



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

Auxiliary Kicks off New Year by Welcoming Two New Auxiliaries in the State of Oregon!

Eastern Oregon Auxiliary No. 362

By Jaymi George, Vice President, Eastern Oregon Auxiliary



Newly elected officers of Eastern Oregon Auxiliary in La Grande, Oregon, January 12, 2019 sworn in by Sereena Hogan (left to right): Helen Willis, Jaymi George, Chris Baldwin, Erin Ahner, Jodi Wallace, Nicole Wallace, and Stephanie Pfaff.

On January 11, 2019, the spouses of BLET members in eastern Oregon started their local BLET auxiliary, welcoming members from both La Grande and Hermiston. Eastern Oregon BLET Auxiliary #362 was organized at a dinner at Ten Depot Street, a local restaurant housed in a historic brick building in downtown La Grande, Oregon. The dinner was hosted by Paul Bovarnick, Of Counsel, Rose, Senders, and Bovarnick, of Portland, Oregon.

In attendance that night were several members from BLET Division 362 and their spouses, and special guests FELA Attorney Paul Bovarnick, and General Chairman BLET Western Region General Chairman Steve Leyshon and his wife Pat. Also, coming out of retirement for the occasion, Past National President Sereena Hogan was in attendance, and Jodi Wallace, our new National 1st Vice President, who spearheaded the organization of our new auxiliary, and presided over the meeting as

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Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503

By Jessica Keene, President, Pacific Northwest Auxiliary

On January 13, 2019, Mr. Paul Bovarnick hosted a brunch at the Elephants Delicatessen in Portland, Oregon, to celebrate the new charter of the BLET Pacific Northwest Auxiliary. Over the best-ever egg scramble, an assortment of pastries, fruit, and coffee, we became an official local BLET auxiliary

The charter was established with more than the required 10 members. All officer positions were filled—voted in were President Jessica Keene, Vice President Mariah Burrola, Secretary/Treasurer April Ferris, Legislative Representative Christine Palmer, Mobilization Coordinator Kinzie Corbin, and Chaplain Samantha Furlow. We also welcomed Rae Zweerts as our Alternate Legislative Representative.

We had the pleasure of being the second new auxiliary to be formally organized by our new National 1st Vice President Jodi Wallace. Jodi facilitated the organizing of her own new local auxiliary in La Grande, Oregon, just two days prior, on January 11, 2019. Jodi did a beautiful job, speaking to the new members and other guests with knowledge, strength, and confidence. She also helped our auxiliary get a jump on fundraising by helping sell tickets for a 50/50 raffle,

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Attendees at Pacific Northwest Auxiliary Organizing Meeting in Portland, Oregon, January 13, 2019 (left to right): Casie Campbell, Matt Campbell, Becky Kreins, Steven Kreins, Sarah Corbin, Paul Bovarnick, Samantha Furlow, Steve Leyshon, Mariah Burrola, Matthew Furlow, Jessica Keene, Jan Zweerts, Rae Zweerts, April Ferris, Kinzie Corbin, Matt Keene, Scott Palmer, Christine Palmer, Jodi Wallace, Patricia Leyshon, Will Wallace, and Sereena Hogan



From the President - BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

of our rail families in the midwestern states and on the east coast and see temperatures dropping into the negatives with snow levels climbing.

I was recently contacted by a local auxiliary member who shared some great tips on membership retention, thoughts for our website, and ideas to help every member realize how important they are to our organization. At the end of our conversation, she said, "I just want to make a difference." Those words have resonated with me ever since she said them. I hope that's the way every auxiliary member feels. When I first considered running for a local auxiliary position, and eventually a national officer, that's precisely how I felt. I wanted to make a difference for my family and for our organization, and to educate railroad families and bring them together over the common bond we all share in this lifestyle. I hope each of our members feels the same way because, when we work together as a team, I believe we can really make a difference for our BLET members and their families across the nation.

I extend a huge THANK YOU to our Past President, Sereena Hogan, who joined 1st Vice President/National Outreach Coordinator Jodi Wallace this January in Oregon to install our two newest auxiliaries. We are proud to be able to welcome the Pacific Northwest Auxiliary #503 in Salem, Oregon, and the Eastern Oregon Auxiliary #362 in La Grande, Oregon. We are grateful to Mr. Paul Bovarnick who hosted both of the meetings and also to the Oregon State Legislative Board for their generous financial donations to help each auxiliary get started.

Second Vice President/Legislative Rep Jessica Cole and National 3rd Vice President/Assistant Legislative Rep Becky Schneider are doing a great job keeping us all in the loop about legislative issues that are continuing to threaten our union, the safety of our BLET members, and our family's livelihoods. "Autonomous" and "trains"... two words I had hoped we would never see next to one another now seem to be showing up everywhere. S.525, The National Right to Work Act, has once again been introduced, and President Trump says he will sign it should it make its way to his desk. BLET members across the country are making a massive push for two-person crew legislation, and we are so happy that, with the help of Jessica Keene, President of our BLET Pacific Northwest Auxiliary, under the guidance of Oregon State Legislative Chairman Scott Palmer, Oregon House Bill 2970 has been introduced to the House of Representatives. Great job Jessica and Scott and all the other Oregon auxiliary officers and members who helped make this happen (see Page 12 for more info). Also, thank you to Christine and Scott Palmer, who submitted the article entitled "Lobbying Guidelines," which is great information for all of us when lobbying in state houses or on "The Hill" in Washington, D.C.

National Secretary Lawana Poss is hard at work processing our end-of-year reports and dues payments that are coming in from our local auxiliaries, as well as dues payments from our members-at-large. Thank you to everyone for submitting your most current information and dues. Also, it's scholarship season! Please take note of the qualification requirements and submission deadline outlined in the article on Page 4. Applications are due in the National Secretary's office no later than April 1, 2019. Many thanks to LECMPA National President Susan Tukul for partnering with us and offering two \$2500 scholarships to those who meet the qualifications listed on Page 4. Please reach out to Lawana if you have any questions about membership, year-end reports, scholarships, or dues. She is always happy to help and quick to respond.

All of your motivated team of national officers are excited about what 2019 holds for the Auxiliary. We are brainstorming all the time on ways to increase our membership and to keep our organization relevant and financially sound. We have several potential auxiliaries in formation, and 1st Vice President/Outreach Coordinator Jodi Wallace is constantly thinking of new ways to reach more families. We are forever astounded at how many BLET families simply don't know the Auxiliary exists! As we move forward, our goal is to spread the word that we are here and we can help.

Lastly, I would like to thank our friends at the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund (BR&CF) who have generously agreed to help us with the rising publication and distribution cost for our newsletter. It's because of their generosity we can continue to offer a high-quality publication to all of our members. They also were there for us recently when National Treasurer Terri Fleming's laptop stopped working and, through their North American Rail Foundation (NARF) funding program, provided Terri with a brand new computer. Thank you so much, BR&CF International President Jesse Taylor, NARF Executive Director Phil Sullivan, and their Board of Directors for these invaluable contributions to our organization. (See Page 14 for more info on both of these organizations, and stop by to visit them in the vendor display area at this year's BLET regional conventions.)

We are also extremely grateful to Cornerstone Benefits Management President Andy Haley and National Director Ed Haley for helping us when we reached out to them recently. Every year it gets harder and harder to acquire prizes for the scholarship fundraising raffles that we hold at the BLET Regional Meetings. Cornerstone has made a generous donation to help us with this endeavor. (For more information about Cornerstone Benefits Management, see Page 11, and be sure to stop by and visit them in the vendor display area at this year's BLET regional conventions.)

I hope you enjoy this very informative issue, and I encourage any member to share with our editor Jodi Wallace any information or ideas that you might have for us for future publications.

Kathleen "Kat" Bisbikis
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Sisterhood . . .

