



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

New Year, New Auxiliary.....

The Yellow City Bomb Squad, Auxiliary 99, Amarillo, Texas



Front and center: Kevin Delahay; *First Row: (Left to Right):* Kathleen Bisbikis, Christina Snider, Pam Winbolt, Meagan West, Victoria Delahay, Jodi Wallace; *Second Row:* Todd Winbolt, Ben Delahay, Vance Snider, Cindy Backus, Shane Backus, Shannon Jones, Shaynah Jones, Randy Tapp, Peter Gilbertson; *Back Row:* Shannon Denney, Michelle Labrier, Gary Labrier, Levi West, Michelle Klumb, Nick Klumb

By Victoria Delahay, President Auxiliary 99, Amarillo, Texas

Amarillo is known as the "The Yellow Rose of Texas" from the Spanish word amarillo, which means yellow. It is also known as "Bomb City," a nickname that came from Pantex, a major high wage employer in the area, and the only nuclear weapons assembly and disassembly facility in the country. Amarillo is the largest city in the Texas Panhandle and home to a large, combined terminal made up of former Burlington Northern and Santa Fe railways.

On Saturday, January 25, a group of families from both BLET Div. 299 and SMART TD Local 1313 came together to celebrate and begin a new local

auxiliary that has not been present for many years, something we learned from Martha Ruth Moreland, who had previously been a member of the Yellow Rose of Texas Auxiliary No. 300, which was dissolved several years ago. Martha Ruth was sponsored by her daughter, Becky Schneider. We are very excited to have Martha as an ongoing member! The evening included a photo booth, a DJ, silent auctions, giveaways, and conversations about the past, while celebrating the future of Amarillo.

Our guest speakers included our National BLET Auxiliary President Kathleen Bisbikis and our National Auxiliary 1st Vice President Jodi Wallace. Both ladies

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Every Vote Counts in 2020



The BLET National Auxiliary is spearheading a CHALLENGE for the upcoming 2020 election to inspire and promote voter participation.

In order to promote activism from now until November 3, 2020, we have organized a way to get everyone involved and also be eligible for great prizes.

The CHALLENGE is broken into 3 levels. Just like a video game you have to complete all the challenges in each level in order to move to the next. Each time you complete a level, you will be put in a drawing for that level's prizes.

- Level 1 - A total of ten (10) \$25.00 Visa gift cards to be awarded.
- Level 2 - A total of three (3) customized Yeti Tumblers will be awarded (approximately \$50 value each).
- Level 3 – One (1) grand prize of a Series 5 Apple Watch (\$399 Value).

These amazing prizes will be awarded at the end of the challenge. The prizes will be worth your efforts aside from the pride and satisfaction you get from being involved and making a difference.

For those who register to participate, all will receive a bumper sticker that reads: "Every Vote Counts in 2020." Additional bumper stickers can be purchased for \$3.00 each to cover the cost and mailing. Winners will be announced November 3, 2020.

Please visit our website at: <https://www.bletauxiliary.net/2020-get-out-the-vote-challenge>, and click on the Level One challenge to get started today!



From the President

BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

*"I will not go quietly into the night,
I will stand my ground and fight,
You may think I am weak but I am
strong. I will be standing when you
have gone"*

— John F. Connor

The BLET National Auxiliary is "leaping into 2020" (no pun intended). We started the New Year in celebration mode as we traveled to Amarillo, Texas, for the installation and celebration of our newest auxiliary, The Yellow City Bomb Squad Auxiliary No. 99. Victoria Delahay, with help from the new members of Auxiliary 99, and friends in the community, planned a fantastic dinner and meeting. To read about the details, or for more information about Auxiliary 99, please see the cover page. Auxiliary 99 is still growing, so if you are in the Amarillo area, please reach out to Victoria - you will not be disappointed!

The National Auxiliary also started a bipartisan voter engagement campaign to challenge all of our members to become politically active and get out to vote, as well as helping others get their voices heard. In our "Every Vote Counts in 2020" Challenge, we have developed three levels of challenges with prizes for each level accomplished. The value of the prizes increases with each level. To find out more about this challenge and how you can get involved, please refer to our website at www.bletauxiliary.net/2020-get-out-the-vote-challenge. I hope you will all TAKE THE CHALLENGE.

We are asking all of our readers to continue to support the Safe Freight Act (Two Person Crew Bill): H.R. 1748, the Congressional bill, and the companion bill in the Senate, S. 1979. We also have many states working on legislation to support two-person crews. If you read a post asking for support in your state, please pick up the phone or send an e-mail to support this all-

important rail safety legislation. Our BLET State Legislative Boards are working very hard to protect our family members. Let's do our part by continuing to inundate our representatives with calls and letters letting them know that we believe TWO people in the cab of every locomotive across this country is the ONLY safe way to move freight, and nothing less is acceptable.

Families, we have a voice, and when we join together in solidarity our voices are louder and stronger than those who are trying to put their profit above the safety of our rail employees and the citizens of our nation. Stand up, families! Use your voice! If we don't tell our congressmen and our community members the dangers of one-person crews on freight trains, who will? This is our livelihood! This is our time! This is our fight! Don't wait for someone else to save you, this time we have to save ourselves.

To all of our members new and old, we thank you for your support. We will continue to do whatever is necessary to grow this grand old organization that is the BLET Auxiliary. Like everything, we have had our highs and lows, but because of your renewed interest and belief that we can be a force to be reckoned with, we are growing stronger and stronger every day.

I look forward to seeing many of you this summer at the regional conventions in Wisconsin and Ohio. Please stop by and visit us at our display table in the vendors' area. Seeing old friends and making new ones is always the best part of this job!

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Find us on the web at www.bletauxiliary.net
Also...

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

In Memorium - Onita and Tony Wayland

*By Becky Schneider, 3rd Vice President/
National Legislative Representative*

Onita C. Wayland, the last International President of the Grand International Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (GIA to BLE), passed away on January 20, 2020, followed by her beloved husband and best friend the following morning, after 73 years together. While their passing was sad, it could also make your heart smile to know that this couple, who were always so devoted to and supportive of each other, passed so close together. The following is a sharing of some of our memories and stories in honor of this strong railroad wife and mother, and her husband who helped the Brotherhood and the Auxiliary in so many ways.

Tony returned from his military service with the 104th Calvary Reconnaissance Troupe in WW II in December of 1945. He hired out with the Missouri Pacific Railroad and, upon his promotion to locomotive engineer in 1968, he joined the BLE, and was a member for 51 years. He officially retired from the railroad in 1984. He met and married Onita in 1946, and together they raised two girls, Brenda and Toni, in the house built by Tony, his brother, and his Dad, in the small town of Mart, Texas.

Tony worked for the railroad back when the hours of service regulation limiting how many hours a rail employee could be on duty was 16 hours instead of the 12 hours it is today. When he would tell stories of his time on the railroad, he was always supportive of the reduction in hours of service because "16 hours was just too hard on us." As it was with many wives during that period, Onita did not work outside the home but was always busy volunteering at church, attending school functions, and even providing the transportation for the Mart girls' athletic teams when buses were not available. Attending auxiliary meetings required special effort as it was an hour-and-a-half drive from Mart to Palestine, where the meetings were held. Tony, of course, attended as many of his girls' functions as he could around his work trips. Even after the children were grown, the Waylands continued

their community involvement, following the Mart Panther Football team, and were devoted members of the First Baptist Church in Mart. Tony even served a term as Mayor of the town following his retirement.

