



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.

Volume 7, Number 1

Spring 2016

Sereena Hogan, President • Susie Burrola, 1st Vice President • Lawana Poss, Secretary • Terri Fleming, Treasurer
Kathleen Bisbikis, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative • www.bletauxiliary.net



Selfie by Serena Kelling - "Railroaders + Auxiliary = Family!"

Nor Cal 39 Anniversary Celebration

By Jana Bauerson, Vice President, Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary

Definition of Rail: a bar or series of bars fixed on upright supports; Definition of family: all the languages ultimately derived from a particular early language, regarded as a group; Definition of Auxiliary: providing supplementary or additional help and support.

This year the Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary celebrates its sixth year anniversary as an official group! Many wonderful and dreamy ideas were brought to the table to acknowledge this celebration. In the end, the vote was to have a glamorous camping ("glamping") weekend where families were welcome to stay the night or just come out and relax for a couple of hours, if that was what time allowed. The families who attended appeared to have a great time and, through the support of each other, were able to keep up with family commitments including baby showers, play rehearsals, selling Girl Scout cookies, and even getting called to drive a train! (Multi-tasking at it's finest!) Kids were playing together, adults shared laughter and stories, and families indulged in delicious potluck food (surf and turf barbecue, taco bar, homemade salads, and lots of eggs, to name a few).

Sending out a huge thank you to everyone who made this happen – it takes a village! To all our rail families, take care until we meet again!

BLET Auxiliary Scholarships are due on or before April 1! See Page 5 for more info.

Helen Gould Auxiliary No. 235 Donates Original Charter to Railroad Museum

By Debbie Keele, Alternate National Secretary & Vice President, Helen Gould Auxiliary No. 235



Helen Brand, Joyce Bumgarner, Debbie Keele, and Carolyn Kirk

Members of Helen Gould Auxiliary No. 235, Osawatomie, Kansas, presented their framed charter to the Osawatomie History and Railroad Museum for viewing and safekeeping. It joins the charter of BLET Division No. 336, Osawatomie, Kansas, along with a vast collection of railroad history. The museum added a wing to the original structure replicating the old Union Pacific depot and dedicated it in 2002.

The Helen Gould Auxiliary No. 235 charter, with 28 charter members, is dated January 26, 1898, twelve years after Mr. W.A. Murdock, of Chicago, founded the Grand International Auxiliary to the B of LE (GIA). She served as Grand President of the Auxiliary for 30 years.

Helen Gould Auxiliary was named after the daughter of railroad magnate Jay Gould. She married railman Finley Johnson Shepart, Eastern Representative of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, at the age of 45. She was famous for her philanthropies, especially in charitable and educational endeavors. She gave not only of her money, but also of herself, to the work of relieving distress and making the world a better place. The ladies made a wise choice as Helen Gould certainly upheld the ideal of our Auxiliary.

An entertaining account of the two-day organizing meeting of the Auxiliary is written in the April 1898 edition of the *Brotherhood of*

— continued on Page 5



From the President - BY SEREENA HOGAN

Greetings members and friends!

I can't deny that it has been nice to have my auxiliary travel schedule slowed down for the last few months enabling me to spend some quality time with family on a couple of trips in November and early December. In mid-December I got an early Christmas gift - a brand new knee!

Needless to say, the recovery and rehab that followed slowed me down for a period of time; however, as March approaches, I am ready to "hit the road" again!

1st Vice President Susie Burrola and I will be in St. Louis on March 9 to organize Gateway Auxiliary 4448. Many thanks to Tracy Meers and Tammy Poole for all the time and energy you put into getting this auxiliary started. Susie and I met Tracy and Tammy at the Southwestern Convention Meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, last September. I will also be in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in late March for the Wisconsin Central General Committee of Adjustment's quadrennial meeting, and then on to Stevens Point, Wisconsin, to organize another new auxiliary that Div. 174 Legislative Rep. Eric Stroik and his new wife Kate Giblin have been working to get started.

Thank you to all of our BLET brothers who contributed their valuable comments about the importance of the BLET Auxiliary (*see opposite page*). We very much appreciate your support and your willingness to add your voice to this issue of our publication.

Congratulations to NorCal Auxiliary 39 on your six-year anniversary! Looks like you all had a great time on your "glamping" trip in northern California (*cover story*). Thank you for sharing that experience with all of us and setting the example of how auxiliaries can bring union families together for fun and fellowship. Thank you also to the members of Helen Gould Auxiliary No. 235 for donating your original charter to the Osawatomie History and Railroad Museum (*front cover*).

Please be sure to read the article on Page 12 by Terri Fleming outlining some very important things that railroaders and their spouses need to know in the event that they are out of service for any reason. Terri learned some of these things the hard way and, although we hope it never happens to anyone else, she wants to make sure that others who do find themselves in this position can be informed and prepared. Along those same lines, thank you very much Susan Tukel, National President of LECMPA, for your informative article/advertisement about the importance of job insurance. We appreciate your support!

Our 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis braved the below-freezing arctic weather of North Dakota in early January to attend the North Dakota State Legislative Board Meeting in Bismarck at the invitation of North Dakota State Chairman Charlie Weick (*story on page 6*). Congratulations to Chairman Weick

on your reelection and thank you for including the Auxiliary at your meeting. Thank you also to our own Auxiliary Member-at-Large Naomi Muscha for treating Kathleen and her daughter Ashley, who is also an auxiliary member, to a tour of the capitol building in Bismarck. We are proud to have a distinguished member of the North Dakota House of Representatives as one of our sisters and very grateful for the work she is doing in her state to promote railroad safety and laws to protect unions and the hard working citizens of North Dakota.

I hope you will enjoy the article on Page 10 by our 3rd Vice President/Assistant National Legislative Representative Rachael Grimes about her experience chairing the caucus in her precinct during the Iowa Caucus. Every election year, it seems like we find ourselves saying that this is the most important election in our lifetime. With the ever increasing polarization of the two major political parties in our country, the chasm between the two parties is at an all-time high. It seems that what divides candidates in both parties is not just their solutions to policy problems; they even disagree about what the problems are! Please take time in the months ahead to educate yourselves about the candidates in the upcoming election and exercise your right to vote on November 8. To find out the real facts about the candidates please don't rely on campaign ads and brochures. Instead, go to www.FactCheck.org and click on the "2016 Elections" tab. To register to vote and find out if your state allows early voting and absentee voting, go to www.canivote.org.

March 8 is a big day for celebrating the accomplishments of women. For more about the history and significance of International Women's Day, see Susie Burrola's "From the Editor" article on Page 15. Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28 is honored to again be invited by Communication Workers of America Local 7000 in Tucson to participate in their Annual Women's Day Celebration to celebrate women in unions. It is always a pleasure to work with and support other unions in the area throughout the year... we are all in this movement together to promote and preserve unionism!

Scholarship applications are due in the office of our National Secretary Lawana Poss on or before April 1, 2016 (*see Lawana's article on page 7*). Scholarship eligibility requirements, application instructions, and application form can be found on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net. We will no longer be accepting applications for International Western Convention (IWC) scholarships as this program has been discontinued. It was an honor for us help out the IWC for by administering their scholarship program since its inception, but it has been phased out with the dissolution of the International Western Convention.