As women, some of us have learned that other women are both our competition and our co-conspirators. Therein lies our conflict. Not every woman will be your best friend, but every woman is deserving of your respect and support. Sisterhood should know no boundary, no race, no class or geography. Sisterhood should transcend and transform us for the better. True sisterhood cannot be forced. It has to be developed with interest, patience, experiences, and over a period of time. There will be times of challenges within your sisterhood. There will be times of laughter, tears, arguments, disagreements, and moments that will inspire you. Within your sisterhood, you may find some close and amazing friendships, maybe even a second family, and that's okay.

So how can we build a stronger Sisterhood?

Be Realistic with your expectations – This can be tricky given the fact that everyone's definition of "realistic" varies. So let's go with what we should expect from our sisterhood. Encourage each other, not slander one another; forgive when needed and hold each other accountable. We have a responsibility to set an example of what it means to be a "sister" and to actually "keep" your sister even when you disagree.

Be Respectful and kind – This should be the foundation of any sisterhood. Respect and kindness can build trust and make everyone feel welcome. We might not always see eye-to-eye and that's okay, but being harsh to your sisters can break the trust and drive a wedge between one another. We all instinctively know how we should conduct ourselves.

Be patient – There are numerous reasons you may lose patience, time and again, with one of your sisters. Always remember, treat other women as you want to be treated, not as you may have been treated by others.

Be Available – Listen to each other's ideas and thoughts. Be there in their times of happiness and their moments of sorrow. While it is important that there be unity among all sisters, you want to be careful not to ostracize others by creating cliques. Cliques can be detrimental to morale and can cause sisters on the outside to feel less important. Alone we can do so little; together we can move mountains.

Engage others – Engage your sisters to participate in meetings, activities, and events. Your ability to relate, discuss, share, and engage other women will absolutely impact how successful your sisterhood will be. By keeping our sisters engaged, we can be a stronger and a more unified voice.

Communicate – Talk, talk, talk, and talk some more. Keeping members informed and up to date is a way to involve all your sisters. Not everyone uses the same platform to receive information (e-mail, Facebook, texting), and many of them can cause misunderstandings. Disagreements are inevitable; we are not always going to get along. Resolve them quickly and communicate what you need woman-to-woman.

Our sisterhood is our tribe and each of us is gifted with something unique, our own arsenal of knowledge, skills, and weapons (not literally). I don't have *sisterhood* all figured out (not even remotely close). I'm not suggesting you go out and make friends with every woman in your auxiliary, because heck, that's just not realistic. What I am saying is listen to your sisters without judgment, and respect them.

It's time for us to put the "sister" back into the word "sisterhood." It starts with you and with me, right here and right now.

Heather is married to Vince Barto, engineer for the BNSF Railroad out of Stockton California. They have two children, Ben and Madison.

Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 Organizes Community Project

Submitted by Gina Kuenning, President, Flat Rock Auxiliary

Members of Flat Rock Auxiliary No. 8 in North Platt, Nebraska, are always on the move. Last October, the auxiliary organized a cleanup day in their community. Following the event, President Gina Kuenning expressed her gratitude to all who participated: "Thank you to everyone who came out to pick up trash on our six-mile BLET Auxiliary adventure! Very proud of all the kiddos who participated in this community service opportunity! We couldn't have asked for a more beautiful day!"





By Kathleen Bisbikis

National President, BLET Auxiliary

Scholarship season is a hectic time of year. So many things to do and it's easy to put off filling out that application till the last minute. Don't take chances when it comes to paying for your children's college education. Parents of high school seniors with goals of attending post-secondary education, trade school, or institutions of higher learning in the fall and/or returning college students, please take a moment to encourage your student to fill out and submit their application for the BLET Auxiliary scholarship and/or the LECMPA scholarship.

The BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Program was established in 1981 and provides \$1000.00 scholarships to the children of both auxiliary and BLET members, with each having at least one year of concurrent membership. The children of an unmarried BLET member who is also an auxiliary associate member or associate member-at-large with at least one-year continuous membership in both organizations, are eligible to submit scholarship applications for consideration.

New this year to the Scholarship Program, the delegates at the 2018 National Convention in Las Vegas voted to open the scholarship up to any member of the BLET Auxiliary who has at least one year of membership. This opens up the door to not just the children of our members, but to the members themselves who may want to finish a degree, start a new career path, or take their education to the next level.

Locomotive Engineers and Conductors Mutual Protective Association (LECMPA) is once again funding two scholarships of \$2500.00 for children who meet the requirements to apply for a BLET Auxiliary scholarship and also have a parent who has been a member of LECMPA for at least one year of continuous membership. If your child meets these requirements, please make sure that he or she marks the box on the application to signify they are eligible for this scholarship, so they don't miss out on this opportunity. We encourage any member of the Auxiliary whose BLET family member is also member of LECMPA to apply.

Applications must be received in the office of the BLET Auxiliary National Secretary on or before April 1, 2019. You can find more information about the BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Program on our website at www.bletauxiliary.net.

Eastern Oregon Auxiliary No. 362

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the BLET National Auxiliary Organizing Officer. A total of 19 people were in attendance at the dinner, and 16 of them signed up to join our Local Auxiliary, including General Chairman Steve Leyshon. His wife Pat transferred from member-at-large to join our auxiliary as well, bringing the total of charter members to 17. With the support of the General Chairman and the BLET members from Division 362 who joined that night, we will have a strong auxiliary and look forward to growing in the future.

Paul Bovarnick spoke to us about the importance of working with state and local legislative representatives and building those relationships so that when important issues arise we will have somebody willing to listen to us and our concerns. Sereena Hogan spoke about the history of the National Auxiliary and its programs. Jodi Wallace spoke about the importance of forming local auxiliaries and what they can accomplish.

Jodi then introduced the members of our elected counsel and Sereena administered the oath of office to all of us as a group: President Jodi

Wallace, Vice President Jaymi George, Secretary Chris Baldwin, Treasurer Erin Ahner, Chaplain Nicole Wallace, Legislative Representative Stephanie Pfaff, and Mobilization Organizer Helen Willis.

The turnout proved that there are committed individuals in the area willing to do what it takes to support the BLET members, their families, and the local community. The group discussed plans for the future of the auxiliary, including fundraising efforts, community involvement, legislative hot topics, and support for the local BLET members through the holiday season and in times of need.

The members raised seed money to get started by conducting a 50/50 raffle, and are looking forward to hitting the ground running with fundraising efforts in the coming months. In addition, the Oregon State Legislative Board donated \$500.00 to our local auxiliary to help us get moving in the right direction.

Many thanks to Attorney Paul Bovarnick, General Chairman Steve Leyshon, Oregon State Legislative Board Chairman Scott Palmer, and Past National President Sereena Hogan for all of their support in getting us organized as a new Auxiliary.

Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

It is almost spring and I know everyone is looking forward to warmer weather! The 2019 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 you there! Please check the BLET website, www.ble-t.org, for more information.

June 24-28, 2019- St Louis, Missouri – Hilton St Louis at the Ballpark (registration open now!)

July 22-26, 2019 – Clearwater Beach, Florida – Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort

WELCOME TO OUR NEW AUXILIARIES!

Pacific Northwest Auxiliary 503 – Salem, Oregon: Matthew and Samantha Furlow, Mackenzie Corbin, Kendall Nichols, Matt and Jessica Keene, Joel Bahrenfuss, Dylan and April Ferris, Jan Zweerts and Judith Zweerts Casey, Mariah Burrola, and Christine Palmer.

Eastern Oregon Auxiliary 362 – LaGrande, Oregon: Jodi and Will Wallace, Jacy Jorgensen, Steve and Patricia Leyshon, Mark and Jaymi George, Tucker and Nicole Wallace, Joseph and Helen Willis, Erin Ahner, Morgan Pfaff, Steven and Christine Baldwin, Anthony Baldwin, Cameron Estes, and Stephanie Pfaff.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Shelby Ostrander- Iowa, Jennifer Balentine – CA, Victoria Delahay – CA, Shelly Cunningham- TX, Joel Anderson- MN, Amanda Miller- Missouri, Erin Benedict- WI.

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Dues notices have been mailed to all members-at-large. Please make sure to send your dues to me and check to be sure that all of your information is correct so that you will continue to receive your newsletter. ALL payments should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary. Payments can also be paid through PayPal.

AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

You should have received your Auxiliary Packets in December. Annual reports and dues are due in my office by March 1, 2019. If you have any questions about the forms, please call, text, 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. Payments can also be paid through PayPal.

SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have children who are college-bound, they may be eligible to apply for the BLET Auxiliary 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 2019-2020 academic school year are due in my office on or before April 1, 2019. **Late applications will not be considered. Please read ALL instructions!** Changes have been made to the application and eligibility.

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

Thoughts and Prayers to: BLET National Vice President and Auxiliary MAL Mike Twombly whose father passed away in December; El Paso Area Auxiliary 591 member and husband of National Treasurer Terri Fleming, Chuck Fleming, whose mother, Jodi Fleming, passed away in December; and Auxiliary National Chaplain and member of Auxiliary 37 in Little Rock, Arkansas, Velma Williams, whose sister, Diane McClellan, passed away on January 2, 2019.

ALSO IN OUR THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

We ask for prayers of strength and healing for our National Legislative Representative Jessica Cole’s mother, “Bev,” as she recovers from surgery. We also ask for healing prayers for Little Rock, Arkansas Auxiliary 37 Secretary-Treasurer Mary Anna Mullins. Mary Anna had a fall and is now recovering at home. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Oscar and Susie Burrola –NorCal Auxiliary 39 – Stockton, California, welcomed their second grandson, Oz Xavier Burrola. He was born on January 24.

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!

Thank you all for your support and membership!



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

“The real acid test of courage is to be just your honest self when everybody is trying to be like somebody else.”

— Andrew Jensen



Jessica Cole

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY JESSICA COLE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE, AND

BECKY SCHNEIDER, ASSISTANT NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



Becky Schneider

JESSICA'S UPDATE:

Huge Heads Up on Right to Work: Your Union Under Attack

Customer service representatives at United Airlines are the plaintiffs in a Janus-style lawsuit naming The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers as the defendant. Though they are airline employees, they are covered by the Railway Labor Act, which administers collective bargaining and unionization efforts for hundreds of thousands of rail and airline employees.

It's no surprise that the Mackinaw Center, which created a hotline to encourage public union employees to opt out of their unions in the wake of the Janus decision, is the filing organization for the lawsuit. Mackinaw Center receives extensive funding from epically wealthy business oligarchs such as DeVos, Koch, and Walton.

The hoped-for endgame here is to starve the union of funds while still requiring them to represent ALL employees, whether they have paid union dues or not. One needs only to look at the list of billionaires behind the lawsuit to see who benefits most from convincing and enabling the average worker that he or she is better off not contributing towards the collective labor voice.

The best counter strategy for the grassroots union member is to educate and mobilize from the lowest levels up. It's a foundation that gives a structure strength. Talk to your co-workers about this manipulation and make sure they are fully aware of who is behind it and why.

Source: Article written by Joe DeManuelle-Wall for labornotes.org, sent by Ohio State Chairman Tim Price

Trump Administration Reneges on Safety Policy to Update Train Braking Systems
U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials

Safety Administration (PHMSA) has tabled a new requirement mandating the installation of electronically controlled pneumatic brakes (ECP) on freight cars based on a cost benefit analysis study which showed that the costs to install such technology, at \$5600 per car, exceeds the projected benefits from accident reductions.

In contrast to standard air brakes, which transfer air sequentially from one car to the next, often in trains more than a mile long, ECP technology allows engineers to apply brakes to all cars simultaneously, lowering the risk of derailments and uncoupling due to slack action within the train.

Australia has widely implemented ECP technology and has noted a 4% to 11% increase in fuel efficiency attributable to the change. However, PHMSA notes that there are additional barriers to installing the systems in U.S. cars, including the ongoing upgrades to Positive Train Control already underway and the issue of numerous cars being owned by shippers rather than carriers.

Source: The Regulatory Review, January 10, 2019

New State Legislatures Begin to Convene

The 2018 General Election brought many newcomers to state office in state legislatures across the country. Many of the new bodies reconvene for the new session sometime in January and will remain active until early to late spring.

This presents both an opportunity and a challenge for your BLET State Legislative Board representatives. All unpassed legislation dies when a session ends and must be taken up anew in the new session via resubmission, a tedious process. Additionally, new legislators must be brought up to familiarity and competence on the issue surrounding proposed legislation.

This creates repetitive work for state BLET lobbyists, but also affords an opportunity to build new

support in fresh minds. You can help by writing or calling your state representatives to explain why safety and labor issues matter to you. Download the Countable App to keep up on who your reps are and how they are voting. Countable makes it incredibly easy to contact them all at once via e-mail.

Source: Wisconsin State Legislative Board Vice Chairman Tony Dimond and National BLET Auxiliary Secretary Lawana Poss

Runaway One-Person Train Crash in Western Australia Contributes to \$600 Million Loss in Productivity

SYDNEY, Australia — Mining giant BHP has revealed that a freight train derailment in Western Australia, a plant outage in South Australia and a copper mine fire in Chile have led to a \$US600 million (\$838 million) hit to productivity for the first half of the 2019 financial year. BHP, in November, was forced to deliberately derail a runaway train loaded with iron ore in Western Australia's remote Pilbara region, which severed the crucial rail link between its mines and shipping hub in Port Hedland, and disrupted exports of its most lucrative commodity. The BHP train, consisting of four locomotives and 268 wagons filled with iron ore, was derailed by BHP's remote operations centre. It had been traveling from Newman to Port Hedland when the driver disembarked at a siding to inspect an issue with an ore car, before the train started moving by itself.

Source: Sydney Morning Herald, January 22, 2019

State Election Fallout: The Power Grab Phenomenon

It wasn't all over in a few states after the people had made their 2018 Election choices. Following the lead of North Carolina Republicans in 2016, who stripped an incoming Democratic governor of many powers before he could take office, Wisconsin's and Michigan's freshly defeated Republicans enacted similar

measures in extraordinary sessions during the lame duck period before newly elected Democrats took power.

Expect many court challenges in all these states. In fact, some of the changes in North Carolina have already been reversed in court, but it has been a series of very difficult battles.

Interestingly, it seems to be hard to find even one pro-democracy defense or reason why the power grab ploy is a benefit to the voters, the PEOPLE.

In Wisconsin, the Republican State House Speaker Robin Vos is quoted as saying the reforms were necessary because otherwise, "we are going to have a very liberal governor who is going to enact policies that are in direct contrast to what many of us believe in." But, in fact, the voters elected Governor Evers to have those powers.

Source: www.vox.com

Trump Administration Plans to Reclassify Nuclear Waste

Under the Trump administration, the Department of Energy is seeking to reclassify a large percentage of nuclear waste as low level, a strategy that would reduce, and in some cases eliminate, the government's responsibility to clean up and dispose of radioactive material.

This proposal is being hit with particularly harsh criticism in Washington State, home to the biggest nuclear waste site in the country, Hanford, which is a leftover from the development of the atomic bomb.

Because nuclear waste of many levels is already shipped by rail, with big increases in such cargo predicted, classification requirements are a particular safety concern for rail families, first responders, and the general public. Classification of such waste has not changed for the time being, but workers must not let their guard down.

Sources: Wisconsin State Legislative Board, Fall 2018; Cincinnati Enquirer, November 13, 2018

Why Election Day is Always a Tuesday: Implications and Food for Thought

Ever wonder why Election Day is always a Tuesday? Apparently it dates back to the days when farmers could not travel on Sunday for religious reasons and had to be at market on Wednesday.

Hundreds of years later, the implications of Tuesday elections, which were originally designed to enable more voters, is, in fact, to hinder many potential voters in the regular week workforce who cannot find the time to go to the polls. According to a U.S. Census report, 14% of eligible voters do not do so because they don't have time.

The small town of Sandusky, Ohio, has responded by recently making Election Day a holiday for its 250 city employees, giving up the Columbus Day holiday in its place.

A few employers have taken up the cause on a broader level in recent years, notably, GM, Patagonia, and Casper, who all gave their employees a paid day off to vote in the 2016 election.

