



# 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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Sereena Hogan, President • Susie Burrola, 1st Vice President • Helen Brand, Secretary • Terri Fleming, Treasurer  
Kathleen Bisbikis, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative • [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)

## War on Workers Escalates with Introduction of National Right-to-Work Legislation

By Sereena Hogan, National President

As U.S. citizens, we enjoy many individual rights, afforded to us by the first 10 Amendments to the United States Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights. Amongst these rights are: the right to freedom of speech; the right to worship according to one's beliefs; the right to a prompt, fair trial by jury; the right to vote in elections for public officials; the right to run for elected office, and the right to bear arms. We consider ourselves fortunate to enjoy these rights and freedoms. So when we hear that "right-to-work" laws are being passed in many states, this sounds like a positive thing, right? **Wrong!!!**

The term "right-to-work" has a seemingly positive feel when one first hears it. With many American workers out of a job in recent years, the "right to employment" sounds like a refreshing change from the poverty and uncertainty of not having such a right. However, the term itself is a misnomer that was intentionally designed to confuse people and has nothing whatsoever to do with granting anyone the right to get work or the right of those who have a job to be protected from losing it. The intention of "right-to-work" legislation is to weaken unions and has nothing to do with an individual's right to employment. Instead, it is the right of businesses not to be subjected to unionization of a workplace.

— continued on page 4



Image courtesy of Economic Policy Institute - used with permission.

## LECMCA and BLET Auxiliary working together to Support Continuing Education

By Kathleen Bisbikis, National 2nd Vice President/  
National Legislative Representative

There is nothing better than when two great organizations work together to benefit others. Over the last year, the BLET Auxiliary and the Locomotive Engineers and Conductors Mutual Protective Association (LECMCA) have been able to turn what was a casual conversation about a scholarship into a reality. We are thrilled to announce that, effective this year, the LECMCA will fund two scholarships of \$2500.00 each, to help support post-secondary education, trade school, or institutions of high learning for families who are members of both of these organizations. To apply for an LECMCA-funded scholarship award, the applicant must be a son, daughter, stepson, or stepdaughter of a BLET Auxiliary member and a Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineer and Trainmen member (living or deceased), with each being a member at least one year. In addition, the BLET member in the family must also be a member of LECMCA for no less than one year. Children of an unmarried BLET member who has been an Associate Member of the BLET Auxiliary for at least one year are also eligible.

The LECMCA has been in business since 1910 helping to make sure that railroad families have wage loss protection should the unthinkable happen. They understand our lifestyle, and well they should as their sales force is made up of employees who have worked in the railroad or union transportation industry. The LECMCA has also been a long-time supporter of the National BLET Auxiliary, helping the auxiliary when needed at regional meetings with raffle prizes and donations.

We are grateful to be able to add these two new \$2500.00 LECMCA scholarships to the list of annual awards that we give out each year to the children of hard-working men and women. We encourage any member of the auxiliary whose family member is also an LECMCA member to apply. The deadline for application is April 1, 2017. You can find more information about the BLET Auxiliary Scholarship program on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net).



## From the President - BY SEREENA HOGAN

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Happy Spring Everyone! I have been busy making arrangements for our annual Executive Council Meeting to be held this year at my home in Tucson, Arizona. We will be meeting in May, hopefully before the really hot weather sets in. At this meeting we carry out the business of the Auxiliary,

grade the scholarship applications, review the activities of the previous year, and make plans for the year ahead.

In our continuing efforts to educate our members, we often provide articles and information in this publication about the benefits available to BLET members and their families. Please take time to read the piece on page 5 about the life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance policy that is provided for railroad employees at the time of their employment. Many retirees are not aware that a reduced amount of the life insurance policy is available to them into their retirement years. Oftentimes, however, beneficiary information is not kept up-to-date over the years, for both active and retired members. In the BLET news release that the information was excerpted from, the BLET asked their members to help inform active employees by posting the notice at appropriate work locations on their property and to remind all retirees with whom they come in contact to call MetLife to inquire about their eligibility for the \$2,000 death benefit and to make sure their beneficiary information is up to date. I hope that those of you reading this will help spread the message as well.

One of the most important things we can do to “make a difference” as auxiliary members is to stay informed about legislative issues that affect railroad employees and their families and get involved by contacting our elected officials.

The two-person crew issue has been a hot topic for railroaders for the last few years. To those of us who understand how the railroad works and the inherent dangers that exist for our operating crews, as well as the communities of people through which the trains pass every day, it seems unfathomable to think of a single person operating a locomotive pulling cars filled with hazardous materials across the nation. Please be sure to read the Legislative Update on pages 6-7 to educate yourself about the recently re-introduced Safe Freight Act that would mandate a two-person crew on every freight train. In addition, I encourage you to take every opportunity to educate your

extended family members, as well as your friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, as to what is at stake for the entire country in this effort to maintain a qualified engineer and a qualified conductor on every freight train.

