



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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Executive Council to Convene in Detroit, May 7-9, 2013

The BLET Auxiliary Executive Council will convene in Detroit, Michigan, the week of May 5, in conjunction with the celebration of the BLET's 150th Anniversary. Congratulations to the BLET for reaching this historic milestone! We are glad to be able to hold our Executive Council meeting at this time and place to coincide with the festivities being planned for this once-in-a-lifetime event.

It would be wonderful for the Auxiliary to have a strong presence at this event. The actual anniversary date is May 8, 2013. If there is any way you can attend this special occasion, please come and join us.

The venue for the event is the Westin Book Cadillac Resort in Detroit. Several other BLET groups will be holding meetings before, during, and after the celebration, so if your spouse is attending one of these meetings, please consider tagging along. I would love to see as many auxiliary members in attendance as possible. We hope to see you there!

**Scholarship Applications
are due April 1, 2013!**
**see "Tidbits from Your
National Secretary"
on Page 4 for more
information!**



BLET to Celebrate 150-Year Anniversary in Detroit on May 8, 2013

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, founded on May 8, 1863, at Detroit, Michigan, will celebrate its 150-Year Anniversary at the Westin Book Cadillac Detroit hotel, the same venue at which the 75-year and 100-year celebrations were held. The hotel is just a short distance away from where the union was founded. A series of meetings and events will culminate with a celebratory banquet on the evening of May 8. All active and retired BLET and auxiliary members are invited to attend. Registration information is available at www.ble-t.org/blet150.

The BLET, originally founded as the Brotherhood of the Footboard, is the oldest labor union in the Western Hemisphere. In 1864, the union changed its name to Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), the name it retained for 140 years until merging with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters on Jan. 1, 2004, when it became BLET.

"This is a proud and historic moment for our great Brotherhood," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. "This year, we are proud to honor the legacy of our Founding Fathers and the many accomplishments our Organization has achieved over the past 150 years to improve the rights and working conditions of our members."

The organization was formed when locomotive engineers on the Michigan Central Railroad became discouraged with working conditions, pay cuts, and the dismissal of their firemen. For the past 150 years, the Brotherhood has been at the forefront of many important gains for all railroaders. In 1875, the BLE was the first labor organization to obtain a contract with a railroad. The BLE also played leading roles in establishment of the Railway Labor Act in 1926, the Railroad Retirement and Unemployment Insurance Acts in 1937, and countless safety measures over the decades.

President Pierce is the 23rd chief in the BLET's long history. The BLET represents more than 55,000 active and retired locomotive engineers and trainmen throughout the United States.

(Parts of the above article were excerpted from the January 2013 edition of the Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen News.)



Auxiliary President's Message - BY ANITA J. CARUSO

Hello to all our members! I hope 2013 has been good to you thus far and that the weather has been calm in your area. In Nebraska, things have been rather pleasant, other than the blizzard we had December 19 and a light snowfall in January - nothing close to what's been happening to the east coast. After Hurricane Sandy, a bad winter is not what people from that area wanted or needed.

It's been kind of a crazy time for me, personally. Our daughter, who is expecting her third child this summer, moved to a new home here in Omaha about a year ago and has continually prodded us ever since to move as well, so as to be closer to her and her family. We had looked at a few houses that were on the market, but nothing prompted us to leave the comfort of our home that we had lived in for almost 25 years since we moved to Nebraska. We had been updating the house for the past nine years, so we were not in any mood to take the plunge!

Around the end of November, Sam found a villa to check out near to where our daughter lives, and the rest is history. We started packing shortly after Thanksgiving. The entire Christmas season is a huge blur. We began moving on December 28, and we started living in our new home on January 2, 2013. Mostly in part because of the mild weather we've had, it was easy to get things done. Under normal circumstances, I would never consider moving during winter, but this is the only time my job would allow us to tackle such a huge endeavor. It would be nearly impossible, with my traveling schedule, to even think of moving during the summer. Our previous home is finally on the market and I pray for a quick sale!

There are several new auxiliaries in the works and I have been having a lot of communication with the "lead person" in setting up auxiliaries in Vancouver, Washington, and Kansas City, Missouri. We are in the final stages of organizing both of these groups and I am

looking forward to going there and meeting everyone. We must remain diligent in encouraging all BLET spouses, friends, family members, and FELA attorneys to join our organization to support BLET members and their families. We offer a number of different types of memberships, including associate membership, which was added in 2006. Please refer to our Constitution & Bylaws, which can be accessed on our website, to determine the difference in membership criteria.

I would like to remind everyone to periodically check out our website at www.bletauxiliary.net. It can also be accessed from a link on the BLET website. Past National President Becky Schneider continues to be our webmaster and we are thrilled that she has agreed to keep helping us out with this very worthwhile tool. Vice President/NLR Sereena Hogan posts monthly legislative updates that are very informative and should be read each month. If you receive our quarterly newsletter and your spouse does not belong to the Auxiliary, please encourage him or her to consider joining.

