



BLET Auxiliary News

Working to bring about safer working conditions for Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen, educate spouses, and enhance the lifestyles of railroad employees and their families.

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Autumn 2021

Kathleen Bisbikis, President • Rachel Pharris, 1st Vice President • Lawana Poss, Secretary • Terri Fleming, Treasurer
Jessica Cole, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative • www.bletauxiliary.net

4th Quadrennial Convention

The Fifth National BLET Convention is scheduled to be held the week of October 10, 2022, at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel and Casino. The Auxiliary 4th Quadrennial Convention will be held at the same time and place as the BLET Convention. Each local auxiliary in good standing (up-to-date with all dues and fees), and having a minimum of eight active members, is eligible to send one of its members or officers to the National Convention to represent them. For each eligible auxiliary, a Convention Delegate and an Alternate Delegate must be elected no later than the end of this year. The Alternate Delegate will attend the convention in the event that the elected Delegate is unable to attend for any reason. The National Auxiliary will issue official credentials for the delegates prior to the convention, and travel and lodging expenses will be reimbursed at the conclusion of the meetings, as outlined in the National Bylaws, Article IV, Section 2, Expense Reimbursement, on page 16.

All Convention Delegates and National Officers are required to attend **all** of the scheduled National Auxiliary meetings during the convention and are responsible for reviewing all information forwarded to them from the National Auxiliary prior to the convention. To learn more about the duties of the convention delegates, please refer to the National Bylaws, Article IV, Representation, on page 15. If an auxiliary is eligible but unable to send a delegate to the Convention, a proxy will be appointed by the National President to represent that auxiliary.

Resolutions reflecting requested changes to the Constitution & Bylaws are submitted by local auxiliaries, members-at-large, and the national officers prior to the convention. These resolutions are considered and voted upon during the proceedings. Those that are passed by the delegates are enacted. After the Convention, the National Constitution and Bylaws are updated with these revisions.

All resolutions must be submitted to the National President sixty days prior to the opening of the General Session of the National Convention. For the 2022 Convention, **the deadline for submitting resolutions is August 11, 2022**. All members are encouraged to read through the Constitution and Bylaws and offer ideas and changes to help move our organization forward into the future. The current Constitution & Bylaws can be found on our website, www.bletauxiliary.net. Please take time to think about how your Auxiliary functions and examine the existing bylaws to evaluate if the bylaw provisions now in place either stifle growth or omit rules that would benefit how the Auxiliary conducts business between conventions.

Numerous changes are made at each National Convention. Some of the major changes implemented during the 2018 Convention included:

ATTENTION LOCAL AUXILIARIES!



Elections for officers of local auxiliaries are held every two years at the last meeting of the calendar year. Some auxiliaries will conduct elections in 2021; however others may not be electing new local officers until next year. Either way, each local auxiliary in good standing (up-to-date with all dues and fees), and having a minimum of eight active members, must elect a Convention Delegate and an Alternate Delegate for the National Convention as soon as possible. The convention is to be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, the week of October 10, 2022.

(1) The term limit for the office of National Secretary was reduced from 8 years to 4 years; (2) Eligibility requirements for scholarships was expanded to include BLET Auxiliary members with at least one year of membership; (3) Dues were increased slightly and member-at-large dues are now prorated for the first year of membership depending on the date of the application; (4) Dues are now waived for those with 50 years of membership, down from 60 years; (5) Associate members of local auxiliaries are eligible to be elected for local auxiliary offices, with the exception of Delegate to the National Convention.

Each of the current national officers will give a report of her activities and accomplishments since the last National Convention in 2018. Election of new national officers will also take place during the Convention. If you are considering running for a national officer position, please let us know.

In order to stay in keeping with the times, the Auxiliary has made substantive changes from the time it was first founded, in 1887. Our bylaws must continue to be modified and fine-tuned at every convention if we are to continue to grow and adapt to the needs and aspirations of our present and future membership.

Look for more information about the details of the National Convention in future issues of this publication. The National Auxiliary Executive Council feels it is important for everyone to start thinking about the process now.



From the President

By KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

“I always wondered why somebody didn’t do something about that.... then I realized I was somebody”

Lily Tomlin

Welcome to our Autumn edition of the BLET Auxiliary Newsletter.

We hope everyone had an enjoyable summer, and I know that I can't be the only one looking forward to cooler weather. California has been hot, dry, and on fire for several months, and I am hopeful we get some rain to fill up our lakes and put out the multiple fires in our forest and improve our air quality.

I was fortunate to attend the BLET Western Regional Convention in Austin, Texas, and the Eastern Regional Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. It felt wonderful and renewing to be back at it and to see everyone again, new friends and old. The feeling was different this year as we have lost some of our railroad family since we last met in 2019, and their absence was felt. At the same time, it was so good to see those who did attend. It felt like coming home again, and I thoroughly enjoyed every second of it. You can read about and see photos from both of these meetings on pages 8 and 9.

This year, I was also invited to attend the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen Convention in Austin, Texas, preceding the Western Regional meeting. This is by far one of my favorite meetings to attend because, if you have ever walked into a room full of brothers and are met with jokes and camaraderie, that is what this is like. These state chairmen do a fantastic job in each of their respective states, and on the national level, and are very supportive of the Auxiliary. I cannot begin to express my appreciation for what they do for all railroad families across the nation.

As a reminder to all of our local auxiliaries, we will be getting ready to attend our National Convention in Las Vegas around this time next year. It is vital that your members elect a delegate to represent your auxiliary at the convention, and an alternate delegate to attend if for some reason the delegate is unable to go. This should be done as soon as possible,

as National Secretary Lawana Poss will be in touch with you to get your delegate's information in November. If you will be attending the National Convention for the first time in 2022, you can plan to leave Las Vegas feeling motivated and refreshed. Among the many things that happen in Vegas, the election of National Officers will take place. You can read about all of this in more detail on the cover page of this edition.

On a more personal note, I'd like to remind you that just because the two-person crew verbiage was removed from the Invest Act by the Senate, this does not mean we will no longer fight for it. We, as the families of railroaders, need to join together now, just like we have in years past, and make it our job to bring attention to our families, neighbors, community leaders, legislators, and the media that it is simply not safe and not acceptable to have only one person in the cab of a locomotive. We all have our stories about events when anything less than TWO people would have ended in disaster. I ask that you please share that information with anyone who will listen. Use your social media as a platform, make calls and write letters, and let's join our voices together, because if we say nothing, we can only blame ourselves.

Lastly, the National Auxiliary is in a period of growth. You do not have to belong to a local auxiliary nor do you have to start an auxiliary to be a member. We have "members-at-large" all across the country doing great things. We encourage you to ask other railroad families to join us.

The more of us there are, the louder our voices become. Let's join together now and become a voice so loud we cannot be ignored!

Kathleen "Kat" Bisbikis
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Find us on the web at www.bletauxiliary.net
Also...

Find us on 
THE NATIONAL B.L.E.T. AUXILIARY



Even our children understand why we need two-person crews. Braley and Brynlee Pharris, daughters of Rachel and Brad Pharris, ask that you and your family help promote rail safety!

