

# The AERA Voice!

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## AERA Hosts a Successful 2016 Annual Meeting

By Janice J. Charlesworth, AERA Executive Director

With approximately 700 education retirees, special guests, and friends of public education gathered for the Alabama Education Retirees Association’s 2016 Annual Meeting at the Cahaba Grand Conference in Birmingham on March 29, it was an historic day. Normally you don’t begin a story with a quote from the close of the meeting, but it truly describes the day. AERA President Joe Ward stated before adjourning the meeting, “Senator Dial gave us hope, Don Yancey gave us information, and Larry Lee gave us inspiration! What more could a member ask for?”

The meeting was opened by President Joe Ward. An invocation and Pledge of Allegiance were provided by Joe McFerrin, past AERA president and current president of Madison County Education Retirees Association. The National Anthem was sung by former AEA President and current Cullman Education Retirees Association President Jo Anne Minnitt. President Ward thanked the members from Birmingham City and Jefferson County who assisted with registration. He also acknowledged the financial support AERA received

from Countryman and Smitherman along with Fidelity Security Life, who provide refreshments every year.

President Ward then introduced the Business Meeting speaker, Senator Gerald Dial, a true statesman with over 40 years of service in the Alabama House of Representatives and Senate, and a friend of public education. He is a former teacher and coach who met his wife while teaching. Senator Dial touched on three important topics including the General Fund, the Education Trust Fund, and the RSA. The General Fund budget has gone to Governor Robert Bentley who plans to veto the budget as it is \$80M short on Medicaid funding. He stated it is important to fund Medicaid to keep rural hospitals from closing and provide the much needed medical care. Funding options include increasing choice taxes such as tobacco products, e-cigarettes, and alcohol. Other options are gambling and the lottery. Senator Dial stated, “I won’t support transfer of funds from the ETF to the General Fund.” He warned our members to watch for a proposal to consolidate the budgets, which will not be good for public education. He commented that the Senate was working to make changes to the ETF budget approved by the House of Representatives and that he was working hard to find the funds for a 13th bonus check for education retirees. Work on the ETF budget will take place beginning April 5. In closing, Senator Dial stated that the RSA is always under review and there are those who like to report it is in bad shape. We don’t need to change anything, and he will fight for the RSA. As he concluded his presentation, he thanked retired teachers, support personnel, and all those in the field of education. Senator Dial



Senator Gerald Dial speaks to members during the Business Session at the 2016 Annual Meeting.

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SEE ANNUAL DISTRICT MEETINGS SCHEDULE ON PAGE 5!