Right-to-Work legislation is a huge issue for all workers in our country right now and, should a national right-to-work law come into effect, this could potentially affect railroad unions. Growing up in a right-to-work state, I did not really know much about unions until I became a railroad spouse. I quickly learned the value of a strong union. In the words of BLET National President Dennis Pierce: “Things like seniority, the right to a hearing and due process before discipline, better pay and benefits, safety protection, and retirement benefits are all at risk if the anti-union forces succeed in eliminating our Union. These aren’t ‘rights’ given to us freely, they are the benefits of a union contract that has matured by hard-fought bargaining by the BLET over more than 150 years of struggle.”

Please call your members of Congress and urge them to **oppose H.R. 785, the national right-to-work bill, and to support H.R. 233, the Safe Freight Act of 2017.** From what I have read and learned, as much as we have been indoctrinated into the use of e-mails and social media rants, these will have little or no effect on getting your message to your elected officials. Phone calls, personal visits, and personal interactions at town hall meetings are much more effective. If you call, you will probably get a staffer on the phone. It is their job to listen to constituents and make sure their voices are heard by their elected officials. Emily Ellsworth, an ex-Capitol Hill staffer and author of a downloadable PDF guide entitled “*Call the Halls: Contacting Your Representative the Smart Way,*” recommends calling your representatives at the district office in your state. State office numbers, she says, are less likely to be busy or have a long hold. Significant volumes of calls in a state office also require coordination by the DC and district office staff and get noticed right away. Ms. Ellsworth’s guide can be accessed online at <https://gumroad.com/l/callthehallsguide>.

I was shocked and saddened to hear of the sudden and tragic death of Charlene Payne last December. We will definitely miss her at the regional meetings. She often attended our auxiliary meeting at the conventions to share new information about healthcare benefits and to answer questions for our members and guests. We offer our heartfelt condolences to her family.

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## Registration Now Open for BLET Regional Meetings

Registration is now open for this year's BLET regional meetings. The western meeting will be held in **San Antonio, June 5-9, 2017**, and the eastern meeting will be held in **Myrtle Beach, August 14-18, 2017**.

**San Antonio Regional Meeting:** Guests will stay at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio Riverwalk (123 Losoya St., San Antonio, TX 78205, (210) 222-1234). Located just steps away from the San Antonio Riverwalk, the Hyatt Regency is a three-minute walk from the Majestic Theatre and a six-minute walk from the historic Alamo. Room reservations must be made by April 28, 2017. If making reservations by phone, be sure to mention group code "BLE."

**Myrtle Beach Regional Meeting:** Guests will stay at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort (10000 Beach Club Drive Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29572, (843) 449-5000). Located right on the ocean, the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort is moments from unique shops, delicious dining, and exciting entertainment. Room reservations must be made by July 14, 2017. If making reservations by phone, be sure to mention group code "BLE1."

Both regional meetings will be filled with educational opportunities and entertaining leisure time activities. BLET convention registration, as well as hotel registration, can be made through the BLET's regional meeting website, [www.bletregionals.org](http://www.bletregionals.org).

The format for each meeting is the same, with registration and a welcome reception on Monday. Opening ceremonies will take place on Tuesday morning, with a closed meeting for BLET members that afternoon. The BLET Auxiliary open meeting will also be held on Tuesday afternoon. A golf tournament will be held on Wednesday. Non-golfers will be on their own to explore the many entertainment options that the area has to offer.

Workshops will be held for Local Chairmen, Secretary-Treasurers, and Legislative Representatives throughout the day on Thursday, followed by a closing banquet that evening.

There is no cost for BLET members who wish to attend the meetings and workshops only; however, there will be fees for those members who choose to attend the meals. The cost of full registration (including all meetings, workshops, the banquet, and all BLET-sponsored meals) is \$200.00 per person. The cost is \$150.00 to register for all of the above **EXCEPT** the banquet. Additionally, reduced children's registration and a la carte meal registration options are also available. For more information, please visit the BLET website for news releases about the meetings, as well as the BLET Facebook page, and the regional meeting website, [www.bletregionals.org](http://www.bletregionals.org) for more information about the meetings and the registration process.

## Auxiliary Saddened by Sudden Loss of Charlene Payne



Charlene Payne, a long-time United Healthcare representative for Railroad Accounts, passed away unexpectedly on Saturday, December 17, 2016. Charlene was a great friend to the Auxiliary and we always appreciated her willingness to update our members about healthcare benefits at the regional conventions. Her passion and dedication in serving all railroad members was remarkable.

In 1987, Charlene joined one of United Healthcare's legacy companies, The Travelers Insurance Company, as a member services consultant for Railroad Accounts. She continuously served railroad members in various roles, most recently as the manager of member relations. She was always on the go, traveling throughout the country to meet with union leaders and their dependents. She shared her expertise by explaining railroad health benefits and eligibility provisions for both active employees and retirees.