The Executive Council will hold our annual meeting the week of May 6-10, 2013, in Detroit, Michigan. We will be awarding our scholarships for 2013-2014; consulting with our financial advisor regarding auxiliary finances; brainstorming as to how we can increase membership; discussing the National Auxiliary Convention scheduled for October, 2014; beginning to formulate proposed resolutions for our delegates to discuss and vote on at the National Convention; and discussing many additional issues relating to all aspects of auxiliary business.

I always look forward to our Executive Council Meetings as we do not get to see each other very often during the year. Since we all work out of our homes, this yearly meeting, along with regional conventions and organizing trips, are the only opportunities we have to visit with one another face-to-face. We do stay in touch with each other on a regular basis throughout the year via e-mails and phone calls. It would be ideal if the National Auxiliary had more opportunities to get together during the year, but we are always focused

on our budget and conserving funds. Rest assured, your Executive Council goes above and beyond in performing their duties for this organization and we do this for the love of the BLET, our members, and BLET families around the country.

The regional convention season is quickly coming around and I will be attending these regionals along with members of the Executive Council. If there is a regional convention being held in your area, (see schedule on back of this newsletter), please try to attend. These conventions are the perfect time to meet your national officers, other auxiliary members from around the country, and the BLET national officers. It is also a great time to take advantage of some of the

educational opportunities that are provided at these meetings. I would love to see more of our members at these very worthwhile conventions!

I wish everyone a wonderful spring, rich with family and friends. I hope everyone has time to "stop and smell the roses" along the way. Work is great, but we all must learn how to slow down and enjoy the precious little time we have on this earth!

Anita J. Caruso
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Lots of Love 4 Lindsay Fundraiser Set for May



The engineers at New Jersey Transit are reaching out to all Auxiliary and BLET members across the nation to help out one of their brothers and his family. Dan Loeb, an engineer with New Jersey Transit, has been out of work since last October. Dan has not been able to work his assignment because he

and his wife spend all their time alternating between being home with their young twins and being at the hospital with their two-year-old daughter Lindsay, who is awaiting a heart transplant.

Lindsay was first diagnosed with an illness known as "fifth disease," typified by a rash and fever, that usually lasts a few weeks and then goes away. However, in some cases, it can lead to myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle. Two weeks after the initial diagnosis, the Loeb's were informed that Lindsay did indeed have an enlarged heart. She was eventually taken to a specialist at the Montefiore Children's Hospital in the Bronx, New York, where her parents were told she was suffering from dilated

cardiomyopathy, a form of heart disease that causes the heart to become so enlarged and weakened that it cannot pump enough blood to the rest of the body. Around Thanksgiving of last year, Lindsay was placed on a transplant list and, on January 3, she underwent surgery to be connected to a mechanical heart. After that, she was restricted to a hospital bed and placed on a respirator.

A recent update from Dan indicated that the family is very optimistic about things right now as Lindsay is no longer on the respirator, and getting stronger and feeling better with the aid of the Berlin mechanical heart. There was a period of time where she was too weak to have the transplant surgery, but she is strong enough now and is at or near the top of the list to receive a donor heart. The transplant pool for someone Lindsay's size is somewhat limited because the heart must come from someone who is either smaller, or up to twice her weight. More information and some very recent photos of Lindsay with her beautiful smile can be seen on her facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Lots-of-Love-4-Lindsay/403643029722337>.

Please consider reaching into your pockets to see if you can spare something for Brother Loeb and his family during this difficult time. Donations can be sent to:

Dan Loeb
P.O. Box 66
Hawthorne, NJ 07507

Many thanks to BLET Div. 171 Legislative Representative Randall Duncan for bringing this to our attention and helping to coordinate this fundraiser for Brother Loeb and his family.



TIDBITS FROM YOUR NATIONAL SECRETARY - BY LINDA D. MAHER

Aloha! Hopefully Punxsutawney Phil and Buckeye Chuck are correct with their weather forecast on how early spring will arrive in the northeast. Now really, what do groundhogs know??? I have been very busy with Auxiliary dues and MAL dues payments coming in. Just a reminder that membership dues are all due by March 31, 2013. If you have not received your packet or your notice of dues, please drop me an e-mail and I will double-check your address and promptly mail one out to you.

New Members

We welcome two new associate members-at-large - David Brown of Fridley, Minnesota; and Paul Piekarski of Downers Grove, Illinois.

Welcome also to member-at-large Tessa Kirkland of Sweetwater, Texas, and Cynthia Onstott who has joined Generosity Auxiliary #37 in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Notice to all Auxiliary Secretaries and MALs

Secretary packets and MAL dues notices were mailed January 2, 2013. Do not forget to send these in for renewal of membership for 2013. Please fill your forms out completely so that I am able to keep all of my records updated. **I would like to ask all auxiliary secretaries to inform our news editor Sereena Hogan of any members who have been dropped from your files so that she can delete their names from the newsletter mailing list.** Sereena's e-mail is vp3sereena@aol.com.

