

# The New Louisiana Voice

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF RSEA



Summer 2023 | Volume 32 / Number 3

## CONGRATULATIONS 2023 RSEA Foundation Scholarship Recipients!



**On the Left:** Callie Bechnel with grandmother/sponsor, Mary Lambert Perque. Callie is from Vacherie and attended E. D. White High School. Callie will attend Nicholls State University and pursue a BS in Biology with a concentration in Pre-Physical Therapy. Mary has been an RSEA member since 2013.

**In the Middle:** Allan Trahan with grandmother/sponsor Betty Barras holding painting of grandfather, Melvin Barras. Melvin and Betty have been RSEA members since 2006. Allan is from Lafayette and ranked #1 in his class of 359 at Lafayette High School. He plans to attend the University of Louisiana Lafayette majoring in Music Education. His career goal is to become a high school teacher/band director

**On the Right:** Kelly Lohman with grandmother/sponsor Linda C. Henry. Kelly is from Pineville and attended Pineville High School. She plans to attend the University of Louisiana Monroe where she will major in biology on a pre-med track. Her ultimate goal is to become a Radiologist. Linda has been an RSEA member since 2010. .

## RSEA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



It is June and we have been busy this year. First, we had our nine Chapter meetings in person this year. The attendance was great for all the meetings held in Shreveport, Monroe, Alexandria, Lake Charles, Lafayette, Houma, New Orleans, and Covington. It was really nice to re-establish the in-person contact with our members.

Also, really important, your association followed and supported several Bills coming from the State Senate and House of Representatives. The most important one was Senate Bill 18 by Senator Price/ Cortez that deals with our cost-of-living allowance. Senate Bill 18 passed both houses and made its way to the Governor. We would like to thank everyone who helped get the bill through.

On our RESA Scholarship winners, this was our third year and we received requests from four candidates, and we issued three scholarships. Three excellent students applied, more information about the applicants is contained in the newsletter.

In our Board Meeting in May we had a long discussion on how to increase our membership. We are working on some projects, but it is about all of us working on increasing our membership. There is power in numbers, and you could have witnessed how numbers work if you had seen the crowd present when our bill went before the different committees. I feel the crowd really made a difference.

The RESA State Conference is scheduled for October 10-11 at the Paragon Casino in Marksville, LA. Please start your planning now. Each message about the conference will highlight some of the things we will be doing at the conference.

Hope to see you there.

**James LeBlanc**  
*President*

## ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Chapter meetings were held for the first time in 3 years and were very well attended. Many thanks to LASERS, OGB, Access 2Day Health, AMBA, LA SHIIP, Empower, Silverscripts and CVS Caremark for joining us.

One of the most important and anticipated reform bills that has been much needed by state retirees has finally been passed by the Legislature. SB 18 by Senators Price and Cortez is on the Governor's desk awaiting to be signed. This bill will provide a more dependable and reliable COLA funding mechanism for state retirees. See Frank Jobert's article in this newsletter for details of SB 18. Thanks to all of you who called your Senator or Representative and urged them to pass this very important bill.

I would like to thank all of our members for their generous donations to the RSEA Foundation Educational Scholarship Fund. I am very pleased to inform you that the RSEA Foundation awarded three \$1,000 scholarships this year. See the front page for more information on the awardees.

Also, last October marked the first time in 3 years that we were able to hold our annual conference. It was once again held at the Paragon Casino and Resort and was very well attended. The next conference will again be at the Paragon and will commence on October 10-11. There is a registration form in this newsletter that you can detach and send to us with your payment. Also, you can download a registration form from our website [www.rseala.org](http://www.rseala.org).

Meet Jerre Perry, RSEA's newest member of the Board of Directors. Jerre is an "At Large Member" from Shreveport.



After graduating from NSC (now NSU) and working for a pediatric group in Monroe for two years Jerre became a Public Health Nurse for what is now DHH/OPH Children Special Health Service in Region 6, which started her decades of State employment. Jerre spent 40+years in DHH Regions 6, 7 and 8 as a PHN in different job titles and as Regional Administrator for the Office of Public Health in both Regions 6 and 7.

