



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF AURA

by Larry C. Mullins, President

This past year, actually a year and a half, as president, has been an interesting period in my life. The Board and I began this past fall to address the question: What is the essential purpose of the Auburn University Retiree Association? As you saw in the winter issue of AURA NEWS in the article by Charlotte Ward that dealt with the founding of AURA in 1994, the primary reason for its development was practical political expediency. Then, as now, the issue focused on the possibility of the erosion and cost of benefits. Through the development and advocacy of AURA at that time, the issue was averted. (Please read the article by Gerald Johnson in this issue for the latest resolution of these issues by our legislature and Governor.)

The current Board of Directors felt we needed to address the issue posed above in light of what is often asked of us by AURA members: What are you doing to represent the interests of Auburn, i.e., higher educational, retirees? The Board tackled this along two fronts. A) What kind of organization do we want to be? B) How do we then accomplish what is determined by the answer to the first question?

Our discussion of the first question leads to the conclusion that AURA needs to have both a social and political focus. The social activities

of the annual barbeque and the annual meeting certainly will continue. This is the easy part. The hard part is: How can AURA have a greater political voice? That is, how do we facilitate making our presence and position known without being an outright lobbying group?

Essentially, we concluded that there are at four ways AURA can have greater impact. First, we must work more closely with the Alabama Education Retirees Association (AERA). AERA, with its affiliation with the Alabama Education Association (AEA), works very hard to look after the interests of all educational retirees, including university retirees. This coming year, based on a vote at the last meeting of AERA, higher education formally will have “a seat at the table” on the Board of Directors.

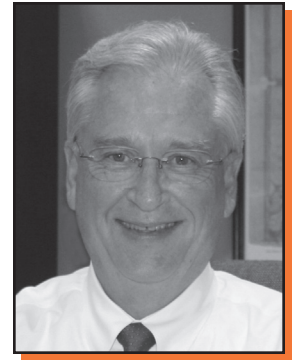
Let me be clear here. AURA is not constitutionally bound with AERA. Rather, we are partners working for a similar result. This does not preclude AURA members from joining AERA. In fact, I would encourage it. This year, I joined AERA because I feel it can be an effective voice for higher education retirees.

A second way AURA can have a larger impact is to work more closely with other university retiree groups in Alabama. This past year, AURA approached AERA – two meetings were held between Janice Charlesworth (AERA), and *continued on page 3*

REPORT OF AURA LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

from Gerald Johnson, Ph.D.

Auburn University Emeritus Professor of Political Science



The Alabama Legislature adjourned *sine die* on April 3 completing this quadrennium and will not meet again in its present session, form, or membership, unless a special session is called by the Governor.

After being out of power for over a hundred years, the 2010 election resulted in Republican supermajority control of the Legislature. Without governing experience and with absolute operational power, a first for the Alabama Legislature, the supermajority exercised its powers to enact the agenda of the supermajority.

In the 2014 session 202 bills were enacted, many of only local or special application, 95 less than in 2013. Of more importance than the number of bills enacted in evaluating a legislative record is the substance of the enactments and what was not enacted.

The supermajority enacted legislation to restrict abortions, require work and drug testing requirements for welfare recipients and photo IDs for voters, barred former legislators from lobbying either chamber of the Legislature for two years after leaving office, authorized the testing of a marijuana derivative to treat epilepsy, adopted the General Fund and Education Trust Fund budgets, and, enacted a number of other specific acts.

Public education, including education retirees, did not fare well during this legislative session or quadrennium. Public education funding over the last four years in Alabama was cut more than any other state in the nation. Education Trust Fund (ETF) dollars, used to fund all of Alabama public education, including health and retirement programs and COLAs for retirees, were diverted to the General Fund and to incentives and subsidies for industry recruitment.

The supermajority enacted the Accountability Act that provides for the use of public school funds to send students to private or religious schools. The Act took \$40 million from the ETF. Survey data show that the Act is opposed by 70% of the voters, including 64% of Republicans, and 92% oppose how it was enacted.

In the 2014 session, while state employees received a bonus pay increase, education employees and retirees did not. Alabama school teachers received a 2.5% cut in pay last year due to increased health care costs before they received a 2% pay raise. Education retirees have not received a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) since 2006—eight years.

The most helpful action of the past session for education retirees, and active education employees, was an agreement reached with RSA / PEEHIP to provide partial funding of PEEHIP sufficient to prevent any increase in premiums or out-of-pocket costs. To meet a \$220 million PEEHIP deficit for FY 2015, the Legislature provided \$77 million. The remaining \$143 million, as needed, will be funded from the PEEHIP Trust Fund (\$107 million) and cost savings.