The U.S. Congress has considered several bills to make the day a national holiday, but they have so far always gone down in fierce partisan debate. In general, the idea is usually supported by Democrats and not so popular with Republicans. Most recently, Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has lambasted the idea on the floor and in an op ed as a "Democratic Power Grab" scheme, an assessment likely based on the assumption that a larger voter turnout often results in more Democrats being elected to office.

Source: Quartz news

Western States Regional News from the Members

Sister Jessica Keene from Oregon sent me a very detailed report on efforts to improve crew transport safety in her state. It was full of so many good details about working at the grassroots level that we decided not to cut it down to fit our Legislative Update and gave it a separate platform for the newsletter. (Please see the article on Page 12 by Christine Palmer.)

Hazmat Derailment in Georgia

On January 6, 2019, a Norfolk South-

ern freight train carrying hazardous chemicals was derailed in Jefferson County, Georgia, near the town of Bartow, spilling hydrochloric acid and hydrogen peroxide. Thirty-nine rail cars were derailed, and the chemical spill prompted the evacuation of Bartow and all addresses within a seven-mile radius of the crash site, as the train was also carrying chlorine; however, no leakage of the chlorine tankers was reported. No injuries related to the derailment were reported, with the exception of a firefighter and three law enforcement officers who were treated at area hospitals for respiratory problems related to the chemical spill. The biggest fear expressed by evacuees was that one of the tank cars could leak even while being cleared and expose the town to a similar situation which happened in Graniteville, South Carolina, 14 years to-the-day prior to this accident. In Graniteville, one of the tankers carrying the chlorine gas ruptured and ended up killing 10 people who were exposed.

While it was reported that the FRA was present, there were no reports of the NTSB having a presence and collecting evidence. Hopefully, this was not one of the accidents the NTSB was unable to investigate because of the shutdown.

Source: WRDW, Augusta, GA, and Aiken Standard, SC

Two-Person Crew Legislation Popping Up Across the U.S.

With new state legislatures convening, we are seeing a resurgence of two-person crew bills popping up across the United States. By our count, so far a total of 24 states have bills introduced. Status of bills that have either passed out of committee or passed their state house legislatures as of this writing are as follows:

- Colorado — Passed by House of Representatives on February 5, 2019
- Maryland — Passed by House of Delegates on February 7, 2019
- Nebraska — Scheduled for a committee hearing March 5, 2019
- New Mexico — Scheduled for a committee hearing on February 15, 2019
- Nevada — A survey has been conducted showing overwhelming support for two-person crews

Nineteen other State Legislatures have introduced bills and we will keep you updated on our website as these important bills advance.

Many thanks to National President Kathleen Bisbikis and to Assistant Legislative Representative Becky Schneider for helping to keep watch on this issue, which is moving so fast in so many places that your National Legislative Representative, Jessica Cole, has been most grateful to be able to delegate some of the bird dogging to other vigilant ladies!

Source: Jodi Wallace and the Colorado State Assembly website, extensive research from numerous sources by Kathleen Bisbikis and Becky Schneider

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

BECKY'S UPDATE:

"I love my dog. He does nothing for political reasons."

— Will Rogers

It has certainly been a wild ride for the country since our last newsletter was published. Just as Senators left D.C. for Christmas, thinking they had a deal to keep the government running, they were immediately called back to work out a different solution. The new 116th Congress was sworn in under the cloud of a partial government shutdown and served their first 23 days with 800,000 federal workers furloughed or working without pay. To add insult to injury, the polar vortex brought record-breaking freezing temperatures to the Midwest and East Coast disrupting commuter travel, especially in Chicago.

Shutdown Effects on Transit

We are all aware of the effects the government shutdown had on government and contract workers, but not much was reported on how the shutdown affected transportation agencies and issues. Most of the FRA and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) were not working during the

Note to all our readers: Please continue to send your state and regional news that you think should be addressed and reported in our legislative updates.

shutdown. There were a few available employees to facilitate inspections and help the TexRail commuter operation prepare for its January 10th opening. DOT funding sources were left with an estimated \$33 million of unreimbursed expenses through January 10 (with 15 more days in limbo), and an anticipated funding gap of \$50 million through the end of January.

The D.C. Metro felt the heat as well, losing almost one-sixth of its weekly ridership and approximately \$400,000 loss in fares and parking revenue every weekday during the shutdown, totaling just under \$1 million.

Despite the discourse in our nation's capital, accidents requiring investigation by the NTSB continued to occur. Of the agency's 397 staff members, 367 were furloughed, 26 were considered excepted, and 4 investigators were recalled to work without pay to support investigations of three international aviation accidents, NTSB officials said in a press release. Work was suspended on 33 ongoing rail, pipeline, and hazardous materials investigations; 22 accidents, including two rail accidents, that NTSB did not dispatch investigators, two of which resulted in fatalities; and on many the agency did not gather evidence to determine if an investigation was warranted. An NTSB official said, "It is possible that perishable evidence may have been lost, which potentially could prevent determination of probable cause." The NTSB also had to postpone its 2019-2020 launch of its "Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvements." That announcement was re-scheduled and released on February 4th.

Source: Railway Age

While working on my report, I ran across a "fun fact." As reported by Gary Faley, Legislative Director at NARVRE, the AFL-CIO recently released reports that looking back over the past eight years, the House Ways & Means Committee has held more than 400 hearings with thousands of witnesses on many important topics, while only **ONE** (emphasis

— continued on Page 14

HOPE FOR CHANGE IN WISCONSIN

By Jessica Cole, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Rep

It's been a very tough eight years in Wisconsin for unions. The election of Governor Scott Walker ushered in unprecedented attacks on labor rights and education, driven largely by Walker's loyalties to out-of-state big business interests who contributed mightily to his campaign and the campaigns of his fellow Republican state representatives.

Right to Work initiatives have sprung up all across the country, both on state and federal levels. Walker's success at defusing public unions by taking away collective bargaining and negating contracts in the traditionally progressive state of Wisconsin helped spur the cause to stomp out unions nationwide. If it can be done in Wisconsin, it can be done anywhere, and at the end of eight years, many of the people who originally felt they would be better off with all of the reforms Walker brought in have realized that they are no better off and, in fact, may be worse off than they were nearly a decade ago.

Wisconsin's standard of living has fallen and public education has been gutted, and the damage done may never be fully corrected. Walker promoted his policies against labor and education from a "divide and conquer" standpoint and was proud of using that phrase and that mindset to bulldoze anyone who didn't agree with him.

Enter State School Superintendent Tony Evers and a 90% turnout in a razor thin election in 2018. Evers, with a shoestring budget by comparison to Walker, managed a tiny victory and, most ironically, a



Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers, Tony Dimond, and Jessica Cole

recount is not legally permitted based on a law signed into effect by Governor Walker himself.

My husband, Wisconsin State Legislative Board Vice Chairman Tony Dimond, and I, were proud to attend a reception and the Inauguration of Governor Evers on January 26, 2019. At his reception, Governor Evers said that people had told him he could never win unless he was meaner than Scott Walker, but he did win at last, and without being meaner. One of Evers' first overtures in office was to extend an olive branch to the other side of the aisle, stating that he hoped to put the past in the past and to get both sides of the aisle to work together again for the good of the citizens of Wisconsin. Amen! Amen! Amen!

Union Auxiliaries Start with You



Are you motivated?
Are you outgoing?
Do you have organizational skills?
Do you have a desire to succeed?
Do want to make a difference in your spouse's career?
Do you want to give back to the community?
Do your kids want scholarship opportunities?
Do you seek a sense of railroad family unity?
Then joining or starting an Auxiliary may be for you!

Questions?

Jodi Wallace - 1st National Vice President BLET Auxiliary
jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net



IN SEARCH OF NEW MEMBERS!

*BY Jodi Wallace, National 1st Vice President/
National Outreach Coordinator*

In Mid-January, we sent out this flyer to a couple of Facebook groups and also put it on the Auxiliary Facebook page. Wow, what a great response we have gotten so far! Not only are people asking about joining already-formed Auxiliaries, we have people interested in starting new local Auxiliaries in their area.