By Rachel Pharris

As advocates for rail safety-related issues, we urge you all to contact your senators and representatives to urge them to support the two person crew bill.

This is about more than just jobs.

This is an issue on safety - community safety, emergency vehicle safety, and rail crew safety.

Ever complained about an intersection being blocked by a train? If there is only one person on a train, it will only get worse. Trains are getting longer; trains carry hazardous materials; trains sometimes cannot be stopped in time to avoid accidents at road crossings; and, in the event of an accident, a single crew member cannot leave the engine to help with any emergency situation.

If you love a railroader, please contact your senators and representatives.

If you love your community, please contact your senators and representatives.

If you hate waiting at intersections blocked by trains, please contact your senators & representatives.

If you have children who are the next generation, please contact your senators and representatives.

Please request they add their name in support of Two Person Crews.

National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen Annual Meeting, Austin, Texas, July 11 & 12, 2021

By National President Kathleen Bisbikis

The 2021 NASLBC annual meeting was held in Austin, Texas, preceding the BLET Western Regional Meeting on July 11 and 12th at the Austin Hilton. The National auxiliary was fortunate to have received an invitation to attend, and honestly, we wouldn't miss it. This year, National President Kathleen Bisbikis and National Secretary Lawana Poss were in attendance to represent the Auxiliary.

Day one of the meeting included the seating of new members from Arizona, Minnesota, and Oregon. A moment of silence was held in remembrance of our dear friend, Chairman Shahraim Allen whose sudden passing has left a hole in our hearts. The remainder of day one was a closed meeting with reports from committees and other vital topics. Day two of the meeting was called to order by the Chairman of the NASLBC, Shane Hubbard, from Indiana. Speakers for the day included National BLET President Dennis Pierce, National 1st Vice President Lee Pruitt, National Legislative Representative Vince Verna, Rick Levy, President of the Texas State AFL-CIO, and yours truly. International Teamster President James Hoffa surprised the Chairmen with his arrival at the hotel and welcomed everyone in attendance.

The national legislative arm of the BLET is made up of the hardworking members fighting at the state and national capitals to help promote the safety of railroad workers everywhere. We are all grateful for everything they do for members and their families.

They are also some of the strongest supporters of our Auxiliary because they understand the impact that the voices of thousands of members of railroad families can lend when fighting for safety issues. As they support us, we support them.

I was so happy to spend the day with these amazing union men who have given me a home amongst their ranks. As I told them, walking into their meeting was like coming home to a group of (older & younger) brothers. I am always met with hugs and jokes and updated with important information about things happening in their states. As seriously as they take their jobs, they are always a fun group made up of some of the best people you could hope to spend time among, and I'm so grateful to be a part of their "family."

Remembering Brother Shahraim Allen

Our dear friend and brother, Shahraim C. Allen, passed unexpectedly on June 24, 2021, at the age of 45. Shahraim, a 3rd generation railroader, served as Washington State Legislative Board Chairman from 2012 until his passing. During his tenure, Brother Allen led in the establishment of a bill to require a minimum crew size on certain trains, and a crew transport safety bill in his state. We will forever miss Shahraim's big smile, warm hugs, and friendly, approachable nature. Rest in peace Brother Allen.



With summer approaching and COVID restrictions easing up, local auxiliaries began to again meet in-person.



Auxiliary 417, Springfield, Missouri, met at the home of Kelly Short on June 7. Front row, left to right: Gail Sanchez, Heather Williams, Tara Parker (via zoom), and Kelsey Epperson. Back row, left to right: Kelly Short, Amy Walters, Rachel Pharris, and Tracy Dougan.

Kelly Short provided a fabulous homemade meal for all in attendance. During our meeting, we had a chance to discuss upcoming elections.



On July 21, the Amarillo Auxiliary met at Joe Taco for family night and to “taco ‘bout” our auxiliary to new families that wanted to join. We enjoyed good food, good fellowship, and welcomed two new members. Our Auxiliary just participated in our local BLET Golf Event (more about that in the next newsletter), and our first meeting of the fall will be held on Sunday, September 19.

Back Row, left to right: Victoria Delahay (President), Michelle Labrier, and new members Stephanie Blunt and Stacy Evenson-Ferguson. Front Row: Pam Wimbolt (Secretary), Megan West (Vice President).



Eastern Oregon Auxiliary 362 met on June 10, 2021, at the home of Jodi and Will Wallace - clockwise from left to right: Steve Leyshon, Chris Baldwin, Jodi Wallace, Pat Leyshon, and Erin Ahner.

“It was a great feeling to once again meet in-person,” said President Jodi Wallace. “We talked about the upcoming year’s activities and how to grow our membership. Since this meeting, we held another in-person meeting and have scheduled a barbecue for September.”



Twin Ports Auxiliary 6388 members were excited to meet at Grizzlys Wood-Fired Grill & Bar, in Superior, Wisconsin. Left to right: President Rose Surchik, Karen Urban, Katy Dorin, and Tom Dorin.

Not in photograph: Steve Surchik.



On an outing with his son, UP Conductor Jerry Reid, a 3rd generation railroader, took his son to see the trains roll by in Downtown Tucson, Arizona.

Recognize Each Other

By Joy Reid, wife of UP Engineer Jerry Reid, Tucson, Arizona

- He'll never understand the weight of managing everything alone a few times a week, without your partner.
- I'll never understand the depths of leaving the family I long to protect, but want to provide for.
- He'll never understand what it's like to go to work and still come home to responsibilities that cannot be ignored.
- I'll never understand what it means to leave a few times a week missing meals and milestones.
- He'll never understand the incredible duty it is to raise and nurture the children without him; to teach them kindness and respect, boundaries, and responsibility on a consistent basis.
- I'll never know what it means to miss a birthday party.
- He'll never understand the silence that screams from his seat at the table.
- I'll never understand what it feels like to leave that empty chair.
- He'll never understand my longing for a few nights in a cold dark quiet hotel room.
- I'll never understand the desire to just be home every night and sleep in our bed.
- Trying to decide whose weight is heavier will only cause division in your marriage.
- I know it's hard, railroad wives.
- I know you because I am you.
- But, when we recognize the weight that we are both carrying, we speak life back into our husbands and each other.
- Your support and encouragement will bring life to your marriage.

Proverbs 18:4 "A person's words can be life-giving water; words of true wisdom are as refreshing as a bubbling brook."

Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 Awards Scholarship to Deserving Student

By Katrina Hughes

Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8, in North Platte, Nebraska, is proud to announce our 2021 local scholarship recipient, Rebecca Ady. Rebecca is attending South Dakota State University as a sophomore. She is the daughter of John & Natalie Ady out of North Platte, Nebraska. John is a member of BLET Division 388, and both he and his wife play an active role in our auxiliary.



Congratulations Rebecca!