Everyone who knew Charlene will miss her knowledge, professionalism, friendliness, and unwavering dedication to assist everyone she represented. We share with her family in the sorrow of her passing.

Donations may be made in Charlene's memory to the Humane Society of Utah, P.O. Box 573659, Murray, UT 84157-3659; or, to the American Red Cross – Donations, 555 East 300 South, Ste. 200, Salt Lake City, UT 84102.

## Going Green

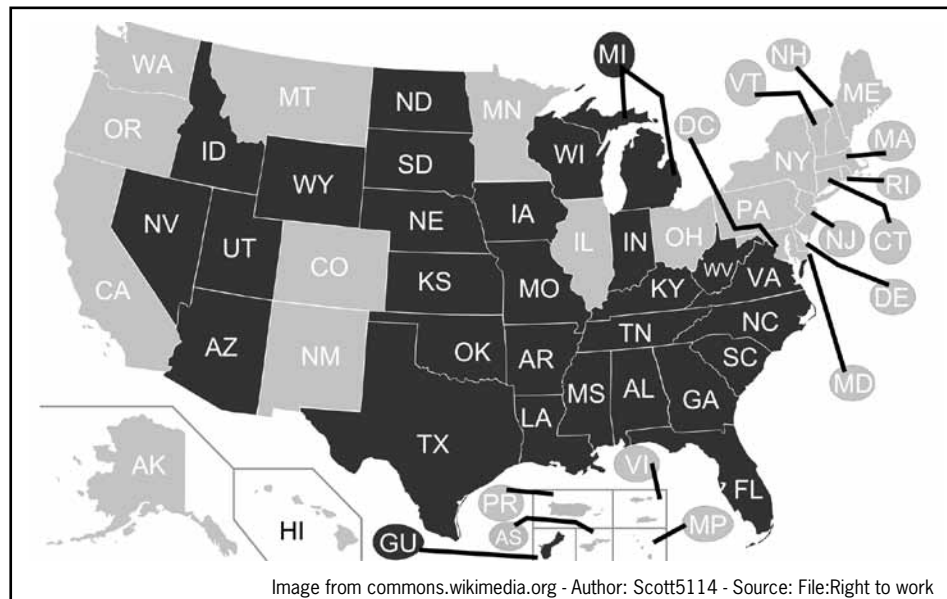
With the distribution of each issue of this publication, a few more of you choose to "Go Green" and help reduce our footprint on the environment by receiving your newsletter in digital format. If you would like to receive your newsletter as an e-mail attachment sent to you each quarter, please e-mail publisher Sereena Hogan at [vp3sereena@aol.com](mailto:vp3sereena@aol.com) to let us know. As always, our newsletter is available on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net) even before the copies are mailed out.

## War on Workers Accelerates ....

— continued from front cover

Rail labor unions, as well as many other unions that represent workers in both public sector jobs and private jobs, have pushed against the passage of these laws that threaten the very existence of unionism in our country. “Right-to-Work” laws eliminate the workers’ financial obligation (dues) to a labor organization, forcing unions to perform their services for free for those workers who choose to not pay union dues, with the ultimate goal of eventually bankrupting the union. Those who favor right-to-work laws claim that such laws have a proven track record of encouraging economic growth; however, not everyone agrees that the laws actually do bring business into a state. According to a study published by the nonprofit American think tank, the Economic Policy Institute, Oklahoma’s right-to-work laws, implemented in September 2001, have not worked out so well. The study revealed that many companies relocated out of Oklahoma, thereby reducing, rather than increasing, job opportunities. In high-tech industries and those service industries dependent on consumer spending in the local economy, the laws appear to have actually damaged growth. At the end of the decade, 50,000 fewer Oklahoma residents had jobs in manufacturing. The authors of the study found no evidence that the legislation had a positive impact on employment rates, stating: “It will not bring new jobs in, but it will result in less wages and benefits for everybody including non-union workers.” (1)

Right-to-work first cropped up in the South in the World War II era, with the first right-to-work push in Texas in 1941 when a group of conservative small-business owners began to lobby against mandatory union dues. By the end of the decade, Texas and eleven other states had passed right-to-work laws, and more mainstream trade associations had adopted the cause. More recently,



Right-to-work states shown in darker shade. Missouri is the most recent to pass right-to-work legislation on February 6, 2017.

as the GOP has taken control of state governments, a flurry of states have passed similar laws. (2) As of February 2017, 28 states have passed right-to-work laws.