Until next time, be safe, be well, and remember to be grateful for all the blessings we enjoy as railroad union families.

Sereena Hogan, National President
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520-297-0944, vp3sereena@aol.com

BLET and AUXILIARY MEMBERS SPEAK OUT ABOUT THE AUXILIARY



**Clyde Larson, Director of Field Operations, Hunegs LeNeave & Kvas;
and Auxiliary Associate Member, Twin Ports Auxiliary No. 6388, Duluth, Minnesota**

Why should people join the Auxiliary? To Keep our union strong. We are being attacked from all sides. We need to work together, be involved, be informed to protect what we have worked so hard for. Other industries have lost so much, including membership. We cannot allow this to happen to the railroad unions.

**Oscar Burrola, Local Chairman, BLET Division 839, Stockton/Richmond, California;
and Associate Member, Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary**

How has the Auxiliary in your area been of value to BLET members? Our local auxiliary members participated in informational pickets when the intermodal facility came into our area, and marched on City Hall for the War on Workers. They were instrumental in helping pass the two-man crew bill in California, and continue to be active with legislative issues and mobilization teams. At our greatest times of need, when we have tragically lost members, the auxiliary members came together to help their spouses and families with benefits due from the railroad, Railroad Retirement issues, and finding programs such as the John Edgar Thomson Foundation. The activities they organize help promote solidarity amongst our members. **My division members have been more active since the involvement of their families.**



**Eric Stroik, Legislative Rep., Division 174; Secretary-Treasurer, Wisconsin State Legislative Board;
and Auxiliary Associate Member-at-Large, Stevens Point, Wisconsin**

How do you feel that a local auxiliary in your area will be of benefit to you and your division members? As BLET members, we have resources in each other, but our spouses quite often do not know who to contact for information or assistance. In forming an auxiliary, we are hoping to create a network for our families to share information about all of the things that most people can take for granted. Railroaders and their families live an unusual lifestyle; being able to provide opportunities for them to not only share information but build and strengthen relationships with each other would benefit all of our members and their families.

**Tim Smith, Chairman, National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen, BLET;
California State Legislative Board Chairman; and Associate Member, Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary**

How has the local auxiliary in your area been of value to BLET members? It has been my sincere pleasure to be involved with the creation of some local auxiliaries. I believe the members of the BLET Auxiliary provide meaningful perspectives to all issues the BLET and its members face, whether they talk to the public, the media, or the legislatures of this country. When it comes time to get the message out, I am always comforted by knowing that the Auxiliary has our back and am proud to know they are represented by such intelligent, dedicated, and hard working leaders. The BLET is better because of them.



B.J. Trumble, Division 33 Legislative Representative, and Michigan State Legislative Board Chairman

The Auxiliary is a crucial element to every aspect of the BLET. Auxiliary members represent the family members who live and deal with the struggles of being a railroad family. They can voice opinions to railroad management that really hit home, taking the business aspect out of the conversation and making it personal. Legislatively, the BLET Auxiliary is an effective and powerful voice. Elected officials pay close attention when wives and family members of a railroader appear before them. The thought process is, "How many others [VOTERS!] are affected by this problem?" The Auxiliary is an excellent support group for railroad families. Lets face it, no one understands what a railroad family endures on a daily basis better than another railroad family! The Auxiliary is the glue that holds railroading families together in addition to supporting and strengthening our union.

What Every Railroad Family Should Know About “Job Insurance”

By Susan Tukel, National President, Locomotive Engineers & Conductors Mutual Protective Association (LECMPA)

Union railroad workers do their jobs under constant threat of discipline – and the possibility of being held out of service without pay. And we all know stories about someone who got in trouble at work because someone else on the crew broke a rule. If there was a way to insure your family against wage loss from railroad discipline, wouldn't you? Imagine going to work every day knowing that if you made a mistake and received discipline, you would still have income for your family's needs.

There *is* a way. It's available to union railroad workers, but not to the general public. It's job insurance.

What is “Job Insurance”? Job Insurance replaces income a union railroad worker loses if he or she is suspended or dismissed without pay as a form of discipline. Union transportation workers, particularly railroad workers, are among the few who can insure themselves against loss of wages from discipline. Job insurance is available at a reasonable rate to BLET members who are subject to discipline.

How Does it Work? Job insurance pays for many types of mistakes a worker makes on the job while the policy is in force. Your policy must be in effect on the date of the infraction. Generally, the infraction must be work-related and be inadvertent. For example, unintentionally speeding or going through a red signal; errors in writing up your log book; accidentally being on the main track without authority. Common exclusions are infractions arising out of possession or use of drugs or alcohol (“Rule G” violations), sleeping on the job, missing calls, altercations and insubordination. The idea behind job insurance is to pay when a worker is doing his or her best at the job but makes a mistake and gets into trouble.

What Kinds of Violations are Covered? Here are examples of claims from conductors and engineers we have recently paid:

1. Entering the main track without authority;
2. Signal violations;
3. Air brake and train handling violations;

4. Speeding;
5. Derails.

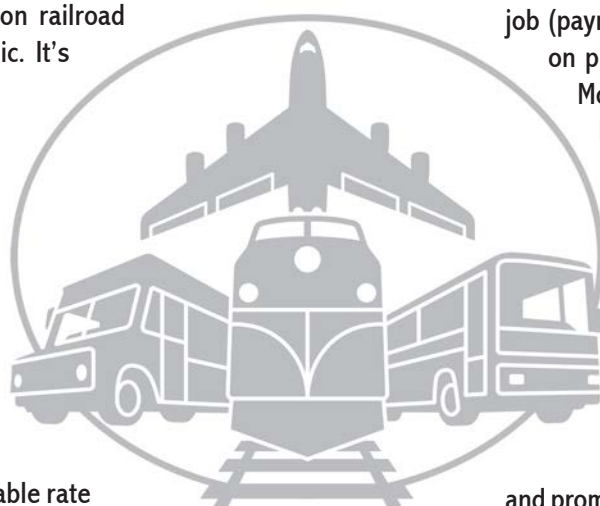
Who Is Eligible? LECMPA membership is available to union transportation workers who are subject to discipline. You must be in good standing with your union, and free of recent discipline, to become a member of LECMPA. We have several policies offering a variety of discipline days. All include:

1. Coverage for wage loss due to discipline (most claims paid within one week of receipt of all claim materials);
2. Accidental death benefit for the member on or off the job (payment for accidental death paid promptly on proper proof, usually within two weeks. Most of our beneficiaries receive payment before the household misses a single paycheck);
3. Accidental death benefit for your beneficiary (beneficiary accidental death not available in Texas or California);
4. A generous Loyalty Appreciation Bonus when you retire after at least five years of LECMPA membership;
5. Personal, individual review of claims and prompt payment of covered claims. We don't care how the employer characterizes the infraction. We do our own investigation. So if the employer says “insubordination,” LECMPA determines if the worker refused a legitimate order;
6. A legally-binding, written contract.