New Auxiliary In Formation

HELP US WELCOME SAN ANTONIO TEXAS
TO OUR AUXILIARY FAMILY

Join our Facebook group at: BLET Auxiliary San
Antonio Information

NEW MEMBERS WANTED

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



By JESSICA
COLE,
NATIONAL
LEGISLATIVE
REPRESENTATIVE

Precision Scheduled Railroading: House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Peter DeFazio Speaks Out In Fortune Magazine Op Ed Below

Wall Street is boosting profits in railroads with new technology. But it's ignoring the drawbacks.

By Peter DeFazio, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair

In a commentary published in Fortune earlier this month, Ike Brannon and Michael F. Gorman took great liberties in trying to debunk my concerns with precision scheduled railroading (PSR). Please allow me to set the record straight.

I have served on the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure for 34 years, crafting public policy through seven different presidential administrations, both Democratic and Republican. Freight transportation is critical to our economy. The ability to efficiently, reliably, and safely deliver freight makes us more competitive in the global economy.

And many transportation stakeholders agree that freight rail is critical to reducing our nation's carbon emissions. The transportation sector is now the highest emitter of greenhouse gases in the country and shifting more freight from trucks to rail could significantly reduce these emissions. Freight railroads estimate that if 25% of the truck traffic moving at least 750 miles went by rail instead, annual green-

house gas emissions would fall by approximately 13.1 million tons.

But PSR is not some fancy optimization strategy to increase freight volume or improve operations and reduce emissions; rather, it is a business strategy promoted by Wall Street to boost short-term profits. Wall Street investors have proven they don't care about the long-term health of the industries from which they seek to extract wealth. Similarly, they don't care about ensuring an efficient, reliable, and safe freight service that drives the U.S. economy.

And they're not hiding it. Investor calls demonstrate that Wall Street investors' myopic focus on short-term profits demands that railroads boost quarterly profits by cutting costs and increasing revenues. In doing so, great freight rail service and the long-term health of the industry is sacrificed.

At public proceedings before my committee and the Surface Transportation Board (STB), and in public letters, an array of shippers have detailed the effects PSR has had on freight movement. These include disruptive changes to operating plans and service schedules; degradation of service, such as delays due to insufficient locomotive power and lack of crews; and unreasonable charges, such as increases in demurrage and accessorial fees. Some shippers have even been forced to use more trucking as a result.

One of the many impacts of PSR is the uncontrolled growth in train lengths. A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found that between 2008 and 2017, train length grew by 25% for two Class I railroads (which comprise the seven largest railroads in the U.S.), and officials from each Class I stated they operate longer trains, including some that extend for several miles. Freight railroad investor

calls continue to boast annual train length increases every year.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is still studying the safety impacts of these long trains. While investors reap the benefits, the general public experiences the drawbacks. What was once a few-minute annoyance now can cause community-wide traffic jams and emergency services delays—concerns expressed to the GAO by the National League of Cities and state and local officials.

And it's getting worse. In multiple committee hearings, I have heard testimony that these longer trains are more frequently blocking crossings for longer amounts of time. Wall Street may not care, but Main Street does.

And finally, freight rail does not function without a strong workforce. Let's not forget that prior to COVID-19, from 2015 to 2019, the freight railroad industry slashed the average size of its workforce by over 17%. It's little wonder that STB Chairman Martin Oberman has sought information about how such a reduction may be related to or contributed to recent shipper complaints. I may be guilty of caring about middle-class workers and their safety more than Wall Street millionaires and billionaires, but I sleep just fine bearing that burden.

My goal has been and remains to foster a healthy freight rail market that boosts the overall economy and reduces carbon emissions. Wall Street's goal is to get wealthier—no matter the impact on our economy, environment, transportation system, or workforce.

<https://fortune.com/2021/07/21/peter-defazio-precision-scheduled-railroading-problems/>

FRA Tightens Positive Train Control (PTC) Reporting Requirements:

Under a Rulemaking issued July 27, 2021, and taking effect August 26, 2021, the FRA revised the regulations governing Positive Train Control safety technology and strengthened its reporting requirements.

The FRA's Rulemaking stated, "Recognizing that the railroad industry intends to enhance FRA-certified PTC systems to continue improving rail safety and PTC technology's reliability and operability (so-called "PTC. 2.0"), FRA is modifying the process by which a host railroad must submit a request for amendment (RFA) to FRA before making certain changes to its PTC Safety Plan (PTCSP) and FRA-certified PTC system. Second, to enable more effective FRA oversight, this final rule expands an existing reporting requirement by increasing the frequency from annual to biannual; broadens the reporting requirement to encompass positive performance-related information, including about the technology's positive impact on rail safety, not just failure-related information; and requires host railroads to utilize a new, standardized report form."

Positive Train Control was mandated by Congress to be put in place on nearly 60,000 miles of track after a head-on crash between a freight train and a commuter train in Los Angeles in 2008. After numerous delays and extensions, the affected rail carriers met the December 31, 2020 deadline for implementation.

PTC technology is subject to four categories of issues: hardware, software, wayside communication, and human error. More frequent and thorough FRA oversight through timely reporting may result in faster resolution of such problems.

Source: <https://www.railway-age.com/cs/ptc/fra-issues-final-rule-on-revised-ptc-reporting/www.metrarail.com>

The Protecting the Right to Organize Act: HR 842

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, favored widely by Democrats and Labor, passed the House in March 2021. It has moved on to the Senate, where it stands a much tougher road ahead because, although the Senate is narrowly controlled by Democrats, the majority is not large enough to defeat a filibuster.

A few of the major provisions of the bill are:

1. Effectively nullifies State Right to Work laws that force unions to provide representation to workers who opt out of the union by allowing the union to collect dues to cover the cost of collective bargaining and contract negotiation.
2. Forbids Employer Interference, Intimidation, and Influence in Union Elections.
3. Allows new unions to move to mediation and arbitration when an agreement on a first contract cannot be reached, as is common.
4. Prohibits an employer from using a worker's immigration status against him or her.
5. Establishes monetary penalties and stricter accountability for employer violations of labor rights.
6. Allows for reclassification of many independent contractors to employee status, thereby increasing their rights.

Currently the PRO Act has been referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

MAJORITY BY RANK:

- Patty Murray (WA)
- Bernie Sanders (VT)
- Robert P. Casey, Jr (PA)
- Tammy Baldwin (WI)
- Christopher S. Murphy (CT)
- Tim Kaine (VA)
- Maggie Hassan (NH)
- Tina Smith (MN)
- Jacky Rosen (NV)

- Ben Ray Lujan (NM)
- John Hickenlooper (CO)

MINORITY BY RANK:

- Richard Burr (NC)
- Rand Paul (KY)
- Susan Collins (ME)
- Bill Cassidy, M.D. (LA)
- Lisa Murkowski (AK)
- Mike Braun (IN)
- Roger Marshall (KS)
- Tim Scott (SC)
- Mitt Romney (UT)
- Tommy Tuberville (AL)
- Jerry Moran (Kansas)

They may be reached via <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm> to express our support for this legislation and to help give it a push out of committee.