Scholarship Applications

BLET Auxiliary Scholarship applications can be obtained on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net. You may also

connect via a link from the BLET website at www.ble-t.org under "Departments," BLET Auxiliary. Scholarship applications for the 2013-2014 academic school year should be postmarked by March 25 so they may reach my office by April 1, 2013. **PLEASE BE SURE TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTION SHEET COMPLETELY** so you know what documents need to be submitted with your application. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

You will also find our article along with others pertaining to scholarship opportunities in the BLET Newsletter that was published in February 2013.

If you need to reach me, just e-mail me and give me a contact phone number along with the state you are in, and I will call get back to you as soon as possible. When calling, if you get my voicemail, please be sure to leave your phone number so I may return your call. I am in the Hawaiian time zone that is anywhere from two hours (west coast) to five hours (east coast) earlier. My contact information is listed below. I am always happy to assist you.

May I take this time to wish everyone a very Happy and Blessed Easter Season from my family to yours! Be Safe!

Linda Maher can be reached September 30, 2012 - May 3, 2013, at 84-688 Ala Mahiku Street #161A, Waianae, HI 96792, 808-888-5783, or at 29215 West Miller Road, Willoughby Hills, Ohio, 44092, 440-944-6579, from May 4 - September 29, 2013. She can be reached by e-mail any time at biddykaili@aol.com.



River City Auxiliary No. 12 Christmas Gathering

**By Darla Fent, Secretary, River City Auxiliary 12
Omaha, Nebraska**

On December 11, 2012, eight members of River City Auxiliary No. 12 met at Michele Keefer's home for a Christmas pot luck, gift exchange, and fellowship. We were happy to have the opportunity to be together at this busy time of the year. We did not meet in January, but had our first meeting of 2013 at Anita Caruso's home in February. Looking forward to spring and hope all of our BLET Auxiliary sisters are well.

Back row: Michele Keefer, Phyllis Eberl, Gina Sequenzia, Pam Dennis. Front row: Connie Tippery, Annie Rangel, Anita Caruso, Darla Fent.

LOCAL AUXILIARY NEWS

NorCal Auxiliary Celebrates 3-Year Anniversary

**By Susie Burrola, President, Nor-cal Auxiliary 39
Stockton, California**

We celebrated our third year anniversary as Nor-Cal 39 on February 13, 2013. It has been exciting to meet so many wonderful families along the way. We have made great progress over the last three years and have accomplished much, including organizing a charter, growing our membership, educating our members, raising money for two scholarships, and really becoming like a family unit, caring for and about one another.

In addition to our monthly meetings, we plan and organize activities for the whole family. We will celebrate our 3rd Annual Bowl-Off in March, a much-anticipated event for the railroad families in our area. We have a trophy that is passed along from year to year with the winning team's name on it. The competitive spirit of the tournament has increased, and we have now started making team shirts and adding "trash talk," — all in good fun, of course! June is our railroad picnic month. We have railroad retirement coming out, along with NARVRE, and Operation Lifesaver. We also announce our scholarship winners at the picnic. In October, we have a pizza day and go to the corn maze. This winter, we are planning a can-and-coat drive for needy families in the area. We wrap up the year with a Christmas party and potluck in December, sponsored by BLET Division 839. It's always a blast to see everyone having a good time eating and dancing and getting to know one another. A special thanks to all the auxiliary and BLET members and families for helping make these events successful.

As with any newly formed organization, we have had a few hiccups along the way, and I am very thankful that we have worked through them and are moving forward. Our mission is to support, educate, and assist in any way possible. If you are not yet a member of the BLET Auxiliary, the members of NorCal 39 encourage you to take a couple of hours out of your schedule and get involved! We all lead busy lives these days, but we feel that it is important to get together and network with other people who understand the crazy lifestyles of our railroaders. Our auxiliary even encourages our members to bring their kids to the meetings; we can find activities to keep them busy. We are looking forward to the fun family activities we are planning for 2013. United we stand!

BLET Divisions 839 and 283 are hosting the 2013 International Western Convention July 14-18 in San Francisco. Our auxiliary is planning and organizing the activities for the spouses and helping with other aspects of the convention. Registration for the IWC is available on the BLET website at www.ble-t.org. The hotel is located in the Financial District, with easy access to the city. For those who wish to do some sight-seeing in San Francisco, we suggest purchasing a CityPASS at <http://www.citypass.com/san-francisco>. This ticket booklet saves 46% on unlimited cable car rides, plus admission to the five best attractions in San Francisco. Hope to see many of you there this summer!

Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28 Going Strong

**By Kathy Hurst, President, Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28
Tucson, Arizona**

Guadalupe Auxiliary to BLET Division 28 is alive and well! During the last year, we have gained 13 new members and have become very active. Our hope is to have many fun activities for our membership to encourage camaraderie among our brothers and sisters.