Onita was a classy lady, raised in southern ways. She spoke up and spoke out, but all within established parameters for a gentle lady. She joined the Auxiliary the year after Tony joined the Brotherhood, and she held many offices for Auxiliary 584 in Palestine, Texas. She attended her first International Auxiliary Convention in 1986. At that convention, a number of important changes were made that put the Auxiliary on the path to making it more relevant in today's world. She held the position of Grand Organizer/Inspector (GOI) for a number of years (somewhat akin to our Outreach Coordinator) and was elected to serve as International Vice President in 1996, and then as International President at the convention in Miami, Florida, in 2001.

One of the many changes that occurred at the 1986 Convention came about as the result of a resolution submitted by the Palestine Auxiliary to establish term limits for international officers. Delegates at that convention also established the Scholarship Program and the position of National Legislative Representative. In addition, the ritual work for regular meetings became optional rather than mandatory. All of these changes were important turning points for the Auxiliary. During her tenure as an international officer, Onita encouraged everyone to propose new ideas to take the organization into the future.

During the years Onita served as International President, the five members of the Executive Council held their annual meetings in Waco, Texas, and had the privilege of driving to Onita's hometown for dinner on the day they arrived in Waco. It was definitely a small town, but big enough to warrant a flashing traffic light at the "busy" intersection. Onita and Tony prepared a wonderful meal for the council members. How they stayed so thin is a mystery because she was such an excellent cook. Many of her recipes, including her incredible home-made rolls and broccoli



Onita Caddell Wayland – February 13, 1928 - January 20, 2020

Graduated Groesbeck High School in 1945

M. C. "Tony" Wayland – October 17, 1922 - January 21, 2020

Graduated Mart High School in 1941

They were married October 26, 1946 in Waco, Texas. Tony and Onita are survived by their daughters, Brenda Fischer and husband Lee, and Toni W. Daugherty and husband Roger; grandchildren Kristen Folley, Kori Wayland Fancher, Steven and Jill Fischer, and Meredith and Chad Dupree; great-grandchildren Kai and Kade Crawford, Elena Fischer, and Fischer Dupree; as well as nieces and nephews Jan and husband Guilio, Roger and Cherokee Caddell, Robert and Mary Jane Caddell, Lindsey and husband Greg New, and Seth Rider and all their families.

salad, are in the first edition of the auxiliary cookbook, Main Line Cooking, which was published during her term.

Listening to her stories about the "good ol' days" in the Auxiliary was a hoot. While believing in and abiding by the traditions of the organization, she also did not cotton to any foolishness. As the GOI, she would conduct "inspections" of assigned auxiliaries' ritual work, and the manner in which their meetings were conducted. On one such trip, she did not have a white skirt

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Yellow City Bomb Squad

- continued from front cover

discussed the importance and benefits of the Auxiliary. Tim Stipp, from the law firm of Schlichter, Bogard, and Denton, LLP, spoke on the importance of rail employees being represented by a FELA attorney if they are injured on the job. We would like to thank this firm for sponsoring our event and for their generous donation! Rachel Pharris, President of Auxiliary No. 417 in Springfield, Missouri, sent a very lovely and encouraging video message. Pete Gilbertson, of Cornerstone Assurance Company, shared great information and answered questions about short-term and long-term disability coverage. We were so glad he could make it to this event. Vance Snider, a member of SMART TD Local 1313, who is running for Congress in Texas Legislative District 13, also spoke.

We held a silent auction and were able to raise \$310 to open our new bank account. We are thankful for those people who participated in our silent auction, as well as the sponsors who donated items.

We have so many plans for the future of our auxiliary and are excited to get those underway. We also plan to work with local auxiliaries across the country to help educate others on the benefits of having an auxiliary and how it can help the members and families of every division.

Many thanks to the following sponsors for their generous donations:

The Law Firm of Schlichter, Bogard & Denton LLP
Merle Norman Cosmetics, Michelle & Gary Labrier
Thatcher Realtors, Helen Benton
Amarillo Venom, Stephanie Tucker
Verdure, Christopher Quintana
Paradise Palms, Olivia Thomas
Southern Soul Earnings, Kristen Daniel
Stitches & Sass Dog Bandanas- Sharon Brausch
Chiropractic Recovery by IVRS, Dr. Kaci Roach
Champion BBQ, Robby Staggs



Front Row (Left to Right): Meagan West, Cindy Backus; *Back Row:* Michelle Klumb, Michelle Labrier, Victoria Delahay, Pam Winbolt, Christina Snider, Shannon Denney

Rileigh Dzik, Hair Stylist
Dani Bickford, Personal Trainer
Etcetera
Sign Gypsies
Duck Leather
Mackenzie & Rose Photography
Denim & Teal

The evening concluded with introduction, induction, and pinning of all our new members: Shannon Denney, Michelle Klumb, Pam Winbolt, Michelle Labrier, Christy Snider, Cindy Backus, Pam Winbolt, Meagan West, Victoria Delahay, and Susan Fuller. Elected officers for this new Auxiliary include President Victoria Delahay, Vice President Meagan West, Treasurer Christy Snider, and Secretary Pam Winbolt. Our Chaplain, Susan Fuller, was unable to be present.

If you ever find yourself in Amarillo, please reach out to us. We would love to share some BBQ, sweet tea, and show y'all around our wonderful town!



Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome

— an ever-present elephant in the room

By Jessica Cole, 3rd Vice President/National Legislative Representative

The hardest part is that you're usually the last person to see that particular individual alive."

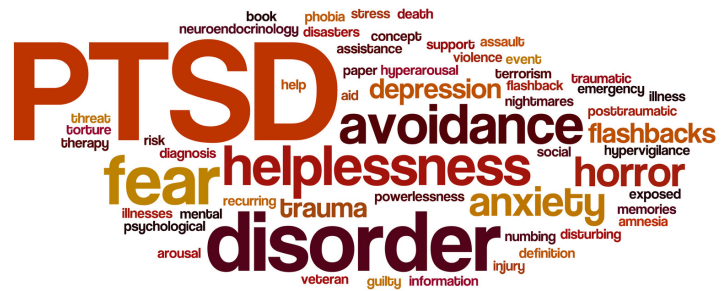
So said our own John Tolman, Vice President of the BLET, in a 2015 Newsweek article about Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome in rail workers involved in critical incidents, a term used to describe accidents, collisions, near misses, and the like.

According to Vice President Tolman, Rail Operators will experience three critical incident exposures during their careers, on average. Further data in the Newsweek article suggests that 12.1% of those will develop PTSD or its symptoms as a result of these incidents.

PTSD symptoms include irritability, trouble sleeping, night terrors, feelings of guilt and unexplained anxiety or agitation, preoccupation with thoughts and dissociation from current reality, flashbacks, and difficulty interpreting and recalling timing of events. The Classic Novel, *Slaughterhouse Five*, by Kurt Vonnegut, is an anti-war novel that famously describes the fracturing of time and of the psyche of a World War II soldier who has PTSD and it is dead on target in its descriptions of the illness. The protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, is literally "unstuck in time."