Arbitration Decision Makes Crew Size a Negotiable Matter

In a huge win for three Class 1 Rail Carriers that simultaneously handicaps the BLET and SMART-TD unions, Federal arbitration has ruled that rail crew size is subject to collective bargaining in contract negotiations. Approximately 60% of Class 1 Freight Rail Conductors are affected by this decision.

All BNSF and Norfolk Southern Conductors are affected, along with about half of Union Pacific's. Three carriers, Canadian Pacific, CN, and CSX, were not parties in the legal action that required arbitration, so their conductors are exempted from this ruling. Additionally, Kansas City Southern was dismissed from the arbitration award after voluntarily withdrawing its demand.

Historical contract negotiations further complicate the issue of who is affected by the award and who is not. As crew size reductions occurred decades ago, agreements contained moratoriums on issues eligible for collective bargaining in the future. At that time, those moratoriums were often negotiated on individual railroads before mergers that ultimately consolidated over 30 Class 1 Railroads down to the seven major carriers we have today. Only some of the moratoriums made

specific reference to crew size, and those agreements were exempted from the arbitration award.

The arbitration was the culmination of litigation that started 20 months ago, initiated by the three carriers to challenge whether the decades-old moratoriums included crew size negotiation or not. The labor member of the arbitration board was the dissenting vote on the 2-1 decision that awarded crew size negotiation to the carriers.

The July 28th arbitration award specifies that negotiations be conducted railroad-by-railroad rather than nationally. That means that the current negotiations over wages, benefits, and work rules, which SMART-TD entered in November of 2019, must continue separate from the new arbitration award. It's speculated that there will be fallout in the contract negotiations, nonetheless, potentially including conductor wage reduction to provide similar economic savings to crew size reduction.

National Two Man Crew Legislation is on the table again in the INVEST Infrastructure Bill, but this bill is currently stalled in the Senate after having passed the House. A number of states also have enacted or are considering state Two Man Crew Legislation, but in the absence of a Federal Requirement, it seems likely that there will be inconsistencies and confusion in interstate shipments and even from one rail line to the next depending on moratoriums in decades-old contracts for carriers that have long ago merged into one of the big seven Freight Carriers currently in existence.

Sources: <https://www.railwayage.com/regulatory/rail-labor-ordered-to-negotiate-crew-size>

(And I wish to add that this is an exceptionally informative article— Please read it to better understand the history behind current decisions.)

Update on what's IN the INVEST in America Infrastructure bill

This is how the INVEST In America Act protects freight and transit rail

for those who are wondering:

Freight Rail:

Requires the federal Department of Transportation (DOT) rescind any special permit or approval for the transport of liquefied natural gas (LNG) by rail tank car issued before the date of enactment. Also prohibits DOT regulations on the transport of LNG by rail tank car from taking effect until DOT conducts a further safety evaluation. Directs the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to initiate an evaluation of the safety, security, and environmental risks of transporting LNG by rail.

- Improves rail safety by addressing highway-rail grade crossing needs.
- Requires a study on the safety effects of long trains.
- Requires FRA to increase its roster of rail safety inspectors by 20 percent.
- Requires FRA to collect data on train length and crew size when an accident occurs.
- Requires the creation of a standardized FRA safety investigation process.
- Requires FRA to engage in a public process before granting waivers from, or suspensions of, railroad safety standards and regulations.
- Creates a federal blocked crossing program to collect data and enforce a 10-minute blocked crossing limit.
- Has a two-person crew freight train mandate that, like the 2020 bill, has some exemptions for short lines and train length.

These are:

- The train operations are not on a main line.
- The train does not exceed a maximum speed of 25 mph on territory with an average track grade of less than 2% for any segment of track that is at least two continuous miles.
- The locomotives are performing assistance to a train that has incurred mechanical failure or lacks the power to traverse

— continued on Page 12

Summer 2021 Regional Meetings

Nashville, Tennessee - August 1-5

By Rachel Pharris, National Vice President/Outreach Coordinator

Nashville welcomed us with open arms for this year's BLET Eastern Meeting. The Grand Hyatt served as our home base for the week and did not disappoint in service, location, or amenities. We were just a short walk away from the excitement of Broadway, lots of shopping, food, and fun.

The Auxiliary started off our week by meeting as a group for dinner at Urban Grub. The food was amazing and the company was even better.

On Monday morning we set up our table in the vendor hall, then moved right into the Auxiliary Executive Council meeting, or, as I like to call it, "meeting of the minds." In attendance were National President Kathleen Bisbikis, National Secretary Lawana Poss, National Treasurer Terri Fleming, and Amarillo Auxiliary President Victoria Delahay, and me.

At Tuesday morning's opening ceremonies, President Pierce welcomed all in attendance, followed by a lineup of great speakers, including Teamsters General President James D. Hoffa; Teamsters International Vice President and Rail Conference Director John F. Murphy; Railroad Retirement Board Labor Member John Bragg; U.S. Representative Jim Cooper, a Democrat who represents Tennessee's 5th District; James Curbeam, Chairman of the Teamsters National Black Caucus and Southern Region Organizing Coordinator; Billy Dycus, President of the Tennessee

AFL-CIO Labor Council; and BLET Auxiliary National President Kat Bisbikis.

The biggest takeaway from President Pierce's speech was the importance of voting. We need to use our vote to make our voices heard.

The Auxiliary meeting, open to all in attendance, was held Tuesday afternoon. We enjoyed meeting some new spouses as well as reconnecting with familiar faces. I was finally able to meet sister Erica Hill, President of our Philadelphia auxiliary, in person. The auxiliary in Philly was the first auxiliary I had the privilege to help organize and was the first auxiliary ever to be installed via Zoom.

President Bisbikis welcomed attendees and gave a brief overview of all that the auxiliary has to offer. Sister Victoria Delahay, President of the auxiliary in Amarillo, Texas, gave an account of the ways the auxiliary has helped her as a railroad spouse moving from northern California to Amarillo and starting a brand-new auxiliary there. I gave a brief summary on organizing new auxiliaries and ways the national officers can help assist anyone who wants to get one started in their area.

Bob Hagan, Director of Political and Legislative Affairs for the BLET, and his wife, Michelle Lepore-Hagan, Representative of the 58th District of the Ohio House of Representatives, also spoke at our meeting. They are

both such an asset to not only the union but to all brothers and sisters they meet. Retired BLET State Chairman Dave Brown, who is now a field rep for the Yaeger & Jungbauer Law Firm, spoke to the attendees about some of the legal issues railroad spouses may be faced with; and Angie Miller from United Healthcare, dropped off bags filled with health care info and promotional items.

Wednesday was family day. Those who did not participate in the golf tournament spent time with their families exploring the sights of Nashville. Many thanks to those golfers who supported the Auxiliary by purchasing mulligans!

On Thursday, auxiliary officers worked at selling raffle tickets. We are thankful to everyone who stopped by our table to purchase tickets or just to say hello. We wrapped up the conference Thursday evening at the closing dinner banquet. It was a great opportunity to spend some time socializing while we said our goodbyes and made some great memories.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our sponsors who donated raffle items: Joseph Jarman; Sherry Schirripa & American Time; Kristen Daniel, El Paso Auxiliary 591; all the local BLET Auxiliaries; the Law Firm of Yaeger & Jungbauer; Mike Poss; Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary; Johnny & Jane Butler; The Pioneer Woman; Domestic Management Services; Moving America; and Will & Jodi Wallace.



