

The New LOUISIANA VOICE

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF RSEA

SPRING 2024 | VOLUME 33 • NUMBER 2



Bottom Row Left to Right: Shannon Templet (Treasurer and LASERS Active Representative), Dean Moberley (At Large and First Vice-President), James LeBlanc (President and Baton Rouge Chapter President), Penny Babin (Second Vice-President and Chapter President Acadiana), Dianne Guillot (Chapter President Monroe), Top Row Left to Right: Jimmy Anthony (Administrative Director), Frank Jobert (OGB Representative and Legislative and Governmental Affairs Director), Mary Mahoney (Chapter President Coastal), Bonita Hearne (Chapter President Shreveport), Benny Harris (Chapter President New Orleans), David Thomas (Past President and Chapter President North Shore), Marlene Swarie (Chapter Vice President Alexandria), Jerre Perry (At Large Shreveport), Not Pictured: Vic Dennis (Chapter President Alexandria), Gwen Thompson (Chapter President Lake Charles), Byron Decoteau (At Large), Barbara McManus (LASERS Retired Representative)



Pictured above is the 2024 Board of Directors Photo taken at the January 2024 Board Meeting. Please take the time to thank these members as they spend countless hours in Committee meetings and taking care of Association business without compensation. They are all worth their weight in gold!

RSEA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hi there; this message will be strange because of the time between writing and when the New Louisiana Voice is published. Our time must be submitted by the 26th of February and The Voice is published at the end of March. Knowing this, we will try to keep our comments as current as possible.

The first big thing we cannot comment on is our yearly chapter meeting. While we are hoping for the best, we know that all dates and places have been established. Our prayers are that everything went as planned.

We have started serious work on our Statewide Conference and again it will be at the Paragon Casino in Marksville, Louisiana. Everything is moving into place and again this year we will have a lot of good information and fun for all.

Lastly, but what should have been first is our membership drive. When one of our members is asked: what the association does for them, tell them to go to Google and type in RSEA. They can also go to our website @rseala.org where there is a lot of information for both the active and retired state employees. In addition, our email is

staff1@att.net, our telephone number is 225-930-0961, and our fax:225-243-9749.

I have requested and action has been taken that all correspondence from our office has this contact information on it. I am also requesting that all information sent to separate chapters have the parishes listed that are part of that chapter. This is something that would help bring our chapters together. There is power in numbers and our goal is to get everyone working and pulling in the same direction.



James H. LeBlanc RSEA President

OBG UPDATE

Effective January 15, 2024, Heath Williams was appointed as the new CEO of the Office of Group Benefits, replacing Colonel David Couvillon. As CEO, Mr. Williams will be responsible for the overall strategy, operational management and executive leadership of OGB.

Mr. Williams has more than 20 years of experience in state government and health plan operations. Prior to joining OGB, he was responsible for trend management, analytics and value-based care for several health plans and delivery systems.

Mr. Williams holds a bachelor's degree in Management Information Systems (MIS) from Louisiana State University and an MBA from the University of New Orleans.

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

HR-82 WEP AND GPO SOCIAL SECURITY OFFSETS UPDATE:

In the last edition of the RSEA Louisiana Voice, we reported that there was to be held a “Field Hearing” or Remote Hearing by the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee—Social Security Subcommittee in Baton Rouge, LA. In fact, the hearing was actually conducted on November 20, 2023 at the St. George Fire Protection District Station on Airline Hwy. in Baton Rouge.

The hearing on HR 82 (Graves) Social Security Fairness Act of 2023, was conducted by U.S. Representative and Subcommittee Chairman Drew Ferguson (GA) and Ways and Means Chairman Jason Smith (MO). As you know, RSEA and other organizations have been tracking this measure and other similar measures and advocating for repeal of the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset

(GPO) for several years.

RSEA was involved with the Louisiana Retired Teachers Association (LRTA), State Fire Fighters Association, and several Louisiana State (LASERS, TRSL) and Statewide Retirement Systems in organizing and hosting the event. Several Louisiana State Representatives and Congressmen and Women were also in attendance, showing their support for government employees and retirees who are adversely impacted by the WEP & GPO. It is my understanding that this was the first such remote Congressional hearing conducted on this matter in over a decade!