LECMPA was founded in 1910 by a group of locomotive engineers who worked together to protect one another from harsh and unpredictable railroad discipline. We have supported BLET and its members for 106 years.

Over the years, we added conductors, dispatchers, maintenance of way, signal workers, and other railroad crafts to our membership. We are non-profit and owned by our members. We are also supervised by the Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services to make sure our practices are proper and in the best interest of our members.

Auxiliary members are often the family members who are in charge of household bills and budgets. Over the course of a railroad career, the majority of our members land in trouble at



LECMPA

least once. Protect your family and your peace of mind with a job insurance policy from LECMPA.

Here's what BLET members have said about our claims process just this year:

- *I was so glad I had insurance with LECMPA. The people I dealt with were so prompt and courteous with answers and payments. I feel they made our lives better by removing the stress of being out of work.*
- *You guys "rock." Not very many companies like yours would have paid a claim that was more than four years old. Thank you so very much for processing this claim. You all were very nice to talk to and understood the circumstances that took place.*

Want to hear more? Many of our state managers and representatives are, or have been, railroad spouses. Call Susan Tukul for more information or to arrange a meeting! 800-514-0010 or stukul@lecmpa.org.

Website: www.lecmpa.org

Helen Gould Auxiliary, continued from front cover

Locomotive Engineers Journal. Helen Gould Auxiliary was organized and inspected on Thursday, February 3, 1898, by Mrs. A.L. Schug, who was a member of Lilac Division No. 152, Argentine, Kansas. The account details the two-day meeting, which including music, dancing, cards, and lunch. The second day, the Auxiliary was presented a beautiful secretary (writing desk) from the B. of L.E., and they also presented Mrs. Schug with an "exquisite bouquet" of cut flowers.

We are proud of our rich history and are dedicated to continuing our local auxiliary for many years to come!

2016 Regional Meetings

Eastern Meeting - July 11-14, 2016 - Chicago, Illinois

Western Meeting - August 22-25, 2016 - Long Beach, California

Why Go to a Regional Meeting?

By Sereena Hogan

An article by the same title, authored by Auxiliary Member Kathy Hurst (then-President of Auxiliary 28 and 2nd Vice President/Assistant Legislative Representative for the National Auxiliary) appeared in the Summer 2012 edition of this publication, and also in the Fall 2013 edition of the *BLET Journal* with the title: "BLET regional meetings offer great opportunities for fun, fellowship, and education."

Kathy's article opened with, "Why go to a regional meeting? You might think, 'I'm not a union officer; what would I get out of it?' Well I am here to tell you... lots!"

Many of us end up at the regional conventions because we are accompanying our husbands who serve in some capacity as officers of the BLET. It's a great way to meet other BLET officers and members, and their families, who we often find out are "kindred souls." As we always say, "Who better understands the uniqueness of railroad life than other railroad spouses and family members?"

So yes, there's the social aspect of it, which can be reason enough to attend. But it's also a great opportunity to learn vital information about so many topics having to do with the lives of railroad families. As Kathy pointed out in her article, by attending regional conventions, she had the opportunity to learn more about the Federal Employers Liability Act that covers railroad employees in the event of an on-the-job accident or injury (as outlined in the article by Kujawski & Marcus, LLC, in our Winter 2015 edition). She also learned about radiation safety and transporting of hazardous materials by rail, and what steps are being taken to protect our spouses who work on trains carrying this type of cargo, as well as the citizens of the communities through which this type of cargo travels. And she learned more about post traumatic stress disorder, something that many train crews experience

after being involved in an accident or pedestrian fatality. Oftentimes it's the spouse who is the firsthand witness of the effects that such a traumatic experience can have on a member of an operating crew. Conventions are also a great place to learn more about the legislative process and the issues that affect railroad employees, their families, and the nation as a whole. And there are opportunities to meet and interact with the vendors who provide our health insurance benefits, as well as job income protection providers, disability insurance providers, Railroad Retirement Board, etc.

The Auxiliary conducts a business meeting at each convention and the officers in charge do their best to bring in speakers who have important information to share with the spouses. For as long as I have been involved, we also try to incorporate some fun activities at our meetings and present opportunities for the spouses to get to know one another. All spouses and family members are invited to the auxiliary meeting and we often gain new members in this way. We also do some fundraising at the regional meetings to support our programs, such as the Auxiliary Scholarship Program and the Care and Assistance Program.

Prior to this year, there were four regional conventions held each year; however that all ended as of last year. We are not entirely sure how things will be handled now that the format has changed to just two regional meetings per year - one in the East and one in the West - but I have a hunch that these meetings will remain an excellent opportunity to meet other railroad families and to learn about topics of importance to us all. I hope to see many of our new members, as well as our long-time members, at this year's two conventions. All BLET members and auxiliary members are invited. Keep checking the BLET Website - Events - Regional Meetings tab for more information about how and when to register for the 2016 conventions.

North Dakota State Legislative Board Welcomes National Auxiliary Legislative Rep Kathleen Bisbikis to Quadrennial Meeting in Bismarck, North Dakota



Member-at-Large and Representative for District 24 of the North Dakota House of Representatives Naomi Muscha addressed the North Dakota State Legislative Board.

Greetings from Naomi Muscha:

As I write this from the great state of North Dakota, the Weather Channel on my phone tells me it's four degrees outside, but that it feels as if it is six degrees. For those of you who have not been blessed with the opportunity to experience such coldness, I suggest you ask Sister Kathleen Bisbikis for her new description of cold. She and her daughter Ashley were privileged to experience North Dakota's weather at its "finest" when they attended the North Dakota BLET State Legislative Board Convention in our capital city of Bismarck January 11-13. The temperature was not only below zero, but was in **double digits below zero!** And then we walked outside to local restaurants!! "Uff da!" as we say here, "We really gave them a taste of North Dakota toughness!"

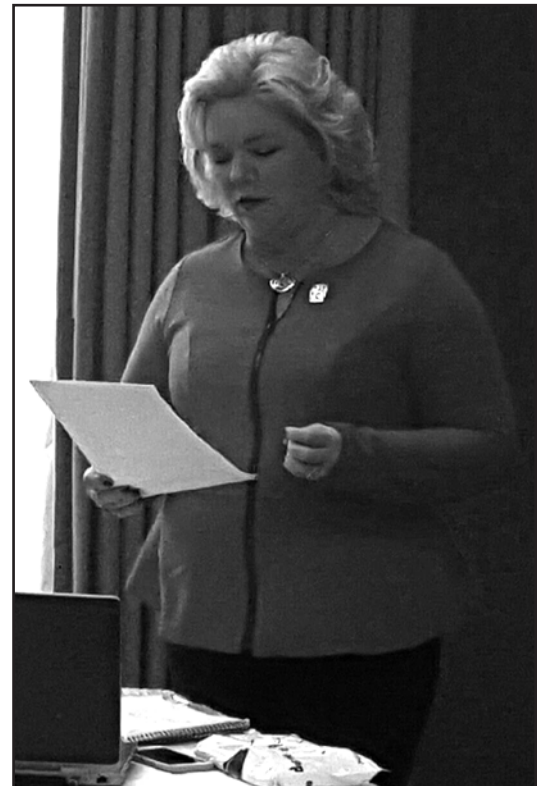
Seriously though, it was a privilege to show Kathleen and Ashley a portion of our state, some of its elected citizens, and our Capitol Building. One thing North Dakota takes pride in is our openness to our government and its procedures. In North Dakota, a bill cannot die in committee or in the hands of a committee chairperson. For most potential bills, testimony is heard from several interested parties, whether they be everyday citizens or professionals who deal with a topic the potential bill proposes to affect. Each and every bill that is introduced receives a hearing in a specified committee and then is placed on the floor of the House or Senate for a vote of that chamber. The determination of the chamber depends upon into which chamber the bill was introduced.