**Jimmy Anthony**  
*Administrative Director*

## RSEA LEGISLATIVE & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



The 2023 Regular Louisiana Legislative Session is finally adjourned! This year's Regular Session ended (sine die) at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 8th. It is possible, as of this writing, that we could possibly see a veto override session, and/or a Special Session on Congressional redistricting by the time you receive this message.

The just-ended session was very important for RSEA and LASERS, with two major retirement bills: One authored by Senator Edward "Ed" Price and Senate President Page Cortez, Senate Bill-18, a COLA "reform" measure, for the four (4) State Retirement Systems; and House Bill-47, (a proposed Constitutional Amendment) by Representative Richard Nelson.

**Senate Bill-18 awaits Governor Edward's signature.** But we have been assured that he is supportive of this measure and has indicated he will sign it, as it impacts all current and future retirees of LASERS, Teachers, State Police and School Employees' Retirement Systems. The measure reforms the current system of granting COLAs from "excess" earnings via the Experience Account and establishes a new COLA account that will be pre-funded by employer contributions and proposes to grant up to a 2% COLA to eligible retirees every two to three years, subject to Legislative approval.

Therefore, this methodology is more transparent, dependable and reliable. This should result in more frequent COLAs, as opposed to the current system, that has not provided a COLA since 2016.

\*NOTE: The current Experience Account will be phased out but will remain in place until the new system takes effect, and any funds remaining in the Experience Account will be transferred to the new COLA account for use there.

Both of the above bills passed both chambers of the Legislature by near unanimous majorities. HB-47 (now Act 107) must go before the state's voters and be approved on October 14th, 2023 in order to require a minimum of 25% of all nonrecurring state revenues to be applied to the Unfunded Accrued Liabilities (UALs) of the State Retirement Systems beginning in Fiscal Year 2024-2025. You will hear more from RSEA between now and October, 2023 when we will ask for your support and YES vote on this measure at the ballot box/voting booth for this initiative to take effect.

On behalf of RSEA and its members, I wish to extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to the LASERS Board of Trustees and Staff, Senator Ed Price and Senate President Page Cortez, Representative Richard Nelson and the entire Louisiana legislature, and Governor John Bel Edwards for their near-unanimous support of these measures!

I must also mention several other "funding" measures by House Appropriations Chairman, Jerome "Zee" Zeringue, who authored HB-1, HB-550, and HB-560, which were all approved by the House

and Senate and combined will appropriate over \$500 million over the next two fiscal years to pay down LASERS system debt. These bills also await the Governor's signature and this could change. However, at the time of this writing, this was the best information available from LASERS.

**Special mention of HCR-67 is also warranted.** This instrument was authored by Representative Michael "Mike" Johnson of Pineville, LA. (District 27). This measure impacts all state and statewide retirement systems and memorializes (urges and requests) the United States Congress to take actions necessary to review and eliminate or reduce the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) better known as the Social Security Offsets. The Resolution requests passage by the United States Congress of H.R. 82 (Graves) and/or S.597 (Brown) The Social Security Fairness Act(s) of 2023.

All of Louisiana's members of the 118th Congress have co-sponsored H.R. 82, along with the lead author, our own Louisiana Representative Garret Graves of Baton Rouge, with the exception of Rep. Steve Scalise. H.R. 82 currently has 279 co-sponsors and we want to know why Rep. Scalise has not co-sponsored the measure? Please contact Rep. Scalise's office by phone and/or email and request that he co-sponsor H.R. 82 and move this legislation through the legislative process for passage! A link to his Congressional contact information is as follows: <https://scaliseforms.house.gov/contact/> NOTE: Senator John Kennedy and Senator Bill Cassidy have already co-sponsored S.597--Social Security Fairness Act of 2023 in the U.S. Senate. S. 597 currently has 44 co-sponsors including Kennedy and Cassidy. It is now up to the U.S. Congress to undertake legislation at the Federal level to repeal both of these dreadful federal offsets.

Our thanks, once again, to Representative Mike Johnson (District 27-Pineville, LA) for continuing to organize and lead the Louisiana's efforts for full repeal of the WEP/GPO.