Another, much newer book, *The Evil Hours*, provides not only a vivid first-hand account from a war time reporter who developed PTSD, but also describes research and treatments that helped him in varying degrees. For family members of an affected person, one of the most difficult aspects of the disease is the impossibility of knowing what it is like to be the affected person: a deeply traumatic event literally puts the victim of that event on the other side of a wall that the rest of the world can't quite see through. Literally, for the victim and for the family, it divides the world into those who have experienced this and those who haven't. *The Evil Hours* does a brilliant job of bridging the void, creating empathy among PTSD sufferers and their families and friends.

In March 2014, the FRA announced that all railroads would need to implement a Critical Incident Response Plan as mandated by the 2008 Rail Safety Improvement Act. This has been done in various ways by the different carriers, but a stark problem remains no matter whose plan you read. Most plans revolve around offering employees counseling after a critical incident. That's a logical, but ineffective place to start, because in many cases PTSD is nearly silent at the outset, such as immediately following the traumatizing incident. However, it is relentlessly progressive as months and years go by, with symptoms worsening and becoming more and more entrenched until and unless treatment is sought. Therefore families and friends



need to be vigilant and should seek advice from a counselor if they feel a loved one may have a PTSD issue.

Because PTSD can cripple a person badly enough that they are unable to work or maintain normal family relationships, it's crucial to get treatment. PTSD sufferers can regain much peace and ability to function in the "normal" world with appropriate intervention and treatment.

Fairly good health insurance benefits are available to many rail employees, and these include mental health benefits. In many cases, this will be the first line of offense against PTSD symptoms brought on by critical incidents at work.

Whereas many State Workman's Compensation plans provide for benefits for those who suffer from PTSD brought on by workplace occurrences, rail workers fall under the Federal Employers Liability Act. And, according to an article from *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*:

"Railroad and subway drivers can experience psychological trauma when trains strike or nearly miss other trains, motor vehicles, or persons, or become instruments of death. Derailments, collisions, and suicides on the tracks can induce feelings of helplessness, horror, guilt, and anxiety in the drivers. Although some drivers experience acute stress disorder (ASD) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), their conditions are not always acknowledged within the occupational setting. The world literature suggests that PTSD has been an increasing focus of concern, giving rise to detailed intervention protocols. In the United States, the Federal Employers' Liability Act (FELA) governs the adjudication of work-related injuries among railroad employees. In practice, it is difficult for railroad drivers with PTSD to receive benefits if there was no 'direct impact' linked to the employer's negligence."

In conclusion, I feel that the PTSD issue is probably far under-addressed within the ranks of the railroad, not only for employees directly affected, but for their co-workers and families. If I can be of assistance to anyone who might need help in dealing with a possible PTSD issue, please call me at 262-672-9742.

Sources: Multiple, including Newsweek, The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, Innervisions, Rail Age, The Evil Hours, National Geographic, and many others.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



FROM JESSICA COLE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE

Liquefied Natural Gas Shipping by Rail

Same old plot we've heard dozens of times: Environmentalists and Safety Mongers are upset, while Industry and Business Interests are happy about a new opportunity provided by deregulation.

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) approved a permit to a Florida based company, Energy Transport Solutions, and it was approved by President Trump. Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), an extremely dangerous, volatile, and toxic chemical, is now allowed to be shipped by rail in a corridor from a fracking site in Pennsylvania to a Delaware River port in Southern New Jersey.

Much concern has been raised about the possibility of a derailment causing tank car fissures that could result in an explosion of epic proportions. At least one New Jersey Lawmaker, U.S. Rep. Tom Molinowski (D), is not happy, stating plainly "The movement of LNG by rail tank car presents unique and substantial risks to public safety and the environment. The decision by the Department of Transportation to allow LNG to move in large volumes without adequate safeguards is irresponsible, and yet another example of the Administration putting corporate interests over the safety of the American public."

Meanwhile, a New Energy Fortress spokesman says, "This special permit is a significant milestone that establishes requirements for moving domestic LNG in a safe and efficient manner. It supports our efforts to bring cleaner and more affordable energy to markets that are reliant on oil-based fuels. We look forward to continuing to work with PHMSA, other regulatory agencies and the railroad industry as this project advances."

According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, Liquid Natural Gas is natural gas that has been liquefied by lowering its temperature to -260 degrees Fahrenheit. It takes 600 times LESS shipping volume than natural gas in gaseous state. After reaching its destination, it is returned to its gaseous state to be sold and used as fuel for multiple applications.

Liquefied Natural Gas has customarily been shipped across oceans in specially designed ships that are referred to as "floating bombs" in industry slang, as the product is so volatile. Virtually no research has been done on shipping this product by rail.

On January 13th, Attorneys General from 15 states and the District of Columbia came out against the Trump Administration proposal, filing complaints with Federal Regulators. *Sources: RTandS.com, U.S. Energy Information Agency*

BNSF Reducing Track Inspections with FRA Blessing
The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has suspended inspection requirements as part of an automated track inspection test pilot program. BNSF is taking advantage of this to reduce the number of human inspections it performs, not only on the section of track under testing for the automated inspection, but on other tracks within their network. In multiple cases, tracks that used to be inspected seven times per week are now being inspected four times a week. Those that were inspected four times a week are sometimes now reduced to two times per week.

BNSF argues that the automated system is doing as well as or better than human eyes and has exceeded all expectations for inspection so far. However, without the regular number of human inspections being performed, no one knows for sure what the automated system is missing, and designers do not have the feedback needed to improve the automated inspection system further. How much does all this matter? We'll

find out. Historically, the track in question has been noted for several thousand defects per year, most of which are quickly addressed with no need for fines, but 19% of which result in fined violation.

Source: InForum.com

Lobbying Washington: The Mexican Train Issue & The Two-Person Crew Issue
I interviewed Wisconsin BLET State Legislative Board Chairman Chuck Schulz about his recent trip to Washington, D.C.

Chairman Schulz stated that 23 State Legislative Board Chairmen traveled to the nation's capital in October, along with National President Pierce. Their purpose was to lobby for Two-Person Crew legislation, as well as to seek legislative action to stop Mexican train crews from running up to ten miles into the United States, taking jobs away from U.S. crews and skirting U.S. regulations.

Chairman Schulz expressed frustration at the unwillingness of GOP lawmakers who are ignorant of the ramifications of these issues to listen to those who actively work in the industry. He described one GOP office where he was told point blank, "We don't believe the Federal Government should be regulating railroads." When Chairman Schulz advised this individual that lack of regulation was liable to result in freight trains carrying haz mat simply reducing their speed to 35 MPH to dodge PTC requirements, operated by one-man crews, running through the lawmaker's own neighborhood, the tune changed a bit, as the man finally began to comprehend that his own safety was potentially at stake.

Chairman Schulz reported that the Mexican Crew issue falls on fairly deaf ears where the GOP is concerned. It simply doesn't matter to them that Mexican Crews routinely cross our border and run several miles inland, taking jobs away from U.S. workers and skirting U.S. regulations. Meanwhile, U.S. crews are barred by Mexican law from running into that nation. Chairman Schulz commented

on the irony that this attitude should come from the same party that so strongly supports closed borders, a new border wall, and tightened immigration requirements. It does seem that it all comes down to what's good for business, and what's good for the rail business is paying Mexican crews pennies on the dollar they would have to pay U.S. crews for the same work. And the rail companies contribute noticeably to the GOP cause, expecting a return on that investment.

Source: Interview with Chairman Schulz, January 2020

FRA Proposes Significant Relaxing of Safety Standards

On December 19, 2019, the FRA issued two Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRMs). One seeks to revise Track Safety Standards (TSS) and the other makes changes to Brake System Safety (BSS) requirements. The rail safety agency claims the changes "promote safety innovation and reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens," further stating that the changes "will increase rail safety as well as save time."

