



Newsletter

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March 2021

Success at the Dome!

It has been a good March so far for GSRA. GSRA'S substitute bill HB 173, authored by our long-time friend Chairman Rep. Tommy Benton, passed the Senate on March 25 with just one dissenting vote. HB 173 provides for GSRA to have input into the selection of two of the seven ERS board of trustees members, a long-time goal of GSRA. This has the potential of giving ERS retirees advocates on the board which makes decisions affecting retirees' benefits. It also authorizes large public retirement systems EXCEPT for ERS and TRS to increase the percentage of their retirement funds placed in alternative investments from 5% to 10%. It was presented by Chairman Sen. Chuck Hufstetler. HB 173 now goes to the Governor for signature and becoming law.

The FY 2022 budget, HB 81, has passed the Senate with minor changes and has been sent back to the House for agreement or a conference committee. Neither the House nor Senate versions have any money for a post-retirement adjustment, but they both have the same statement: "The Board of Trustees is urged to consider a benefit adjustment for retired state employees in accordance with sound actuary principles." While this statement does not advocate for a COLA, it also does not advocate solely for a 13th check. It leaves that decision to the ERS board.

HB 593 to reduce income taxes by increasing taxpayers' standard deductions by a minimal amount (\$48 for single filers; \$66 for married filing jointly) will reduce annual revenues by roughly \$140 million. That amount with the current federal matching funds would pay for about 1.5% COLA. HB 593 sailed through both houses.

SB 167 by Sen. Nan Orrock, with 15 sponsors, remains in the Senate Retirement Committee pending a post-session meeting to decide whether to refer this bill for actuarial review – that is, to determine how much it will cost. SB 167 does two things desired by GSRA. It mandates semi-annual 1.5% COLAs under most circumstances, and it, in effect, authorizes COLAs to be granted to GSEPs retirees should the ERS board ever grant COLAs.

A Senate substitute to HB 146 by Rep. Houston Gaines was agreed to by the House. HB 146 provides for paying state employees and teachers three weeks of parental leave for the birth of a child or placement of a child for adoption or foster care. No other bills affecting retirees were in play during the month.

Much hard work and finesse were required to get HB 173 passed in its final form. HB 173 originally started out to address only alternative investments for all large public retirement systems including ERS but excluding TRS. It authorized the included retirement systems to increase the amount of their pension funds which they could place in alternative investments from 5% to 10%. But well over 90% of GSRA membership responding to a poll opposed this increase. They also overwhelmingly opposed ERS retirees being treated differently than TRS retirees.

In the meantime, GSRA had been stymied since last year in finding sponsorship for our bill to provide for our input into the selection of three out of the seven ERS board members. Rep. Matthew Gambill volunteered to help us out, but his bill was halted by a technicality. We learned concurrently that the Governor's staff had concerns about the bill. Through the outstanding resourcefulness and persistence of our great advocate and Legislative Liaison Chuck Clay, who worked closely with new House Retirement Chair John Carson, enough of those concerns were allayed that we were given the green light to proceed in a modified form -- the approval was given for GSRA to have input into the selection of two of the ERS board members. But we now had another pitfall - as a non-fiscal retirement bill, it could not be introduced after the session's 20th day, and that had just passed. So Chair Carson hunted for another retirement bill which could be amended and came up with HB 173.

Proceeding forward was not a difficult choice for us, although it was one we preferred not to make. The long-term upside of potentially having two ERS board members more sympathetic to ERS retirees' worsening financial conditions

seemed more beneficial than the possible risks of alternative investments' failures in collapsing financial markets.

So GSRA representatives Chuck Clay and Chuck Freedman attended the House Retirement Committee meeting on March 2 to speak for the substitute. In the question period that followed, Rep. Stacey Evans, who had learned about GSRA's poll on alternative investments, said she was uncomfortable passing a bill which was opposed by the vast majority of people affected by it. After considerable discussion by many members and ERS director Jim Potvin, and the agreement of Chair Benton, a substitute for HB 173 was proposed and unanimously passed out of committee. The substitute is exactly what GSRA requested and also retains provisions sought by other public retirement systems -- a true win-win.

GSRA's substitute HB 173 passed unanimously in the House on March 8. It was presented by Chair Tommy Benton, who also shepherded it through the House Rules Committee March 5. This was after he had agreed to

GSRA's desired changes to the original bill as requested in committee on March 2.

