

Legislative Committee Update

Through March 7, this legislative session's first 30 days have been very benign for GSRA members. "Cross-over" day 30 occurred Thursday, March 7, which means that neither legislative house will accept bills from the other house. Of course, this does not prevent bills which have been accepted from being amended or even substituted for ("Christmas trees" or "vehicles") to reflect the content of bills that did not cross.

While there have been several bills addressing various retiree benefit issues, none directly affected current ERS

and SHBP members, and only one bill -- HB 263 -- addressed SHBP premiums for future state employees, K-12 employees, and Technical College System of Georgia employees. HB 263 did not cross.

On the fiscal front, State revenue collections were excellent in December and January, averaging about 10% above the same months a year ago. However, the February collections were disappointing, being in the 4% range. Consequently, the Governor and General Assembly are being conservative in their appropriations. The FY 2013 amended budget bill has passed both houses but in different forms. The subsequent conference committee report was adopted. The FY 2014 appropriations bill contains funding for the ERS Board's requested Annual Required Contribution which is reportedly sufficient to fund future pension benefits but not sufficient to fund cost of living adjustments. The bill does not contain funding adequate to stabilize State Health Benefit Plan member premiums, let alone to retire some of the unfunded future liability for retiree health benefits.

Of course there have been several actions and bills addressing issues more general than retiree benefits. Those receiving the most publicity have been bills to foster better governmental ethics, bills concerning funding for the state's Medicaid program, and a consensus bill reforming youth criminal justice.

HB 263 was authored by Rep. Chuck Martin and sponsored by House Retirement Committee chairman Paul Battles and member Lynn Riley. As originally drafted, HB 263 would have prohibited the state from subsidizing SHBP premiums for individuals employed *after June 30, 2013*, both during their employment and subsequent retirement. It would *not have affected current employees*, other than those with undefined breaks in service that would last beyond June 30, or current retirees. Companion organizations including Georgia Professional Human Services Association (GPHSA), Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE), Georgia Retired Educators Association (GREA), and Georgia Association of

*****ATTENTION GSRA MEMBERS*****

The Thomasville Local Chapter is hosting a meeting for all GSRA members and potential members on April 12, 2013 at the Public Library in Thomasville, Georgia from 12:30 pm to 4:00 pm. Speakers include GSRA President Bill Tomlinson, Vice President Kip Mann, Treasurer BJ Bennett and GSRA Legislative Liaison Chuck Freedman. AMBA will also be making a presentation about the benefits available to GSRA members.

There will be a refreshment break about 2:15 pm and door prizes will be awarded at the end of the meeting.

Come join us in Thomasville, Georgia on Friday, April 12th.

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Thomasville, GA 31792
RSVP to 229-200-9535*

Educators (GAE) all had severe reservations about HB 263 and coordinated their opposition with GSRA. GSRA prepared two fact sheets to support our position. We were effective. Rep. Martin withdrew the bill, it did not "cross," and it appears the bill is dead in any form.

GSRA president Bill Tomlinson and legislative liaison Chuck Freedman attended the House Retirement Committee meeting at which Rep. Chuck Martin presented his rationale for drafting HB 263. Rep. Martin maintained that his intent was never to stop funding health insurance for active employees, only for newly hired employees after they retire. He said he was most concerned with about \$15 billion in future benefits' liability and the depletion of the SHBP OPEB reserve fund. HB 263 was to be a vehicle to make decision makers aware of the need to fund these liabilities. Rep. Martin acknowledged that he was aware of the potential problems arising from his provisions affecting breaks in service. He said he would be coming forth with a substitute that would more clearly reflect his intent, but none was submitted.

A number of committee members asked a variety of questions, with most of them prefacing their remarks with statements as to their concerns about the bill. Rep. Coleman, a leading teacher advocate, expressed concerns about the impact on state employees. Rep. Wilkerson asked about the impact on individual retirees. The public was invited to speak afterwards. The first several speakers were teachers and teacher advocates including representatives of GAE and PAGE, all of whom opposed the bill for various reasons. Chuck Freedman for GSRA and Wayne Drummond for GPHSA were the last to speak. Freedman complimented Rep. Martin for wanting to fully fund the SHBP OPEB liability but questioned the advisability of addressing only one component of employee compensation in isolation. He noted that the state's low employment market competitiveness was deplorable six years ago and had lost ground subsequently. This has exacerbated the great difficulty of recruiting and retaining competent and motivated staff to deliver the services demanded by the public. Freedman suggested that the state as an employer might be better served by a study of total employee compensation to identify various plausible options and their relative cost-benefits. He concluded by requesting that Rep. Martin consider requesting a study committee for this purpose in lieu of any other form of HB 263. Mr. Drummond expressed similar concerns for recruiting and retaining human services professionals.