Among many proposed changes these probably are the most potentially dangerous:

1. Allowing for continuous rail testing, a method which differs from stop-and-verify inspections that have been the traditional approved method, and then extending the verification time window to allow data to be analyzed off site to between 24 and 84 hours versus the current 4 hours.
2. Extend the time for Class 1 Air Brake Testing to a full 24 hours between inspections, from 4 hours. The FRA states this "is expected to significantly reduce the number of brake tests performed while increasing network velocity. This allowance is already safely in place in Canada." However, there are FREQUENT news items covering terrible train accidents in Canada and investigations into alleged company cover-ups, so

it is hard to know why the FRA would hold up Canada as a good example of safety!

To view the proposed Track Safety Standards rule, see <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/nprm-rail-integrity-amendments-track-safety-standards>.

To view the proposed Brake System Safety rule, see <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/nprm-miscellaneous-amendments-brake-system-safety-standards-and-codification-waivers>.

Source: Railway Age

Price Fixing Lawsuits

It seems the lawsuits just keep coming as numerous shippers sue for price fixing alleged to have been done by the four biggest freight rail shippers: CSX, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Norfolk Southern, and Union Pacific. A class action suit on behalf of some 16,000 shippers was ultimately disallowed by a Federal Court in Washington in 2017 after the court determined that the damages to the various shippers were so disparate from each other that they could not be considered a class. Since then, 38 companies have filed their own individual suits.

The allegations center around price fixing through fuel surcharges that were improperly applied as an across-the-board increase tied to percentage-based transportation rates, rather than to actual fuel price increases. The four defendant carriers saw large profit margin increases allegedly tied to the new methods of calculating the fuel surcharges.

According to court documents, representatives for the carriers are alleged to have colluded on how surcharges would be applied at various social events and through trade associations. Prior to these agreements, the fuel surcharges were up for negotiation when bidding on shipping contracts, so profits tended to stay flat as carriers bid down the surcharges in order to win the shipping contracts.

CSX and Norfolk Southern have declined to comment on the lawsuits. BNSF and Union Pacific vigorously deny the charges of wrong doing and say they will defend themselves in court.

Source: Houston Chronicle

New National Study on Two-Person Crew Confirms What Rail Families Already Knew

Although FRA Administrator Ron Batory and the Association of American Railroads continue to promote the idea that trains are as safe or safer with only one crew member, and that two people on a crew may interfere with technological safety advances, the new FRA commissioned study says otherwise.

The highly regarded Volpe Center has conducted cognitive task analysis and studied the job requirements of rail workers as they performed their jobs and utilized advancing technology across multiple years.

Their report concluded, "Results from the locomotive engineer and conductor CTAs indicate that train crews, a primary example of an elemental team in railroad operations, exhibit characteristics of high performing teams that are found across industries," the report said. "These include mutual performance monitoring — to catch and correct errors — and active support of each other's activities."

"These teamwork activities went beyond the requirements of formal operating rules and were not explicitly covered in training," the report states.

The Volpe Center has been praised by Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao for enabling and enhancing transportation safety. Of the Volpe Center, Ms. Chao said,

"It has worked to reduce rail-grade crossing accidents, improve vehicle safety, and better manage the airspace. . . . The Volpe Center continues to provide important contributions to our national transportation system. Especially now, when we have entered a historic period of transportation innovation that promises to boost economic growth and improve quality of life. These innovations are occurring in all modes of transportation, including roads, rail, maritime, and aerospace. . . . All these innovations are exciting, but they can be disruptive. This is where Volpe's contribution plays an important role. Volpe's data and analysis provides trustworthy information that helps us distinguish

between 'High' and 'Hype' performance innovations. Volpe's data helps build confidence among stakeholders, including the public whose acceptance is critical to realizing the potential of ground-breaking innovations."

A 2013 study of rail crews by Volpe also noted: "The locomotive engineer and conductor function as a joint cognitive system, meaning that conductors and locomotive engineers jointly contribute to the set of cognitive activities required to operate the train safely and efficiently."

"While each crew member has a distinct set of formal responsibilities, in practice they operate as an integrated team, contributing knowledge and backing each other up as necessary."

"When operating on the mainline conductors not only serve as a 'second pair of eyes', alerting the locomotive engineer to upcoming signals and potential hazards (e.g., activity at grade crossings; people working on or around the track), they also contribute knowledge and decision-making judgment."

"Conductors also serve an important, redundant check and backup role, reminding locomotive engineers of upcoming work zones and speed restrictions."

"If necessary, they will also handle unanticipated situations and activate the emergency brake, in cases where the locomotive engineer has not responded quickly enough."

"Conductors have developed a variety of skills and strategies that enable them to handle non-routine situations safely and efficiently."

All these findings fly in the face of FRA Administrator Batory's claim that, "rail safety data does not support a train crew staffing rulemaking," an argument he used in abandoning FRA Rule Making Recommendations for Two Man Crew in May of 2019.

It remains to be seen whether the new Volpe study, in combination with the 2013 study, will make any difference in the FRA's position on this vital safety issue.

Source: Smart TD

Notes from the FRA Region 4 Meeting with Legislative Chairmen

BLET State Legislative Board Chairmen and SMART UTU Legislative Directors from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin met with FRA District 4 Administrators and Specialists in Chicago on January 16, 2020.

A short synopsis of extensive meeting notes provided by Wisconsin Chairman Chuck Schulz highlights the extensive and disconcerting number of safety issues covered in this meeting.

UTU Chief of Staff Jerry Gibson began the meeting by discussing several alarming issues:

1. 15,000 to 17,000 foot long trains running through Detroit.
2. National Transportation Safety Board's failure to investigate several fatal incidents, claiming budget issues.
3. Concern over delays in Risk Fatigue Reduction Plans even as Precision Scheduled Railroading increases the extent of fatigue related problems.
4. Pace of changes in the rail industry has accelerated tenfold. More changes have come about in the past 5 years than in the prior 50.

FRA Hazardous Materials Specialist Al Budleski mentioned numerous issues on Norfolk Southern involving violations where Distributed Power engines are placed with only one buffer car. NS has requested a special permit to operate these trains, but it has not been granted. Crews involved in such violations should retain paperwork if possible and call the FRA as soon as possible.

Because carrier officers are often asking for the paperwork back, crews are asked to note the date and time of the paperwork, as this can be helpful in tracking it down. Per CFR, an employee may take a photo related to safety as long as requirements are followed, including certain employees being in the clear and they are not fouling a track when the photo is taken.

Budleski warned of instances where crews are picking up cars with incorrect paperwork and reminds crews to

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Photo courtesy of BLET PR Dept.

Guest Columnist

From the Desk of the Chairman

By Scott Palmer, Chairman, BLET Oregon State Legislative Board

September of 2008 found me in Washington, D.C., lobbying for the Rail Safety Act on behalf of the BLET. Numerous state chairman had been called in to support a dying bill. The bill had passed both the House and Senate but had not been scheduled for a conference committee, which is where the differences in language between the two versions is ironed out. Without a conference committee, the bill would die at the end of the session. We were there, in that awful summer heat, to lobby both chambers and essentially to try to cherry pick parts we liked from each version for incorporation into a final bill should the bill ever reach a conference committee.