So far, we have interest in Nebraska, Montana, Texas, Missouri, Nevada, and California. In addition, we have some others who were interested in starting a new auxiliary before the flyer was created.

If you are interested in starting a local auxiliary in your area, please e-mail me at jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net.

Lobbying Guidelines

By Christine Palmer, Legislative Representative, Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503, and Scott Palmer, Chairman, Oregon State Legislative Board

The following guidelines may be useful to those of us who are new to the world of politics and lobbying.

1. NEVER talk about political donations in the Capitol or any government office.
2. Always be prompt for a meeting with an official.
3. Dress is "business casual," such as dress pants and a nice blouse. Do not wear jeans unless the meeting is off the Capitol premises and the official you are meeting is well known to you.
4. Do have fun and let your personality shine through.
5. Know what you want to say before the meeting; their time is limited.
6. Always be polite and professional; in politics we have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.
7. Bring copies of documents that support the topic on which you are lobbying to give to the legislator.
8. Bring business cards if you have them and present one to the legislator and one to their staffer.
9. Staffers are the power behind the throne. Treat them well and lay on the charm.
10. Try not to use railroad jargon. The railroad life is hard enough for a lay person to understand without unintentionally muddling up the message.
11. NEVER lobby while wearing anything with the railroad's logo. BLET polo shirts are fine, but we don't want to confuse an official about who we are representing by showing up wearing a UP hat.

We are all on this journey together and we hope these guidelines bring you success.

Extreme Winter Weather Underscores Need for Human Crews

By Jessica Cole, National Legislative Representative

The horror stories about minus-40-degree temperatures (**not** including wind chill), awful blizzards, and dangerous ice storms in the northern and central parts of the country are sadly all true. Here in Wisconsin, we had a deliciously mild winter until mid-January, and it's been horrific ever since, combining some of the most treacherous precipitation with the coldest temperatures I've ever lived through.

It's caused epic trouble for everyone, including the railroad and its employees. I asked my husband to describe a few of the difficulties and perils he faces as an engineer.

Snow brakes were one of the first things he mentioned. When ice and snow works up into a train's wheels, the brakes simply don't work. At all. Until they get hot enough to melt the ice. Because humidity and changing temperatures and barometers mean there's no standard accurate description for winter precipitation, there's also no way a computer algorithm can calculate accurately how long it will take for brakes to warm up enough to work properly.

As an example, last week we had liquid rain that froze as it fell, and our temperature was 19 degrees. Normally this wouldn't be expected to happen. You get some sort of snow, ranging from light and fluffy to powdery and fine in 19-degree weather. Almost always. But not that night, because the air at 10,000 feet, where the clouds were, was about 40 degrees, but the air at ground level was only 19 degrees.

Different amounts and forms of ice, sleet, and snow all melt at different rates, somewhat independent of temperatures around them. It could take several days to completely melt an inch of heavy ice off a driveway in 35 degrees and clouds, but an inch of snow could be gone in half a day of 25 degrees if the sun is out.

With regard to train brakes, that means an experienced and properly trained human engineer needs to assess each snow brakes situation and make human judgements on when the train feels ready to operate safely with fully functional brakes.

As more and more talk comes forward about the future possibilities for autonomous freight trains, it's smart to take yet another lesson from that most merciless teacher, Mother Nature. She can do anything at any time, and no technology can fully adapt without human ingenuity.

Registration Now Open for BLET Regional Meeting in St. Louis

**Hilton at the Ballpark, St. Louis, Missouri
June 24-28, 2019**

Details and registration available at the BLET's regional meeting website, <http://bletregionals.org>. If making reservations by telephone, you must mention the group code "BLE." Room reservations must be made by May 22, 2019.



A note of thanks from Alternate National Treasurer Helen Brand:

I wish to thank my BLET Auxiliary Sisters for all the thoughts, prayers, flowers, and cards in the recent loss of my brother. I truly appreciate all of your friendship and the blessings you bestowed on me and my family. We have an extended family with the Auxiliary and I thank you again.

In Sisterhood,
Helen

GETTING-TO-KNOW-YOU CHRONICLES:

Meet Steve and Pat Leyshon!

By Jessica Keene, President, Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503

You may have heard of, or even have met Brother Steve Leyshon, General Chairman of the Western Region General Committee of Adjustment (wow, that's a mouthful!), but did you know Brother Steve, who lives in Las Vegas, Nevada, with his lovely wife Patricia (Pat) and daughter Jen, loves the color green, enjoys a good steak, and looks forward to January 1st every year because it's a new beginning to make more memorable moments?

Brother Steve is a pretty great guy! I've personally had the pleasure of meeting him and Pat on many occasions. It's obvious to whoever meets these two that they are a great team with big hearts and fantastic senses of humor. In June 2018, I accompanied my husband to the BLET Western Regional Meeting in Monterey, California. It wasn't the first time I'd met these two, but it was the first time I was able to **really get to know them**. I became a part of the Union family through the Auxiliary and they became family immediately. Trust me, you could not ask for better family than Brother Steve and Sister Pat.

The General Chairman of the Western Region General Committee of Adjustment is responsible for negotiating, making, interpreting, and enforcing contracts between engineers and trainmen and the rail carriers that employ them. In addition to his general chairman duties, Brother Steve has been known to volunteer during national conventions, mentor local chairman and other division officers, and help them learn their roles as company officers. He has taught many great leadership skills and offers guid-

ance whenever someone throws a question his way, including me. I have called or texted Brother Steve many times and he has always taken the time to help me.

Because Brother Steve and many other BLET officers are so committed to helping their union family, I felt we should get to know them a little better. I asked Brother Steve some questions to help us all understand not only his union job, but also to give us a look into who he is as our fellow Brother.

What are the most challenging parts of your job?

"Mostly it is all the issues that continuously arise. I have explained it best by saying it's like trying to juggle bowling balls, and then someone will throw you a chainsaw - but that's the job. I would consider the number one challenge is trying to get an idea on what the member wants to see changed in the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Everyone loves more money, but other issues are just as important."

What part of your job is the most time consuming?

"Extensive travel takes a lot of time away from my office and duties that need to be attended to. Although I have tried to limit it and use other technologies to substitute travel, the face-to-face contact is sometimes imperative."

What do you enjoy about your position?

"The greatest part is working with the local chairmen of the

19 divisions in our committee. I strive to always have an open dialog with them and get their opinions on various items, and they are a great resource when it comes to what is occurring in their areas. This job would be impossible without them."

In a perfect world, what would your greatest accomplishment be in your job? (What is your dream accomplishment?)

"This one's easy to answer. The advancement of technology has brought demise to many jobs in the country and narrowed the employment choices that an individual can seek out. It is imperative in our industry that we maintain human interaction with the operation of trains. Two crew members in every locomotive is a must and those employees must be so valuable that the railroads wouldn't want to do without them."

What is one thing you'd change about your job?

"I don't know that I would change anything about this job other than to have the resources to expand the number of full-time committee officers. As any local chairman would tell you, it takes more than just one person to make a division successful and strong. The same is true with a general committee. Having full-time vice general chairmen, and the general secretary/treasurer to help with the administration of the committee is priceless."

What advice do you have for your fellow union brothers and sisters?



Steve and Pat Leyshon

"Attend your division meetings and get involved! When I became interested in union work, I was still young and said to myself, if you don't get involved, who will? A lot of members tend to shy away from the division offices, but if you take the chance, you would be amazed at what you can accomplish. Maybe you will be that person who makes a difference in a member's life."

What do you wish other union members knew about what it takes to do your job?

"There are several skills that you need to do this job. Organization, negotiation skills, and knowing when to say no to the carrier. But probably the most important is people skills. One of the greatest compliments I have received is when a local chairman told me that he changed his way of interacting with his members by watching me do the same. That means a lot to me that my personal actions are noticeable."

With new members joining, what do you feel would be vital information to pass on to a new union member?