Rep. Martin had a lengthy conversation with

Tomlinson and Freedman after the meeting ended. He expressed openness to further study, although it was not totally clear how open he would be having the study cover all employee compensation. Rep. Martin subsequently sent Freedman a letter confirming his intent to work with GSRA.

As reported in last month's newsletter, Senate Retirement Committee chairman Fran Millar requested that GSRA provide him an updated list of top legislative priorities. GSRA leadership was glad to comply, sending him two lists -- short-term and long-term priorities. We gave him two documents: [one contained just the lists](#); the [second contained our rationale for including each priority](#). These priorities are consistent with opinions expressed by members over the last few years.

Other bills of potential interest to GSRA members which have crossed include:

- HB 71 by Lynn Riley (71st) to authorize the Georgia Municipal Employees Benefit System and associations of political subdivisions to invest up to 10 percent of the total assets of their respective funds in real estate. GSRA is concerned about future use of this bill as a precedent to authorize ERS to do the same.
- HB 361 CS by Lindsey (54th) to, among other things, require employees' written authorization in order for employers or labor unions to be able to deduct member dues. It is unclear as to whether this bill might apply to GSRA or GREA members.
- HB 454 by Martin (49th) to authorize reviews of tax breaks to help determine if they are achieving their intended goals. This is a good government bill.
- HB 511 CS and HR 603 by Dempsey (13th). HB 511 was originally brought to GSRA legislative committee attention by member Aileen Hycner in our Metro Chapter. The bill authorizes DCH to undertake a 2 year pilot study of bariatric (obesity prevention and/or correction) surgery results for up to 75 SHBP members, to include covering the costs of the patients' care. HR 603 directs DCH to use existing data for the same purpose.
- SB 24 by Bethel (54th) to authorize DCH to assess hospitals for provider payments for the purpose of obtaining federal Medicaid matches. (flew through both houses and signed by Governor)

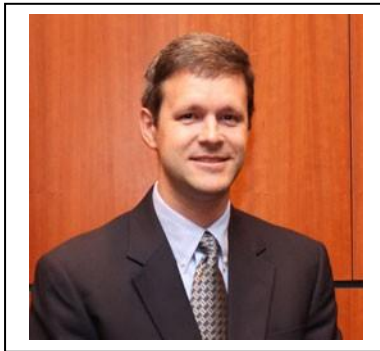
- SB 224 by Golden (8th) to authorize certain funds for venture capital investments. GSRA has initiated inquiries to determine whether the ERS pension fund could be used for such investments. If the answer turns out to be yes, GSRA will seek to amend SB 224 to preclude such use of the pension fund for the purposes of SB 224.

Other bills which crossed over and which impact other retirement systems include: House Bills 246 and 345, and Senate Bills 142, 143, and 178. See the complete list of bills of interest including descriptions and status by clicking this link, [Legislative Status Report](#).

ERS DIRECTOR TO SPEAK IN DUBLIN

Mr. Jim Potvin, Executive Director of the Employees Retirement System of Georgia, will address a GSRA sponsored meeting in Dublin, GA on Tuesday, April 30th beginning at 11 am. There is no cost to attend this meeting; however, since the meeting is scheduled at the Cloverleaf Restaurant, lunch is available for a fee. All GSRA Members, as well as all active or retired state employees covered under the ERS, are invited to attend.

Jim Potvin is the Executive Director of the Employees' Retirement System of Georgia (ERSGA). He joined ERSGA in February, 2009, after 15 years in private industry working in retirement plan administration and consulting.



He began as a pension administrator for Georgia-Pacific Corporation, before moving into a consulting role with Arthur Andersen LLP. He later joined Hewitt Associates, a global HR consulting firm, as the Location Manager for the RFM Pension Administration outsourcing group. A native of Connecticut, Jim holds a B.A. in Mathematical Economics and Managerial Studies from Rice University, and an M.S. from Georgia State University. He is a member of the National Association of State Retirement Administrators, the National Association of Government Defined Contribution Administrators, Inc., the National Conference of State Social Security Administrators, and the Government Finance Officers Association.

The meeting location is:

Cloverleaf Restaurant

425 Central Drive, East Dublin, GA 31027

478-275-2080 (Cross Streets: E. Johnson St. and Circle Dr.)