Photos, top to bottom: 1) Erica Hill and Rachel Pharris; 2) Kathleen Bisbikis addressed the attendees at the Opening Ceremonies; 3) Jared Bisbikis and Rachel Pharris.

Austin, Texas - July 12-16

By Kathleen Bisbikis, National President

Austin, Texas, served as the backdrop to this year's BLET Western Regional Meeting. The Austin Hilton was just minutes from delicious Texas BBQ. As the first regional meeting since COVID, I think all 315 of us in attendance would agree that it felt good to be together again with our rail family. That feeling resonated throughout the entire week.

Opening ceremonies commenced on July 13 with a welcome from BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce, followed by the presentation of the colors by the Austin Fire Department Honor Guard, and an invocation by Brother Gary Pedigo, Chairman of the Texas State Legislative Board. Guest speakers included Teamsters General President James P. Hoffa; Teamsters International Vice President and Rail Conference Director John F. Murphy; Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED) Vice President Roger Sanchez; Railroad Retirement Board Labor Member John Bragg; IBT Joint Council 58 President and Local 988 President Robert Mele; and Mike Collier, candidate for Lieutenant Governor in Texas. I was honored to address the attendees following this impressive lineup of speakers

President Pierce presented the brass bell on behalf of the 57,500 men and women of the BLET to recognize General President Hoffa's pending retirement. "Thank you, Brother Jim, for your leadership, and congratulations on a remarkable career," President Pierce said. "On behalf of all BLET members, I want to also thank you for your vision of uniting all transportation workers in the strongest Union in America, which led directly to the creation of the Teamsters Rail Conference." Hoffa spent the past 23 years leading the Teamster labor union. Brother Hoffa stayed throughout the opening ceremonies and was happy to visit with all the attendees and pose for photos.

A slideshow presentation was shown in Memoriam of those brothers and sisters who left us too soon—always a tearjerker and a reminder of the dangers that we sometimes forget come with jobs in the railroad industry.

Tuesday afternoon, the BLET Auxiliary held our meeting, which is open to everyone in attendance. National Secretary Lawana Poss and I conducted the meeting. We were fortunate to have our own great lineup of guest speakers, including Pete Gilbertson from Cornerstone Benefits Management; Angie Miller from United Healthcare; and our old friends and former State Legislative Chairmen, now Special Representatives for Yaeger & Jungbauer Law Firm, Scott Palmer and Dave Brown. Our meeting was very well attended, and included many conversations about the benefits of joining the auxiliary, as well as the railroad's future.

Our week in Austin ended with the Thursday night banquet and the drawing of the 50/50 winner. Lawana and I are thankful to see all our old friends and meet new ones over the week. We left Austin, like everyone else, feeling refreshed, motivated, and excited to get back to work reminding everyone of the importance of our union.



Photos, top to bottom:

1) Lawana Poss, Terri Fleming, Rachel Pharris, Kathleen Bisbikis, Victoria Delahay, and Emily Kohn-Schnatz, at the Nashville Meeting;

2) Lawana Poss welcomed members and guests to the Auxiliary Table in the Vendors' Area.

3) From front to back: Chris Bladwin and Jodi Wallace from Eastern Oregon Auxiliary No. 362, LaGrande-Hermiston, Oregon; Jessica Keene, and Isabella Keene, from Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No., 503, Salem, Oregon.

4) Kathleen Bisbikis and James P. Hoffa



LOCAL AUXILIARIES GET CREATIVE WITH FUNDRAISING DURING PANDEMIC

FLATROCK AUXILIARY NO. 8 GOLF TOURNAMENT

By Katrina Hughes

I think we would all agree that fundraising has been a bit of a challenge the past year for our local auxiliaries. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines, we were unable to host our Annual Casino Night fundraiser, our staple event. So, on short notice, we decided to give hosting a Golf Tournament a shot, whereas it is an outdoor activity. The Golf Tournament took place June 5, 2021, at the Oregon Trail Golf Course in Sutherland, Nebraska. It was a huge success and a great show of brotherhood with General Chairman Chad Lambert, Vice General Chairman Brian McCoy, and General Secretary/Treasurer Stacy Madsen attending amongst the many BLET local members, friends, family, and members of our community.



Above photo: A few of the teams dressed up to tee off the women's box on one of the holes

Photo grouping at left, clockwise from top left:

1. Gina Kuenning helps her husband Travis don the appropriate attire to tee off the women's box.

2. Matthew Vierya, Matthew Comer, Hector Morales, Molly Morales.

3. Kris Rosenthal and Corban Hughes.

4. Tracey Rosenthal, Katryna Hughes, Amanda Rivas

AUXILIARY 417 GARAGE SALE

By Rachel Pharris

BLET Auxiliary 417 in Springfield, Missouri, held our first fundraising garage sale Friday, June 4, and Saturday, June 5. All the proceeds went toward annual dues for the participating members. Items sold were donated by members, friends, and family. Members worked shifts setting up, pricing, and selling. We were able to make enough to cover the 2021 dues of all participating members.

PHOTOS: left photo, front to back: Gail Sanchez, Kelly Short, and Oscar Sanchez; right photo: Brad Pharris and daughter Brynlee.



Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

Greetings everyone!

It was wonderful to see many of you at the regional meetings this summer in Austin, Texas, and Nashville, Tennessee! A big thank you for your donations for the raffle table and thank you to all who purchased tickets! We had so many wonderful prizes and excited winners!

Please put the dates for next year's meetings on your calendar and plan to join us:

June 13-17, 2022 – Denver, Colorado, at the Hilton Denver City Center

August 1-5, 2022 – Baltimore, Maryland, at the Hilton Baltimore, Inner Harbor

More details will be available at a later date.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!!

Dereck Haugen – Texas
Jene Ann McGill – Missouri
Susan Garland - Tennessee
Nichole Bischoff - Texas

CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Care and Assistance Program (CAP) is our organization's way of saying thank you to long-time members. The CAP provides financial assistance to qualifying members and helps them to maintain a little bit more of the dignity they deserve. Please check to see if someone in your Auxiliary may be eligible for the Care and Assistance Program and encourage them to apply. Members at Large are eligible also! Please contact me for applications!

AUXILIARIES

Local auxiliaries are required to elect a Delegate to attend the Las Vegas National Convention in October 2022. **Please send me the name, address, phone number, and e-mail address for your elected delegate as soon as possible.** For more information about the National Convention, please see the front cover story.

MEMBERS-at-LARGE

Please make sure to send your dues to me and check to see that all of your information is correct so that you will continue to receive your newsletter. All checks should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary or you may use PayPal or VENMO. The links for these online payment services are located on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net.

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

Our thoughts and prayers go out to Dave and Shannon Dinges and family. Son, Zachary Keiper passed away on Thursday July 8, 2021.