And now, a **national** right-to-work law that would institute right-to-work policies in the entire country has been introduced in Congress by far-right Republican Representatives Joe Wilson (S.C.) and Steve King (Iowa). If enacted, the National Right-to-Work Act, H.R. 785, introduced January 31, 2017, would amend the National Labor Relations Act, the main federal law covering private-sector unions, and the Railway Labor Act, an earlier law that covers transportation industry unions. The legislation would prohibit “security clauses,” a standard part of labor contracts that requires workers to pay fees to labor organizations that bargain on their behalf. When in place, they solidify a key source of revenue for unions. Right-to-work laws allow workers the right to opt out of belonging to a union or pay union dues at companies covered by union contracts. Employees who choose not to pay union dues would not have to, but would still enjoy all the benefits of a union’s collective

bargaining agreement. Such workers are commonly referred to as “free-riders.”

The intention of national right-to-work legislation is to “cut organized labor off at the knees” by making it impossible to finance the work put in by American unions to represent and protect working people. Those of us whose loved ones work in the railroad industry have come to recognize that a strong, sturdy union is essential to negotiate and enforce collective bargaining agreements and to ensure that the voices of its members are heard when it’s time to make critical decisions about pay, benefits, working conditions, and more. According to the Economic Policy Institute, workers in right-to-work states earn 3.1 percent less than those in other states, and the workplace fatality rate also tends to be higher in those states.

Representatives Wilson and King introduced a version of the national right-to-work legislation back in 2015 that did not make it through Congress. With a Republican-dominated House and Senate and a President who endorsed right-to-work laws during his campaign, the newly introduced legislation unfortunately now has a much better chance of gaining

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***All auxiliary members and union members and their families are urged to contact Congress to express their opposition to the National Right-to-Work Act, H.R. 785. Call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121, and ask to speak with the House of Representative member from your Congressional District. You may find out who your representatives are by texting your zip code to 520-200-2223. A list of your representatives will be texted back to you within seconds.***

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momentum. Contrary to what has been spouted by the far right and the President in their claims to first and foremost use the federal government to advance the interests of the American worker, it appears that their real agenda is to weaken the power of hard-working citizens by crushing the American labor movement. Defunding the entire structure of workers' voices will only result in a decline of our standard of living. (3)

Along with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) and the BLET, I urge you to contact Congress to express your opposition to all right-to-work laws, both on the state and the national level. In addition, please implore other railroad spouses, union members, your families, and your friends to do the same. If they are unfamiliar with the real meaning of "right-to-work," please take the time to educate them. Share this article with them, or refer them to the BLET Newsflash dated February 27, 2017, on this subject at <http://www.ble-t.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5937>. Do whatever it takes to ensure that they understand what right-to-work really means and that these destructive anti-union/anti-worker laws threaten the way of life of all American workers and their families.

**Sources:**

- 1 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rickungar/2012/12/11/right-to-work-laws-explained-debunked-demystified/2/#442507ceb2e3>
2. <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/union-busting-republicans-lick-their-lips-at-the-possibility-of-a-federal-right-to-work-law-9695862>
3. <http://deadline.com/2017/02/wga-east-blasts-national-right-to-work-bill-aim-to-wipe-out-unions-1201902034/>

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## **Did you know that all BLET Members, active and retired, are covered by a life insurance policy?**

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### **Life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance benefits under BLET National Agreement**

Active and retired railroad employees covered under The Railroad Employees' National Health and Welfare Plan may be eligible for Life and Accidental Death and Dismemberment (AD&D) benefits from MetLife.

For eligible active employees covered by the above policy, the death benefit is \$20,000, and there may be an additional AD&D benefit that could pay up to \$16,000, should circumstances permit. For eligible retired employees, the death benefit is \$2,000.

Most employees filled out a designated beneficiary form when they began work for a participating railroad, and MetLife urges employees and retirees to keep this form with their other important papers

If you need to update your beneficiary form, or if there is doubt as to whom you designated, it is recommended that you complete a new form and send it to MetLife. A beneficiary form, as well as a copy of the full summary plan description book, can be found at <http://www.yourtracktohealth.com>.

Select "Life" in the gray box at the bottom of the page, then select "Railroad National Plan." (<https://www.yourtracktohealth.com/PageContent.aspx?MenuId=136>) You can also obtain information about this benefit by calling MetLife at (800) 310-7770.

This is a very important benefit for all eligible active and retired railroad employees covered under the national health and welfare plans, although many employees, especially retired employees, may not be fully aware of it.

Widowed spouses and children may also be due life insurance benefits if the deceased spouse or parent was eligible for the insurance, but the family members were unaware of the coverage.

The insurance policies were originally issued by Travelers Insurance Company, but MetLife began administering the program in 1995.

To file a claim, a potential beneficiary must be able to provide the name, birth date, Social Security number, and death certificate of the worker, as well as the name of the railroad company for whom the deceased worked.

If you should have any questions regarding this benefit or your possible eligibility for same, then please contact MetLife at (800) 310-7770.