North Dakota's process is like other states from this point. If the bill is successful in one chamber, it passes to the other chamber, and the bill process is repeated. If the bill is not successful in the first chamber, the bill dies. Of course, this is not to say the bill or the idea is forever dead! In 2015, the North Dakota House chamber had a two-man crew bill that failed by a very narrow margin.

Congratulations BLET Brother Charles D. Weick on your reelection to a second term as Chairman of the North Dakota State Legislative Board! Thank you for including the Auxiliary at your Meeting!

Our state has had oil train explosions and fatal train-school bus accidents in the recent past and we fully expect to have proposed legislation in 2017 that deals with the two-man crew issue. Hopefully, this next time, the bill will pass.

I would certainly welcome any information from fellow BLET Auxiliary members concerning such legislation. I can be reached via e-mail at nmuscha@nd.gov, or by mail to: Representative Naomi Muscha, P.O. Box 34, Enderlin, ND 58027; or by phone at 701-793-0326.



BLET National Auxiliary 3rd Vice President/ National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis shared information about the Auxiliary and details of the National Auxiliary Legislative Program with attendees at the Quadrennial Meeting of the North Dakota State Legislative Board held in Bismarck, North Dakota, January 11-13.

Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

It is almost spring and I know everyone is looking forward to warmer weather!

The 2016 Regional Meetings will be here before you know it! Make your plans to attend. It is a great opportunity to meet wonderful people and learn so many important things in the classes and meetings held there. I look forward to seeing many of you there! Please check the BLET website for more information.

EASTERN REGIONAL MEETING: July 11-14, 2016 – Chicago, Illinois.

WESTERN REGIONAL MEETING: August 22-25, 2016 – Long Beach, California.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS AT LARGE!

Judy Nickerson- Gladewater, Texas; Jacob Wright-Manhattan, Kansas.

CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Established in 1921, the Care and Assistance Program (CAP) is our organization's way of saying thank you to long-time members. These members are usually elderly and their incomes are such that they are not able to obtain some of the basics for everyday living. The CAP provides financial assistance to qualifying members and helps them to maintain a little bit more of the dignity they deserve. Our CAP recipients are grateful for what we do.

Please contact me for applications!! Please check to see if someone in your Auxiliary may be eligible and encourage them to apply. Members at Large are eligible also!

MEMBERS AT LARGE

Dues notices have been mailed to all members-at-large. Please make sure to send your dues to me and that all of your information is correct so that you will continue to receive your newsletter. All dues payments are due in my office by March 1, 2016. **Checks or money orders should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary.**

AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

You should have received your Auxiliary Packets. Please have these back to me **BEFORE** March 1, 2016. If you have any questions about the forms, please call or e-mail me. I will be more than happy to assist you in getting these forms properly filled out and

processed. **All payments should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary.**

SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have children who are college bound, they may be eligible to apply for the BLET Auxiliary Scholarship. Scholarship information and applications can be obtained on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net. You can also find a link on the BLET website at www.ble-t.org under "Departments," then "BLET Auxiliary." Scholarship applications for the 2016-2017 academic school year, are due in my office April 1, 2016. Late applications will not be considered. Please read ALL instructions! Changes have been made to the application and eligibility.

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

Donna Milford, Auxiliary 30 Vice-President - Donna's father, Rev. J. C. Sorrow, passed away December 27, 2015. Our thoughts and prayer go out to Sister Donna and her family.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Members-at-large Eric Stroik and Kate Giblin were married on December 18, 2015, in Wausau, Wisconsin! Congratulations Eric and Kate!

Members-at-large Jodi and Will Wallace celebrate the birth of their granddaughter, Kennedy, on January 8, 2016! Congratulations to parents Tucker and Nicole Wallace and grandparents, Jodi and Will!

IN OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

We ask for prayers of strength and wisdom for Auxiliary 348 President Anna Tice and her husband Mark as they process the recent adenoma diagnosis of – and seek the best avenue of treatment for – daughter Vanessa, 20, who has been dealing with serious health issues all of her life. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

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!

When you wake each morning, let the words "Thank You" flow from your lips. This will remind you to begin your day with gratitude and compassion.

Thank you all for your support and membership!!



Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, by e-mail at Lewp2007@bellsouth.net, or by mail at 1394 Bywood Court, Suwanee, Georgia 30024.

When sending payments to the Auxiliary for dues, fees, etc., please make all checks and/or money orders payable to BLET Auxiliary.

If I can answer any questions for you, give me a call or send me an e-mail and I will get back to you as soon as I can!!

— Lawana

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



"The history of the labor movement needs to be taught in every school in this land. American is a living testimonial to what free men and women, organized in free democratic trade unions can do to make a better life. We ought to be proud of it!"

— Hubert H. Humphrey

ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE?

November 8, 2016, could be one of the most important and ground-breaking elections in our history. Voter turnout is essential to a favorable outcome in the upcoming presidential race. The deadline to register or re-register to vote for any election is 11:59:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the 15th calendar day before that election. Please take the time to make sure everyone of legal voting age in your home is registered in time. If you still need to register and would like to do so online, please go to <https://teamster.org/election-center> where you will be guided through the registration process. If you would prefer to register in person, you can go to any of the listed sites to fill out a voter registration card.

- State or local voter registration and/or election offices
- The department of motor vehicles
- Public assistance agencies
- Armed services recruitment

centers

- State-funded programs that serve people with disabilities
- Any public facility that a state has designated as a voter registration agency

The National Transportation Safety Board Announces Its 2016 Wish List

On Wednesday, January 13, 2016, the NTSB announced its annual "wish list" for safety for the coming year. Several items listed would change regulations for US Railways. One of the items they would like to see is the removal of the older style DOT-111 tank cars. They feel these cars are too dangerous to haul flammable liquids near populated areas, and have been blamed in the past for high profile crude oil explosions in both Canada and North Dakota. "The deadline for implementing such tank rules is 2025," the NTSB said. "Until these tank cars are removed from service, people, their towns, and the environment surrounding the rail system remain at risk."