RSEA was also involved in the selection of witnesses who testified in support of HR 82 (Garret Graves). The following government retirees were on the witness list and testified in favor of HR 82: Mr. Patrick Yoes, retired Louisiana Law Enforcement Officer and National President of the Fraternal Order of Police; Ms. Ann Dugas, retired Louisiana State Employee;

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS (CONTINUED)

Mr. Bernard “Bernie” Piro, retired Louisiana Fire Fighter; and Ms. Paula Porter, retired Louisiana Educator. Several Louisiana Congressmen and Women, including the author of HR 82, Garret Graves, also testified in favor of the bill. I also attended the hearing representing RSEA, and was not allowed to testify due to time limitations, but I did submit written comments on our behalf.

There appears to be overwhelming bi-partisan support for the measure among the Committee persons in attendance and as evidenced by the fact that there are currently 308 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives on HR 82 and 50 co-sponsors in the U.S. Senate on the companion bill S.597. It is now our task to continue to lobby and advocate for passage of HR 82 during the 118th United States Congress which encompasses 2023-2024.

Our thanks go out to Congressman Garret Graves and the entire Louisiana Congressional delegation in the House and Senate, as all are co-sponsors of legislation to repeal the WEP & GPO. I also wish to thank LA. Speaker Pro Temp, Mike Johnson (District 27-Pineville) who continues to show his leadership and support at the state level for repeal of the WEP and GPO.

2024 REGULAR LEGISLATIVE SESSION RETIREMENT BILLS:

The Louisiana 2024 Regular Legislative Session begins at noon on Monday, March 11, 2024 and ends on Monday, June 3, 2024 at 6:00 PM. There are currently three (3) retirement bills that RSEA is tracking: 1) SB-1 by Senator Edward “Ed” Price provides relative to transfers of service credit between retirement systems. RSEA is taking a neutral position on this bill. 2) SB-5 by Senator Blake Miguez requires fiduciaries for public retirement systems to make investment decisions based solely on financial factors. Some have referred to this bill as an anti-ESG bill. RSEA has no position at this time on this measure, as we are relying on LASERS to provide expert/ technical guidance to RSEA on this particular bill. Finally, RSEA is tracking 3) HB-30 by Representative Larry Bagley. It provides relative to retirement eligibility in the Louisiana State Employees Retirement System (LASERS).

RSEA is taking no position on this bill at this time, as it may have an actuarial cost to the LASERS system, and would add to the unfunded accrued liability (UAL) of LASERS without any additional funding.

BLUE CROSS/BLUE SHIELD SALE TO ELEVANCE HEALTH UPDATE:

The proposed sale of Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BC/BS) of Louisiana to Elevance Health (of Indiana) was opposed by the RSEA Executive Board. In preparation for a Louisiana Department of Insurance hearing to discuss the sale, the RSEA Executive Board voted to oppose the sale of a non-profit mutual insurance company (BC/BS) to a for-profit stock corporation, Elevance Health. RSEA joined with the Louisiana State Medical Society, Louisiana Hospital Association, Louisiana Treasurer, and Louisiana Attorney General in questioning the sale of BC/BS to Elevance Health.

Our concerns dealt with the common-sense notion that a for-profit corporation, as opposed to a not-for-profit mutual insurance plan, could only result in higher premiums, lower benefits, or a combination of both. Additionally, we were concerned about the potential loss of services through a reduction in the number of medical service providers, hospitals, and other healthcare facilities in the Blue network. And the potential loss of jobs by those currently employed by BC/BS of Louisiana.

For the above reasons, RSEA adopted a position of opposition to the sale, as we believed it was the best way to protect existing benefits provided to state employees and retirees, and other covered members of the Office of Group Benefits (OGB). RSEA will continue to monitor this situation, in the event the idea of a sale/merger of BC/BS is brought back up for consideration. At RSEA we continue to fight to protect your existing healthcare and retirement benefits, while always looking for an opportunity to enhance your benefits whenever possible!



Frank Jobert, RSEA Legislative & Governmental Affairs Director

SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE

RSEA of Louisiana is pleased to announce it will award up to \$3,000 in scholarships to students attending an accredited Louisiana institute of education. The qualifications for the scholarship are:

The student's parents/grandparents must be members of RSEA and have continuous membership for three consecutive years. The student must be currently enrolled in or accepted to an accredited Louisiana institute of education and have a GPA of at least 2.5. Only full-time students will be considered. The student must submit a written statement expressing their financial need for the scholarship, and must submit two personal letters of reference, with at least one from an academic advisor. The student must submit a detailed statement (500 words or less) regarding their educational/career goals. Their current ACT or SAT score, as well as a copy of their school transcript. Finally, their signed application. Applications may be mailed or e-mail your application to janthony.rsea@gmail.com. You can download an application from the RSEA website at www.rseala.org. Mail to: RSEA of Louisiana

ATTN: Scholarship Committee
9412 Common St., Suite 7
Baton Rouge, LA 70809-8414

Deadline for applications is Friday, April 26, 2024. If you need additional information, please contact Jimmy Anthony at (225) 831-4988.

