOCIATION

**YOU ARE OUR PRIORITY**

OUR MEMBERS FORM THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Since 1926, 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 exhibitor table at GSRA. For more information, visit [apcu.com](http://apcu.com), or call us at (404) 768-4125 or toll-free at (800) 847-9431.



**SERVING** U.S. POSTAL SERVICE EMPLOYEES ★ STATE & FEDERAL WORKERS IN GA ★ RETIREEES & THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

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



**UnitedHealthcare® is proud to be a sponsor of the GSRA Annual Meeting.**

**SHBP retirees give UnitedHealthcare® Medicare Advantage plans over 96% satisfaction.\***

Visit us online anytime  
Learn more at [www.UHCRetirees.com/shbp](http://www.UHCRetirees.com/shbp)  
Toll-free 877-755-5343, TTY 711, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. local time, 7 days a week.



\*2017 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.  
H2001\_180901\_041543\_M SPRJ44291