



Newsletter

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January 2024

Session Kicks Off with ERS Pension Fund to Get Massive Infusion; No Additional Money for Increased COLAs; Retirees to Get a Small Bonus

By Chuck Freedman

The governor submitted his budget recommendations for Amended FY 2024 and for FY 2025. The AFY budget has \$500 million – yes, \$500 million – to pay off unfunded liabilities and increase the funding percentage by about 2.5% to around 74%. We continue to hear that the governor and leadership intend to add another \$500 million in each of the next two years to hopefully raise the funding percentage to 80%, as long as that money is “available” – just like we will get COLAs when money for them is “available.”

These huge amounts are good for the long run. They will ensure the continued viability of the fund’s ability to pay retirees their **current** benefits. But these \$500 million investments **WILL NOT HELP** retirees in the short run because they will not fund COLAs. Even when the fund eventually gets to 80%, Executive Director Potvin tells us that will not have the effect of doubling the amount of COLA calculated by ERS formula. (Contact legislation@mygsra.com for an explanation). This confirms that an additional \$280 - \$300 million (each year) in total funds are still required for annual COLAs to average 3%, with ERS using its funding policy model to determine the COLA amount each year. GSRA will again be attempting to find supporters for the additional funding needed for higher COLAs in FY ‘25

The governor’s recommendations retain the \$26.75 million for one-time benefit adjustments this year, and another \$26.75 million for the same next year.

The governor also recommended “almost a quarter billion dollars” for schools to pay their share of employer contributions for the State Health Benefit Plan. The governor stated that this will allow school employees to continue the same plans that we do without degraded coverage or increased premium/out-of-pocket costs. What this money will really do is avoid the long-term practice of having state agencies subsidize school employees’ health care through higher employer contributions.

All of the governor’s recommendations have been included in the respective appropriations bills. ERS Executive Director Jim Potvin made his annual presentations to the Joint Appropriations Committee and again to the House Appropriations Education Subcommittee. You can see his remarks and the subsequent questions [here](#), starting at 2:34:10.

The Senate Retirement Committee took the first action of the session on retirement bills. None of the bills, in the first session, directly impact GSRA members.

In Memoriam

Representative Richard Smith

Representative Richard Smith, who was a dedicated member of the Georgia House of Representatives from Columbus and who led the powerful House Rules Committee, recently passed away at age 78.

GSRA will remember Representative Smith who was a supporter of retirees and a leader in the effort to reduce/abolish surprise medical billing. GSRA presented Representative Smith our legislative service award for his efforts on behalf of GSRA members and all state retirees. Smith was elected to the House 20 years ago and Chuck Clay our GSRA lobbyist had this observation, “Smith was soft spoken, organized, and always courteous, even while presiding over the often contentious and occasionally raucous House Rules Committee. Throughout, he maintained a steady calm presence while maintaining a firm grip. He was always a strong spokesman for state employees, teachers and retirees of both.”

His advocacy for GSRA and all retirees will be missed.



Figure 1: Georgia House Rules Committee Chairman, Representative Richard Smith.

A Message about the GSRA Facebook Page

By Allan Hill

Our GSRA Facebook homepage is a public page, meaning anyone can access it. GSRA did this because it is part of our outreach efforts for new members, to make it accessible for potential members. Our Facebook administrator monitors the page regularly and has identified a potential stalker trying to contact female users.

Our administrator has seen this person reply to comments posted by women that say “Hi, I don't know if you are comfortable with this, I like your profile. I've tried adding you to my friends list, but it doesn't seem to work. That's why I decided to comment here. If you don't mind, you can add me to your friends list so we can be good friends, thank you.” (See below for a screen shot of the referenced comment.)

We have blocked this potential stalker, so he should not be replying to anyone's posts again. But we cannot stop somebody else from trying the same thing. Please, do not respond to any of these posts. We want everyone to feel safe and comfortable with our Facebook page. If you feel you are being stalked or harassed, please contact webmaster@mygsra.com.

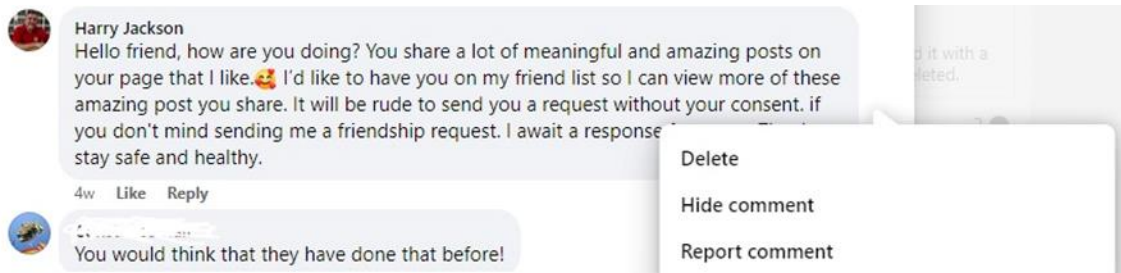


Figure 2: GSRA Website. Screenshot of the comments left by a potential stalker with the options to manage the comment.