Finally, I would be remiss in my responsibilities at RSEA, if I did not mention the departure of Ms. Cindy Rougeou, upon her retirement from LASERS, after over 30 years of loyal and dedicated state service, including approximately 20 of those years at LASERS, as Executive Director! Cindy is a team player and has brilliantly guided LASERS through some turbulent years and brought us to the level where we are today. Our thanks to Cindy, and her team of staff and Board members, for all they have done for RSEA and our retirees. Our LASERS system is in excellent condition, thanks to the work Cindy and her team have performed, and she is now one of our retiree members of RSEA! I have enjoyed our working relationship and RSEA is better for having been associated with Cindy. I also welcome aboard the current LASERS Chief of Staff, Mr. Trey Boudreux, as the new LASERS Executive Director, and I look forward to working with Trey, as we continue to move forward together working for the people we represent—you the retirees!

**Frank L. Jobert, Jr.,  
Legislative & Governmental Affairs Director**



# OGB UPDATE

## Vantage Health Plans

Effective January 1, 2024, the Vantage HMO and Medicare Advantage health plans will no longer be available. Your health coverage is NOT going away, but you will need to choose a new health plan option to begin after December 31, 2023. Vantage was acquired by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana in 2019 and since then Blue Cross has been consolidating the Vantage health plans and services.

During the Annual Enrollment period (October 1 – November 15, 2023) you will be able to select a new health plan from one of the five Blue Cross Magnolia or Pelican options. Please note that these plans DO NOT include dental or vision coverage, but dental and vision discounts are available through Blue Cross's Blue365 program. Also note that members who fail to select a new health plan during the Annual Enrollment period will be defaulted into either the Magnolia Local Plus or Blue Advantage health plan.

OGB is here to help! We will be holding in-person meetings for Medicare retirees during the Annual Enrollment period so you can visit the health plan vendors and ask questions about your options. Please plan to attend the Annual Enrollment meeting that will be held in your region:

## Non-Medicare Retiree Meetings

DATE	LOCATION	TIME
October 4	ULL Cecil J. Picard Center 200 E Devalcourt St. Lafayette, LA 70506	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 4	Bossier City Civic Center 620 Benton Rd., Bossier City, LA 71111	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 11	Monroe Civic Center 401 Lea Joyner Memorial Expressway, Monroe, LA 71201	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 18	State Police Auditorium (Bldg. A) 7919 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 18	Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center 346 Civic Center Blvd., Houma, LA 70360	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 20	SLU Old Student Union Theater 303 N. Union Ave., Hammond, LA 70402	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 25	Alexandria Convention Center 2225 N MacArthur Dr., Alexandria, LA 71303	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 25	UNO Student Center Ballroom 2000 Lakeshore Dr., New Orleans, LA 70148	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
November 8	Lake Charles Civic Center Contraband Room 900 N Lakeshore Dr., Lake Charles, LA 70601	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM

## Retirees with Medicare Meetings

DATE	LOCATION	TIME
October 5	ULL Cecil J. Picard Center 200 E Devalcourt St. Lafayette, LA 70506	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 5	Bossier City Civic Center 620 Benton Rd., Bossier City, LA 71111	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 12	Monroe Civic Center 401 Lea Joyner Memorial Expressway, Monroe, LA 71201	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 19	State Police Auditorium (Bldg. A) 7919 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 19	Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center 346 Civic Center Blvd., Houma, LA 70360	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 26	Alexandria Convention Center 2225 N MacArthur Dr., Alexandria, LA 71303	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 26	UNO Student Center Ballroom 2000 Lakeshore Dr., New Orleans, LA 70148	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
October 27	SLU Old Student Union Theater 303 N. Union Ave., Hammond, LA 70402	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM
November 9	Lake Charles Civic Center Contraband Room 900 N Lakeshore Dr., Lake Charles, LA 70601	9:00 AM or 2:00 PM

Representatives from OGB, Blue Cross and Caremark/SilverScript will also be attending the Annual RSEA Conference on October 11, 2023.

If you have questions, please contact OGB customer service at 1-800-272-8451.