Ruby "Loyce" Duke, passed away Thursday, July 15. She was a long-time member of Auxiliary 37, Little Rock, Arkansas, serving as Chaplain. Loyce joined the auxiliary in 1971.

Shirley Serene Whiting passed away Thursday, August 19. She was a member of Auxiliary 37 in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Mary Anna Mullins, a long-time member and Secretary/Treasurer of Auxiliary 37 in Little Rock, Arkansas, passed away September 4 at the age of 91. Mary Anna served as National Chaplain for the then-GIA from 2001 - 2005. She was always a wealth of information about all things pertaining to the auxiliary for all of us and she will be missed.

These long-time members of Auxiliary 37 will surely be missed by their Auxiliary family!

Kelly and Phil Short, Springfield, Missouri, Auxiliary 417. Phil's mother, Joyce Short, passed away on July 25, 2021.

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

Our thoughts and prayers to all BLET members, Auxiliary members, our family members, and friends battling COVID.

Contact me or any National Officer when there is a death of a member or the death of one of their family members. We want to be able to send our condolences to the family. We would like to also share in the joy! Please let me know of any exciting happenings!

GO GREEN!

Have you made the move to GO GREEN and receive your newsletter in full color by e-mail!! It is so easy to do! Just send me an e-mail to lwposs@gmail.com requesting your newsletter be sent to you by e-mail instead of regular mail. When the quarterly newsletter is published, you will receive an e-mail with a full color digital PDF of the newsletter.

Past Newsletters are also available to read any time on our website at bletauxiliary.net.

Thank you all for your support and membership!!



Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, or Lewp2007@bellsouth.net

"Complaining about a problem without proposing a solution is called whining."

— Theodore Roosevelt

Special note from Lawana:

Many thanks to all of you who extended expressions of sympathy, caring, and love, following the passing of my dear mother Sarah Willene Hamilton Worley, on September 10, 2021. Those of you who know me, know that my mom and I were very close and she will be dearly missed. We are grateful for the many wonderful memories she left us with.

Legislative Update

Continued from Page 7

difficult terrain, including to or from the location where assistance is provided.

- The locomotives are not attached to any equipment (except a caboose) and do not travel further than 30 miles from a rail yard.
- A location where one-person operations were being utilized one year prior to the date of enactment of this bill, only if the DOT Secretary determines that the operation achieves an equivalent level of safety.
- Short-line exception.

In addition to the above, a train may be operated with a reduced crew if the carrier has fewer than 400,000 total employee work hours annually and an annual revenue of less than \$20,000,000.

A train must be operated by a two-person crew (no exception), if:

- **It is transporting one or more loaded cars carrying material toxic by inhalation.**
- **It is carrying 20 or more loaded tank cars of a Class 2 material or a Class 3 flammable liquid in a continuous block.**
- **It has 35 or more loaded tank cars of a Class 2 material or a Class 3 flammable liquid throughout its consist.**
- **It is 7,500 feet in length or longer.**
- Has a cross-border provision for the southern border of the U.S. mandating that a U.S. crew take control of all trains one train length north of the CPB scanners.
- Makes yardmaster employees subject to FRA's hours of service protections.
- Directs the FRA to take such actions as are necessary to ensure that certain older air brake control valves are phased out on rail cars operating in cold regions of the United States, an issue brought to light by SMART-TD leadership in 2019.
- Directs the DOT to require railroad carriers to regularly

report on failures of positive train control (PTC) systems.

- Directs the Secretary of Transportation to issue a final rule on fatigue management plans within one year.

TRANSIT:

Establishes a working group to improve the musculoskeletal health of transit and commercial vehicle drivers by developing stronger ergonomic seating standards in transit and commercial vehicles. Requires the working group to compare design standards for women to those for men.

Provides funding for corridor planning and development of high-speed rail projects, reducing traffic congestion and shortening travel times.

Requires passenger and commuter railroad carriers to implement response plans and employee training in order to address assaults against both passengers and employees. The section also requires railroads to report annual assault data to FRA.

Jessica Cole lives in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She can be reached at jcts1987@gmail.com, or 262-672-9742/



By Becky Schneider,
Asst. National
Legislative
Representative

Richard Trumka — July 24, 1949 — August 5, 2021

Labor lost a valuable advocate on August 5th — Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO. Brother Trumka rose from the coal mines of Pennsylvania to serve as President of the United Mine Workers Union from 1982 to 1995. He held the position of secretary-general of the AFL-CIO from 1995 to 2009, until being elected President on September 16, 2009, a position he held until his unexpected death on a camping trip with his family. President Biden praised

Mr. Trumka saying “he was someone I could confide in. You knew whatever he said he’d do, he would do.” A novelty in this day and age. God rest your soul Mr. Trumka and thank you for your service.

Sources: Associated Press/ New York Times/LA Times

Matt Rose’s Warning Comes True About Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR)

— Retired BNSF Executive Chairman Matt Rose got it. According to Bill Stephens at Trains Magazine, Matt Rose warned at the 2019 National Rail Carrier Conference that the Class 1s were inviting regulatory risk by adopting PSR, reducing service, and demarketing some types of traffic in pursuit of higher profits. “We have this common carrier obligation to provide freight service to all customers in all markets.” The warning has come to fruition from different sides, but the latest came from the Surface Transportation Board (STB) Chairman Martin Oberman, who questioned whether the railroads are fulfilling their obligations as common carriers because of Wall Street pressures. For more detail on Chairman Oberman’s concerns, which are reflective of congressional as well as employee concerns, follow this link to the full article: <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/former-bnsf-executive-matt-roses-2019-warning-comes-true/>

Source: Trains Magazine, July 22, 2021

Don’t Forget Elections Have Consequences — Are Fair Elections a Bad Thing?

With all of the good work the Biden Administration has been trying to get done in Washington, DC, my greatest fear is what will be happening in the States. While the 2020 Federal Elections may have leaned toward Democrats, the fact remains that most red states, stayed very red. H.R. 1, the For the People Act, was passed by the House in March, but has been stalled in the Senate by filibuster threats, and now summer vacations, and the infrastructure bill’s snail’s pace. Rep. Clyburn’s

suggested lifting the filibuster only for voting rights issues (if not for everything else), which should be done. It is important to our democracy that the malicious gerrymandering be thwarted.

Time is running out and it doesn’t look good for the home team. By August 16, 2021, the Census Bureau is scheduled to release the 2020 census data to the states, enabling state governments to begin redrawing their legislative and congressional districts. Both Democrats and Republicans have used the every 10-year redistricting process to redraw districts that favor the ruling party. However, the 2010 redistricting was weaponized by the majority of Republican-controlled State Legislatures, often resulting in Republican candidates winning even though more votes were cast for Democrats statewide. After the Supreme Court decision in 2019, the Court ruled that lawsuits over partisan gerrymandering raise a political question beyond the reach of the federal courts. In this first redistricting year since the decision, the Court has turned the process into a veritable “arms race,” combining a new degree of sophistication in map-drawing technology, high levels of partisan polarization, and no recourse to fight against racially motivated district lines. If sued for racial discrimination, states only need argue their maps were drawn based on party interest, not race. The Brennan Center listed four states — Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, where they could realize anywhere from 6 to 13 new districts that heavily favored GOP candidates and would be enough to flip the House back to their control.