Chairman Benton ushered HB 173 through Senate Rules and presented it to the Senate Retirement Committee on March 17. GSRA was represented at the meeting by Chuck Clay and GSRA president Jim Sommerville. The bill went back through Rules to the Senate floor on March 25. Through all this time, Chuck Clay was in contact with all the pertinent parties to make sure the bill kept moving toward passage.

GSRA greatly appreciates the contributions of Rep. Matthew Gambill, who initiated a bill, never introduced but used as the basis to amend the original HB 173, to change the ERS board appointment process. We also appreciate the contributions of House Chairs John Carson and Tommy Benton, of Rep. Stacey Evans, of Senate Chair Chuck Hufstetler and of Senate Rules Chair Jeff Mullis. We encourage those of you who are constituents of any of these fine representatives to send or call them with your thanks.

GSRA Membership Drive – New Members BOGO

GSRA will soon begin a new membership drive to increase our membership. Once again we are offering two years of membership for the price of one year's membership to all new people who sign up and join GSRA between April 1 and December 31, 2021. In addition, we are targeting four specific target groups that we wish to extend this offer to:

1. Former GSRA members whose membership expired before August 31, 2020) who are listed as inactive on our rolls that we want to encourage to rejoin (if they themselves have not expired). Keeping or bringing back old members is important to the life of the organization.
2. We now have access to the Employees' Retirement System's list of retirees who have indicated that they want to receive info from GSRA. We will offer these potential **new** members the added incentive of buy one year membership, get their second year free.

3. We wish to extend our 2 years membership for 1 year's price to members of Georgia Public Human Service Association (GPHSA) members. We have gotten permission from GPHSA to submit a letter through them to their members making this offer to join our association also. As I'm sure you know GPHSA has been a collaborative partner of GSRA, representing active and retired state employees, for years.
4. Finally, we are offering all our current members the opportunity to "gift" a membership to someone you know who is eligible to join GSRA, whether already retired or still in active employment. When you send in the membership application on their behalf, with **your** \$20.00, we'll notify them and acknowledge your gift, as a current GSRA member, of the complimentary two-year membership. It's a no-risk opportunity for them to experience the benefits of membership and hopefully will lead them to renew when the time comes. It's an easy way to spread good will and

the good word about our Association. Several members said they wanted this option so we're answering your request.

We've been successful four out of the past five years championing retiree interests with the Legislature and ERS, receiving multiple one-time adjustments, but it's become obvious to get back to receiving COLAs on a regular basis we must increase our membership numbers and increase our clout each year. Increased numbers really count! As usual GSRA members continue to benefit all retirees from state government and it's time more retirees join us in this effort to receive maximum benefits. Thank you for your understanding, support, and help in this membership drive!

Kip Mann
Membership Chair

Donate to the GSRA Legal Fund



[GSRA Legal Fund](#)

GSRA Pension Deduction

We talked, you listened. Thank you to all of you who submitted your Pension Deduction form authorizing GSRA to deduct dues from your ERS pension each month. You can rest easy that your dues will be kept up to date, and that is one due date you will not have to remember.

For current members who have not yet taken advantage of Pension Deduction for their renewals and would like to, please visit our website at www.mygsra.com and you will find the form there OR call the GSRA office at (770) 312-2799 and we will be glad to mail one to you. The dues deduction is \$1.67 per month and not only does this keep your membership active, it also provides financial stability for the association.

Please do not hesitate to let us know if you have any questions or concerns.



Jim's View: An Action Alert will be coming!

As you can probably tell from reading this newsletter, GSRA's Legislative Committee has been very busy and hard at work during this legislative session.

Although it is only legislative day 38 when I am writing this column, we already know that the budget will include language in it encouraging the ERS Board of Trustees to provide retired state employees some type of post benefit adjustment. Our sources tell us that the language in the

budget is open ended and does not specify whether that post benefit adjustment is a one time “bonus” check or a cost of living adjustment (COLA). We also understand from our sources that the House of Representatives included some extra funds in the appropriation to the ERS to cover a portion of whatever post benefit adjustment that the ERS Board decides to provide retired state employees. We are hopeful that when it is all said and done those extra funds will still be there.