2024 Scholarship Donations

Laura D. Samson	In memory of all U.S. Veterans
Mary Alice Metzler	
Ray Clement	In memory of the Clement/Martin Family
John Robinson, IV	
William L. Cann	In memory of Cassile Cann
Michael Higgins	
Patty Maxwell-Masotti	In memory of Bruno Masotti
Cynthia Clouatre	
Gerald Mathes	
Richard Scott	
Rebecca Tedford	
Karen St. Cyr	

Linda H. Bennett	In memory of Joshua Bennett
Jesse Dolive	
Brenda Clark	In memory of Karl A. Johnson
Elizabeth Landry	
Clair R. Duke	
L. Bruce Morgan	
Alfred F. Sanders	
Kirk Guilbeau	
Russell A. Pease	
Don Leger	
Joyce Ben	In memory of Leroy Richard
Norma Thomason	
Margaret Gilcrease	
John W. Davidson	
Donald L. Falcon	
Timothy J. Palmatier	
John E. Gilcrease	

2024 Scholarship Donations

Robert W. Taylor Carolyn T. Kitchin	In memory of Philip Kitchin
Mattie A. Deville Rose M. Breaux	In memory of Arlene Hedet
Elsie J. Azare Paul Melancon Paul Autin Charles Wiesendanger Patricia Wilhite Yasmine Fernandez	In memory of Violet R. Ruschel
Alice M. Albert Gerard J. Goar	

We are wrapping up our membership drive for the year, so if you have not renewed your membership, now is a good time to take advantage of that. Memberships have held steady for many years now at \$18. I would like to encourage you to try our convenient automatic monthly dues deduct from your LASERS check. 78% of our members pay that way and it's only \$1.50 a month. You will never fall behind in your dues or forget to make a payment. Please try it! I would like to apologize to the members who paid their 2024 dues in October, November and December of 2023 and subsequently received a second dues notice. We have been working with the LASERS IT team to reconfigure the SOLARIS database to give us better reporting data. Unfortunately, when we called up the list of members that had not paid yet, the list included those that had paid early. That error has now been fixed. Anyone who paid a second time has either been refunded or that payment was applied to 2025. In the future we will have to double check our lists to ensure that this does not occur again.

LASERS Tracking Retirement Bills in 2024 Regular Legislative Session

The 2024 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature begins March 11. LASERS is currently tracking three retirement bills that would impact the System if passed. These bills are relative to transfers of service credit between systems, retirement eligibility, and fiduciary responsibility. A full list and description of retirement legislation is located on the LASERS website at www.lasersonline.org.

The Louisiana State Legislature website, legis.la.gov, also provides in-depth details on legislation, daily meeting schedules, and links to watch committee meetings live. LASERS will continue to provide regular updates through *Member Connection* emails and our social media accounts. You can sign up for our emails on the home page of our website.

Changes to the LASERS Board in 2024

The LASERS Board of Trustees elected **Byron P. Decoteau, Jr.** and **Virginia Burton** as the 2024 Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, at its January meeting.

Byron P. Decoteau, Jr., Director of the Department of State Civil Service, will lead the LASERS Board as Chair. He has served as an active member Trustee since 2022 and previously served on the Audit Committee. Virginia Burton has a long history on the LASERS Board and has held various key positions throughout her tenure as a Trustee.

In addition to the new Chair and Vice Chair, we welcome newly elected Trustees - Pam Diez, Cortny Jarrell, and Laura Lapeze. New ex officio members are State Treasurer John Fleming, Commissioner Taylor Barras, and Rep. Tony Bacala (Chair of the House Retirement Committee). Sen. Ed Price, Chair of the Senate Retirement Committee, returns as an ex officio member.

Learn more about the LASERS Board at lasersonline.org/about/board-of-trustees/.