In addition to the tank cars, the NTSB has also expressed its disappointment in last year's extension of the PTC (positive train control) deadline from 2015 to 2018. NTSB Chairman Christopher Hart said Congress should have forced railroad companies to meet the original 2015 deadline for installing the automated train system. The mandate was set after a commuter rail crash in California in 2008, but railroads successfully lobbied lawmakers last year to give them more time. "Every PTC-preventable accident, death, and injury on tracks and trains affected by the law will be a direct result of the missed 2015 deadline and the delayed implementation of this life-saving technology," Hart stated.

Amtrak Completes Activation of ACSES along Northeast Corridor

Advanced Civil Speed Enforcement System (ACSES) is a system that works similar to that of positive Train Control (PTC) on freight lines. Amtrak activated its final section of ACSES on December 18, 2015, along the Northeast Corridor between Washington D.C. and Boston. It has also been activated between Philadelphia and New York, and Washington D.C. and New York, and all before the original statutory deadline of December 31, 2015. It is believed that had ACSES been activated earlier, it may have prevented the May 22nd derailment outside of Philadelphia where five people were killed and hundreds injured. That crash is still under investigation by the NTSB.

FAST ACT (Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act) HR 22

On December 4, 2015, President Obama signed into law HR 22, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act. HR 22 will provide \$281 million dollars for long-term funding for the country's highways, mass transit, and rail systems over a five-year time frame. The bill authorizes funding for Amtrak, providing \$1.45 billion for Amtrak in 2016, increasing to \$1.8 billion by 2020. In addition, the bill includes \$199 million for funding of commuter railroads to install positive train control technology. FAST ACT also restricts the use of DOT-111 tank cars for transporting flammable liquids and strengthens tank car standards. The bill includes an increase in the thermal blanket protection for tank cars and also requires top fitting protection on tank car retrofits. In addition, HR 22 includes the following rail related items:

- Amtrak funding under a new

Northeast Corridor account and a separate National Network program, with total funding for both programs set at \$1.45 billion in 2016, rising to \$1.8 billion by 2020. Also, competitors would be allowed to operate up to three Amtrak long-distance lines if they could do so at less cost to taxpayers;

- the creation of private-sector opportunities to invest in passenger-rail stations and right-of-way development;
- passenger and commuter-rail safety, track, and bridge safety measures;
- reforms to the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan program;
- a consolidation of rail grant programs for passenger, freight, and other rail activities; and
- the creation of a federal-state partnership for a state-of-good-repair grant program.

Ohio Fights Back On Right To Work Bill

Right to Work has shown back up in the state of Ohio. Overturned once already in 2011 by voters in the Buckeye state, Republican Representative Tom Brinkman is sponsoring a bill that would prohibit requiring employees of private companies to pay union dues for the wages and benefits bargained on their behalf, and for the representation they receive.

Brinkman said that the legislation is necessary because Ohio is losing private sector jobs to other states that currently have Right to Work laws. Brinkman said many union members get what he calls "shoddy service." He said there is no reason Ohioans who do not want to join unions should

be required to pay the fair share amount they currently do under Ohio law. But Democratic State Representative Michele LePore-Hagan told Brinkman there's a big difference between paying dues to the YMCA and a union. Ohio union members showed up in such large numbers to voice their opinions at the hearing on December 1st that they were overflowed into two other rooms in the statehouse. The current hearing would only affect employees who work for private sector companies; however, as stated by Terry Holland, a state prison worker: "Public unions will fight this bill too. We know that when they get their foot in the door, we are next again."

Amtrak CEO/President Announces Retirement

Amtrak CEO Joseph Boardman has notified the Board of Directors that he will be retiring from his current position as of September 2016. Mr. Boardman has served as the Amtrak CEO/President for the last eight years. In a letter to Amtrak employees, Boardman said, "When I look back at this time, I see so many accomplishments and so many changes we made to make America's railroad a stronger, safer, and more important part of our nation's transportation system."

BLET & SMART—TD Petition FRA for Speed Signs

Driving on the highway and having no speed signs to remind you of the posted speed in that area would be considered unreasonable. Why should it be any different on the railroad tracks? Yet, for some reason, railroads in certain areas either don't have signs posted or are removing them. In the interest of crew safety, as well as the public's safety, the BLET and SMART Transportation Division unions have joined together to petition the Federal Railroad Administration to mandate regulations that uniform warning speed signs be placed in advance of permanent speed

restrictions. The unions have asked that the signs be standardized in size, shape, and color.

Amtrak On-Time Performance

Every day thousands of people use Amtrak as a means to commute to and from their jobs in cities across the nation, but they don't always get there on time because of unexpected delays. In January and early February of this year, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) solicited the opinion of the public for feedback on the issue of on-time performance for passenger trains, asking for stories of how they have been personally affected and allowing the public to voice their concerns. The public comment period concerning on time performance concluded on February 8, 2016.

In accordance with Section 213 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, the STB is proposing a definition of "on-time performance." The STB will be looking at and redefining what is considered to be "on-time" performance as it relates to passenger trains. It is currently considered to be on-time if the train reaches its terminal no later than 5 minutes after its scheduled arrival time per 100 miles of operation, or 30 minutes after scheduled arrival time, whichever is the less.

Indiana HR 1029 Two Person Crew Bill Update

Indiana State Legislative Board Chairman Brian Farkas and BLET members in Indiana worked diligently to get The Two Person Crew Bill, HB 1029, heard in the State House; however, they were not able to secure a hearing during the current session. We know that Chairman Farkas will be back at in 2017 pushing again for a Two Person Crew Bill in the state of Indiana and we will all be right behind him giving 100% support! Thank you Brother Farkas for all your hard work.

Colorado Two Person Crew Bill HB16-1136

The state of Colorado is following suit behind states like North Dakota, California, and Indiana in an attempt to secure legislation on the state level that would require a two person crew on all freight trains while in motion. The bill is scheduled to be heard in front of the House Transportation & Energy Committee in late February.

We encourage all members in Colorado to contact their State Representatives in support of HB16-1136. You can locate your representative by following this link <http://www.leg.state.co.us/CLICS/CLICS2016A/csl.nsf/DirectoryHou?openframeset>

The phone call takes only a few minutes of your time and can be made by anyone who is a resident in the state. Tell your friends, family and neighbors to make the call; this isn't just for union members, it's a safety law that affects everyone.

Oil Trains in California Get a NO Vote in Northern California

Valero Oil Company suffered a large setback when the City of Benicia, California planning committee voted unanimously "no" to the oil company's request to build a rail loading station at the oil refinery located in California's bay area. In order to reach the refinery located in Benicia, Valero had planned to use trains to transport the crude oil to their refinery. The oil trains would be traveling through several cities including the capital city of Sacramento where trains would pass through large residential and busy business areas. Valero had planned on transporting two trains daily made up of 50 oil tankers per train. The Benicia city commissioners heard arguments for four nights before coming to their unanimous decision. "I don't want to be complicit with what has become a social

nightmare across the country," George Oakes said, referring to oil trains, several of which have crashed and exploded. Valero is expected to appeal the decision to the Benicia City Council.

Do you know when your state primary is?