So now our attention turns to the ERS Board meeting scheduled for 10:00 am on April 15th. At this meeting, the Board of Trustees will vote on whether or not to provide a post benefit adjustment to retired state employees. There are several positive economic factors that we hope will allow the Board of Trustees to finally provide state retirees with increased economic stability by voting on April 15th to grant a COLA. I mentioned several of those factors in my address to the ERS Board at their February meeting. You can find my talk in the February newsletter.

While we will not be able to physically address the ERS Board at their April meeting, we can let them hear from our members in the days leading up to the meeting. As we get closer to the April meeting, be on the lookout for an Action Alert from GSRA. Please be ready to immediately respond to that alert by sending, in your own words, an email to the

ERS Board describing how the lack of a COLA has diminished the purchasing power of your pension, created long term financial instability for you and adversely impacted your standard of living, as well as those loved ones who may depend on your pension for their daily sustenance.

You have been very supportive of our efforts in the past to have the annual COLAs restored. I appreciate the support you have shown. I know that I can count on that same level of support from you, if not more, in the coming days as we approach the April 15th meeting.

Thank you.

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, Sadie Rogers, GSRA At-Large Board Member, is featured.



Sadie Rogers
GSRA At-Large Board Member

After graduating from Carson-Newman College, Sadie began her first full time job as a high school social studies teacher.

(Teaching in some form would keep following her thereafter.) Later she moved to Louisville, Ky. to begin a time as a social worker and teacher in adoptions, foster care, and community support. In 1967 she arrived in Georgia, doing much of the same thing at the Georgia Baptist Children's Home.

In 1968, Sadie ran into an old college friend, who suggested she apply for a job with the State of Georgia, Division of Children and Youth. She did, and began her State of Georgia career by being the first female court services worker. Later she was asked to work in a new volunteer effort in the Division of Children and Youth, recruiting and training citizens to work as support backup to juvenile offenders. When Gov. Carter came into office he wanted volunteers as support to all social services offices, so she moved to the new Office of Volunteer Services as a regional director.

Sadie's next move was to the Division of Aging Services to serve as director of Staff Development and

Training. This was the beginning of 18 years of teaching, securing trainers, securing venues, and arranging 20 to 30 conferences and meetings annually. The conferences/meetings took on legs and required a new skill set in management of government contracts, as well as learning industry standards. That training came with the Society of Government Meeting Professionals. In 1986, Sadie, two hotel sales staff, and two CDC conference managers helped form the Atlanta Chapter of Society of Government Meeting Professionals (SGMP). Sadie later served on the organization's national board and as national president.

Somehow, during all this, Sadie squeezed in a year of graduate study in management, sponsored by an agreement with Georgia State University and the Division of Aging Services. After that came another move, this time to the DHR Office of Conferences and Meetings.

Finally the sainted 33 years rolled over, and she went out with the phone ringing, thinking she was lucky to have worked the lifespan from babies to senior adults. In 2001, she retired to be a citizen volunteer and professional grandmother.

Rejuvenation, Fellowship and Celebration Come Join Us at the 2021 GSRA Annual Meeting

While the 2020 Annual Meeting was different by being virtual, the 2021 Annual Meeting will be different because it will be a celebration of the return of living our lives on our terms. Many of the details still need to be finalized, but the two things we know for sure is that we will be meeting in-person on October 4-5, 2021, at Lake Blackshear Resort in Veterans State Park, and that it will be a lot of fun.

We encourage all members who participate to have received the COVID vaccination and to continue to wear masks while inside in large groups. We will be having a major announcement about the agenda by late April. Mark your calendars and plan to celebrate the renewal of longtime friendships and the making of new friendships. Hope to see you there!

February New Members

Name	City		Name	City		Name	City
William Byrd, Jr	Rock Springs		Bernard Hudson	Woodland		Jimmy Walton	Milledgeville
John Cunningham	Ellenwood		Lyndell Mickelson	LaGrange			
Billy Dampier	Brunswick		Timothy Potts	Covington			
Julia Hewgley	Acworth		Diane Turner	Dublin			

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APCU partners with Members Health 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 Sherril Roman, a Managing Associate with Members Health Management, to offer a great workshop, "Money Talk 101," at GSRA. This seminar is designed to facilitate conversations around financial education 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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