EFT Notices Now Accessible through myLASERS

Benefit notices (EFT notices) are only generated when there is a change to your gross, taxes, insurance, or credit union amounts and at the end of the year. These notices will no longer be mailed, but you can access them online through your myLASERS account.

Submit Your Louisiana Photos

For years, LASERS has been fortunate to receive hundreds of photos from our members and affiliates that vividly depict the state's unique landscape, culture, industries, and historical landmarks. Many of these submitted images are prominently showcased and properly credited in various digital and print materials produced by LASERS.

If you have original images that reflect the charm of Louisiana, we invite you to share your photos with us. Whether it's a breathtaking sunset over the bayou, a snapshot of local festivities, or a unique view of historical landmarks, your photos could become part of our visual narrative.

If you would like to submit your images, please go to lasersonline.org/submit-photos/ to begin the photo submission process.

2024 RSEA Hall of Fame Inductee

Robley P. “Shine” Domingue, Sr., was a graduate of Lafayette High School in 1946, attended Southwestern Louisiana Institute (ULL) in 1946. He graduated from Spencer Business College in 1948. H had an infectious smile that earned him the nickname, “Shine”, which stuck with him throughout his entire life. “Shine” proudly served his country for six years in the Louisiana National Guard from 1949 as a medic. “Shine” then became a Louisiana career public servant having served 40 plus years from 1953 until he passed away in 2005. His service included the Custodian of Voting Machines Office, Voting Machines Department, Commissioner of Elections, State Elections Director as Assistant Commissioner of Elections, and Director of the Commissioner of Elections, & finally part-time in the Secretary of State’s Office. “Shine’s” leadership skills were so apparent, he served on the Board of Directors of the Retired State Employees Association (RSEA) for

many years and most notably as Lafayette/Acadiana Chapter President, where he was known for having one of the most well attended RSEA Chapter meetings, He held state offices as secretary-treasurer, first and second vice-president and eventually rose to Statewide President of RSEA, until the time of his passing



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RETIRED STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION • LOUISIANA

2024 RSEA Hall of Fame Inductee

Victor "Vic" B. Dennis, Jr. graduated from Lowery High School in 1956. Vic is a U.S. veteran who proudly served his country for 30 years in the United States Air Force from 1956-1986, as a Chief Master Sergeant, the highest enlisted rank. Vic was a dedicated public servant who devoted thirty years of his life to the citizens of the U.S. and 14.5 years of service to the State of Louisiana in human resources for DHH at Pinecrest State School, later called Pinecrest Developmental Center. Vic retired in 2001 as Regional Human Resource Director. Vic continued to pursue degrees in higher education and was awarded a Bachelor's Degree in Adult Education and two (2) Master's Degrees in Human Resources and Personnel later in life. While serving on the RSEA Board for several years, Vic is a strong voice for the less fortunate in prison and jail, and he is also very passionate about his faith, through service to his church and religious community in the Alexandria-Pineville area. Vic continues to serve in his local community as a Board Member of a Homeless Agency, for United Way and Habitat for Humanity, the Rapides Parish Sheriff's Office Prison Re-Entry Program, Alexandria Counseling Services, local and state Behavioral Advisory Councils, SMI, a mission support for Zimbabwe, and Biblical Teaching for his church. Vic Dennis is passionate about his service to RSEA and he served as Alexandria Chapter President for many years and Statewide RSEA President for two years, and has served, and continues to serve,

as RSEA Legislative Committee Chairman. Vic has advocated for retiree COLA's and protecting State Employee's healthcare and pension benefits. As the RSEA Legislative Committee Chairman he led the fight to enhance and protect cost of living allowances (COLAs) for retirees and fought for the Office of Group Benefits Plan in order to protect employee/retiree health and life insurance benefits.



RSEA FOUNDATION TO RAFFLE OFF FLAG QUILT

The RSEA Foundation will raffle off this beautiful 50" x 65" American Flag quilt as a fundraiser for scholarships. The drawing will be held on Monday, April 15, 2024 at 10 AM at the RSEA office. The flag was made and donated by Patsy Austin of Baton Rouge.

Tickets are \$10 each and only 500 tickets will be available. The quilt will be on display at the 2024 chapter meeting locations. You may also visit our office at 9412 Common St., Suite 7 in Baton Rouge to view the quilt. Our office hours are 9 AM – 3:30 PM Monday thru Thursday.





*Working Today for **Your** Tomorrow*

9412 Common Street, Suite 7
Baton Rouge, LA 70809



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