This past December, we assisted the local BLET officers with the annual holiday party, sponsored by Bremseth and Associates. Consensus is that this was the best holiday party yet for the families of Division 28. We found a great venue with a fabulous kitchen and lots of room for the kids to play indoors and out. Santa (Division 28 member Clay Taylor) arrived on a brightly decorated fire engine. A record number of BLET members' children escorted Santa into the building and to his seat on the stage. There they each took a turn telling him what they wanted for Christmas and enjoying their goody bags. There were so many youngsters, it required an emergency run to the store to fill more bags. Tables were decorated with sock snowmen and balloon bouquet centerpieces on green and red table clothes. Dinner consisted of a yummy Mexican buffet with a variety of desserts provided by auxiliary members. Member Becky Taylor headed up a drive for donations of clothing and toiletries for the many homeless teens in our community and the response was fabulous. This party was a great example of what can be done when members of the division and the auxiliary work together to put on a bash.

Our next endeavor is a St Patrick's Day picnic sponsored by local attorney Chip Rabb. There will be face painting for the kids, snow cones, and a barbecue feast prepared by Division 28 member Ray Guiterrez. In April, auxiliary members will help with the annual Old Timers' Picnic for the retirees. All members are invited and this year we have invited Railroad Retirement Board District Manager Gale Bowman to share information and answer questions. Future plans include a summer bowling bash, and perhaps a fall picnic... and, of course, the annual holiday party!



Please let us know what is going on with your local auxiliary so we can feature it in our newsletter!



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - BY SEREENA HOGAN, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REP

"Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator. And change has its enemies."

— Robert Kennedy

As we herald in a new year, many of us found ourselves wondering if the 113th Congress that convened for the first time on January 3 will be any better than the historically unproductive 112th Congress. The 113th Congress greeted 82 new members of the House (47 Democrats and 35 Republicans), and 13 new senators (8 Democrats and 4 Republicans). There is some hope that the diverse demographic makeup of this Congress, which is the closest thus far of any previous Congress in history to the demographic makeup of the American population, may make for less rigidity, less "us against them" attitude, and more of a spirit of "let's work together to bridge all our differences and find ways to move forward and create legislation for the good of America." So far, however, it appears that politicians in Washington have not had much success at bridging the partisan divide to find workable solutions.

Financial Crisis Continues

Although we didn't actually slide over the edge of the so-called "fiscal cliff," on January 1, we came really close! In the wee hours of New Year's morning in three of the four time zones in the Continental U.S., the Senate passed a bipartisan compromise, making permanent the Bush-era tax cuts for individuals earning less than \$400,000 per year and couples earning less than \$450,000. For those whose annual earnings exceed those levels, tax rates were raised from 35% to 39.6%, which is expected to raise approximately \$600 billion in new revenues in the next ten years. Amongst numerous other provisions, the bill also extended unemployment insurance and delayed federal spending cuts for two months.

Debt Limit Ceiling Suspended

The next battle lawmakers had to confront

in fixing the ongoing financial crisis was whether to increase the nation's debt limit. As defined by the U.S. Department of the Treasury "[t]he debt limit is the total amount of money that the United States government is authorized to borrow to meet its existing legal obligations, including Social Security and Medicare benefits, military salaries, interest on the national debt, tax refunds, and other payments. The debt limit does not authorize new spending commitments. It simply allows the government to finance existing legal obligations that Congresses and presidents of both parties have made in the past." (<http://www.treasury.gov/initiatives/pages/debtlimit.aspx>)

On February 4, President Barack Obama signed the "No Budget, No Pay Act of 2013" into law, officially suspending the nation's debt limit through May 18. The bill also suspends pay for members of Congress if their chamber does not pass a budget resolution by April 15. Under the measure, the Treasury Department can simply ignore the current \$16.5 billion debt ceiling and keep borrowing to cover the cost of federal obligations. On May 19, the debt limit will kick back in and automatically reset at a higher level. Treasury officials can then begin taking what they call "extraordinary measures" to continue paying the nation's bills. Analysts at the Bipartisan Policy Center predict that the Treasury will run up about \$450 billion in additional debt through mid-May and that the next point at which the nation will need to raise the debt limit will come in August.

Sequestration goes into Effect

As we move into March, the biggest news nationwide is the sequestration. What is that anyway? It's just a fancy word for across-the-board forced budget cuts in funding of national programs. The cuts went into effect beginning on March 1. Had it not been for the deals struck at the end of last year to avoid the "fiscal cliff," these cuts, enacted by the Budget Control Act of 2011, would have begun going into effect on January 1. With the enactment of the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 on January 2 of this year,

the sequestration date was pushed back to March 1, 2013. Over the next seven months, the automatic cuts will slash how much federal agencies are allowed to spend by \$85 billion. On a broader scope, \$1.2 trillion will be trimmed from federal deficits over the next 10 years. The cuts are to be split 50-50 between defense and domestic discretionary spending. It's all part of the attempts to get a handle on the growth of the U.S. national debt, which skyrocketed when the 2007 recession hit and now stands at more than \$16 trillion.

This all began with the 2011 standoff over the U.S. debt ceiling, when Republicans in Congress demanded spending cuts in exchange for giving the Obama administration the needed legal headroom to pay the federal government's obligations to its bondholders. Congress and the administration agreed to more than \$2 trillion in cuts. About \$1 trillion of that was laid out in the debt-ceiling bill and the rest was to be imposed through sequestration.