"The history and importance of unions and how they affect our lives today. Unions were formed by the people who wanted corporations to be bound by certain

terms and conditions of employment. Union membership allows us to negotiate better wages and working conditions as a group and not allow corporations to decide what is in their best interest. Union membership also allows for a mechanism to appeal any discipline or time claim that the employee feels is unjust. Without a union, the corporations would use the "good ol' boy" tactic to decide an employee's fate.

Secondly, the pay structure on some carriers is complex and needs to be explained in detail and correctly."

What else do you think fellow union members need to be aware of with regard to your job, yourself, and the union family?

"I have been in the workforce for over 40 years now and have worked both non-union and union jobs in that time. I was a carpenter for many years and never investigated the possibility to join a union in that craft. Instead, I accepted what the boss said he'd pay me and worked the hours he asked, and yet others got preferential treatment because of their association with the boss. Not to mention that, as an "at will" employee, he could tell me to pack my things and leave without so much as an explanation why.

Watch out for the buzz words used today such as "right to work." The words "right to work" may sound good, but this is what allows companies the right to terminate their employees at their whim, pay them what they want, and destroy the unions. We are in a fight for our livelihood, not just in this industry, but also in other unionized industries. We need to combine our voices more to combat that attack."

What is the one thing about

yourself you'd like your fellow union brothers and sisters to know about you?

"I always try to be good to people and help them out. I trust everyone right from the start and, unless they do something to change that, I continue to have trust and respect for everyone. I really want people to know that."

If you ask Sister Pat how she handles the long hours Brother Steve keeps, she will tell you she's a railroad brat. "My Grandfather, dad, brother, nephew, first husband, and now Steve, my second husband, have all been U.P. yellow! My dad was a union officer when I was born. If there was a derailment, he could be gone up to three months. You get used to it. You become self-dependent. Without fail, as soon as Steve leaves for longer than three days, something goes wrong—the plumbing, a car issue, there's always something. Jen and I have always taken care of whatever needed done. You just learn that part of this lifestyle."

Sister Pat went on to explain how important it is to support her husband in this role. "We as a family are completely committed to serving the union and its members. Because Steve is committed, we try to help any way we

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PRESIDENT
EDWARD P. HALEY
NATIONAL DIRECTOR

can. Steve has never been happier than being a union chairman. He truly enjoys his union work."

I asked Sister Pat what one thing she would think her daughter would have to say about her dad doing union work. Her response: "I know Jen would say she is proud of him. She understands the importance of what he does."

Lastly, I asked Sister Pat what advice she would give to other families of Union Officers. She responded: "Support them in any way you can; what they are doing is so important. The union helps so many who without it would not have fair wages or even jobs. The union is so very important."

It's hard to see things from someone else's perspective sometimes. I know I've been guilty in the past of not seeing the big picture. People like Brother Steve work so hard to better the lives of BLET members and their families. They give up family and vacation time, they travel while sick, answer their phones day or night, holiday or special anniversary, and work tirelessly for the best interest of all their brothers and sisters. They don't hear this enough but **THANK YOU!** Thank you, Brother Steve and Sister Pat, and Jen for all the sacrifices, hard work, and devotion you have all committed to us. We are all so very fortunate and so extremely grateful!

Auxiliary Members Take Active Role in the Political Process in Oregon

*By Christine Palmer, Legislative Representative
Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503*

At the January 13, 2019 Organizing Meeting of Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503 in Portland, Oregon, special guest Arthur Towers, Political Director of the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association, spoke to those in attendance about some of the ways the legislature works at the State Capitol. He told us about an up and coming bill regarding issues having to do with Uber and Lyft. Auxiliary 503 President Jessica Keene mentioned to him that the rail carrier that employs her husband was starting to use these services to transport rail crews. After Jessica and some of the other attendees at that meeting informed him of their concerns with this practice, Mr. Towers invited Jessica, as well as any additional auxiliary members who wished to participate, to join him at the Oregon State Capitol to speak about their concerns.

Following the January 13 Organizing Meeting, Jessica received a letter from Mr. Towers inviting her and other auxiliary members to join him at a meeting of "stakeholders" who care about the issue of Uber and Lyft insurance. The meeting was scheduled for January 18 at the Oregon State Capitol Building in Salem. The meeting would be attended by representatives of the insurance industry, the taxi industry, Uber, Lyft, and the trial lawyers. Representatives from several state agencies, such as transportation and insurance regulators, would also be in attendance. The AFL-CIO might also be there if issues regarding the rights of drivers comes up.

This meeting was to discuss legislation regarding Public Passenger Vehicle Services (PPVS) such as Uber, Lyft, and taxi services. The bill being proposed to address insurance requirements would also address many other issues having to do with PPVS.

Arthur's letter to Jessica stated that the issue of insurance first appears on Page 5 of the proposed bill, stating that the owner of the vehicle is required to show proof of insurance (as any vehicle owner is required to do). Language on Pages 8-11 gets into the "meat" of the insurance piece. It sets a minimum of \$1M coverage, and states that there has to be uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage, and the personal injury protection benefits that were brought up as concerns at the auxiliary's January 13 organizing meeting. The language specifies that someone who is injured can always try to collect on the policy that Uber holds, and that passengers are never limited to just the insurance that the driver/vehicle owner has.

In his letter, Arthur also explained that the meeting would be held in a large room with people sitting around a big table and that Oregon State Representative Paul Holvey (D), Oregon House District 08, who is a tremendous ally for consumers and workers, would lead the meeting.

The letter goes on to state: "Once we get everyone's issues on the table, Rep. Holvey will make a decision about how he wants to proceed. On the insurance side, a couple of key issues:

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Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503

... continued from Front Cover

which brought in \$230.00 (\$115.00 for our new local auxiliary, and \$115.00 to winner Karen Malm, who attended as a guest).

We have so much support and are very grateful to our speakers who all brought something different to the table. Our speakers included: Steve Leyshon, General Chairman of the Western Region General Committee of Adjustment; Paul Bovarnick, Of Counsel, Rose, Senders and Bovarnick; Sereena Hogan, Past National President of the BLET Auxiliary; Chris Malm, Oregon Department of Transportation; Scott Palmer, BLET Oregon State Legislative Board Chairman; and Arthur Towers, Political Director of the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association, who also happens to be an expert lobbyist.

In the short time since we formally organized, we have hit the ground running. We have participated in meetings of interest at the State Capitol, lobbied for a two-person crew bill, been the recipient of a \$500.00 donation from the BLET Oregon State Legislative Executive Board, and continue to work with our local Operation Lifesaver representative to educate the residents of our surrounding communities on safety around the railroad tracks and crossings.

We have had some shuffle in our local officer positions as we find our way and figure out where our talents will best serve our local auxiliary. Our secretary-treasurer had to step down for family reasons, and we continue to think of her and support her where we can. Our chaplain also stepped down due to an overload of personal obligations. Vice President Mariah Burrola has taken over the secretary-treasurer position for the time being, and I will be handling all of the chaplain duties for now.

Christine Palmer has been very active in her legislative position, writing articles (one of which appears on this page and the other on Page 9), as well as scheduling appointments for our Oregon State Legislative Chairman Scott Palmer and our local auxiliary members to lobby in support of the two-person crew bill. She is an amazing individual and we are so lucky to have her.

Mariah Burrola has been the auxiliary's right arm. She is so supportive, remaining flexible for the auxiliary's needs and ready to jump in to whatever needs doing. She is a true godsend and we hope every auxiliary has their own Mariah Burrola.

A heartfelt thank-you to Paul Bovarnick for hosting our brunch and all the other support he continues to provide. Paul also introduced us to Mr. Arthur Towers, who has opened many doors for us in the Oregon legislative arena so that we can work toward facilitating changes to ensure the safety and security of our train crews and our communities.

Lastly, we must thank our railroaders. As I have often stated, "If it weren't for my supportive husband, Matt Keene, Local Chairman of BLET Division 416, this local auxiliary would not be here." Not only did he sign me up for attendance at the Western Regional Meeting last June in Monterey, California, he has also offered so much support and encouragement throughout the startup process of our new auxiliary. If it weren't for the support we have from our railroaders, we wouldn't be here to support them back. It is truly more than just a career; it is a lifestyle for the whole family!

