

GREETINGS TO ALL

Tom Vocino, AURA President, 2015-2016

I am honored to be your president this year. In collaboration with the AURA board of directors, my goal is to serve AURA members and other Auburn University system retirees as well as I can.

As a political scientist with more than a passing interest in what happens in the Alabama Legislature and other places in state government, I believe it behooves every education retiree to take an interest in the decisions made by the Legislature and other entities of Alabama government. With the desperate shape of Alabama's General Fund that finances nearly all of state government other than education, education retirees must be vigilant about state revenues and how they are budgeted or possibly suffer negative consequences.

In the regular session and the first special session of the Legislature this year, a proposal to establish a flat tax for Alabama received a great deal of support. If the effort to pass it had succeeded, it would have resulted in a 2.75 percent levy on our state retirement incomes. Also, there was an effort that made it out of committee in the first special session to move \$225 million from the Education Trust Fund to prop up the ailing General Fund. Education interests including the Alabama Education Retirees Association (AERA) beat back this effort. These initiatives, which would hurt education retirees and education generally, will surely surface soon again. Vigilance and organization will be our best protection against a negative outcome.

Another long established state retiree benefit that we need to monitor and protect is PEEHIP which is administered by Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA). With the severe shortage of government revenues that Alabama state government is experiencing, you can be sure that legislators and the administrators of the program will consider cutting benefits or shift a greater burden for these programs onto the backs of retirees. Thus, PEEHIP is another program that, in my opinion, requires our attention.

A tried and true method of protecting benefits is to have someone from your group with a thorough knowledge of the decision making environment become a member of the decision making body. In this regard, our colleague and AURA board member Gerald Johnson has filed the paperwork to become a candidate for a position on the Teachers Retirement of Alabama Board of Control. Given that Gerald is an AU retiree and has worked with AEA, AERA and many of the key policy players in Montgomery, I believe that his occupying one of the key RSA Board positions would be a large plus to ensure fairness for us as AU system retirees. I am certain that Gerald would appreciate our support when the ballots are mailed in October.

I look forward to seeing you at the fall dinner. This year we have the honor and privilege of hearing Dr. Wayne Flynt who is always interesting and informative. See you on October 8th. ♦



So, how you doing?

Eugene J. Akers, AURA Board Member

Simple enough question right? Responses generally range from “I’m doing fine” to “I’m not really feeling well today.” Ok, that might be good enough today, but in the future this minimal response will be insufficient for most people or even yourself. In my last article, I mentioned one of the newest areas of applied consumer technology associated with individual health metrics. As much as I hate to admit it, the older I get the more concerned I become with my overall health. The display of physiological analytics in a personal dashboard would be of great interest to me. Therefore, I thought I would research the application of consumer technology, hardware and software, as it applies to personal health applications. The concept of a “personal health record” (PHR) has been around for a while. While some of those efforts, such as Google Health, have failed there are many others in the market such as Microsoft’s Healthvault or Blue Cross/Blue Shield’s BeHealthy.com. Applications like these have been around for a while on the Internet and are now available on your smartphones and tablets as an application. I found them to be very useful especially when I am in a doctor’s office filling out the same forms regarding my personal information and health history over and over again because it seems my doctor is the only one in the country that does not keep this information on their stupid computer! He should let accounting do his medical history files because they never ask me for any information when it comes time to pay. Sorry, I digress. My fascination with wearables began with consumer products that focus on the personal physiological metrics associated with your short and long-term well-being. Metrics such as number of steps and miles walked, calories burned, heart rate, blood oxygen levels, just to name a few. I thought they might really be on to something here. Just think, I could walk into my doctor’s office and download all of this information directly into his iPad without answering 20 questions or filling out that stupid paperwork again.

...the older I get the more concerned
I become with my overall health.