Remember the special congressional panel called the Super Committee created in August 2011 to find less painful ways to cut spending? In November of that year, the committee concluded its work, stating that they had failed to come up with a bipartisan agreement for a deficit reduction plan, leaving federal agencies to opt for more harsh cuts that no one wants.

More than \$500 billion will be cut from the Defense Department and other national security agencies. The rest of the cuts will be on domestic programs, such as national parks, federal courts, the FBI, food inspections, and housing aid. The Pentagon has already laid out plans for furloughs of hundreds of thousands of civilian workers, as well as cuts to combat readiness training and weapons maintenance. Social Security, Medicaid, federal pay (including military pay and pensions), and veterans' benefits are exempt; however, Medicare spending will be reduced by 2% per year versus the previously planned levels.

It remains unclear how long the sequestration will last. Some speculate

that in coming months public pressure will force Republicans to relent on revenue, especially as cuts to the military begin to be felt. But Republican leaders have said they will stand firm against tax increases, suggesting that they have won at least a temporary victory on reducing the size of the government.

Tax Holiday is Over

Have you noticed a decrease in your paycheck since the beginning of the year? The Social Security payroll tax holiday expired at the end of 2012. For the past two years, the federal government has been collecting two percent less in social security taxes from wage earners to fund Social Security, and from railroad workers who pay Railroad Retirement Tier 1 taxes; however, that has come to an end and workers' take-home pay has decreased as a result.

Filibuster Reform

The United States Senate glossary of terms defines filibuster as "any attempt to block or delay Senate action on a bill or other matter by debating it at length, by offering numerous procedural motions, or by any other delaying or obstructive actions." The only procedure by which the Senate can vote to place a time limit on consideration of a bill or other matter and thereby overcome a filibuster is by invoking the cloture rule. Under this rule, the Senate may limit consideration of a pending matter to 30 additional hours, but only by a vote of three-fifths, or 60 votes, of the full Senate. (http://www.senate.gov/reference/glossary_term/filibuster.htm)

Although the filibuster is an important tool that can be used by the minority to stop the tyranny of the majority in crucial cases, the current rules have made it too easy to abuse this rule and paralyze the Senate. For much of the nation's history, the filibuster was used sparingly and only for the most important or heartfelt issues, in which case a senator had to stand up and talk around the clock to delay a vote, as was illustrated in the 1939 political drama film "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," in which Jimmy Stewart played the character of a senator who rattled on for almost 24 hours to block a vote on a bill he strongly

opposed. In many cases, the filibusterer would just rattle on about anything and everything, whether it was relevant to the issue or not.

According to current Senate rules, senators who want to filibuster legislation do not need to hold the floor by talking, but must only raise their hand to object, thereby forcing a cloture vote and putting the onus on the majority to win 60 votes before a topic can even be raised for debate. No speech on the floor is required and the filibusterer does not have to expend any time or energy on the effort. The same piece of legislation can be filibustered over and over again, causing endless delays.

Several internet sources I reviewed in my research on this subject stated that the filibuster was utilized nearly 400 times by the 112th Congress... no wonder they were proclaimed the least productive Congress since the 1940s! In any case, it has come to the attention of those in Congress and the American public that the filibuster rule is being seriously abused. The filibuster has been especially abused in recent years to stall the confirmation of judicial nominees, which has led to the creation of 77 vacancies on the federal bench and has caused a hardship for those seeking justice through the courts.

Senators Tom Udall and Jeff Merkley led the charge earlier this year for Senate Rules changes to reform the much-abused filibuster rule by reinstating the "talking filibuster." However, the final result of theirs and others' efforts to reform the filibuster rule was somewhat disappointing.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) negotiated a compromise in late January that includes two packages of amendments to the Senate Rules concerning filibusters. The amendments were passed on January 24 by votes of 78 to 16, and 86 to 9. This new deal preserves the filibuster but offers the majority several options for how to get bills to the Senate floor. The return to the "talking filibuster" was not included in the amendments.

The following is a list of the formal changes:

1. Shorten debate following a cloture vote on the motion to proceed from 30 hours to four.
2. Leave the ability to filibuster that cloture vote essentially intact.
3. Allow the minority to offer two amendments on every bill.
4. Shorten confirmation time for judicial nominees once cloture is invoked.

Two informal changes are to be executed without actually changing the Senate rules:

1. Senators will have to actually be on the floor to threaten a filibuster.
2. Time allocated for debate will have to actually be spent on debate.

Some Democrats who wanted to see bigger changes were disappointed that Majority Leader Reid did not go further and instead chose to avert the "nuclear option," a parliamentary procedure that could implement rule changes with only 51 votes rather than a two-thirds majority.