I had been pushed for time to get to the airport and I did the one thing specifically forbidden for me to do; I did my own laundry. My lovely wife, Christine, was frequently mortified by some of my fashion choices and she always washed, ironed, and packed my clothes. This, after I had forgotten dress socks once and resorted to drawing on a pair of stunning argyle socks with a Sharpie.

D.C. was like a laundromat that September - hot, muggy, and coin operated. The group made the rounds talking to representatives and senators about the Rail Safety Act and, at some point, I found myself in South Carolina's Representative Jim DeMint's (R) office. Mr. DeMint came in and sat down and, as we began to speak, I felt something sliding down the left leg of my trousers. Looking

down I saw a pair of my wife's unmentionables drop to the floor, freed by gravity from the static cling that had held them there! I hadn't used a dryer sheet when I did my own laundry. Without breaking eye contact, I pushed the panties under the Representative's desk with my shoe and continued my talk with the none the wiser.

And that, Ladies and Gentlemen, brings us to my first lesson in lobbying: listen to your spouse!

I invited the auxiliary members in my state to help me lobby in Salem and, after their first nervous session or two, they quickly discovered that it is fun. Lobbying is simply educating someone on your position. You don't have to wear a pair of \$500 shoes or have a diploma from an Ivy League school to be effective; all you need to be is honest, and be one with your topic.

Most state bills that concern us as railroaders and railroad families begin in the House side rather than the Senate side and are usually from the Transportation or Labor committees. A quick search of your State.gov website will show you committee assignments. The next hurdle is determining which party controls the House because people from that party will serve as the chairperson on all House committees. And that brings us to rule number one:

Rule #1: We have no permanent enemies and we have no permanent friends. Many times, I have had trusted Democrats

fail to support me on an issue and many times I have had far right Republicans back me to the hilt. Politics is politics and often there are unseen influences and pressures that might make an issue politically expedient for a rep, or suicide. Accept that. Don't ever get angry. If they can't help us on this today, maybe they can help us on something else tomorrow.

When I try to find a sponsor for a bill, I look for Democrats first. Once I have a list of committee members, I'll do some research on them. If John Smith is on Transportation, I'll put "John Smith for Congress" in the search engine. Using this, or a simple name search, will always pull up their campaign page. From their campaign page you can learn about their background, family, education, etc. Those representatives who are also union members will proudly display that on their campaign page. Bingo! You have a potential sponsor.

All reps have different policies for making an appointment. More and more lately, they seem to prefer e-mail. Call their office and find out.

Rule #2: The representative's staff will make or break your chances. Very often the Staffers are relatives of the representative and so they share a close bond. If you are rude to them, the representative will hear about it. If you are polite, pleasant, and maybe even funny, the rep will hear that too. They aren't going to refuse to make an appointment for you,

but being pleasant will get you so much further than being brusque or businesslike. I knew my U.S. Rep and all his staff was from Eastern Oregon and so once, on a trip back to D.C., I brought a few sprigs of sage brush to their office, "so you don't forget what home smells like," I told them. After that, their door was always open to me.

You need to know your topic inside and out and you will only be given 10 or 15 minutes to make your case as to why there needs to be a rule or regulation. Most reps have a limit on how many bills they can introduce in a session, so start well before the session begins if you want to run a bill. You need to anticipate who will oppose the bill and what their likely arguments will be, and be prepared to include that in your talk. Never, ever sugar-coat an issue, exaggerate, or hide anything from the rep. Once they find out - and they will find out - they will never trust you again. Be honest and open and let them see if they can finagle a way around the problems that your bill would create.

The rep's time is precious; don't waste it. Be prepared, be early, and bring copies of whatever documentation is relevant to the issue so you can give it to the rep. NEVER interrupt a representative.

Rule #3: Be yourself! I once walked into a Republican congressman's office in D.C. to lobby for Amtrak funding. He was notoriously opposed to funding for Amtrak and so I strode in, bold as brass, and

asked if I could search under his couch cushions for 150 million in change. He didn't vote for the funding, but we were always friends after that.

These people see all sorts of folks all day everyday. The ones they are going to remember are the ones who are real. Be yourself. Laugh. Let them see the real you and you will be remembered.

Dress nicely and never, ever wear anything with a logo other than the BLET or BLET-A. They don't expect a suit and tie or a little black dress with pearls, but if you show up in shorts and a t-shirt, you will not be taken seriously.

Rule #4: Never discuss money. It is illegal to discuss campaign contributions or any kind of funding or gratuity on government property or on a government phone. You will be shown the door. The only place where that is proper is off property.

Rule #5: Support the people who support you! If you have a rep who has carried your issue, even if it was unsuccessful, you support that person. From campaign contributions to

endorsements on their campaign page to knocking on doors or making phone calls during their reelection- loyalty is a two-way street. If you become known in your Capitol as a good friend to have, doors will open to you that you never knew existed. Everyone can use a good friend, right?

If you get a sponsor for your bill, volunteer to get signatures of co-sponsors. This will free up the staffers and, not only will they love you for it, it will show that you are serious about your issue and that they can count on your help in getting it passed. I can't stress this point enough. The Auxiliary recently helped me with the legwork on a bill and all of the representatives took notice.

Talking to representatives and senators seems intimidating. Even calling their office seems spooky. What if they answer? What do I say? However, once you do it, you will realize that it's just talking to someone.

Rule #6: State chairmen, get your auxiliary members to help you! They are intelligent, articulate, passionate and (forgive me ladies) cheap! Like most state

legislative boards, I don't have a lot of funds for lobbying or anything else for that matter. If an auxiliary member who lives nearby can make a meeting or a conference call (thank you, Jessica Keene), the board can save the money it would have paid me for other things.

When I go into a rep's office with an auxiliary member, I can explain the issue from a railroader's perspective. My auxiliary partner can explain it from her perspective—how it affects her family, her community, things I didn't even consider. We might be able to tell some hair-raising stories, but when a BLET-A member levels her gaze at a rep and tells them she almost lost her father the other day, well, that gets their attention. Use this tactic to your advantage!

As I near retirement and look back, I realize the value of the Auxiliary. I have seen it grow stronger and more vital every year. The ladies and men of Oregon's auxiliaries have lobbied with me, made appointments and had follow-up meetings, testified before a public hearing, and have proved themselves to be a force to be reckoned with. I am so very

proud to have such partners alongside me. For this education, I thank the redoubtable Mabel Groetzinger and Becky Schneider who showed me the worth of their members. They knew more than me and I learned from them.

We have a fight coming. And we have to win! The coming battles over a two-person crew and train length cannot be won by state boards or auxiliaries acting alone. They can only be won by acting together.

I hope that all BLET members will rise to the challenge and take their partner's hand in theirs and stand to battle. Together. No power on earth can defeat us if we are united.

In 2008, President George W. Bush signed the "Rail Safety Improvement Act" into law. It came on the heels of the Chatsworth, California disaster, September 12, 2008. I hadn't even unpacked my suitcase from the D.C. trip before I was sent there as a primary investigator for the BLET's Safety Task Force. I was there and what they say "happened," wasn't what happened. But that's politics and a story for another time.



Important Notice: The 575 Series Grill in photo above may not be exact model being raffled in this drawing.

Exciting News!

We are selling raffle tickets for a Traeger Pro Series 575 Grill (Model TFB57GZEO) - a \$799 value!