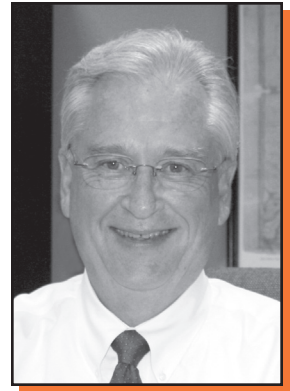
Not knowing where to start, I just started at Best Buy (much more fun than Google). So I went to the store in Auburn and asked one of the sales geeks about those thingamajigs that provide this type of information since I did not know the specific technology term for this type of gizmo. After that “You must be an idiot look” for about 10 seconds from the sales geek, he told me that “wearables” are over on the other aisle. Really, is that the best term an industry of really smart people can come up with for this type of technology - wearable! Having been in this business for over 50 years, I found this somewhat embarrassing. But at least I now know what to Google for these types of products. But “wearable” is literally what this type of technology involves. All of these devices are worn by a person either around their wrist/arm or attached to their body in some other fashion, the most popular being on the wrist like a watch.

The next part of my journey was to understand what types of metrics these type of devices can capture. The most common metrics captured by these devices include heart rate, calories burned, number of steps walked, number of miles walked, change in altitude (???), calories burned and blood oxygen levels. Two other popular applications are sleep monitoring

UPDATE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Gerald W. Johnson

AU Emeritus Professor of Political Science



The Alabama Legislature, among its many responsibilities, has the specific charge to enact operating budgets for the General Fund (GF) and the Education Trust Fund (ETF). The Legislature began its regular session on March 3rd and adjourned on June 4th without adopting a GF budget. The Governor called the Legislature back into Special Session on July 13th and it adjourned on August 11th without adopting a GF budget.

At the time of the writing of this report, the Governor is expected to call the Legislature back into a second special session in time to adopt a GF budget prior to the start of the new budget year on October 1. A special session can only be called by the Governor and is limited to 12 legislative days within a 30 calendar day period.

The problem is the GF needs some \$300 million just to maintain the funding level of the current budget. The state has borrowed from or used all existing reserves and resources and without additional revenues state services and programs such as parks, public safety, health care, roads and similar programs will face substantial budget cuts. The solution to the problem has escaped the Legislature because of a lack of any consensus on how best to address the problem.

The proposed solutions include: greater cuts in services and programs; increase in taxes; new revenue through taxing gaming and a state lottery; Simplified Tax Plan; use of BP settlement funds; and, shift of revenues from the ETF to the GF. There are multiple options within each of these broad options that further exacerbate the problem. What taxes should be raised? Cigarettes? Soft drinks? Elimination of FICA income tax deductions? Tax pensions? Corporations? What programs and services can be cut? Gaming and a lottery require a constitutional amendment and would not address the need for FY16 additional revenue.

The proposals to shift funds from the ETF to the GF include: consolidate the ETF and the GF; move some of the growth taxes that support the ETF to the GF, un-earmark taxes that now go to the ETF; establish a 75%-25% percentage distribution of new revenues to the GF and ETF respectively; use \$300 million of unappropriated dollars now in the ETF Rolling Reserve Fund; and, reform, cut or increase member costs of education retirement and health insurance programs.

The problem is the GF needs some \$300 million just to maintain the funding level of the current budget.

The 2015 sessions of the Legislature did manage to pass and defeat some important legislation.

The Legislature passed bills to: strengthen the Open Meetings Act; increase economic incentives for industry recruitment; reform the State Medicaid program; revise the Alabama Accountability Act; create a Two-Year College Board; establish Virtual Schools; and, strengthen a number of health, domestic, and safety programs.

The Legislature failed to pass legislation to: allow loaded handguns in vehicles without a concealed weapons permit; give judges, ministers and others the right to refuse to perform marriage ceremonies; allow "Uber" companies; privatize ABC stores; restrict abortion clinics; reverse a 54% increase in the cost of renewing driver's licenses; give payday loan

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New Address Label Format

The newsletter address label has been changed. Notice the code on the address label following your name. It indicates whether you are up-to-date with your dues. The old codes of “p” and “n” have been replaced with:

“p-2015” - indicating that you have paid through December of the current year (2015).