## LASERS UPDATE

### COLA Reform Bill Approved by Legislature

Legislation to create a new, more predictable model for funding future cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for eligible retirees and beneficiaries of the four state retirement systems, including LASERS, was approved in the 2023 Legislative Session. Senate Bill 18, sponsored by Sen. Ed Price and Senate President Page Cortez, currently awaits the Governor's signature.

#### What does Senate Bill 18 do?

The current model for funding COLAs has been infrequent and unpredictable, as it involves a complex granting matrix and relies heavily on market conditions. Senate Bill 18 allows for a transparent and predictable funding model to grant future COLAs.

#### What is the new funding mechanism?

Under Senate Bill 18, LASERS employers will directly fund COLAs. Essentially, funding would become a component of the annual employer contribution rate and be deposited directly into

a newly created COLA account. Employer contributions have declined in recent years and are projected to continue to fall. This legislation captures a portion of these and other expected decreases to fund COLAs. Beginning in 2024, deposits into the COLA account would equal one-half of the decrease in the total employer contribution rate, growing until deposits reach a maximum of 2.5% of payroll.

#### How much will COLAs be?

COLAs will be up to 2% of the first \$60,000 of the retirement benefit.

#### Will COLAs be automatic?

No. COLAs would only be granted if there is enough funding in the account and upon legislative approval.

#### How often will COLAs be granted?

The proposed model is expected to generate enough funds to grant a COLA every two to three years, subject to legislative approval.



## **When would the first COLA be paid under the new legislation?**

There is no set time for payment of the first COLA under the new model. A COLA can only be granted when there are sufficient funds to pay a COLA and when the legislature approves the granting of the COLA.

**More details and answers to your questions about Senate Bill 18 are available on the LASERS website at <https://lasersonline.org/senate-bill-18/>.**

## **July 1, 2023 Benefit Payment Falls on a Saturday**

Please note that the July 1 benefit payment falls on a Saturday, which could affect the receipt of your funds.

Direct deposits are guaranteed to be in your bank or credit union on the first day of the month. Be aware that if the first falls on a weekend or holiday, funds may not be available until the following business day. In these cases, contact your financial institution directly for information on when your funds will be made available to you. That decision is made by your financial institution, not LASERS. If you have not received your monthly benefit payment by the first business day of the month, contact LASERS at 225.922.0600 or 800.256.3000.

## **Attend the LASERS Retiree Workshop on July 19 in Baton Rouge or Online**

LASERS will host a workshop for retirees at our office in Baton Rouge and online on Wednesday, July 19, 2023. Members will have

the chance to hear from LASERS Executive staff, receive important Member Services information and reminders, and connect with our state agency and community partners.

Registration information is available on the LASERS website at <https://lasersonline.org/retirees/>.

## **Nominations Close July 11 in 2023 LASERS Board of Trustees Election**

The nomination period for the 2023 LASERS Board of Trustees Election closes on July 11, 2023. Five seats on the Board are up for a vote. Two seats are open for retired members and three for active members.

If you are interested in being a candidate in this year's Board election, nominating petitions are available on the LASERS website or you may call LASERS to have one mailed to you.

## **Be Prepared for Hurricane Season with Direct Deposit**

Hurricane Season is here. As a reminder, receiving your monthly LASERS benefit payment as direct deposit can alleviate any worries about delayed paper checks because of post office and road closures or other emergency shutdowns.

If you are not yet enrolled in direct deposit, sign up today! The form to authorize direct deposit is available in myLASERS and the LASERS website.

## **WHO ARE WE TO JUDGE?**

## **LONG-TERM CARE PLANS FOR ALL LIFESTYLES.**

With Long-term Care coverage from **RSEA & AMBA**, you can live for today without worrying about tomorrow.