RSVP to Ms. Connie Copeland at cbcopeland@bellsouth.net.

Come hear Mr. Potvin speak !

Local Chapter News

Tri-County

Tri-County local chapter had nine members who attended GSRA Day at the Capitol/Legislative Reception on January 30th. Chapter members appreciated the opportunity to speak with their local legislators, Representative Debbie Buckner and Senator Josh McKoon, and thank them for their support of GSRA. The chapter

thanks chapter Legislative Chairperson Joy Evans for her hard work in making the day a success for members.



Burton Carter in front of the State Capitol

Waycross

Burton Carter, retired from the Department of Transportation and past president of the Waycross local chapter, recently ran for a vacant seat on the Department

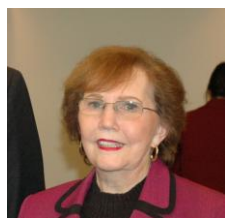
of Transportation board. While a former legislator was eventually selected to fill the vacancy, GSRA applauds Burton's efforts to contribute to better government operations, even well into his retirement years.

West Georgia/Columbus

The West Georgia/Columbus local chapter held a meeting February 12th with an informative presentation on Social Security and how to maximize benefits by Landon Weeks, Cameron Hooper & John Mason from Morgan Stanley. After a great meeting, including food and fellowship, two great door prizes, Home Depot \$25.00 gift certificates, were given away. The chapter wishes to thank Home Depot for its generosity in donating the gift certificates.

IMPORTANT: The chapter voted to change meetings to the 3rd Tuesday of the month starting with the May meeting.

Member Spotlight



This month's Member Spotlight is Bobbie Jean Bennett (otherwise known as BJ). BJ was raised in Dacula, graduated valedictorian at Dacula High school, and graduated magna cum laude from Georgia State University. She has one daughter

and now lives in Monroe. BJ worked for the State Merit System for almost 38 years and retired in 1996. She began at an early age at the bottom rung of jobs and completed her career as the Commissioner of Personnel Administration. She performed almost every type function in the Merit System from clerk, typist, secretary, bookkeeper, accountant, manager, division director, deputy commissioner, and commissioner. Bennett was an accounting technician when the State Health Benefit Plan was installed for state employees in 1962, and she was involved in the Plan—either as a staff person or manager—from that time until she retired. In the 1970s-1980s, she managed the administrative function and the Information Technology Section. Then in 1980, the Deferred Compensation Plan was implemented with her at the helm,

and in 1986 along came the Flexible Benefit Plan with her at the helm. In 1992, Governor Zell Miller appointed her as Commissioner of Personnel Administration, which gave her a position on the Employees Retirement Board of Trustees until retirement. Bennett remained busy after retirement in consulting work for a few years and then discontinued consulting work to care for her Mother. She was one of the founding members in GSRA, serving as Secretary in 2007-2009, President 2010-2011 and Treasurer 2012-2013. GSRA asked BJ to answer the following questions about her public service career.

Q – What was your first job in state government? Why did you want to work in public service/state government?

A – Six days out of high school and one month before my 18th birthday I began work with State Government as a Typist I. My goal was simply to find a “good” job, and it never dawned on me to consider it public service. Before high school graduation, I traveled from Dacula to Atlanta to talk to a State Merit System Recruiter. He looked up my test score (that was when we had to take written and performance tests) and saw that I would be

certified within the top three candidates. The Recruiter, Walt Withers, did not let me leave until I had accepted the Typist job in the “Records unit of the Merit System.”

Q - Did you have a role model or mentor in your public service career? If so, who was it and how did they help?

A –I had several mentors, but my first one was the Deputy Director for the Merit System, Ralph Moor. He always encouraged me to do my best as his Principal Secretary. Moor was instrumental in establishing the State Employees Credit Union and as his secretary I opened my wings by being required to “set up” the bookkeeping records for the Credit Union.

My 2nd mentor was Edwin L. Swain, Director of the Merit System. Swain allowed me to “flex” my work schedule to attend a college course at Georgia State University in early afternoon and a second course in early evening so that I could be home early enough to care for my daughter. By flexing my schedule, he allowed me to earn an undergraduate degree (magna cum laude) in accounting and finance. He also assigned me to be responsible for the financial records of the agency and taught me a lot about insurance financing. Other mentors were Walt Withers and Charles Storm. I learned much from each of these individuals. They were true friends and always supported me as I completed my college education and progressed in my career.