“p-2016” - indicating that you have paid through December of next year (2016).

“n” - indicating that you have not paid and that you should send in your dues.

We hope that these changes will clarify your status regarding the payment of your AURA membership dues.

Interested in becoming a member of the AURA Board of Directors?

Four positions on the AURA Board of Directors will be filled at the annual meeting next May. If you would like to serve on the Board or learn more about what Board membership involves, please contact one of the Board members listed elsewhere in this newsletter.



AURA Board endorses Dr. Gerald Johnson for Teachers Retirement System (TRS) Board of Control.

In its August meeting, the AURA Board of Directors voted to endorse Dr. Gerald Johnson for Retired Position No. 1 on the TRS Board of Control.

Some 82,000 Alabama education retirees are eligible to vote in the election for this position. **Ballots will be mailed to each retiree by October 14 and must be returned by November 21.**

TRS has a budget of \$32 billion and over 420,000 participants. The TRS Board has 15 members, three ex officio and 12 elected. Two elected positions are filled by public education retirees.

The TRS Board has the responsibility to maintain the retirement and health insurance programs for Alabama education retirees.

AURA members and fellow state education retirees are encouraged to vote for Dr. Johnson to fill this important position.

AURA Board Members for 2015-2016

- Tom Vocino, *President*
tvocino@alasu.edu
- Don Seay, *Immediate Past President*
seay551@bellsouth.net
- Carol Daron, *Secretary*
daronhc2005@yahoo.com
- Susan Nunnelly, *Treasurer*
nunnesu@auburn.edu
- Gene Akers
dreugeneakers@gmail.com
- D'Linell Finley
dlfinley@alasu.edu
- Sandy Johnson
sandyjj130@gmail.com
- Larry Wit
witlawr@auburn.edu
- Gerald Johnson
drj.gwj@gmail.com
- Larry Ridgeway
ridg1292@bellsouth.net
- Karen Sharpless
karensarpless1@gmail.com
- Barbara Witt
wittbar@auburn.edu

**Annual AURA meeting at Saugahatchee
Country Club on May 8, 2015**



Outgoing President Don Seay is presented a plaque commemorating his service to AURA by incoming President Tom Vocino.



President Don Seay presents the eagle statuette to Janice Charlesworth, Executive Director of the Alabama Education Retirees Association, in recognition of her selection as the recipient of the 2015 Wilford S. Bailey Award.



Janice Charlesworth and her family and staff enjoy visiting with Dr. and Mrs. Gerald Johnson prior to the meeting.

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.

how you doing... continued

and alarms. There are many different vendors that provide wearable technology, most notably FitBit, Apple, Sony, Google, Garman and Withings. There are several reviews on the Internet that can assist you in making an informed decision if you are interested. I also found a really good source of information at www.wearable.com. Happy hunting.

I then decided to try one. My daughter had already purchased a wearable and was gracious enough to allow me to use hers for a test run. The device was simple enough to use and interface with the mobile app on my phone. Bluetooth connectivity allowed me to simply transfer data from the wearable to the phone app for review. I have to admit, the steps walked and calories burned was somewhat interesting but the best feature for me was the sleep analysis. I am not sure how it knows Deep Sleep from the others, but the newer devices will be able to determine REM sleep as well. To be truthful, these devices are probably best suited for those with an active lifestyle and exercise regimen. But I did find another type of wearable that did appeal to me. I found two excellent wearable devices that are intended to help improve one's golf game. One was a device that attaches to the golf glove and the other to the top of each club. I will let you know if it works out since I could not resist the temptation to buy one.