*(Excerpted from a BLET National Division News Release dated August 27, 2014, at <http://www.ble-t.org/pr/news/newsflash.asp?id=5617>.)*

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



*"Success is not final,  
failure is not fatal..."*

*... it is the courage to  
continue that counts"*

— Winston Churchill

## H.R. 233 the Safe Freight Act 2017

On January 3, 2017, Congressman Don Young from Alaska re-introduced the Safe Freight Act of 2017 (H.R. 233). This legislation would mandate a two-person crew on all freight trains—a certified engineer and a certified conductor.

BLET members, both active and retired, as well as auxiliary members are urged to contact their House representatives and ask them to co-sponsor H.R. 233. Members can reach the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask to be connected to the representative from your congressional district. You can also go online at <http://www.house.gov/htbin/findrep>, enter your zip code, and your representative's information will be provided.

The Safe Freight Act affects all of us in the railroad industry, regardless if we are the employee or the family member at home. It's a bill about safety, not just for the communities that these trains travel through, but also for the men and woman who are in the cabs of the locomotives, and for the peace of mind for those of us at home worried about things that we cannot control while our loved ones are at work. One person on a train is not enough, and no amount of propaganda that the carriers or the government are willing to try to sell us will ever make up for the second person sitting in the cab should an emergency arise.

We need co-sponsors for this bill. When the bill was introduced in 2016, 69 congressmen co-sponsored it; we need more in 2017. How do we get there? We all need to step up and stop expecting someone else to do what we need to do ourselves. Pick up the phone, write a letter, go to your computer and electronically make your voice heard. However you choose to do it, get it done. Let's show Congress that we know what the words solidarity and strength mean by deafening our representatives with our voices in support of this bill that is not just important, it's imperative!

In a newsflash on the BLET website, National President Dennis R. Pierce said: "In spite of what the railroads might say, technology has not advanced to the point that it can replace the eyes and ears of railroad

professionals. Please do your part as the job you save may be your own."

## Texas Lawmakers try to "Derail" State's Bullet Train

Lawmakers in Texas filed 18 bills in an effort to put a halt to the privately funded bullet train that would make the 240-mile run between the cities of Houston and Dallas. The laws are aimed at complicating the company's ability to acquire private property via eminent domain, as well as strengthening the protection of the landowners. The bills would also prohibit the state from ever maintaining or operating the high-speed rail operation. "I still have doubts about whether a high-speed rail project makes sense for Texas," Texas State Senator Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe) said. "Taxpayers should not be expected to pay the bill if the project fails."

Texas Central, the company in charge of the high-speed rail project, announced in February that property owners have agreed to sell approximately 30 percent of the land needed for the rail project once environmental clearances have been finalized and construction is ready to begin. The biggest issue facing Texas Central and its opponents is the company's use of eminent domain to acquire property because it's a railroad. Property owners and lawmakers are challenging Texas Central's eminent domain authority.

Elected officials in both cities support the high-speed rail project. "Our legislature should be in the business of expanding transportation options and embracing innovation," the group Texas Rail Advocates said in a statement. "We hope legislators don't fall victim to a vocal minority who would have our state bury its head in the sand by ignoring our growing population and clogged roads."

Once completed, the Texas bullet train would use Japanese bullet train technology. The trip between Dallas and Houston would take approximately 90 minutes and would have one stop near College Station.

## Supreme Court Review of Two-Person Crew

The BLET scored a major victory when the Supreme Court declined to review an appellate court's decision against the Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway (W&LE) when the railroad attempted to use managers in place of union members on railroad crews.

"This final decision by the highest court in the land reminds us all of the importance of strong contract language, followed by strong union activism, to protect our contracts," BLET President Dennis Pierce said. "The now unimpeachable decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit is not only important for our W&LE members, but for all operating employees



and rail labor in general. The nationwide fight over operating crew size is far from over, but this victory helps to ensure that union contracts requiring two crew members are enforceable by the union, even to the point of a strike."

### **Win in New Hampshire over Right-to-Work Legislation**

Despite full Republican control of the State House and aggressive lobbying efforts by New Hampshire Republican Governor Chris Sununu, New Hampshire will not be added to the growing list of right-to-work states. The New Hampshire House of Representatives voted 200-177 to kill the union-targeting legislation that called for prohibiting unions from charging fees to nonmembers for the costs of representation. Additionally, the House moved to indefinitely postpone the bill, making it ineligible for debate for the next two years.

Republican Rep. Sean Morrison, a firefighter, said suggestions that right-to-work would attract businesses into New Hampshire were misplaced. Roughly nine percent of New Hampshire workers are unionized, according to federal statistics, and between just three to four percent are in private unions. He argued that the legislation would weaken the power of unions, therefore hurting workers. "I implore you to oppose this attack on our middle class," Morrison said.

There are currently 28 states that have passed right-to-work legislation: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Kansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana,

Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, and most recently Kentucky in January 2017 and Missouri on February 6, 2017.