Q – What’s the biggest challenge you faced in your public service career?

A –Without a doubt, my biggest challenge was as Commissioner of Personnel Administration. Governor Miller was demanding a “Pay For Performance” system for State Government, and yet he pushed hard to accomplish the task in less time than needed – especially because we didn’t have a performance evaluation system that supported the ideal of “Pay For Performance.” Trying to satisfy the political aspirations and the technical requirements was the most challenging task in my career.

Q – What was the best thing about your public service career?

A – I don’t believe that I can name a best thing because my career was one that, in all probability, will never be mastered by another person—not because of me but because the opportunity, environment and culture have

changed so drastically. I will always be thankful for the people (staff, consultants, peers, and superiors) who came into my life, taught me, and left a soft spot in my heart. I learned from each of them and I hope that I was able to mentor a few of them in the 38 years that I worked. I thoroughly enjoyed working with staff to implement “new” programs, such as the Deferred Compensation Plan, 401(k) plan, Flexible Benefit Plan, many improvements in the personnel related computer systems, and changes in the State Health Benefit Plan.

Q – What was the worst thing about your public service career?

A –I cannot remember a “worst thing”. That is the way it happens as you age, you forget the “bad spots.” I regret not being able to complete the work that was started while I was Commissioner and I regret that Governors ripped the State Merit System to shreds and then finally totally “squashed” it. Georgia needs a system that demands competence and dedication from its workforce while the workforce deserves support and competitive compensation and benefits

Q - What do you think is the biggest change in state government we will see in the next 10 years?

A – I believe that State Government will continue to “downsize” departments, ask more of employees, continue outsourcing, and continue mechanization until it will not be able to supply the services that Georgia citizens need and should receive. Only when it becomes apparent to the State leadership that they cannot drive employees to work harder for little reward, will there be a change. Government has an important role—and providing that role with good service means institutional knowledge and competent employees with an understanding that public service is an honorable career.

Q - What have been your favorite hobbies or activities in retirement?

A – My favorite pastimes have been reading, bridge, and working with GSRA; however, caring for my Mother during the last eight years has been time-consuming, frustrating, challenging and rewarding. I would do all of these over and over again.

Q – What makes retirement rewarding for you?

A – I finally have time for in-depth study of the Bible so that I can teach a women’s Sunday School class. I have also enjoyed touring Alaska, New Zealand, Australia, Israel, and many countries in Europe. Learning about other cultures and seeing the “Wonders” of the world has been rewarding.

Q - What is the biggest challenge you see for state retirees in 2012 and beyond?

A – The biggest challenge to me is to understand the things that you can do or change, understand the things that you cannot do anything about, and to know the difference. Our world is changing so rapidly that we are forced to evaluate every new technological movement to decide if it is worth learning while living in a culture that in many ways is in opposition to what

we were taught. The financial condition of states and the federal government will add pressure on how we are taxed and live. We must be vigilant in trying to influence the “powers that be” to honor promises.

Q – How do you think retirees could address that challenge?

A – Retirees should grow in faith to keep their psyches well, eat and work healthy, stay tuned to and understand changes that are discussed about the world around them, voice their opinions about issues, and remain vigilant with fellow retirees to influence political leaders when appropriate.

New Members in February

Name	County	Name	County	Name	County
Warren Beverly	Wayne	Mary Garrison	Meriwether	Tom Metz	Glynn
Cheryl Black	Lowndes	William Garrison	Meriwether	Shirley Miller	Dekalb
Mildred Brannon	Clayton	Joseph Hawkins	Jones	Diana Norris	Meriwether
Melinda Brown	Madison	J. Marvin Helms	Upson	Nan Orrock	Fulton
James Camon	Berrien	Rebecca Huey	Glynn	Deborah Price	Clarke
Ryan Deloatch	Upson	John Keys	Dekalb	Sandra Pullman	Chatham
Donald Dimsdale	Newton	Carol Killingsworth	Meriwether	Tommy Reddish	Tattnall
Rejune Edwards	Cherokee	Larry Manley	Putnam	Imogene Whitaker	Randolph
William Funderburk	Meriwether	Cynthia Maxwell	Cobb		





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Does GSRA Have Your Correct Contact Information?

Please be sure to update your **email address** with GSRA when it changes. Simply log in to www.mygsra.com using your old email address and password; select “Our Members” and “My Profile”, and then change your information using the “edit” feature.

If your **mailing address** changes, and you do not use a computer, please notify us of your new address by sending a card or letter to the address at the bottom of this page.