Amtrak & High Speed Rail

On December 13, 2012, BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman testified in support of Amtrak and rail labor at a hearing before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee entitled "Northeast Corridor Future: Options for High-Speed Rail Development and Opportunities for Private Sector Participation." In his testimony, Vice President Tolman expressed the BLET's firm belief that, based on its prior successes in spite of budgetary and funding limitations, Amtrak should continue to be the rail service provider for the Northeast Corridor and across the United States. He pointed out that rail privatization in other parts of the world has led to systemic safety and reliability problems and that any current and future work to improve the Northeast Corridor must include a professional, unionized work force of rail employees.

Thank you Brother Tolman for representing the BLET at this hearing. A complete transcript of the hearing can be found at: <http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Tolman-Testimony-Congress-NECorridor.pdf>.

Historic Legislation to Fund Passenger Rail Passed in Virginia

On February 23, the Virginia State Senate, on a vote of 25-15, passed legislation to invest \$568 million in the state's passenger rail system via the Virginia Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital Fund, which was established in 2011, and \$230 million into their freight rail system via the Rail Enhancement Fund, for a total investment of \$798 million over the next ten years, to improve Virginia's rail network. Virginia is the first, and only, state with a dedicated pot for passenger rail and the first state to attach a dedicated, long-term funding source to the advancement the state's intercity and high speed passenger rail system. Hats off to the BLET and BMWED brothers and sisters who supported Governor Bob McDonnell's "Virginia's Road to the Future" long-term transportation solution and helped to get this legislation passed. This will result in employment opportunities for members of the Rail Conference as well as other rail unions and other divisions of the Teamsters.

BLET National Officers Testify at NTSB Hearing

Hearing on Accidents and Incidents in which Human Factors Play a Role:

During the final week of February, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) conducted a hearing in connection with its ongoing investigation into the June 24, 2012 high-speed head-on collision of two Union Pacific freight trains in Oklahoma that claimed the lives of two BLET members and a conductor, and seriously injured a second conductor. In his testimony as part of a panel of witnesses appearing before the NTSB, National BLET President Dennis Pierce informed the Board about the increasing complexity of the duties of a locomotive engineer due to new technologies, new regulations, and new operating requirements that force engineers to multi-task more now than ever before. He was also critical of the industry's punitive approach to discipline. President Pierce pointed out that, at a time when the transportation industry has legitimate concerns about operating crews being distracted by personal electronic devices such as cell phones, BLET members are tasked with monitoring

numerous electronic devices installed on locomotives to increase productivity and monitor performance in ways that divert their attention from the roadway ahead. He stated that, with so many systems to manage, today's locomotive engineers are routinely put in situations that challenge their ability to balance all that they have to do. Yet the standard response when things go wrong is to place the blame on, and inflict punishment upon, the crew members rather than fully investigating the root causes of these events and adjusting systems and procedures to reduce risk.

President Pierce concluded his testimony by stating that the BLET does not agree that any engineer should be blamed for the systematic risks created by adding layer upon layer of electronic technology without proper training and retraining, and with inadequate consideration of the complexities of the human-machine interface. He also stated that the BLET is capable and ready to participate in efforts to properly train its members. To see the entire transcript of President Pierce's testimony, please go to: http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Pierce_NTSB_Goodwell.pdf.

Positive Train Control (PTC): On February 27, BLET National Vice President Steve Bruno participated in one of three panels of witnesses who testified before the NTSB in a day-long forum on Positive Train Control, focusing on implementation problems and delays that the railroads claim to be experiencing. In 2009, Vice President Bruno had coordinated the BLET's participation in developing a PTC regulation after Congress mandated installation of PTC following the tragic collision in 2008 of a Metrolink passenger train and a Union Pacific freight train. He explained to the Board that with today's train weights and distributed power train operations, the current fixed signal systems are outdated and that PTC, as an overlay on top of existing signal systems, is a necessity. Vice President Bruno urged the NTSB to stand firm against those in the railroad industry who are resisting, watering down, and lobbying against, the implementation of this technology. The entire transcript of Vice President Bruno's testimony can be found at: http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Bruno_NTSB_PTC.pdf.

Resignation of Transportation Secretary LaHood

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced on January 29 that, after serving for four years in President Obama's Cabinet, he would not be staying on for the second term. He said he plans to remain at the department until his successor is confirmed by the Senate. Possible replacements for LaHood include Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who has pushed for increased rail service in Los Angeles and served as chairman of last year's Democratic National Convention, and Debbie Hersman, Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board. The name of former Representative Jim Oberstar of Minnesota, who led the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, has also been mentioned.

Rep. Jeff Denham Named Chair of RR Subcommittee

On January 16, U.S. Representative Jeff Denham (R-CA), a member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, was named Chairman of the Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee for the 113th Congress. Rep. Denham has been an outspoken critic of California's ambitious plan to connect Los Angeles and San Francisco with high-speed passenger trains. The \$68 billion project has been a favorite of the Obama White House, but has not received much support from Republicans. Last summer, Mr. Denham wrote and won support for an amendment to the House's fiscal 2013 spending plan for the Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development departments that would have barred the use of any funding for California's high-speed rail efforts. Rep. Bill Shuster (R-PA) was previously the Chairman of the Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee and is now the Chairman of the full House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Sereena Hogan can be reached by phone at (520) 297-0944; by mail at 8720 N. Myrtle Dr., Tucson, Arizona 85704, or by e-mail at vp3sereena@aol.com.