Ohio is the state currently in the hot seat with its right-to-work battle underway. This is the second time right-to-work legislation has been introduced in the state of Ohio. When first enacted by Ohio's Republican-controlled legislature and signed into law by Governor Kasich in 2011, it was repealed by the state's voters in a 2012 ballot initiative. "In Ohio, union and non-union people have said, we think people deserve a fair shake and the ability to negotiate fair wages and conditions in the workplace, and I think they'll respond negatively to that kind of legislation," House Minority Leader Fred Strahorn said.

### **New Railroad Crossing Ad Aimed at Male Drivers**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has teamed up with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in a seven-million-dollar nationwide advertising campaign aimed primarily at male drivers between the ages of 18-49. Young male drivers are involved in approximately 75% of all crossing accidents. The "Stop, Trains Can't" advertisement will be focused in the 15 states identified as having the most dangerous crossings, as well as states that made up 75 percent of the crossing accidents in 2015.

"Too many people are still taking unnecessary risks and needlessly paying with their lives," said Former U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. "These deaths are preventable, and this ad campaign is a reminder for everyone that ignoring signage at railroad crossings or attempting to race or beat a train can have deadly consequences."

Crossing deaths are preventable through education and awareness. The message of the new campaign is simple and on target: "STOP, trains can't!"

### **Amtrak**

In a hearing by the Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Amtrak President and CEO Wick Moorman urged investment in the aging Amtrak rail system. "The time is now to invest in our aging assets," Moorman said in prepared remarks. "More than ever, our nation and the traveling public rely on Amtrak for mobility, but the future of Amtrak depends on whether we can renew the cars, locomotives, bridges, tunnels, stations, and other infrastructure that allows us to meet these growing demands."

Moorman pointed out that an investment in the infrastructure that makes up Amtrak will not only help to better serve passengers, but will also contribute to creating jobs in several different areas, including construction and manufacturing, as well as other jobs that would be outsourced across the nation.

Amtrak had a record year in 2016 with 31 million passengers and \$2.2 billion in ticket revenue being reported. Moorman

stated that with investments to modernize and improve the current operation, things will continue to grow over time.

### **Elaine Chao sworn in as Secretary of Transportation**

Elaine Chao was sworn into the office of Secretary of Transportation on January 31, 2017, by Vice President Mike Pence, replacing Anthony Foxx. The Senate confirmed her by a vote of 93-6.

Chao formally served under President George W. Bush as the Secretary of Labor during all eight years of his administration. She also served as deputy secretary at the Department of Transportation.

Top Democrat on the panel, Senator Bill Nelson from Florida, said: "I think we need Secretary Chao as someone who has the experience and who has common sense and that will be in the position to offer level-headed, good experience-based advice to the government going forward."

In her first tweet after taking her new role, Secretary Chao said: "It is an honor to rejoin the extraordinary people of @USDOT and begin working to rebuild America's infrastructure."

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*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](mailto:biz4413@gmail.com).*

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# Tidbits from National Secretary Helen Brand

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Spring is almost here and it's a time for new beginnings. The trees are producing new leaves, the grass is turning from brown to green, and flowers are starting to bloom. It's my favorite time of the year, with more daylight hours and warmer weather.

## 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. The CAP provides financial assistance to qualifying members and helps them to maintain a little bit more of the dignity they deserve.

We send our condolences to the family of Care and Assistance Program recipient, Sister Estelle Haun Nuss, who passed away December 12, 2016. Estelle was a long-time member of Auxiliary 189, Birmingham, Alabama. After that local auxiliary closed, she remained a member-at-large until her passing. She will be missed by her family and friends.

## AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

The dues for auxiliaries is now due, along with your annual report paperwork. Please enclose an updated list of all members with address, e-mail, phone numbers, and spouse's BLET division number. I am happy to help in getting the forms properly filled out and processed.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarship applications for the BLET Auxiliary are due April 1, 2017. Applications received after that date will not be considered.

**Please read all REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS before completing the application.**

## Scholarship Applications are due April 1, 2017!



Qualification requirements, instructions, and application form can be found on the Auxiliary website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net).

The requirements for the LECMPA \$2500 scholarship are the same as those for the Auxiliary scholarship, with the additional requirement that the BLET member parent must also be an LECMPA member for at least one year.

## MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Dues for members-at-large are now due. We have had a tremendous response since the notices went out, but there are a few who still need to respond. We also accept payment using PayPal. Please go to our website for more information at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net).

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to Donnie & Serena Marie Kellings on the birth of their daughter, Aurora Marie Kellings, born January 4, 2017. Congratulations also to proud grandparents Jeanette and Fil Elle. Serena, Jeannette, and Fil are all members of NorCal 39 Auxiliary.

## THANK YOU!

Many thanks to the State Legislative Boards whose members subscribe to our quarterly newsletter. Your support of our publication is greatly appreciated!



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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!!