Tickets are \$5.00 each and can be purchased on our website, www.bletauxiliary.net

Proceeds to benefit the BLET Auxiliary National Scholarship Fund and Care & Assistance Program.

Drawing will be held via "Facebook Live" at the Eastern Regional Meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, on August 20, 2020.

Need not be present to win! Grill will be shipped directly to the winner.

Twin Ports Auxiliary No. 6388 Duluth-Superior

Staying active during bitter winter cold is a must!

Surviving the winter months in the Twin Ports of Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin, located at the western part of Lake Superior, is not for weaklings. If you don't keep moving, you could wind up as stiff as the bronze sculptures along the lake. So that is what Twin Ports Auxiliary President Rose Surchik, who works as a mail carrier in the area, and the members of Twin Ports Auxiliary No. 6388 do - they stay busy and keep moving!

This winter, employees of the Superior Post Office learned that there were many children in the local school district who are in foster care or whose families are homeless or in poverty. Postal employees reached out to the community to ask for donations of winter clothing for these children, as well as hygiene products and food, to donate to the Superior School District's Angel Fund.* Auxiliary members collected hats, mittens, and food for these children in need and delivered them to the post office to be donated to the Angel Fund. In addition, they donated a check in the amount of \$100 to the Fund to be used as needed.

The members also participated in the Reverse Advent Calendar exercise proposed by the National Auxiliary. It's a great activity that can involve the whole family. It starts with finding a basket or cardboard box and placing it in an accessible place in the home. Each day in the month of December, a food item that can be donated to a family in need is added to the box. A few days before Christmas (or even in the weeks following December), the box is delivered to a local food bank or charity in need. Rose delivered her box to her local Dollar General store where items were being collected for donation to the Salvation Army.

On December 18, Auxiliary 6388 and the two BLET divisions in the Twin Ports area held their annual Christmas party, which was well attended and fun for all. According to Rose, the party went great and she congratulates everyone who won raffle prizes, and thanks all who donated prizes and purchased tickets. She would especially like to thank the local unions for their support, as well as the law firm of Hunegs, LeNeave & Kvas for sponsoring the event.

And finally, Rose would like to wish all of her auxiliary and BLET sisters and brothers across the nation all the best for the New Year!

Thank you, Rose, and all the members of Twin Ports Auxiliary for all you do throughout the year!

* The Superior School District Angel Fund is set up to allow community members to give monetarily to support some of the various financial needs that students and their families face with the start of the school year and also for ongoing costs that may arise throughout the school year. Some of these costs may include field trip costs, laptop fees, clothing needs, yearbooks, and school supplies. The funds may also be used to help families with outstanding food service balances. Donors are able to specify how they would like their donation distributed.



Katy Dorin, Auxiliary 6388 Vice President/Chaplain, and President Rose Surchik (who works as a mail carrier) delivered donations to the Post Office. Superior Postmaster Kermit Nelson and Bryce, a fellow mail carrier, accepted the donations on behalf of the Superior School District Angel Fund.



Auxiliary 6388 Members Dennis and Lisa Kuhl looking festive at the BLET/BLET Auxiliary Christmas party. Dennis is a member of BLET Division 163 in Proctor, Minnesota.



Dollar General in Superior, Wisconsin, took in donations of food this holiday season and delivered them to the Salvation Army.



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

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NORTH DAKOTA STATE LEGISLATIVE BOARD MEETING JANUARY 8, 2020

The BLET Auxiliary was represented at the North Dakota State Legislative Board meeting on January 8 by Member-at-Large, Naomi Muscha. She delivered a message from President Kathleen Bisbikis, who was unable to attend. The NDSLBS was inquisitive on the workings of the Auxiliary and discussion was lively concerning ideas on starting an auxiliary in North Dakota, as presently none exists. Last summer at the annual BNSF two-day picnic at Sertoma Park in Bismarck, there appeared to be interest from the spouses in attendance, so moving forward we will continue to cultivate that interest. The new State Chairman, Sean Forschen, was presented a copy of the latest Auxiliary newsletter.

Among the guest speakers contributing to the meeting were BLET Vice President/National Legislative Representative John Tolman; North Dakota District 35 Senator Erin Oban, Minority Caucus Leader; North Dakota District 44 Representative Josh Boschee, House Minority Leader; BRCF International President Jesse Taylor; AFL-CIO North Dakota Field Director Andrew Bushaw; Alliance for a Better North Dakota, Ross Keys; Bolt Hoffer Boyd Law Firm Field Rep. Alex Neigum; and Hunegs, LeNeave, Kvas Field Rep. Mike Muscha.



Front row, left to right: North Dakota Senator Erin Oban; Charles Weick, 1st Vice Chairman; Auxiliary MAL Naomi Muscha; **Back row left to right:** Chad Haugtvedt; Secretary-Treasurer Darin Hamre; Terry Pauli; North Dakota Representative Josh Boschee; Chairman Sean Forschen

Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

The 2020 regional meetings will be here before you know it! Make your plans now to attend. It is an excellent opportunity to meet wonderful people and to learn so many vital things in the classes and meetings that will be held. I do hope to see you there!

June 22-26, 2020 – Milwaukee, Wisconsin
August 17-21, 2020 – Cincinnati, Ohio

Please check the ble-t.org web site for more information

SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have college-bound children, they may be eligible to apply for a BLET Auxiliary Scholarship. For information, instructions, and applications, please go to our website, www.bletauxiliary.net. Scholarship applications for the 2020-2021 academic school year are **due in my office on April 1, 2020**. Late applications will not be considered. Please read **ALL** the instructions!! Changes have been made to the application and eligibility requirements.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Auxiliary 99 Yellow City Bomb Squad Amarillo, Texas: Victoria Delahay, Austin Landess, Shannon Hunt Denney, Vance Snider, Michelle Klumb, Susan Fuller, Michelle Labrier, Krista Blair, Deedee Rios, Tricia Taylor, Martha Ruth Morland, Meagan West, Heather Carnahan, Sherrie Hays, Dan Burke, Mela Byerly, and Kristen Garza

CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Established in 1921, the Care and Assistance Program (CAP) is our organization's way of saying thank you to long-time members. These members are usually elderly, and their incomes are such that some of life's little pleasures are out of their reach. The CAP provides financial assistance to qualifying members and helps them to maintain a little bit more of the dignity they deserve. Our CAP recipients are grateful for what we do.

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

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Dues notices have been mailed to all members-at-large, and dues were due in my office by March 1, 2020. If you have not already done so, please submit your dues to me and make sure that all of your information is correct so that you will continue to receive your newsletter. All checks should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary, or you may use the PayPal link located on our website.

AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

Year-End Reports were due in my office before March 1, 2020. If you have not yet submitted your report, please do so immediately. If you have questions, please call or e-mail me. I will be more than happy to assist you in getting these forms correctly filled out and processed. All checks should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary, or you may use the PayPal link located on our website.

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

The last GIA International President, Onita Wayland (2001-2006), passed away on January 20, 2020. At the time of her passing, Onita was a member of Generosity Auxiliary No. 37, in Little Rock, Arkansas. Onita's husband, Tony Wayland, passed away on January 21.

Charlotte Stapp, member of Generosity Auxiliary 37, in Little Rock, Arkansas, passed away on October 15, 2019.

Dee Vannoster, Member of Helen Gould Auxiliary No. 235 in Osawatomie, Kansas, passed away January 15, 2020.