HR 1 would implement a series of rules and procedures designed to curb partisan gerrymandering. If the bill isn’t passed before August 16, some parts could be modified to be retroactive, but not all of the legislation’s original redistricting reforms would be preserved if this happens. The For the People Act was also crafted to counter the hundreds

of bills filed in State legislatures to strengthen voter suppression, establishing redistricting rules that include enhanced protections against minority voter dilution, mandate states use independent federal commissions to oversee their redistricting process, and require transparency and public participation in the redrawing process. Law professor Lawrence Lessig predicts, “the gerrymandering we saw in 2010 is going to be gerrymandering on steroids in 2020.” He noted that in 2010, “people were still worried that the Supreme Court was going to come in and strike down extreme partisan gerrymandering,” but in June of 2019, the court said, “We’re not going to do anything,” ruling it a political issue, not reviewable by the courts. The point of all this is: Are fair elections where voters choose their representatives, not the other way around, such a bad thing? This is how the system is supposed to work.

Source: Jacobin July 2021/The Hill Aug 2021

Amtrak Update

Here’s How to Argue for Long Distance Rail: Jim Matthews, President of National Rail Passengers Association (RPA), reported on a “Stay Tuned” podcast hosted by former U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara interviewing DOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg. According to Mr. Matthews, “Mayor Pete” put on a master class in how to unapologetically defend passenger rail investment on its own merits. Bharara was interviewing Buttigieg about the impending Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework (BIF) deal and was enthusiastic about the potential big investments in passenger rail focused on Amtrak’s Acela and the Northeast Corridor. When Buttigieg pointed out that rail investments will also benefit long-distance routes, Bharara quickly noted that those routes are “unprofitable,” implying that only the Corridor was worth investment. Without missing a beat, Secretary Buttigieg said, “Sometimes people throw out this idea that, you know, they’re anti-trains because trains don’t make a profit. Well, the whole

reason we have a Federal policy around them is that they’re not there to make profit, they’re there to make sure the economy as a whole is stronger. That’s why we do anything, right? If something could be efficiently, fairly, and profitably delivered by a business, you wouldn’t need government assistance, you wouldn’t need Congress, you wouldn’t need a big bill to make it happen.” The Secretary did what all good advocates do — he countered a misimpression with facts, and he did it very well on a national platform.

Source: Rail Passengers Association, Jim Matthews President, July 30 Hotline

Rolling Stock Upgrades: Amtrak has revealed prototypes of refreshed Superliner coaches, dining cars and sleeping cars. Passengers’ voices have been heard, and based on the changes coming to the Superliner, Amtrak figured out a way to cost-effectively tackle the issue of needed repairs. The first updated coach cars go into service near the end of June and will continue through all long-distance western routes over 3-years. Bi-level Superliner coaches have had a nice refresh of the soft surfaces. Superliner sleeping cars will have higher quality sheets and new toiletries. According to the RPA, because the refresh is soft surfaces only, you will still need to pack your shim-and-duct-tape kit, but it’s a welcome and significant improvement, and long overdue. The improvement to the seats in the Sightseer Lounge is somewhat less dramatic, but still welcome, as is the improvement to the table side of the lounge, and in the dining cars.

Source: Rail Passengers Association July 30 Hotline

Infrastructure Bill and Amtrak: Any kind of real increase in funding for passenger rail is a plus. That said, the infrastructure bill doesn’t come close to what is needed to bring our passenger rail system to what it needs to be to provide a true network of clean, energy efficient, climate friendly mode of travel. While the 5-year funding proposals of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework (BIF), combined with the

Senate’s Surface Transportation Investment Act of 2021, count as the biggest federal investment in passenger rail since Amtrak’s inception, it is far below the \$110 billion 5-year INVEST in America Act passed by the House. Representative Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Chair of the House Transportation & Infrastructure (T & I) Committee, was notably displeased by the deal struck between the White House and the bipartisan group of Senators. When asked, he said, “I could give a damn about the White House. We’re an independent branch of government. They cut this deal. I didn’t sign off on it.” Once the bill passes the Senate, Rep. DeFazio told reporters, “then we will have an informal conference, and then the bill will be over here with my name on it, and we can amend it and send it back.” So, there is a glimmer of hope that funding could be increased closer to the House levels. This Senate bill leans more towards bringing what’s broken and in disrepair back before heading down the bold path of substantially increasing our national network.

The figure for the \$66 billion for passenger rail is broken down as follows:

- NE Corridor Grants - \$6 billion for procurement and deferred maintenance.
- Intercity Passenger Rail Federal-State Partnerships - \$36 billion.
 - o NE Corridor set-aside - \$24 billion.
 - o Intercity Rail funding for capital projects to repair, replace and rehabilitate assets to improve performance and address maintenance backlog - \$12 billion
- Amtrak National Network - \$16 billion to modernize and update the national network including all 15 long-distance routes and 28 state-supported routes.
- Rail improvement and safety grants - \$5 billion.
- Railroad Crossing Elimination Program - \$3 billion competitive grant program to eliminate railway-highway grade crossings.

While the \$66 billion figure sounds good, in actuality it includes the \$34.2 billion already passed as part of the Surface Transportation Investment Act of 2021. So, the bill only provides an additional \$32 billion over what would have already been authorized as part of the normal re-authorization cycle, as opposed to the highway section which is fully included. It is \$10 billion less than the June agreement between the White House and the bipartisan group of Senators, and \$70 billion less than the INVEST in America Act passed by the House in July.

Source: Rail Passenger Association July 30 Hotline/Mass Transit Mag July 29

As this article was being submitted, the Senate passed the BIF by a vote of 69 to 30 with one Senator not voting because he was with his wife undergoing chemotherapy. The bill will now go back to the House where, as alluded to above, it faces an uncertain future from progressives and the T&I Committee. Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) has stated that she won’t take up the bill until the Senate passes the second part of its infrastructure plan — a \$3.5 trillion package that includes Democrats’ top priorities. Before being voted on by the House, we need to make sure the minimum crew size provision is put back into the bill. The Senate’s passage of the bipartisan measure gives a victory for Biden and the centrist-minded group that led the legislation, especially notable in that it garnered the vote of Minority leader Mitch McConnell. The Hill said it quite well in referring to infrastructure as “one of Washington’s long-running legislative white whales.”

Source: The Hill, August 10, 2021

Infrastructure Bill and the Border Wall

Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) attempted to tie border wall funding to the infrastructure deal on August 4th. The amendment that would prohibit the cancellation of border wall contracts, which had

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North American Railway Foundation®

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Many thanks to the North American Railway Foundation (NARF) for sponsoring our newsletter and making it possible to share educational articles and information with our members across the nation, to keep railroad spouses and their families up-to-date on changes affecting benefits, and to educate our members about important legislation that helps promote safety on the nation's railroads.