Pop Culture Representation: A Railroad Wife Saves the World

By Railroad Wife Dacia M. Arnold, Denver, Colorado

At the end of the day, I wonder how I got everything done. The kids are alive in their beds, and I have finally collapsed as a last ditch effort to make time for myself. I am not a single. I am a railroad wife. That is my superpower. I call it a superpower because I honestly have no other explanation as to how I keep up with most everything on my own half the time.

Someone should write a book about how self-sufficient railroad wives are. Someone should also write another dystopian novel, but for adults, with the same high-action stakes as the popular book-to-movie stories, and with a more believable character. If anyone could save the world, a railroad wife and mother would be the most resourceful problem solver to do the job. Well, I have written that book and it's called Apparent Power.

With our spouses gone 34 of 44 hours at the very least (many go weeks away from home), we often take up hobbies to keep our minds from lurking to the worst possibilities while they are unreachable. Personally, I work outside the home, go to school full time, and juggle multiple baby sitters for my two kiddos (kinder and preschool). In addition, I love to take on "do-it-yourself" projects, and I write books. For other spouses, their list of hobbies may be different, but the reasons are all the same: we have to stay busy lest we worry.

The railroad is dangerous. Too often, we read on the news and social media of our sisters becoming widows. Not the kind we joke about because our railroaders are never home, but their railroader will truly never come home. It is a reality we hate to think about, but we do every time we kiss them goodbye or get the text, "I just got called." I never fail to say, "I love you. Be safe." Like reminding him will magically keep everyone and everything around him working properly.

(I'm not crying; you're crying.)

I wrote a book about a railroad wife who never asked to be the world's savior. When crap hits the fan, all she wants to do is make sure her baby is safe and find her railroader. It is already near impossible to contact a railroader on duty, much less during a worldwide disaster, but a railroad wife would figure it out. She would walk 100 miles of track to make sure that man was safe, if for no other reason than to make sure he did what she told him to do. Though she works independently throughout her daily routines, her heart still belongs to that worker on the rail. We don't stop being wives when they turn off their phones. Nope. We count down the hours until they "go dead." We meddle by the window when they tell us they have tied up and are on their way home, so we can see them pull in the driveway. Holidays are especially hard. With so much expectation on making appearances, and struggling as one-half of a team to make the celebration perfect, it is easy to feel lost and lonely. But we cope. We strong-arm it through life 75 percent of the time. Railroad wives are pretty much the superwomen no one knew about until now. Apparent

Power is for sale now through Amazon, Barnes and Noble, iBooks and many more sites. It is time you had a heroine who knows the struggles of making hard decisions alone. You got this!

Apparent Power has been critically linked to Hollywood blockbusters like Divergent and Annihilation by Kirkus Reviews (read the full review at <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/dacia-m-arnold/apparent-power>), and is available for purchase through all major book retailers, including Amazon.



Dacia loves meeting up with fellow railroad wives while she's on tour. Check out her website for new dates or see her at one of her signing events across the country:

- April 19-20: FanX Salt Lake City Comic Convention
- May 31- June 2, 2019: Author Row at Denver PopCulture Con
- September 18, 2019: Author Event at Barr Memorial Library, Fort Knox, Kentucky 1130-1330.
- October 18-20, 2019: Walker Stalker Convention, Atlanta, Georgia

BIO:

Dacia M. Arnold is an award-winning, Amazon Bestselling American novelist, freelance writer, mother, medical professional and a ten-year Army Veteran. She enjoys writing about main characters who are otherwise normal people with extraordinary abilities. As a freelance writer, Dacia contributes monthly to the Rocky Mountain Fiction Writer's blog where she shares her relatively short experience in the literary world. As a mother of two and railroad wife, Dacia incorporates her experiences in all aspects of her life into her writing. She sometimes incorporates life with her husband, a conductor for Union Pacific in Denver, Colorado, and a few do-it-yourself projects. When in rare form, she will share stories about her time in the military, her medical experiences, short fiction stories, and very rarely a poem.

Resources:

<https://daciarnold.com>
<https://facebook.com/authordaciarnold>
<https://twitter.com/daciaauthor>
https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/18134027.Dacia_M_Arnold

Legislative Update continued from Page 7

added) hearing was devoted to the funding and finance of our nation's infrastructure. According to Gary, "A single, two-hour hearing will simply not allow a committee to carve out hundreds of billions in revenue and funding for an abundance of ignored projects."

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR), the new chairman of the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee has remarked that, "The President must be on board for a House-passed bill to get through the Senate." One of the issues to come before Congress that has wide bipartisan support is addressing infrastructure that has been disgracefully ignored for decades. On the campaign trail, President Trump repeated over and over his promise to fix the nations crumbling infrastructure. We can only hope that he will be as tenacious about infrastructure as he is about his wall.

Source: National Association of Retired & Veteran Railway Employees (NARVE)

Amtrak News

HR 6147, the appropriations bill containing Amtrak funding, was passed by the House and Senate, but held hostage during the most recent frantic negotiations trying to avert the next government shutdown. It was part of the budgets passed for several departments on February 15.

Meanwhile, Amtrak's President and CEO Richard Anderson continues his quest to strip anything "not nailed down" at Amtrak in his attempt to turn it into a profitable enterprise. What he is apparently missing is that Amtrak was formed as a governmental transportation entity in 1970 to alleviate private railroads' common carrier obligation to provide passenger service. He has already stripped hot meal service from most trains and implemented alternatives that passengers say is worse than airline food. He has removed ticket agents at a number of stations. He is determined to pick apart long-distance trains and focus only on the Northeast Corridor. Most recently, Amtrak put forth a Request for Information seeking to "improve" dining operations with or without current Amtrak employees. Protestors in support of their Amtrak Brothers and



North American Railway Foundation®

founded by the BR&CF



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

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

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

North American Railway Foundation

Philip J. Sullivan II, Executive Director

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Brotherhood's Relief & Compensation Fund

Jesse E. Taylor, International President

*2150 Linglestown Road

Harrisburg, PA 17110

(717) 657-1890

** As of April 1, 2019, BR&CF and NARF will both be housed in the same building at the following address:
300 Sterling Parkway, Suite 105, Mechanicsburg PA 17050. Phone numbers and e-mail addresses will remain the same.*

Sisters passed out fliers stating, "All aboard the cold cut express."

Mr. Anderson also abruptly closed the Riverside, California call center, affecting 500 employees and outsourcing their work to a non-union facility. The option for these California employees is to move to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, if they want to keep their jobs. In another union-busting tactic, he is now outsourcing work to non-railroad employees. While these particular cruelties don't directly affect BLET members, they reduce the number of workers who pay into Railroad Retirement, and they are just another example of the new leadership's plan to keep chipping away at union representation.

Source: NARVE

As reported in the last issue of the newsletter, the "bustitution" (the plan to replace a large portion of the Southwest Chief with a long bus ride) was stopped by six Senators who championed its removal, including Tom Udall (D-NM), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Jerry Moran (R-KS), and Pat Roberts (R-KS). For their efforts, the Rail Passengers Association (formerly NARP) awarded their Golden Spike Award in saving the Southwest

Chief and the benefits to the communities they serve across a swath of rural America.

Source: RPA News

Lastly in Amtrak news, does anyone remember when Amtrak was the hottest train on the railroad? Most of those who do are either retired or close. When Amtrak was created to relieve the Carriers of their responsibility to provide passenger service, the quid pro quo was the "preference clause" (49 USC § 24308(c)), which is still on the books. In July, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Amtrak and the FRA can set the standard for on-time performance for Amtrak, which is currently at an all-time low. The American Association of Railroad's argument alleges that Amtrak is "for profit," giving it an unfair advantage if given track preference. However, the Supreme Court has already ruled that Amtrak is a governmental entity. Congress mandated that people should be prioritized first and the railroads have thumbled their noses at that notion for years without consequence. The Carriers are set to take their argument to the Supreme Court, but since Justice Kavanaugh was part of the D.C. Circuit Court decision, he will have to recuse himself. A tie vote won't overturn the lower court's decision. (Source: RPA)

Note: RPA's Rail Nation Summit will be held this year in D.C., March 31 – April 3 for anyone interested in attending and participating in "Blueprint 2020: You Be the Architect."