PEEHIP is fully funded for FY 2015. However, the projected increases in PEEHIP funding needed for FY 2016 is \$345 million and for FY 2017 \$417 million. Without additional revenue or a change in the Rolling Reserve Act, funding of PEEHIP will be a substantial challenge and will make pay increases or COLA adjustments very difficult.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF AURA *continued...*

Don Seay, Donna Wolfinger, Alan Hackel, Tom Vocino and myself (AURA) – with the idea of AERA sponsoring a meeting (and, as it turned out, lunch) of representatives of the several university retiree associations in Alabama. Don Seay, Tom Vocino and I attended what was an excellent discussion. Collectively, the university retiree groups realized we are dealing with similar issues, and we are grappling with how we can be more effective in advocating for our members. Working together, higher education can have a greater political presence, because it represents a larger number of retired persons.

Last month, my wife and I were invited to and attended the annual meeting of The University of Alabama Retirees Association (TUARA). Mildred Switzer, the current president of TUARA, has been invited and has indicated she will attend our AURA annual meeting on May 30 at Saugahatchee Country Club.

A third way AURA can be more effective is to have more members. Simply put, the more members represented by AURA, the greater (potential) political impact we can have, both as an association and individually in contacting legislators and the governor. The ability to advocate for our well-being, especially in the context of the COLA and forestalling any future PEEHIP

premium increases cannot be underestimated. While we did not see an increase in PEEHIP for the upcoming year, there is already rhetoric about how this cannot continue. We must be ever vigil.

Let me encourage you to ask your fellow retirees, if they are not already members of AURA, to join. AURA currently contacts new retirees about joining, but those who have been retired for several years need encouragement. Please ask them to join us.

Still a fourth way AURA can be more effective is to keep you better apprised of the political side of things. To this end, Gerald Johnson, this year's Wilford Bailey Award recipient and renowned political scientist, has agreed to provide an article for each AURA NEWS dealing with the most up-to-date policy analysis we can get.

So, in conclusion, the answer to the question of: What are we doing as a Board? The answer is: We are trying to find effective ways to be your advocate. We need your help, also. Please give us ideas that you feel could lead to positive outcomes for AURA and educational retirees in general.

I have enjoyed working with the AURA Board of Directors and I look forward to continuing work with the Board under Don Seay's leadership. ♦

REPORT OF AURA LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE *continued...*

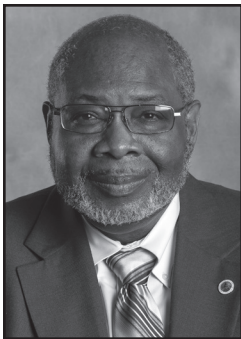
The Rolling Reserve Act passed in 2011 caps the ETF budget at recession levels and requires the Legislature to set aside ETF growth dollars that could be appropriated for pay increases, COLAs, more teachers, health insurance funding and other needed education programs.

This year, 2014, is an election year and a new legislature will be elected. Elections have consequences. The Alabama Education Association (AEA) and the Alabama Education Retirees Association (AERA) exist to advocate for the welfare of their members, including participation in the electoral processes to educate members on candidates who support public education and education retirees. This will be the primary interest of AEA and AERA leading up to the June primary and November general elections. To be successful, the support of AURA members in these efforts will be essential. ♦

Nominees for Board of Directors

Eugene J. Akers

Eugene J. Akers is a three-time graduate of Auburn University with a B.S. in Mathematics (1970), a Master of Business Administration (1979) and a Doctorate in Public Administration (2006). Dr. Akers recently retired with over 45 years of information technology work experience in the public and private sectors. The primary focus in his career was on the strategic management of information technology resources including strategic planning, organizational analysis, procurement, and risk management.. Dr. Akers is currently working as an Adjunct Instructor in the College of Business, Information Systems and Management Department teaching graduate and undergraduate courses. ♦



D'Linell Finley

D'Linell Finley has served as pastor of the Southlawn Baptist Church located at 5340 Mobile Highway, Montgomery, Alabama 36108 for the past ten years. Prior to his retirement from Auburn University Montgomery Dr. Finley taught at Alabama State University and the University of Alabama. He is currently an Adjunct Professor of Political Science at Alabama State University. Dr. Finley is also Director for both the Montgomery and Tuskegee Lee Samford Extensions (Beeson Divinity). Dr. Finley is a recognized public affairs expert. He is a frequent guest on radio and television. His comments are often quoted on the internet, and in newspapers throughout and beyond Alabama. He is Co-Chair of One Montgomery, Vice President for Programs of the Montgomery Education Retirees' Association, and Commander in Chief of Prince Hall Consistory # 19 Montgomery, Alabama. He also holds membership in several other civic and professional associations. ♦

Sandy Johnson

Sandy Johnson is a graduate of Michigan State University. She began working at Auburn University in 1994. She held administrative staff positions with the Institute for Latin American Studies, Conference for Latin American History, and Society of the History of Technology. Later, she moved to the Office of Career Development Services, and from 2003 until her retirement last year she was employed by the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department. In these positions she performed accounting functions, managed membership, handled student applications, organized conferences, and interacted closely with a wide range of administrative and faculty personnel. In her leisure time she has enjoyed traveling with her husband, Gordon, square dancing and quilting. She looks forward to being part of the AURA Board. ♦