Retirement Rocks!

By Marilyn Monath, Member-at-Large
Denver, Pennsylvania

My husband of 30 years, Robert J. Monath (Bob), a former member of BLET Division 74, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, retired two years ago after being on the railroad for 36 years, 11 months, and 21 days. He started with Penn Central, and then on to Conrail, and finally retired from Norfolk Southern. While working full time as an engineer, Bob earned a Bachelor's degree in General Humanities from Penn State University. I was able to earn my Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration with a Psychology Minor from Alvernia University while working full time as well.

I also retired last December from my job as a Fundraising Specialist from CONCERN, a nonprofit child welfare agency that provides foster care, life skills training, and delinquency services to children and teens. At my former boss's request, I have remained active with this organization and continue to help the kids by serving on several committees as a volunteer.

How are Bob and I spending our retirement? We are enjoying more time with our daughter Melissa and her husband Rusty, and our three grandchildren, Julia (16), Allison (14) and Jack (5). We also enjoy taking trips to New York City for a two- or three-day stay to catch a show and dine out with friends, going to Atlantic City to try our hands at the slots and blackjack tables (sometimes we even win! LOL), and going down to the Daytona Beach



**Bob and Marilyn Monath on the dock
by the bay in Atlantic City... Cheers!**

area to visit with our niece and her family. Our "bucket list" consists of travel to Austria, Australia, Hawaii, and back to our favorites — Paris and Rome.

Bob will tell you that he is very busy with the "honey-do list" I have created for him, that has grown throughout the years of his time on the railroad. We both agree that the best part of retirement is going to bed when we want to, getting up when we want to, having date nights, and relaxing and enjoying our golden years together.



**"Poppy" and Jack check out the simulator intalled in a
Norfolk Southern locomotive cab at the Pennsylvania
Railroad Museum in Strasburg, Pennsylvania**



The Monath's Grandchildren - Jack, Julia, and Allison

Groundhogs and Candles

Predicting the Weather



For centuries, February 2 has been known as “Groundhog Day” in the United States. It is the day that the groundhog emerges from his hole where he has been hibernating for the winter, to look for his shadow. If he sees his shadow, he regards it as an omen of six more weeks of winter weather and returns to his hole. If the day is cloudy and he sees no shadow, he takes it as a sign of spring and stays above ground. The legend of Groundhog Day goes back to ethnic cultures and the awakening of animals on specific dates, and its origins tie our present day culture to the distant past when the forces of nature had a more prevalent influence on people’s daily lives.

The tradition of the groundhog and his shadow is believed to stem from similar beliefs associated with Candlemas Day, a Christian festival of lights that is celebrated annually in some countries on February 2. Candlemas marks the midpoint of winter, halfway between Winter Solstice and the Autumn Equinox. In pre-Christian times, this “feast of lights” celebrated the increasing strength of the life-giving sun as winter gave way to spring. On that day, all the candles to be used in the church for the coming year were brought into the church and blessed. People believed that Candlemas Day predicted the weather for the rest of winter. If the weather was bright and sunny on that day, it was believed to mean that there was more winter to come; if it was a wet and stormy day, it was believed that the worst of winter was over.

If Candlemas be fair and bright, Come, Winter, have another flight; If Candlemas brings clouds and rain, Go Winter, and come not again.

The ancient legend of Candlemas and the similar belief of Groundhog Day continue to be recognized annually on the second day of February due to the efforts of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club, established in 1887, and their now-famous groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil. Early observances of Phil’s predictions were conducted privately in the wooded areas neighboring the town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Today, tens of thousands of visitors from all over the world gather at Phil’s temporary home on Gobbler’s Knob, about two miles east of Punxsutawney to await Phil’s appearance. A select group from the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club, known as the

Inner Circle, a group of dignitaries recognizable by their top hats and tuxedos, take care of Phil year-round and plan the annual ceremony, complete with a festival of music and food. February 2, 2013 marked 127th year of Groundhog Day at Gobbler’s Knob. Many of you will be pleased to know that no shadow was seen on this year’s Groundhog Day! So come on Spring... we are ready!!!

The following are some noteworthy and amusing highlights about Phil that were posted on the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club website at <http://www.groundhog.org/>.

- During Prohibition Phil threatened to impose 60 weeks of winter on the community if he wasn’t allowed a drink.
- In 1958, Phil announced that it was a “United States Chucknik,” rather than a Soviet Sputnik or Muttnik that became the first man-made satellite to orbit Earth.
- In 1981, Phil wore a yellow ribbon in honor of the American hostages in Iran.
- Phil traveled to Washington, D.C., in 1986 to meet with President Reagan. He was joined by Groundhog Club President Jim Means, Al Anthony, and Bill Null.
- Phil met Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburg in 1987.
- In 1993, Columbia Pictures released the movie Groundhog Day starring Bill Murray.
- Phil appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show in 1995.
- In the years following the release of the movie, record crowds numbering as high as 30,000 have visited Gobbler’s Knob in Punxsutawney!
- In 2001, Phil’s prediction was shown live on the JumboTron at Times Square in New York City. Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell attended the ceremonies, making him the first sitting governor ever to do so.