The North American Railway Foundation, founded by the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund (BR&CF), was formed on October 22, 1996, as a nonprofit organization (a private operating foundation). Its purpose is to explore, nurture and support railway safety, efficiency, and technology, and to educate about and preserve the history of railroads in the United States and Canada. The goals of the Foundation are achieved by providing direct and active financial support to deserving non-profit institutions and projects, which exemplify the Foundation's purpose.

The Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund, a non-profit corporation established in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was founded on June 12, 1912, by Luther G. Smith, a locomotive engineer for the Pennsylvania Railroad, to provide job income protection to railroaders throughout the United States and Canada who were "held out of service" due to suspension or dismissal. Brother Smith did not object to the railroads using a method to discipline employees when such discipline was necessary, but he did not see the logic in innocent family members having to suffer when the head of the home made an error in the performance of his duties that resulted in a suspension or dismissal.

North American Railway Foundation

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PRESIDENT
EDWARD P. HALEY
NATIONAL DIRECTOR

Save The Date-
Halloween Game Night
October 23rd 7pm est
Hosted by
Auxiliary #71 Philadelphia

Greetings from your Editor, Rachel Pharris

*"What, sir, would the people
of the earth be without
woman? They would be
scarce, sir, almighty scarce."*

-Mark Twain



**Rachel and Brad Pharris at
the BLET Regional Meeting
in Nashville, Tennessee**

Sisters and Brothers,

I have just arrived back at home following the BLET Regional Meeting in Nashville. This was my first time to attend a regional meeting. I was very much anticipating this experience and it did not disappoint. Spending time with my auxiliary family for several days was just amazing. Working our vendor table, attending the opening meeting, and hosting other women in our open auxiliary meeting filled my heart.

I communicate daily with my fellow auxiliary officers, and it was great to finally meet them in person. We were able to spend time working together on goals for the next year, as well as having fun after our duties were complete. We were able to see some local sights, eat several meals together, and enjoy getting to know the spouses.

I made connections with a couple of fellow wives interested in starting an auxiliary in their area. I cannot wait to work together with them and make this happen. My main goal as outreach coordinator is to reach out to other railroad families and help them get connected with the auxiliary. Whether that means connecting with the officers and members of a current auxiliary, enrolling spouses as new members-at-large, or organizing a new auxiliary, I am up for the challenge.

If you would like more info about joining the auxiliary, please reach out to me via phone or e-mail.

I also want to say a big thank you to my fellow officers of our local Auxiliary 417 in Springfield, Missouri, for doing the planning of our 2nd annual golf tournament while I was away in Nashville. They did a fabulous job making sure nothing went undone and the event went off without a hitch.

Rachel Pharris
BLET Auxiliary National Vice President/Outreach Coordinator
404 South, Willard, Missouri
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Legislative Update, continued from Page 13

already been cancelled last month, required 60 votes in order to be added to the bill, but was defeated by a 48 to 49 vote. Joe Manchin (D-WV) was the only Democrat to vote for the amendment.

Source: *The Hill*

Railroad Retirement Updates

Budget Boost for FY 2022: The American Rescue Plan has provided the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) full funding for its years' long Information Technology (IT) project. The agency will finally be able to modernize its archaic computer systems, which should open the door to better service and efficiency once fully implemented. Also included in the Biden Administration's FY 2022 Budget request is a net increase in funding to help offset the lean years of budgetary shortfalls. If approved, the RRB plans to use those funds to hire additional staffing, especially in light of the fact that nearly 25% of its employees are now eligible to retire.

Source: *BLET NYSLB Facebook/Smart TD*

Statements of Service: The Board has issued a Form BA-6, Certificate of Service Months and Compensation, for every railroad employee with creditable railroad compensation in the previous calendar year. The statements were mailed the first half of June, so if you have not received your 2020 statement, contact an RRB field office at 1-877-772-5722. Please take a moment to make sure the Form reflects the correct amount of credits. If something is missing, be sure to file a protest. You have four years to make any corrections to erroneous information.

There is a wealth of information at www.rrb.gov in addition to access to field office representatives. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Board. They are here to help us.

Source: www.rrb.gov/newsroom

Medicare Drug Prices: NARVRE Legislative Director Gary Faley continued his reporting on the exorbitant prices seniors are forced to pay for prescription drugs when the rest of the world pays 3 to 4 times less than we do here in the United States. H.R. 3, the Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act passed the House in 2019, but remains stalled in the Senate behind other priorities arising from the election. The bill would cap out-of-pocket costs at \$2,000 a year and require Health and Human Services (HHS) to negotiate the price of certain drugs directly with the pharmaceutical companies. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that action alone would save the government \$450 billion over 10 years. If that occurred, Congress wouldn't have to worry so much about paying for the infrastructure bill; it would be halfway there. Aside from the procedural hurdles that the bill would have to overcome, the enormous amounts of money spent by pharmaceutical and health

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We welcome your submissions for our publication. Please send your stories, articles, photos, poems, etc., to:

Rachel Pharris, Editor
BLET Auxiliary News
rachel-rae@live.com
417-872-9641

The next issue will be published in December 2021. Please have your submissions to Rachel on or before November 15, 2021.



BLET Auxiliary

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Legislative Update, continued from Page 15

industry lobbyists would require a great deal of grass roots muscle to get the message through. Below is suggested language to write your House representatives and senators:

As your constituent, I support H.R. 3 and am asking that you pass legislation that allows Medicare to negotiate for lower prescription drug prices. Every year prescription drug plans spend more than \$129 billion on prescribed medicines. The CBO reports that Medicare could have saved over \$14 billion on just 50 drugs in 2016 if the program had paid the same prices as the Department of Veterans Affairs, which IS allowed to negotiate drug prices. Over the last year, drug companies increased the price of over 1,000 drugs, including those for chronic conditions, all during a national pandemic. We urge you to do the right thing and put patients before the sky-high profits of the pharmaceutical companies. Celebrate Medicare's 56th Anniversary, and tell them you're a senior who votes.

To contact your representative or senator, call 877-668-3864 or log on to www.congress.gov and click on the member tab on the right to send an e-mail.

Source: NARVRE August 2021 Newsletter

It's about time!

New York City hosted a ticker-tape parade on July 7 and called it the Hometown Heroes Parade. Our very own Brother Art Blakey represented the BLET at the event, where transportation workers were included in the effort to recognize and thank essential workers who helped pull the City through the pandemic.

Brother Blakey, a member of Division 497 in Jersey City, serves as the General Chairman of the Port Authority Trans Hudson (PATH) GCA. PATH trains were responsible for moving thousands of riders safely each day between Manhattan and New Jersey. Brother Blakey was quoted as saying: "Having been born and raised in New York City, I feel that a ticker-tape parade through the Canyon of Heroes is one of the biggest honors the City can bestow on someone." Despite the honor and jubilation, Brother Blakey did not lose sight of the reason for the parade and the somber reality of the pandemic. Thank you New York City for recognizing all essential workers!

Source: BLET News Flash July 12, 2021

Becky Schneider lives in El Paso, Texas. She can be reached at beckybat@att.net, or 915-581-1373.