Nominees for Board of Directors



Lawrence (Larry) C. Wit

Larry was educated in the Midwest, but came to Auburn in January of 1976 as an Assistant Professor in the then Department of Zoology and Entomology. During his tenure at Auburn he taught physiology and conducted research in the area of physiological ecology. In 1990 he became the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Sciences and Mathematics, a position he held until his retirement in September of 2012. Larry and his wife Nancy enjoy traveling and visiting with their children and grandchildren in the Atlanta area. ♦

Gail H. McCullers

Gail McCullers, a native of Cullman, AL, received her degrees from Auburn University and went on to have a 45 year career with the university. She worked 23 years in counseling, psychometrics and teaching and another 22 years as director of Housing and Residence Life. She retired from Auburn University in 2002 and stays actively involved in a number of educational organizations: NEA, AEA, AERA, AURA and Lee County Education Retirees Association. She enjoys reading, traveling and working with the SENIOR SAINT group at her church. She has shown special interest in AURA over many years and served as president of our organization. Gail has been appointed by the Board of Directors to fill the remainder of the term of a vacant Board of Director position. ♦

Thank You, Monarch Estates!

Monarch Estates, known for “**Gracious Retirement Living**,” located at 1550 E. University Drive in Auburn, has generously allowed the AURA Board of Directors to use its Eagles Nest Meeting Room for their monthly meetings for several years.

We would like to acknowledge this donation from Monarch and encourage anyone considering moving from their home to visit Monarch for a tour.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
AUBURN UNIVERSITY RETIREE ASSOCIATION
Nineteenth Annual Meeting

FRIDAY, MAY 30, 2014 • 11:30 A.M.
SAUGAHATCHEE COUNTRY CLUB

Our annual Spring Meeting is Friday, May 30, 2014 at the Saugahatchee Country Club in Opelika. Start gathering at 11:30 a.m. and eat at Noon. A great buffet, as usual, is in store for us. Cost is \$10.00 per person.



NOTE: In order to provide Saugahatchee with the number of persons in attendance, please call one of the persons listed below and let them know by May 15 that you are coming and how many will be in attendance. Please call, either: Sonny Dawsey (887-9057) or Bert Hitchcock (821-3180).

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MEETING AGENDA:

Welcome Larry Mullins, President

Grace Gail Mccullers

Lunch

Wilford S. Bailey Award

Wilford S. Bailey Importance Larry Mullins

Introduction of Wilford Bailey Award Recipient Tom Vocino

Wilford S. Bailey Award Recipient, 2014 Gerald Johnson

Business Meeting

Aera Update And Legislative Report..... Janice Charlesworth, Executive Director

Financial Report Larry Mullins

Membership Report Sonny Dawsey

Recognition of Outgoing Board Members Larry Mullins

In Memory of Bob Couch Susan Nunnelly

Introduction of New Board Members Don Seay

Questions And Comments From Attendees

Passing of the Gavel

Adjournment



NOTE *from the* EDITOR

— LARRY C. MULLINS —

As we move forward, please give thought to what you would like to contribute to our newsletter, or what topics you feel would be interesting to our members. I look forward to hearing from you. Please contact me at LMULLINS@AUM.EDU or at 334-478-4466, or contact either of the members of the Publication Committee: Bert Hitchcock (HITCHWB@AUBURN.EDU) and Alan Hackel (AHACKEL@ELMORE.RR.COM).

REMINDER!

*Auburn University Retirees:
If you have not joined, JOIN TODAY!*

You may have already paid your 2013-2014 dues to join AURA. If so, you will find “(p)” after your name on the address label on this newsletter. If not, you will find “(n).”

AU-AUM Retiree AURA Enrollment Form

Name _____ AU _____ AUM _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

____ Single Retiree \$25.00 ____ Surviving Spouse \$10.00

____ Retiree and Spouse \$25.00 ____ Sponsor \$25.00

____ Retiree & Retiree Spouse.. \$25.00

\$ _____ Scholarship Contribution

If you have any questions, please contact Sonny Dawsey at sonnypapa@gmail.com; Gail McCullers at gailandrichard@charter.net; or Don Seay at seay551@bellsouth.net.

*Please make check payable to Auburn University Retiree Association or AURA
and mail to the address below:*



AURA
P.O. Box 1436
Auburn, AL 36831-1436

BALLOT FOR AURA BOARD OF DIRECTORS, THREE YEAR TERMS STARTING JUNE 2014

Please vote for candidates

_____ Eugene J. Akers

_____ D'Linell Finley

_____ Sandy Johnson

_____ Larry Wit

Gail McCullers, appointed for 1-year term

Clip and Mail your ballot to:

AURA

P.O. Box 1436

Auburn, AL 36831-1436

Your ballot must be received by
May 15, 2014



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