*— Helen*



## *Looking Back at Our History as we Celebrate 130 Years*

This year is a pivotal year for the Auxiliary, as we celebrate our 130-year anniversary. The Auxiliary came into existence on October 16, 1887, in Chicago, Illinois. That was the year that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) Convention was being held in Chicago and a number of the wives of the organizers of that convention had volunteered to assist their husbands in the planning and organizing of the event.

In the feature article entitled "Helpmate for 75 Years," that appeared in the program for the BLE's 100-year anniversary, auxiliary member Marcella Hackett recounts ... "Let us go back in time to the late 80s. The scene was a bustling one... the wives had undertaken many duties in order to assist their husbands in [the] BLE Convention assembled that October in 1887 at Chicago, Ill. Out of their capable handiwork was to come the idea to organize an auxiliary to the BLE. The idea was voiced and it took hold like wildfire."

"The energetic leadership of Letitia B. Murdock was especially noted by the women at the meeting. The widow of William A. Murdock, a locomotive engineer on the North Western Railroad, Chicago, she was urged to organize the auxiliary. The need to organize was urgent as many of the wives already were meeting in little groups scattered throughout the United States and Canada, but without central leadership. The wives wanted desperately to help their husbands elevate themselves and families educationally, economically, and socially."

Mrs. Murdock called a meeting on October 16, 1887. At that gathering, the first unit, Division One, was organized right there in Chicago, with 10 charter members. Five days later, the women met again and adopted a temporary constitution and bylaws, and elected their officers. Mrs. Murdock (first row, center, in the photo on this page) was elected to serve as the Grand President of the newly founded Grand International Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. She served in that position for the next 32 years!



It was decided that Chicago would be the headquarters of the order. Following the issuance of that first charter, others were distributed in quick succession. Year after year, the number of divisions increased until at one time 600 lodges (later named divisions, and now called local auxiliaries) held charters. That original roster of 10 members grew to more than 26,000!

At the time of the 100-Year Anniversary celebration of the BLE, there were 476 divisions throughout the United States and Canada, with a collective total of more than 21,000 wives. Each division was required to have a minimum of seven members.

At the second convention, held in September 1889 in Chicago, permanent bylaws and ritual were adopted. The ritual included five forms: Opening, Initiation, Balloting, Installation, and Closing.

In her article, Marcella Hackett goes on to say:

"Above all else, this second convention desired BLE recognition of their order. A letter went to BLE Grand Chief Engineer P.M. Arthur requesting a public announcement that the group was Auxiliary to the BLE.

He and other brothers at first opposed the idea of an auxiliary. Mere women ... what could they really do" ... expressed a typical attitude of the times. But the bright, vivacious women under the auxiliary banner soon won a complete change of mind. Grand Chief Arthur gave his promise of earnest future support and admitted that the women might be the means of doing a great deal of good. (Later, in 1908, Grand Chief Engineer Warren S. Stone was to say: 'The success of the BLE was largely in the hands of the GIA because women's influence was extensive in the family.') Brother Arthur suggested the name for the new order: 'Grand International Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.'"

That name and the order prevailed until the 2006 National Convention when the name was changed to BLET Auxiliary in keeping with the changes that had occurred with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers as a result of the 2004 merger with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. As with the BLET, we too split off from our brothers and sisters in Canada and became a national rather than an international organization.

*Look for more on our history in the next issue of this publication.*



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## ***Greetings from your Editor, Susie Burrola, 1st Vice President***

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This year my local auxiliary, Norcal 39, celebrated our seven-year anniversary of being active. It has been an eventful seven years to say the least. For any auxiliary that feels like they are struggling to get things rolling or that it's not working out, I want you to know that it will get there.

When we first started out, we had a few people who were strongly committed to getting the ball rolling. That small group of us were willing to try anything and everything to become established... and we did! With that being said, we have learned a lot over these last seven years. We started off with small turnouts and what seemed like little interest. We would get discouraged at times, but we always were mindful that what was most important was being together for our families. Our families were our driving force. We wanted our kids to feel supported and comforted, and we found that comfort with and through one another. We wanted to support our spouses and be informed on everything that happens with them, so we stuck it out.

We continued to meet monthly and began organizing parties to try to get new members interested. One of the best organized events that really worked to get people involved was our annual bowling party. Our goal was to create a fun activity that people could enjoy with their families, and it worked. Our first year's bowling tournament had such an amazing turnout that it gave us the reassurance we needed to continue to move forward.

Over the years, we have planned and organized many activities — some have been complete flops, while others have been highly successful. It is really a matter of trial and error to figure out what works best for your area. These last seven years, we have figured out the things that have worked best for us for getting people involved. These things include: an annual bowling party in March, holding an annual summer party, doing a "friendsgiving" for Thanksgiving, and our annual Christmas party. We hold monthly meetings in addition to these events, but the events are what have been the best for us.