Jim Booth, husband to Member-at-Large Anne Booth, Tucson, Arizona, passed away on December 26, 2019.

Our thoughts and prayer go out to all family and friends.

Please contact me when there is a death, birth, or any significant celebration of a member or one of their family members. We want to be able to send our condolences to the family but would like to also share in the joy! Please let me know of any exciting happenings! Thank you for your support and membership!



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

"Doubting yourself is normal. Letting it stop you is a choice."

— Mel Robbins

Legislative Update

Continued from Page 7

be vigilant and to challenge incorrect paperwork at pickup.

FRA Operating Practices Specialist Timothy Aardema addressed increases in Hours of Service violations and territorial qualification issues. Securement issues are also on the increase, particularly in Wisconsin. ALL tracks must have a handbrake on them even when being actively switched or attended, per FRA. Aardema also stated that Individual Liability write-ups to management are on the rise, as the FRA attempts to hold individuals more accountable for violations.

FRA Administrator Turnbull encouraged employees not to be scared off from reporting violations, stating the Freedom of Information Act prohibits release of specific complaint details. PTC Specialist Calvin Visor called in to the meeting to update the group on the status of PTC implementation. Railroads have until the end of 2020 to implement the technology, so the FRA will not take violations before then. Regionally, implementation is on target with UP at 100%, CP at 80 to 90%, BNSF at 100%, and CN at 75%. However, the biggest issue that still remains is lack of compatibility and interoperability between railroads, because different carriers have implemented PTC differently.

FRA Track Specialist Bullock reported that PSR is causing problems with carrier inspectors being able to perform their regular inspections in a timely manner. He mentioned that his inspectors are up to date except on the BNSF. Wisconsin inspectors are finding numerous violations and holding carriers accountable.

Bullock noted regular issues with CSX using defective equipment as well as numerous issues with multiple carriers adding more than one block to a train on block swaps. UP has more individual liability than any other carrier. Bullock was questioned as to whether piston travel and brake shoe settings must be observed on both sides during air tests. The answer is yes, except for a transfer train test, which requires only that the brakes be observed as set.

Bullock was also asked about a crew being told to depart out of an initial terminal on a train where an EOT could not be armed. Bullock stated that when this happens, the correct procedure is to move one mile down the track and try to arm the EOT again. Enroute failure is not applicable in this case. In conclusion, Chairman Schulz characterized this meeting as a constructive opportunity to work with the FRA for the good of all. Schulz expressed some reservations about a proposal to change the structure of the FRA supervisory system from Regional overseers watching all the carriers to Regional overseers being assigned to a particular railroad. This policy change is under discussion but not implemented at this point. If enacted, it will result in significant changes in how oversight is conducted by the FRA, but the scope of the changes remains to be seen.

Source: Interview and meeting notes with Wisconsin State Legislative Board Chairman, Chuck Schulz.

Jessica Cole lives in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She can be reached at jcs1987@gmail.com, or 262-672-9742.



FROM BECKY SCHNEIDER, ASST. NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE

Blocked Crossings – Talk to the Hand Update

The FRA has launched a web portal to allow public input. FRA administrator Batory said, “FRA expects that collecting this data will help us identify where chronic problems exist and better assess the underlying causes and overt impacts of blocked crossings—locally, regionally and nationwide.”

The new web page can be found at www.fra.dot.gov/blockedcrossings. The website requests specific information from users to include date, time, location and duration. The FRA will use the information collected to gain a more complete picture of where, when and for how long such obstructions occur at the nation's approximately 130,000 public grade crossings.

In a setback to jurisdictions who have been fining trains blocking crossings, a Federal judge ruled in favor of the AAR and against local law enforcement stating that federal law preempts state law when it comes to railroad commerce. As such, state laws used to fine rail companies that block roadways for more than five minutes are unenforceable. Any of you that have had law enforcement try to give you a ticket for blocking a crossing can cite this ruling.

Source: FRA News Release

Stop, Look & Listen – Where did it go?

The standards for safe truck driving have been set and maintained by the large trucking firms; however, smaller trucking firms and independents continue to willfully violate federal and state highway and safety laws, directly threatening train crews, passengers, and potentially causing significant property damages, as well as needless injuries, deaths and traumatizing of train crews.

While not necessarily violating grade crossings, farm vehicles pose their own threats when crossing private rights of way, thereby distorting track alignment, often resulting in derailments. Automobiles are again posing an increasing threat to trains because apparently the whole world is in too big of a hurry to wait the 3 minutes for the train to pass. No one seems to remember Operation Lifesaver's message – stop, look, listen and live.

The current state of affairs is a unique opportunity for all parties affected to work together with Congress to establish legislation to address the willful violations by vehicular traffic at grade crossings, just as the country dealt with the unacceptable rise in Driving Under the Influence violations. Harsh punishments should be prescribed and given to those who violate grade crossing laws, and those punishments should increase with every violation, just like with DUI. Rather than putting the mental and physical damage on the crews and railroads, that liability should be borne by the violator. Treating grade crossing violators with the punishment that fits the crime would significantly reduce the urge to commit the crime.

Source: Railway Age

In good news, Operation Lifesaver received renewed grant funding for its rail safety education efforts for 2020 from the Posner Foundation of Pittsburgh. Executive Director Rachel Maleh said, “the 2020 grant will allow us to expand our work at the national level and support our state programs across the country.” Trustee for the Foundation, Henry Posner III stated, “In a society increasingly consumed by digital distractions, and in a culture that seemingly encourages a diminished sense of personal accountability, Operation Lifesaver performs a unique and important role in raising the public's consciousness about safety around railroad lines.” Operation Lifesaver is the only nonprofit and nationally recognized leader of rail safety education. The organization is dedicated to saving lives by empowering the public to make safer choices near tracks and trains.

Source: Operation Lifesaver Press Release

UP Just Doesn't Get It

In two articles I read, which were published four days apart, one touts Union Pacific reopening 60 lanes in 2020 reversing course from the cuts they made under their Unified Plan in 2018. Their reasoning indicates that reopening the closed lanes will offer possible benefits in offering more service options. Canadian railroads, years ahead of U.S. railroads in their PSR journeys, similarly restored some of the intermodal schedules they had cut. PSR is the overreaching strategy to make more profit by doing less with fewer people. Railroad executives hold that “improved reliability of the services that remain will keep customers coming back and eventually increase business by converting freight from the highways to the rails. So far, that hope has not come to pass.”

Four days earlier, the same organization reported that UP predicts more headcount cuts and yard consolidations in 2020. UP reported a 20% drop in crew starts and an 11% dip in carloads because of reduced traffic. The question remains what UP can do in its quest for ultimate efficiency? Hump yards, train lengths and employees are still in the crosshairs in their long-term goal of 55% operating ratio. It is predicted

that total workforce will decrease by roughly 8% this year. Not good news for our working Brothers and Sisters, especially when the railroads think that the return of agricultural freight volume could be a boon for them in light of the initial trade deal with China.

Source: Pixabay

Amtrak Updates

As Amtrak heads toward the 50th anniversary of its creation next year, the nation's passenger railroad does so in the best financial condition in its history. The railroad ended its Fiscal Year 2019 setting new records for ridership and operating revenue, and an operating loss of \$29.8 million, the lowest in its history. Challenges still remain and one of the biggest, on-time performance (OTP). The Inspector General has said that by improving OTP on each route by 5% would result in \$8.2 million in reduced costs and \$3.9 million in increased revenue over just one year.