Oil Train Safety Regulations

Washington State Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-Battle Ground) has reintroduced a bill to reinstate oil train safety regulations, rules implemented by the Obama administration in 2015, which were rolled back last year by the current administration. The bill, known as the Oil and Flammable Material Rail Transportation Safety Act, was introduced to bring back the safety requirements requiring updated air-controlled braking systems with more effective electronic pneumatic brakes. Measures are being taken to update the cars currently carrying oil and other flammables that would decrease the odds of trains blowing up in case of an accident or derailment. Unfortunately, the process is painfully slow as it is being done more by attrition than active replacement.

Source: The Columbian, Vancouver, WA

With the uptick in oil and natural gas operations, more trains will be carrying these particular types of hazardous cargo across the country.

— continued on Back Cover

Auxiliary Members Take Active Role in the Political Process in Oregon, . . . continued from Page 12

1. There are three periods of service that Uber drivers provide. The first period is when they turn on the app and are waiting for an assignment. The second period is when they are on the way to pick up the passenger. The third is when the passenger is in the car. There is disagreement about whether or not Uber's insurance should kick in during the first period.
2. Should taxicab companies have the same responsibility as Uber/Lyft?
3. It is not at all clear that Uber and Lyft agree. That should be interesting.
4. Should drivers have to submit to criminal background checks? There is split opinion here because some argue that it is very hard for a convicted criminal to get hired, and that once they get out of jail, their crime should not be held against them forever."

During the meeting, Jessica introduced the BLET Auxiliary to the room, as well as Auxiliary Member April Ferris, and herself. Jessica explained to the room how this bill is important to the Auxiliary because the carrier has hired Uber and Lyft drivers to transport rail crews to and from the trains. Jessica went on to explain that, although required insurance does not fix all of their concerns, it is a start and the Auxiliary supports the bill.

The AFL-CIO safety committee representative asked Jessica to elaborate on the other concerns. Jessica explained that hours of service for these public transportation drivers are not regulated; therefore a number of problems have been documented by rail crew members, such as driving when exhausted, possible drug usage with no drug testing, disregard for basic traffic laws, and the safety and upkeep of their vehicles. Although they had been invited to attend, neither Lyft nor Uber had a representative present during the meeting.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the safety committee representative asked further questions. Jessica stated that the Auxiliary's current end goal was to discourage the carrier from using unregulated cab services. Representative Holvey advised Jessica that he supports that goal and that he would like to back the Auxiliary on this issue.

Jessica received a thank-you letter from Mr. Towers following that meeting, in which he thanked the BLET Auxiliary for their engagement in the meeting, and stated: "You changed the tenor of conversation when you told your story. We are having all of these conversations without hearing from the people who actually ride in Uber and Lyft. The Oregon legislative process is unique in that a small group of people can make a huge difference. You started the process today. I appreciate the opportunity very much to work with you on passenger safety issues moving forward."

We are pleased that this, the Oregon auxiliary members' first trip to the State Capitol, has proven to be very productive. Many, many thanks to Arthur Towers for helping facilitate the involvement of the auxiliary in legislative matters that affect railroad employees in the state of Oregon, and to FELA Attorney Paul Bovarnick for inviting Mr. Towers to address attendees at the Organizing Meeting of Pacific Northwest Auxiliary No. 503.

Greetings from your Editor, Jodi Wallace

Are you a Member-at-Large? Have you ever thought about starting a local auxiliary where you live? Well if so, I am here to help you out. I recently took on the task of starting a local Auxiliary here in Eastern Oregon and I am bummed it took me so long to do it.



You might be saying, "I do not have the time or energy to start an auxiliary near me." My first suggestion is, do not take it on by yourself; find a couple of other BLET spouses and all of you work together to get it going. That is what I did, and we all worked together to make it happen because we knew it was something we wanted in our area.

Having a local auxiliary helps you bring the people in your area together and gives you the sense of a railroad family. You will be creating an arena to educate the spouses on railroad benefits, safety issues, legislative issues, and other concerns where you live. You can reach out to the members of your auxiliary and BLET division if there is a tragedy in your area, and help them out. You can have local scholarships to help the children of your members attain their goals for higher education.

So, if you want information on how you can start a local auxiliary in your area, please get in touch with me so I can help you get one going.

If you have not checked out our updated website, please take a look. You can find it at www.bletauxiliary.net. You will find links to great information and links to the Facebook pages for some of our Local Auxiliaries. If you need to get in touch with me for anything, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Jodi Wallace can be reached at 1-541-663-6966, jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net, or by snail mail at 1804 Washington Ave., La Grande, Oregon, 97850.

"From the first settlers who came to our shores, from the first American Indian families who befriended them, men and women have worked together to build this nation. Too often the women were unsung and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength, and love of the women who built America was as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well."

— President Jimmy Carter

(Submitted by National President Kathleen Bisbikis)

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

**Jodi Wallace, Editor
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The next issue will be published in June 2019. Please have your submissions to Jodi on or before May 24, 2019.



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Legislative Update, continued from Page 14

Personal observations have shown this increased activity on the BNSF in my area of the country. New tracks have been laid and a refinery is being built in Southeastern New Mexico that will service a large natural gas field in the not-too-distant future. We'll keep our eyes on this issue.

Railroad Retirement

On January 2, 2019, the Senate confirmed three new member nominations to the Railroad Retirement Board: Erhard R. Chorle, Chairman; Thomas Jayne, Management Member; and Jonathan Bragg, Labor Member. President Pierce expressed his confidence in Brother Bragg's confirmation based on his railroad career and union offices held over the last 18 years. Brother Bragg is a member of the Signalman's Union and most recently served on the National Railroad Adjustment Board advancing Rail Labor's interests in arbitration. President Pierce is looking forward to working with Brother Bragg and the new Board.

Source: BLET Newsflash

January's posting from the Railroad Retirement Board addresses Q&A:RRB Reports Performance Under Customer Service Plan. The RRB's Customer Service Plan promotes the principles and objectives of customer-driven quality service agency-wide. The plan lays out timeframes in determining claims; the level of service customers can expect, and their pledge to keep beneficiaries informed if the Board has met those goals for 2018. The eight Q&As include:

- How the RRB measures overall timeliness for customer service
- How timely, overall, was the customer service provided by the RRB, as measured by this timeliness index
- Standards used by the RRB for processing applications for railroad retirement annuities and how well it met those standards
- Standards used in the area of survivor benefits
- Standards used by the RRB for processing applications for disability annuities under the Railroad Retirement Act

- Standards for the handling of applications and claims for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits and how well the RRB did to meet those standards.
- RRB's performance in meeting its standards in fiscal year 2018 compared to 2017
- Ability of beneficiaries to provide feedback to the RRB about the service they receive.

The full questions and their answers can be found on the RRB's website at www.rrb.gov.

2019 Payroll Taxes for Railroad Retirement – The amount of earnings subject to Tier I and Medicare withholding rose this year from \$128,400 to \$132,900 for Calendar Year 2019. Medicare is still collected on all earnings, but does increase an additional .9 percent for earnings over \$200,000 single, or \$250,000 married filing jointly. Maximum earnings subject to Tier II taxes rose this year to \$98,700 up from \$95,400.

Source: Railroad Retirement Board

Remember, for those retired and receiving Railroad Retirement annuities, those annuities are not subject to State Income Tax, only Federal, so don't let state employees tell you differently. It is written into the law.

Cadillac Tax

On January 24, Representatives Joe Courtney (D-CT) and Mike Kelly (R-PA) introduced HR 748, the Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act of 2019, a bipartisan bill to repeal the "Cadillac" tax on health insurance benefits. As of March 4, the bill had 210 cosponsors (99 Republicans and 111 Democrats) and it's growing daily.

Source: Congress.gov

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