Thanks for your support of GSRA, and please, continue to visit our Facebook page for updates and information.



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From the Home Office

By Robert Riddle

Hello everyone! I'm coming to you from my little home office (converted bedroom) and hoping everyone had a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

It's with a good deal of trepidation that I assume the reins of GSRA President from the able hands of Beverly Littlefield. She has done a fantastic job as President, and we have made progress in moving GSRA forward under her leadership. She has been and continues to be a wonderful mentor and with the Board's help, I hope I can stand on her shoulders and continue to move GSRA forward in a way that benefits all our current and future members.

As Chuck Freedman's legislative report indicates, we have already had a busy January when it comes to legislative activities. I am grateful for Governor Kemp's commitment to the sustainability of ERSGA with his recommendation for a \$500 million appropriation into the retirement fund. House and Senate Appropriation Chairs have voiced support for shoring up the retirement system with this appropriation. Although, it does not mean that we will start getting COLAs again from this infusion of state dollars, it is a step in the right direction. It is a reminder that all members must strive to stay in touch with your local representatives and senators regarding your need for a meaningful COLA. More than me, Legislative Chair, Chuck Freedman, our fine lobbyist Chuck Clay, and the GSRA Board; the elected officials listen to you: their neighbors and constituents. So please take a moment to send a note or email to your legislator expressing your thanks and appreciation for their support and needs of state retirees.

Finally, I would also like to express my appreciation to Judy Bryson for agreeing to serve as Vice President and the other volunteers that serve as GSRA Board members and Chapter Presidents. A special shout out to Kevin Burke, who is recovering from a recent procedure, for all the IT support he manages for GSRA. I hope to get out to all chapter meetings and meet as many of you as I can in the coming months. I look forward to the coming year and the progress we will make for GSRA, and all state retirees and I hope you will feel free to reach out to me with your thoughts and concerns.

Local Chapter News

GSRA Southwest Ga Chapter



Figure 3: Southwest Georgia Chapter members.

The Southwest Georgia chapter met on January 17th at Albany State University's West campus.

Chapter President, Bob Pollock welcome everyone and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Captain Jason Carter with the Dougherty County Sheriff's Department presented an interesting and informative report on scams and how to avoid them.

President Pollock reminded members that the General Assembly was in session and encouraged attendees to ask their representatives and senators to support GSRA legislation especially COLA related.

ABC Douglas Chapter



Figure 4: ABC Douglas Chapter members enjoying lunch.

ABC of Douglas Chapter had meeting on January 15, 2024, at the Covered Wagon. Our speaker was Susan Preston, a pharmacist from Malcolm's Drug Store. She provided a very insightful presentation regarding medication management in health care.

Tri-County Chapter



Figure 5: Tri-County Chapter members enjoyed lunch and an update on GSRA's legislative priorities.

The Tri-County Chapter held its first quarterly meeting of 2024 on January 29th at Doodlum's Barbecue & Fruit Stand in Woodbury with twenty six (26) members in attendance. The meeting began at 11:30 AM with an opening prayer. Everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch and fellowship. An update was provided on the 2024 legislative session along with GSRA's legislative priorities and ongoing efforts. Upcoming election dates for local and federal elections were provided as part of information sharing. The next chapter meeting is tentatively planned for Monday, April 29th back at Doodlum's Barbecue Restaurant in Woodbury.



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Columbus/West Georgia Chapter

Please join the GSRA Columbus/West Georgia Chapter meeting on Tuesday, February 13, 2024, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at B. Merrells Restaurant, 7600 Veterans Parkway, Columbus, Georgia. You will be able to purchase your lunch if you choose to eat. The restaurant does not open until 11:00 but we ask that you arrive promptly so that orders can be taken at the beginning of our meeting. For planning purposes, it is extremely important to know how many will attend. Please RSVP no later than Sunday, February 11th to one of the numbers listed at the end of this update.

Judy Bryson, President-Elect for GSRA will be providing a legislative update. There will also be time to discuss activities chapter members would like to have at upcoming chapter meetings.

We are looking forward to seeing you soon. Be sure and RSVP! Bring your ideas, suggestions and perhaps a potential new member. To RSVP or if you have any questions, please contact one of the officers listed below.

President, Gloria Coker/706-577-5913

Vice President/Treasurer, Judy Bryson/404-558-9634

Secretary, Cindy Tharp/706-289-1639



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Welcome New Members!

December			
Name	City	Name	City
Tony Sampson	Valdosta	Anthony Thomas	Kingston
Patricia Davis	Lizella	Joann Butts	Milledgeville
Early Watkins	Stone Mountain	Thornell King	Darien
Mary Womack	Macon	Gerry Dean	San Antonio, TX
Lesia Cason	Hazlehurst	Sherry Washington	Patterson, GA
Brenda Jackson	Milledgeville	Robert Faulkner, Jr	Statham
Robbie Jeffcoat	Navasota, TX	Freweini Love	Hephzibah
Winnie Cleghorn	Blackshear	Joe Johnson	Summerville
Pam Thomas	Eastman	Cynthia Cartwright	Atlanta



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