The presidential primaries are underway but they still have a long road left in front of them. Do you know when your state primary is? Do you know what the deadline is to register in time to vote in your primary? Not all states handle their primaries the same ... closed, open, semi-closed, caucus - if you're not sure what your state does, now is a good time to educate yourself. There are several websites out there that can be helpful. The Federal Voting Assistance Program website, <https://www.fvap.gov/vao/vag/appendix/state-elections> can provide you with a good deal of important information including the dates and types of primaries each state holds. I encourage everyone as we go deeper into the election year to educate yourself and to make sure everyone of voting age in your family is registered in time. Voting is a privilege that we should not take for granted. Remember that your vote is your voice, let yours be heard!

Presidential Emergency Board 249

295,000 – That's the number of passengers who will be affected on March 13, 2016 if New Jersey Transit (NJT) cannot come to an agreement and settle the ongoing contract negotiations between themselves and the Labor Coalition who represent over 4000 employees from 11 different unions, including the BLET. President Obama appointed three neutral arbitrators to the PEB 249 in November 2015 to help settle the conflict between employees and the carrier. New Jersey Transit, as well as the unions, have submitted

— continued on Page 14



Rachael Grimes Chairs the Caucus in her Precinct during the 2016 Iowa Caucus

By Rachael Grimes, National 3rd Vice President/Assistant National Legislative Representative

It is imperative that every BLET member and their family members cast their vote this November 8th!

I highly recommend that you encourage the railroader in your home to make arrangements to obtain an absentee ballot and vote early if that option is available in your state. No one can predict whether or not he or she will be in town and able to go to the polls on election day!

To learn the deadlines and requirements for voter registration and early and absentee voting in your state, visit the National Association of Secretaries of State's "Can I vote?" website at:

www.canivote.org

In the fall and winter of every fourth year, the Nation turns to see what will happen in Iowa, at least in the political realm. The Iowa Caucus is an electoral event in which residents of Iowa meet in precinct caucuses in all of the 1,681 precincts and elect delegates to the corresponding conventions in each of the state's 99 counties. These county conventions then select delegates for both Iowa's Congressional District Convention and the State Convention, who eventually choose the delegates for the presidential nominating conventions.

During a national election year, all eyes are on the Iowa Caucus as this is the first major electoral event of the nominating process for President of the United States, since 1972. News correspondents from all over the country interview everyday people. The Iowa Caucus operates very differently from the more common primary election used by most other states. Rather than going to polls and casting ballots, Iowans gather in designated venues such as schools, churches, public libraries, and even individuals' homes.

Most candidates in the race for the presidency spend months campaigning in Iowa in advance of the Caucus. The state is buzzing with small town hall meetings, all the way to huge events with thousands of Iowa voters. In 2006, I followed the Democratic hopefuls all over Iowa. Unfortunately, this year I am working full-time and was unable to go to any of them. I was kind of "twitchy" knowing I would not be able to attend any of these events, as this is one of my favorite things about Iowa. It gives Iowans a chance to meet and talk directly, sometimes even one-on-one, with the candidates. After the Iowa Caucus, you will often hear the candidates

mention at rallies in other states some of the stories they were told during their time in Iowa. There really is no other state where they get more down-to-earth with the voters.

During the Democratic Caucus, supporters gather in groups, supporting the candidate they prefer. Each precinct will be able to elect delegates to the county, state, and then national conventions. The number of delegates each precinct is awarded is based on the percentage of voters who show up at the designated location. Each group must have a certain percentage of attendees to be viable (able to have a delegate assigned). If a group does not have enough people, other supporters can persuade the members of the smaller group to change their vote to another group. Part of attending a caucus is for the interaction. Generally, "Robert's Rules of Order" is the format that is used. Each attendee can share information, ask questions, or just sit back and listen. The caucus may align, and realign the attendees until there are enough people in each candidate's group to have a delegate assigned.

Other states have attempted to move their voting ahead of Iowa many times, to no avail. In the history of the Iowa caucuses, a candidate who has a better than expected outcome will most definitely receive more press. Everyone knows that the media can help make or break a candidate. A candidate who does not have a strong showing in Iowa may end up with little or no media coverage. Oftentimes candidates have dropped out of the race after an unfavorable turnout in Iowa. No candidate has ever won the nomination with an unfavorable outcome in these caucuses.

This year I was asked by the Democratic Party to chair the caucus in my precinct. I attended a three-hour training session and contacted some local volunteers to assist. I admit, after

all the elections that have been nullified by invalid ballots or whatever, I was pretty intimidated. Luckily, I was able to contact our past chair and he was of great service. I went to our elementary school where we were holding the caucus around 5:00 p.m. I had to set up areas for each candidate's supporters, an uncommitted area, and visitor areas. As voters arrived, we checked them in or registered them as new voters. At 7:00 p.m., the last person in line becomes the last person able to register; I was instructed to not allow anyone to participate who was not in line by 7:00. I live in a small town and, fortunately, we did not have to turn anyone away.

The first order of business was to elect delegates for the county platform committees and the committee on committees. We were able to have a total of four who were nominated and voted in. I was voted in as a delegate for the committee on committees. Back in 2006, I served on the platform committee through the state convention. After our delegates for our precinct were voted in, we moved on to the really big reason we were all there—electing delegates to represent who we wanted to be the Democratic presidential candidate at the Democratic National Convention. Our precinct was divided equally between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, which is ironic because that actually ended up being the way our state voted. Hillary was declared the official winner with 49.9% and 23 delegates awarded; Bernie had 49.6% and 21 delegates. My husband, Dave Grimes, was voted as a delegate. He will be attending the county convention and the

state convention, with hopes of going on to the national convention.

I am looking forward to a very exciting political race after Super Tuesday, the single most exciting day in United States primary elections (except for the Iowa caucuses, for us Iowans). Super Tuesday is a Tuesday in February or March of a presidential election year when the greatest number of states hold their primary elections to select delegates to national conventions, at which each party's presidential candidates are officially nominated. This year Super Tuesday will be on March 1. This is usually when we glean a pretty good idea which candidates will win their party's nomination.

I know the ads will come back on TV and newspapers and in all the social media. The ads and phone calls do get annoying, even for those of us who love politics, but that is what makes the people of this country who we are: free speech, a democracy, and the ability for us to choose who we want to lead this country forward. The other option, the one without all of these avenues to sway your vote, would be that we just had a leader who told us he was our leader, with no ability for us to participate. So, although the media gets to be bothersome, please take the time to understand your candidates and learn about them yourself rather than being swayed by ads or commercials. Go out and VOTE! It is not just your right; it is your obligation! Remember all the people who have given the ultimate sacrifice so that you may have the right to say who you want to preside over this beautiful and free country we love so much.



BLET Member David Grimes (front left) was voted as a delegate at the 2016 Iowa Caucus.

Don't count on political advertisements to learn about the candidates. . . for a reliable source to find out the true facts about major political players in the United States, go to www.factcheck.org

FactCheck.org is a nonpartisan, nonprofit "consumer advocate" for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics. Launched in 2003, FactCheck.org has received several honors for their work sorting truth from spin in politics. In 2006, TIME magazine named FactCheck.org one of "25 Sites We Can't Live Without," and also that year the World E-Gov Forum named them one of 10 sites that "are changing the world." In 2008, PC Magazine called FactCheck.org one of the "20 Best Political Websites."