However, the most interesting wearable technology I discovered was from a company that uses "research in psycho-physiology to create technology that changes how we perceive, feel and behave." It is called "empathic wearable technology." Empathic wearable technology supposedly "enhances our experience by interacting with our emotions, needs and relations with others. Empathic technology can be under the intentional control of the wearer, or it can be based on preset algorithms that monitor our mood and physiology in the background. Doppel, as it is called, is a new breed of wearable technology that is built from a deep understanding of the physiological roots of emotions. Supposedly, this technology can affect your mood based on your physiological feedback combined with the pulse of a wearable device." Ok, I am going to stop right here because this is starting to freak me out a little. I do not pretend to understand the science behind this technology but I do see some great possible applications. The most obvious is being able to control the mood of my wife or grandkids from my smartphone! Seriously! If you are interested in this type of technology check out the website at <http://www.tturquoise.com>.

In closing, I hope when they start to move this technology from "wearables" to "implantables" they will at least come up with a better name. ♦

LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE... continued

borrowers six months to pay off a debt rather than 14 days; authorize a \$50 million bond issue to build a state hotel at Gulf State Park; permit the use of medical marijuana; and, a number of related bills.

The Legislature is expected to be back in session in the next few weeks. Historically, the Legislature has preferred to adopt limited and half measures designed to get through the current problems with sufficiency, if not resolution.

In both the regular and special sessions a broad coalition of education

organizations, including AURA, AERA and AEA, along with others and key members of the Legislature, both Republican and Democratic, managed to protect the ETF and prevent the adoption of bills harmful to public education and education retirees. Special Session II will pose the same challenges.

An informed and active AURA and AERA membership and presence in the ongoing legislative processes are of critical importance. ♦

Bailey Award Nominations Sought

The AURA Board of Directors will soon begin the review of nominations for the 2016 Wilford S. Bailey Award to be presented at our annual meeting next May. The Bailey Award was established to honor the pioneering work of Dr. Wilford S. Bailey who recognized the need for an organization to advocate on behalf of retirees in an effort to protect their benefits.

Candidates must be a U.S. citizen or organization established in the U.S., demonstrate high moral character, have demonstrated a unique and significant association with activities concerning the benefits and welfare of educational community retirees, and display social and professional qualities that are commensurate with the community of education and educational institutions.

Nominations for the Bailey Award should be submitted to President Tom Vocino at tvocino@alasu.edu. ♦

FOR YOUR DUES STATUS, CHECK THE NEWSLETTER ADDRESS LABEL!

- If “p-2015” shows after your name, your dues have been paid through December, 2015.
- If “p-2016” shows after your name, your dues have been paid through December, 2016.
- If you have not paid your AURA dues for 2015, you will find an “n” after your name.

Please complete the form below and mail it with your 2015 dues payment:

AU-AUM Retiree AURA Membership 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

\$_____ Gift Contribution

If you have any questions, please contact Sandy Johnson at sandyjj130@gmail.com or Tom Vocino at tvocino@alasu.edu.

Please make check payable to AURA and mail to the address below:



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

AURA FALL DINNER MEETING

Co-sponsored by the Auburn University Department of Athletics

WHEN: Thursday, October 8, 2015

WHERE: Auburn Alumni Center, 317 South College Street
Park in the gravel lot in the rear of the building and come in the back door. To park in the paved lot, a vehicle must have an AU parking hangtag displayed.

SPEAKER: Dr. Wayne Flynt, Professor Emeritus, AU Department of History

TIME: 5:30 p.m. Registration
6:00 p.m. Catfish Dinner followed by Dr. Flynt's Address

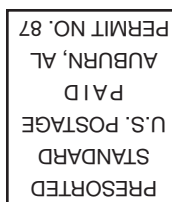
COST: Free to AURA Members, Spouses, and Guests

In order to provide the caterer with the number of persons to prepare for, please let us know if you are coming and who will be in attendance by contacting one of the individuals below:

Larry Ridgeway: ridg1292@bellsouth.net or 821-0600

Karen Sharpless: karensharpless1@gmail.com

Deadline for Reservations is Wednesday, 9/30!



P.O. Box 1436
Auburn, Alabama 36830