Amtrak Delays. In 2018, Amtrak trains were delayed by freight trains more than 100,000 times or 59%. On November 21, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced S. 2922, the Rail Passenger Fairness Act, to help improve Amtrak's OTP by providing Amtrak with the ability to challenge freight railroads in court giving it a way to enforce current law. Improving OTP will not only save taxpayer money, it will increase ridership by allowing passengers to reach their destinations at scheduled times. While the House has yet to introduce a companion bill, House Transportation leaders warned host railroads that if they don't find a solution for these delays, Congress will step in and introduce regulations to fix it for them. Ian Jeffries, President and CEO of the American Association of Railroads advised the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee of the Metrics and Standards being developed by the FRA and asked for a delay of action until it is released in this Summer. Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) relayed to Mr. Jeffries that if left to Congress to fix, "you're probably not going to like [it], and it's going to be very prescriptive."

Source: Rail Passengers Association

Railroad Retirement News

Railroad Retirement Annuity holders remember STATES CANNOT TAX YOUR RETIREMENT BENEFITS. If your state tries to tell you differently, you can advise them of this: According to the Railroad Retirement Act, Section 14 (45 U.S.C. Section 231m), railroad retirement annuities are not taxable for State income tax purposes. Period!

2019 Excess Railroad Retirement Taxes. If you believe that excess railroad retirement taxes may have been withheld in 2019 (i.e., you worked for the railroad and the union), you may have overpaid if your total earnings exceeded \$98,700. A worksheet for computing excess taxes can be found at www.rrb.gov.

The Railroad Retirement Board put out a reminder of changes for 2020. The document setting forth the details can be found on the website listed above.

Source: Railroad Retirement Board

Insurance Form 1095-B. For those covered by the GA-23000 Insurance Plan, please note that based on a change to IRS requirements, most covered by the Railroad Employees National Health and Welfare Plan will no longer automatically receive a paper copy of Form 1095-B (the form setting forth insurance coverage for the year). Some paper statements will still be issued in states like New Jersey that require them for state filing purposes. If you would still like to receive a paper copy, you can call Railroad Enrollment Services at 800-753-2692 or e-mail a request to railroad_enrollment_service@uhc.com.

Congratulations to Brother Sean M. Forschen, a second generation locomotive engineer, who by acclamation was elected Chairman of the North Dakota State Legislative Board during its quadrennial meeting in Bismark, ND, January 8-9, 2020, and to the rest of the Board also all elected by acclamation.

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

In Memoriam - Onita and Tony Wayland

— continued from Page 3

to wear to the meeting, as was a requirement during those days. The ladies were insisting on loaning her a skirt, but none of them were of her stature and size. So, she advised them that the world would not come to an end if she did not wear a white skirt and the rest of the meeting went on as planned. There were those, however, who were mortified and felt that she had practically committed blasphemy by wearing something other than a white skirt to the meeting. It is doubtful that she missed those traditions when they were no longer required.

During her tenure and that of her predecessor Ruth Wyndham, she focused on finding sources of revenue for the Scholarship Fund. In her persuasive way, and in addition to the raffles held at each regional convention, she convinced almost every convention committee to sponsor at least one National Auxiliary scholarship per year, with the exception of the Southwest Convention Meeting (SWCM). The SWCM Chairman didn't see the need to sponsor an auxiliary scholarship because the SWCM scholarship program was so robust. Onita finally wore him down and, as a peace offering, he offered the proceeds from the SWCM Golf Tournament, which turned out to be extremely lucrative for the National Auxiliary Scholarship Program for many years.

Tony helped out in every way he could to make Onita's auxiliary job easier, but mostly he would "man" the auxiliary display table at the regional meetings, selling raffle tickets and distributing information about the Auxiliary while the auxiliary officers conducted their meetings. He was usually joined by his pals Everett

Dollar and Bill Mullins, who were also husbands of international officers. Of course, anything Onita asked of him, he did without hesitation or complaint and with a smile on his face.

Tony was also a rancher and ran a herd of cattle on land outside of Mart. He and Onita took care of those cattle, with everything that entails, including getting them fattened up for auction. Even after Tony could no longer perform his rancher/cowboy duties, they kept a few head of cattle and Onita would drive him out to visit them several times a week. Onita always said, "he just loves those cows."

Depending on your stage in life, Onita was like your sister, mom, or grandmother. Tony was exactly the same way, as a brother, dad, or grandpa. They were such loving, kind, and generous people, it was a privilege and honor to have known them.

From an Article in the BLET Journal from May 1, 2006, written by Onita:

"As I prepare to turn over the reins of the organization, I reflect back to what I consider an innovative and pivotal era in our history. I have overseen the continued change and improvement of the GIA started by my predecessors. We have helped expand upon our mission and purpose. I thank the BLET for its support during my tenure as International President and feel strongly about the role BLET spouses can play. We can be a springboard for change in the future — going forward, not backward. On a final note, we do not want to forget our history and heritage, but we must embrace the future, and it is time we continue to move forward."

A wise woman indeed!

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It's Scholarship Time!



BLET Auxiliary Scholarships for the 2020-2021 School Year are due in the office of the National Secretary on or before April 1, 2020. Late applications will not be accepted! For more info, instructions, and application forms, please go to www.bletauxiliary.net.

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

Jodi Wallace, Editor
BLET Auxiliary News
541-663-6966
jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net

The next issue will be published in June 2020. Please have your submissions to Jodi on or before May 15, 2019.

Greetings from your Editor, Jodi Wallace

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."

— Walt Disney

Sisters and Brothers,



The longer I serve in my position as a national officer and meet railroad families around the country, the more I realize that not everyone knows that we are not just a group for wives who sit around to gossip and have tea. Yes, it is true that when the GIA first started, membership was open only to the wives of engineers. As the years have gone by, times have changed, and we have progressed to a group that includes spouses, children (18 years and older), and parents of BLET members. In addition, we also have a class of membership called "associate membership," which is open to railroaders, people who enjoy trains, and anyone interested in the work we do and the purpose we serve. Some areas even have associate members from other rail unions.

We welcome everyone who wants to help look out for the safety and welfare of our railroaders and their families. We are a group of women, men, and children who want to help make a difference in the lives of railroad employees and their families, and to be a voice for our railroad workers when their voices cannot be heard.

We have lobbied in front of our legislative representatives to help fight for legislation that is important in our states, and on a national level. We have called upon many of our local representatives to ask them to sponsor the two-person crew bill. We conduct fundraisers for members who may have financial or medical hardships. We award scholarships, both on a local and national level, to help with college expenses for children of rail employees. In some cases, we even take treats to those operating employees who are going on, or returning from, duty, to show them how much we appreciate them and the work they do. Some of our local auxiliaries get involved in projects within their communities, such as picking up trash on a clean-up day, giving to local shelters or food banks, and collecting socks or other supplies for our homeless or elderly.

We are more than just a "lady's club," we are an organization full of men and women working toward a better quality of life for our spouses, who we love and want to see return home safely from every trip. So, if you are not a part of our Auxiliary because you think it is just a lady's club, please come and check us out. If there is not a local auxiliary near you, you may join as a member-at-large. We would love to have you! And, if you are interested, we would be more than happy to help you get a local auxiliary started in your area, for that is where our members can do the most good by getting involved in issues that are specific to the locale in which you live.

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BLET Auxiliary


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