A group of scholars who are contributors to FactCheck.org monitor the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players in the form of TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews and news releases. Their goal is to apply the best practices of both journalism and scholarly research, and to increase public knowledge and understanding.

FactCheck.org is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The APPC was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania that would address public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels.

You're Fired!

By Terri Fleming, National Treasurer

Those dreaded words are all too common for railroad operating employees. Although it is usually not a permanent situation, railroads companies have a practice of placing an employee "out of service" as a form of discipline for an infraction of the rules while on duty. Most of the time the employee returns to work after a "dismissal period;" however, that period of time can be very stressful for the employee and his/her family.

My husband was "fired" for a mistake he made at work. During this time, he did not receive a paycheck. If your spouse is like my husband, many of his benefits are automatically deducted from his paychecks each month. These deductions are listed on each paycheck stub. Even though he was not receiving a paycheck, these bills still needed to be paid.

Job Insurance or Income Protection

It is so important for railroad operating crew members to have job insurance or job income protection. Even if an employee follows the working rules to a tee, he or she can be fired for an infraction committed by another crew member on the same train. Many infractions are covered by job insurance or income protection policies if the employee is up to date with payment of premiums. You need to notify your job insurance provider as soon as possible. We did receive income from my husband's job insurance provider during the time he was not receiving a paycheck. His provider waived the payment of monthly premiums while he was being disciplined, but you should call your provider to find out their policy.

Railroad Retirement

Railroad Retirement Unemployment Compensation may be another source

of income for you during this time. My husband was the Local Chairman and is the General Committee of Adjustment Secretary/Treasurer, and was being paid a salary for these positions. If your spouse is a paid union officer, his salary may be deducted from the Railroad Retirement benefits that you may receive. Call the Railroad Retirement Board as soon as possible so they can help walk you through it.

Other Benefits

You may also have extra benefits being deducted from your paycheck, such as short term/long term disability benefits, life insurance, or long-term care premiums. You need to notify each of these companies as well so that they can bill you during this time in order to continue these benefits.

Union Dues

Talk to the secretary/treasurer of your husband's local division to find out the amount and time period that needs to be paid. If your spouse has plans to run for an office any time in the future, then they must stay current with their monthly union dues or they will not be eligible.

Health Care

Fortunately my husband was not laid off for a long period of time, so our health insurance was covered. If your spouse is dismissed for awhile, you need to contact your health insurance provider to find out if your benefits will continue or if you need to take further action.

Hopefully this will never happen to your spouse, but if it does I hope this will help you through the process of this challenging time.



Terri Fleming lives in El Paso, Texas. In addition to serving as National Treasurer to the BLET Auxiliary, she also serves as President of her local auxiliary, El Paso Area Auxiliary No. 591. She can be reached at 915-857-7220 or by e-mail at flemingt@aol.com.

Through the Eyes of a Babe . . .

By Mariah Burrola, Member, NorCal Auxiliary #39

Growing up as the child of a railroader has been a challenge. Our family lifestyle was completely different from that of any of my friends' families. At first, I thought it was normal to not see my dad every day or that he was unable to be with us for holidays or birthdays, or even sport events. As I got older, I realized that it was actually not common; I was the only person in my group of friends whose dad worked for the railroad, so I was the only one who did not have both parents around for these important times in my life.

It went from friends not ever knowing or meeting my dad to the extent that some of my friends and acquaintances thought that my parents were divorced or separated. I soon realized that the majority of my teachers or coaches, or my friends' parents, had never had the chance to meet my dad; it was always only my mom who was seen to be involved in our lives. My mom was looked upon as a "single mother" and it seemed that people always tried to sympathize with her for taking care of us four kids all on her own. I agree that it must have been hard having to do a lot of the parenting alone, with the other parent working and being gone days at a time and never having a regular schedule.

While everyone was able to acknowledge and sympathize with the "single mother" in the situation, I felt that nobody was really able to relate to how my brothers, sister, and I felt or what we were going through. I grew up watching my friends' dads being able to be there for the majority of the events that were taking place in their lives. I felt alone; I felt that I was the only kid who lived the way we did and that it would always be that way. I felt selfish for thinking the way I did about how unfair it was that my dad wasn't around as much. I knew that he worked as hard and as much as he did to provide my family with the best life he could.

I realize that all railroaders work hard and sacrifice much to earn a good living and be able to offer their family financial security and a good lifestyle. I couldn't be more appreciative of everything my dad has provided for our family, yet I know that he would have loved to have been able to participate more in our lives. I couldn't help



Mariah Burrola (4th from left) leads the younger children in some dance moves during NorCal Auxiliary 39's annual picnic.

but feel a never-ending conflict of the love and hate relationship of living a railroad life. It wasn't until I was about 15 years old that a local auxiliary got started in my area for railroad spouses and families. Once the auxiliary got started and families came together for holidays and events, I learned that there are other families and kids out there who have gone through—and are going through—what I have experienced. It felt like a relief to learn that there were other people out there who could relate to my family; that I wasn't alone.

The auxiliary went from being random people who had similar lifestyles to becoming a real family. We were all there for each other, for all the holidays and all major events that happened. Families that once seemed half empty suddenly were filled with the joy and happiness of coming together as one giant family. I never would have dreamed that a small organization could make such a big impact on so many lives, but here we are today. It's amazing to see how much closer and bigger this family has grown. I am now 20 years old and I have to say that seeing the younger children of railroad families being able to have what I did not have for the first 15 years of my life is the best feeling in the world. The auxiliary is truly a blessing to railroaders and their families. I know that my life would not be the same without the support I have received from my auxiliary family.

Going Green . . .

You can help reduce our footprint on the environment by "going green." As always, our newsletter is available on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net even before the copies are mailed out. We now offer readers the option to receive the newsletter in digital format. If you would like to receive your newsletter as an e-mail attachment sent to you each quarter, please e-mail publisher Sereena Hogan at vp3sereena@aol.com to let us know.

Legislative Update

— continued from Page 9

their proposals of what they feel is a reasonable contract and the PEB has reviewed each side and determined on January 11, 2016 the following: “wage increases totaling 17% over a six-year term; health insurance contributions that will rise to 2.5% of straight time pay by January 1, 2017; modest increases in employee copays for in-network doctor visits and emergency room visits; mandatory mail order for prescription drugs; 20-minute Conductor certification pay; and a five year phase-in of Carrier 401(a) contributions for new hires.” NJT’s proposal to eliminate employee passes was rejected.

The two parties are now in the 60-day “cooling off” phase and, if there is no negotiated settlement to the dispute, it is likely that on 12:01 a.m. on March 13, 2016, the carrier could enforce an employee lock out or the unions could call for a possible strike. The employees of New Jersey Transit have been without a contract for the past five years.

Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association

Sometimes we can get caught up in our own issues and we don’t always see what is going on around us. On January 12, 2016, the Supreme Court heard oral argument in *Friedrichs v. the California Teachers Association (CTA)*. What is at stake in *Friedrichs* is not just the status of teachers’ unions. A Supreme Court verdict in favor of *Friedrichs* will open the floodgates to a potential gutting of organized labor in this country. Consider what *Citizens United* has done for corporate interest. Now imagine if you would that this corporate interest was then able to – with its massive funding ability – specifically challenge any and all elements of the law that protect the rights of unions and those they represent. What should concern us all is not simply the case in itself, rather the

precedent it will set that will permit an army of attorneys to do irreparable damage to organized labor in America and the hard-working men and women they represent.

Department of Labor 2015 Union Membership

U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez issued the following statement on the department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics report released concerning union membership in 2015:

“With today’s Bureau of Labor Statistics’ report, we are reminded again that the labor movement continues to be one of the most powerful forces for strengthening the middle class and providing economic stability, for members and non-members alike.

“Median weekly earnings of full-time union workers (\$975) were more than 25 percent higher than those of non-union workers (\$776) in 2015. That’s not pocket change – it comes to more than \$10,000 per year. That goes a long way toward writing the mortgage check, paying down the car loan, or even just keeping the kids in snow boots. And, that doesn’t even account for the superior benefits, safer workplaces and other advantages that come with union representation.

“Plus, strong unions empower all working people, putting upward pressure on wages and labor standards throughout the economy. After all, you don’t need a union card to have benefitted from the advent of the weekend.

“So we all have skin in the game when unions are threatened and collective bargaining rights come under attack. When a larger percentage of workers belong to unions, the middle class grows and thrives. But research shows that a decline in union membership over roughly the last four decades is responsible for one-third of the growth in wage inequality among

men and one-fifth of the growth in wage inequality among women.

“The Obama administration continues to push back against these attacks, exploring avenues for strengthening the right to organize and new strategies for giving workers greater voice on the job. We believe this essential to building an economy that works for everyone.

“We’ve made a dramatic turnaround in the last seven years – from a devastating recession to the highest levels of job growth since the late 1990s. But, there is still unfinished business. We must do more to ensure that all working families can share in the fruits of this recovery.

“When more workers are able to stand together and speak up for one another, negotiating for their fair share of the value they help create, it strengthens all of us. To restore balance to the economy and create shared prosperity, we need robust labor unions and powerful worker voice.”

Railroad Retirement Tier I & II for 2016

The Railroad Retirement Board has announced that the Tier I and Tier II payroll taxes for covered railroad employees will remain the same going into 2016. Tier I will continue at 7.65 percent. That amount is divided into 6.20 percent for retirement and 1.45 percent for Medicare hospital insurance. The maximum amount of earnings subject to the 6.20 percent contribution for 2016 remains at \$118,500. There is no maximum for the 1.45 percent Medicare tax. Tier II tax will also remain at its 2015 rate of 4.9 percent for employees. The maximum amount of earnings subject to the 4.9 percent tax continues to be \$88,200.

Railroad Retirement Annuities Not Taxable by State

According to Section 14 of the Railroad Retirement Act (45

U.S.C. Section 231m), retirement annuities are not taxable for individual state income tax purposes.

Bruce Rodman, of the Public Affairs/Office of Administration of the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board says, “Both of our primary enabling statutes – the Railroad Retirement Act and the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act – specifically exempt the benefits paid under them from state income taxes. However, if a person doesn’t know this – and sometimes this might stem from people using free tax-prep software or obtaining volunteer assistance in filing their returns – and declares it as taxable income, the state tax collection agencies probably won’t know any better.”

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) also states on the FAQ section (see #18) of their website that railroad retirement, unemployment and sickness benefits paid by the RRB are not subject to state income tax. However, these benefits are taxable on the federal level.

Many tax preparers and even states are not aware of these statutes and may attempt to tax your annuities. It is up to us to make sure that our annuities are not taxed by the states in which we live.

A railroad retirement annuity is an amount paid monthly to retired (age or disability) railroad employees by the United States Railroad Retirement Board (RRB). The RRB also pays annuities to spouses, divorced spouses, and survivors of retired or deceased railroad employees.

Kathleen Bisbikis can be reached by phone at; 209-786-7367, by mail at 7367 Stabulis Rd., Valley Springs, California, 95252, or by e-mail at biz4413@gmail.com.



Greetings from your Editor, National 1st Vice President Susie Burrola

Getting Back to the Basics

As the Auxiliary continues to grow, we want to welcome any new and not-so-new ideas. We know the times are changing and we have to adjust. Knowing the wheel cannot be reinvented, we are just trying to bring back the importance of the

old fashioned "strength" of the unions, while not being dismissive of any new or creative ideas. We welcome all ideas, suggestions, or ways we can improve that the membership would like to share with us.

Last year our National Auxiliary gained approximately 150 new members and nine new auxiliaries. I have learned so much along the way and have come to realize that each BLET division has many of the same issues all across the country. I have had the privilege of meeting some amazing people, and will continue to work on new membership and help to advise and stay in touch with existing membership. I very much appreciate the support we have received from those who have reached out to us to help them get an auxiliary started in their area, as well as the continued support of all of our current members.

We strongly encourage our members to get more involved, whether at a local level or a national level. You can write an article for the newsletter, help with fundraising ideas, stay active on legislative issues, or simply call your congressional representatives when asked, just to mention a few. To find out more ways to get involved, please contact one of your local or national BLET Auxiliary officers.

March 8 is International Women's Day. The earliest known observance of Women's Day was on February 28, 1909, in New York. The Socialist Party of America designated this day in honor of the 1908 strike of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, where women protested against unsafe and unfair working conditions. On March 19, 1911, International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time by over a million people in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland. In 1975, during International Women's Year, the United Nations began celebrating International Women's Day on the 8th of March. It is an occasion for looking back on past struggles and accomplishments of women and for looking ahead to the untapped potential and opportunities that await future generations of women.

The theme for this year's observance of International Women's Day is "Pledge for Parity." It amazes me that we are still fighting for equality in this day and age; however, as you may have noticed, equal pay for women, and other women's rights issues, have been hot topics in the current presidential campaigns. Women have come a long way socially, economically, culturally, and politically, and we have much

to celebrate, but, according to the National Women's Day website, www.internationalwomensday.com, "gender parity has slowed in many places." The World Economic Forum estimates that, at current rates, gender parity will not be achieved until 2133. Although the 2016 celebration of International Women's Day will most likely have come and gone by the time you are reading this, I encourage you to visit the website for ideas on how you can take action to help achieve gender parity more quickly.

Presidential Elections are just around the corner. That being said, I can't stress enough the importance of the need to revitalize our unions and America's working class. Please do your homework on the candidates and learn their positions on issues that affect our livelihoods so that you can make an educated decision before you go to the polls this year. It's so encouraging to see the energy coming from the younger generations in this election season. Please encourage everyone you know, of legal voting age, to get out and vote!

*"The world will not be
destroyed by those who
do evil, but by those who
watch them without
doing anything."*

— Albert Einstein

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

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