- You select the daily amount
- You select the benefit period
- No waiting period for pre-existing conditions
- No premium increases with age



Learn More: **1-877-556-4582**

**[myambabenefits.info/rsea](http://myambabenefits.info/rsea)**

RSEA – Retired State Employees Association of Louisiana

# **2023 RSEA CONFERENCE**

## **OCTOBER 10th-11th**



### Sessions Include:

- Entertaining Keynote Speaker
- Interesting Topics
- Informative Exhibits
- LASERS/OGB Benefits Update

### Activities Include:

- Bingo
- AARP Driving Program (extra fee)
- Recognition Luncheon
- Door Prizes



711 Paragon Place, Marksville, LA 71351  
[www.paragoncasinoresort.com](http://www.paragoncasinoresort.com)

### Lodging Rates (plus taxes & \$12 Resort fee):

South Tower Guest Room	\$ 99.00
North Tower Guest Room	\$109.00
Deluxe Atrium Guest Room	\$129.00

\$12.00 Resort Fee will be assessed per room, per stay.

### For Reservations Call:

- **(800) 642-7777** — Ask for the 2023 RSEA Conference Group Rate—**RSEO10G**
- To receive this special rate, you must reserve your room by: **September 18, 2023**

### Registration Fees:

- RSEA Member— \$50
- Non-Member and Guests—\$60

### RSEA 2023 CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Retired From (Agency): \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Veteran (Yes/No): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Required\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Your email address will be shared with conference vendors. AARP Driving Class Fee is Collected at the Door on the Day of the Class.

### REGISTRATION FEES

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 Member

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ \$60 Guest / Non-Member Registration Fee

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL ENCLOSED

Mail Your Completed Registration Form and Check to:  
RSEA Foundation, 9412 Common Street, Suite 7, Baton Rouge, LA 70809  
Questions? Call (225) 930-0961 or email [janthony.rsea@gmail.com](mailto:janthony.rsea@gmail.com)  
[www.RSEALA.org](http://www.RSEALA.org)





Working Today for Your Tomorrow

9412 Common Street, Suite 7  
Baton Rouge, LA 70809

PRSR STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Baton Rouge, LA  
Permit #53



**RETIRED STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION**  
**"WORKING TODAY FOR YOUR TOMORROW"**

 **RSEA**  
Working Today for Your Tomorrow

**The New  
Louisiana Voice**

— EDITORIAL OFFICE —

9412 Common St. • Suite 7 • Baton Rouge, LA • 70809  
TELEPHONE – 225-930-0961  
Website – <https://www.rseala.org>  
Facebook – [www.facebook.com/RSEALA](https://www.facebook.com/RSEALA)  
Editor – Jimmy Anthony  
(E-Mail: [janthony.rsea@gmail.com](mailto:janthony.rsea@gmail.com))  
Editorial Assistant – Carl Grotton

— OFFICERS and BOARD —

James LeBlanc, Jr. – President – 225-284-9447  
Dean Moberley – 1st Vice President – 225-755-0633  
Penny Babin – 2nd Vice President – 337-247-0569  
Shannon Templet – Secretary/Treasurer – 225-622-3993  
David Thomas – Immediate Past President – 985-290-2107

— AREA PRESIDENTS —

Acadiana – Pennie Babin – Lafayette – 337-247-0569  
Alexandria – Victor B. Dennis, Jr. – Pineville – 318-623-4547  
Baton Rouge – James LeBlanc, Jr. – 225-284-9447  
Coastal – Mary Mahoney – 985-537-3090  
Lake Charles – Gwen Thompson – Sulphur – 337-912-9373  
Monroe – Dianne Guillot – West Monroe – 318-376-6275  
New Orleans – Benny Harris – New Orleans – 504-658-2585  
North Shore – David Thomas – Slidell – 985-290-2107  
Shreveport – Bonita Hearne – Bossier City – 318-746-1924

— AT-LARGE —

Jerre Perry – Shreveport – 318-789-1822  
Byron Decateau – Baton Rouge – 225-342-8273  
Dean Moberley – Baton Rouge – 225-755-0633

— EX-OFFICIO/LASERS —

Barbara McManus – Lake Charles – 337-433-8910

— ACTIVE/LASERS —

Shannon Templet – Prairieville – 225-622-3993

— OGB Representative —

Frank Jobert, Jr. – Slidell – 504-289-9424

— DIRECTOR EMERITUS —

Sona F. Young – Lake Charles

— ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR —

Jimmy Anthony – 225-247-4763