In addition to the parties, we also experienced trial and error with our fundraising efforts. In the past, we have tried doing bake sales and 50/50 raffles. At first we thought these worked great,

but it turned out these fundraisers were actually turning people away because it seemed like we were asking for money at every event. People wanted to come out and have a good time with their families and not feel like we were trying to get our hands in their pockets. Turnout for events started to slow down as a result of this, so we had to regroup and come up with some new strategies to raise money. This year, we had our first pig raffle. We sold tickets for \$5 and people could buy as many tickets as they wanted for their chance to win half a pig. This turned out to be a great way to raise money for the auxiliary while giving people something of value without being over priced. We are looking forward to doing this fundraiser again and hope it continues to work for us.

If I could offer any advice to those of you who feel like you are struggling to get started, it would be to "hang in there." You will have people who come and go, and you will have some fundraisers and events that work and some that are complete failures. It is okay — learn from those experiences and regroup. As we reached our seven years of being active, we are still trying to find our way, and all the amazing friendships we have made have turned into us being one big family. That alone has made all the ups and downs completely worth it. By coming together and sticking it out through the tough times, we have been successful at advocating for workers, families, and communities. We have marched for the War on Workers at our state capital and attended town hall meetings. We continue to educate families about legislative issues, railroad retirement, and healthcare benefits, and to offer scholarships for children of railroad employees, and help one another when tragedy strikes.

By forming an auxiliary, we have made a difference in our lives, along with the lives of those involved in the railroad.

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*Tell me and I'll forget.  
Show me and I may remember.  
Involve me and I learn.*

*-Benjamin Franklin*

## BLET Auxiliary Working Hard, Reaching Out

By Terri Fleming, National Treasurer



Since I have been more active in the BLET Auxiliary, I have noticed a trend within our organization. I have seen many people realize the need and importance of the Auxiliary. Our membership has grown and the donations for our newsletter, scholarships, and Care and Assistance Program have also grown. We wish to thank all who have contributed to these causes. It is so important to our

organization that we continue with these outreach programs.

We are very grateful to those who have advertised their services in our quarterly newsletter in the last couple of years. The articles and advertisements help to educate our members about valuable services that are important to railroad families and the advertising income has helped to offset the costs associated with producing and distributing the newsletter. The costs involved for each issue are approximately \$1200.00. With the help of some law firms specializing in FELA, specialized insurance companies, as well as job income protection companies, and personal donations, we have been able to save on these costs. Our newsletter is very helpful to many as we try to inform and educate our members - as well as the many railroaders who enjoy reading our newsletter - on important matters concerning the railroad industry.

The Auxiliary was able to award eleven \$1,000.00 scholarships last year to deserving sons and daughters of our members who wish to pursue higher education. These recipients are not only high school graduating students, but some are continuing their education by working on a master's degree, or even a doctorate degree. If you are a member of the Auxiliary, married to a BLET member, and have a child who is entering a college or trade school, it would be worth your while to have them apply for one of our scholarships. You can find our scholarship information and application form on our website. We realize that the cost of education is very high today and we hope that with the award of a scholarship, it will help ease the burden.

Through our Care and Assistance Program, we offer financial assistance to our members who have fallen on hard times due to an accident or illness. Many members are unaware that this program does not have to be an ongoing monthly gift, but can also help on an as-needed basis as a one-time gift, or for just a few months to get through a difficult financial situation. Although we are not able to offer large sums of money, every little bit helps during a time of need. Until last December, we were helping three

widowed members on an ongoing monthly basis through our Care and Assistance Program (CAP). Sadly, one of the recipients, Estelle Nuss, passed away last December at the age of 87. As of this March, we are now providing assistance to another deserving long-time member who is also a widow. If you, or another member you know of, might benefit from this program, please contact our National President, Sereena Hogan, for an application.

We have tried many fundraisers in the last couple of years. We continued to sell our cook books, as well as the "BLET Chick" t-shirts. We continue to conduct raffles at the regional meetings and sell Mulligans at the golf tournaments. We also have a "Smart" Program from different grocery stores around the country. Our members can register their customer appreciation cards online and a small percentage of each purchase they make goes to the Auxiliary. Also new this year, we were fortunate to have a BLET member in northern California who is a Tupperware dealer, offer to have some of the profits of his business donated to the Auxiliary. For more about this ongoing fundraiser, see our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). If you have any ideas or thoughts for a nationwide fundraiser, please let us know. Please remember that we are a non-profit organization and all designated monies will go to each so-said fund. The funds donated for our Scholarship Program are tax deductible.

The Auxiliary is very proud and honored to continue to provide our membership and their families with education, scholarships, and other help as needed. If you or your organization would like to sponsor an edition of the newsletter or donate to any of these causes, or even make a non-tax-deductible contribution to our general fund to help us continue the work we do, it would be much appreciated. If you have any question or concerns, please feel free to contact me or any of the Executive Council members.

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

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