Resources:

The Punxsutawney Groundhog Club Groundhog Day, <http://www.groundhog.org/>

Project Britain Folklore Calendar: Candlemas Day (the Christian Festival of Lights), <http://projectbritain.com/year/candlemas.html>

From 1st VP/National Outreach Coordinator Gina Forman

Are you properly insured? Have you taken the time to plan for the unexpected? Now is a good time to get your ducks in a row!



Greetings and Happy Spring to all of you! I hope that this year brings good health and many blessings to you and your families. I would like to take my time in this issue to share with you a few reminders that many of us overlook. Many of us have multiple life insurance policies, accidental insurance policies, disability plans, and personal insurance plans. Many of these policies are bought or signed up for and then we never follow up on them. Plans often remain in place for several years and we forget about them.

The problem that sometime comes up is that the plans benefits may change, and if it was purchased as a group plan, you never receive notice of the changes. Likewise, our lives change. You might have a plan that benefits an ex-spouse, and you never have changed the beneficiary. Your plan may not allow your beneficiary to change post-mortem and you could be caught up in the court system for a long time. I suggest you and your spouse take a few moments to go through your plans together and make sure that everything on file is current. If you have a will, make sure it is updated and current. If you do not have a will, regardless of age, please look into making one. For many of you, you will find things missing in your insurance policies, or perhaps find overlapping coverage. When it comes to your home and auto policies, review your coverage and deductible amounts to make sure they meet your needs. Spending a little bit of time with your insurance agent, financial planner, or end-of-life planning counselor can bring you a great amount of comfort and peace of mind.

I have seen the down side of being underinsured or improperly insured. It can be devastating to a family. I sincerely do not want to see that happen to any of you. I hope your spring season is wonderful and full of new beginnings!

Gina Forman can be reached at 765-432-1050, tweety95@yahoo.com, or 63 S. Hood Street, Peru, Indiana 46970

Greetings from the Editor, Sereena Hogan

With the upcoming BLET 150th Anniversary celebration just around the corner, not to mention the regional conventions coming up soon and trips to visit family, I am realizing that a busy travel schedule lies ahead. It has been nice to spend some time at home these last few months getting caught up on a few things around the house and in my office.

The BLET 150th Anniversary Celebration is shaping up to be a very momentous event. I hope that many of you will be able to make it there for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to celebrate the heritage of our union. Last year, the Auxiliary celebrated our Quasquicentennial (125-Year) Anniversary on October 16, 2012! President Caruso and I are working on an article about the history of the Auxiliary to appear in the program for the BLET's 150th Celebration.

It's going to be an action-packed week for some of us in Detroit, with the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen's Meeting starting on Sunday, May 5, and then our Executive Council Meeting being held on Tuesday and Thursday, and the BLET 150th Anniversary Celebration on Wednesday. Looking forward to seeing some of you there!



Happy Spring Everyone!

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

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The next issue will be published in June. Please have your submissions to Sereena by May 25.

Mark Your Calendar Now for Upcoming Events!

BLET 150TH Anniversary Celebration

**May 8, 2013
Detroit, Michigan**

Westin Book Cadillac, 114 Washington Blvd., Detroit, MI, 48226 - to register, download registration materials at www.ble-t.org/blet150.

Hotel reservations can be made by calling 888-627-7150 and be sure to ask for the BLET-150 Group Rate. Room block limited to 250 rooms. Room rates are \$132/night if reserved prior to April 17, 2013.

2013 Regional Meeting Schedule:

**86th Annual Southeastern Meeting Association - June 23 - 28, 2013
Richmond, Virginia**

Arrangements Chairman Troy Bryant, Local Chairman of Division 532, welcomes all BLET members to historic Richmond/Short Pump, Va., for the 2013 SMA. For more information and to register, go to: <http://www.sma2013.net>.

**73rd Annual International Western Convention - July 14 - July 18, 2013
San Francisco, California**

Co-chairmen Luis Chavez Jr. and Oscar Burrola welcome all BLET members to the Hilton San Francisco Financial District Hotel for the 2013 IWC. For more information and to register, go to: <http://www.iwc2013.org>.

**75th Annual Eastern Union Meeting Association - July 28 - August 1, 2013
Baltimore, Maryland**

Arrangements Chairman Fred Cox, Local Chairman of BLET Division 52, welcomes all BLET members to Baltimore for the 2013 EUMA. For more information and to register, go to: <http://www.ble-t.org/info/meetings/euma>.

**78th Annual Southwestern Convention Meeting - August 25 - 29, 2013
New Orleans, Louisiana**

Arrangements Chairman Arlin Todd, Chairman of the Louisiana State Legislative Board, welcomes all BLET members to the Loews New Orleans Hotel for the 2013 SWCM. For more information and to register, go to: <http://bletswcm.org/19601.html>.

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