



BLET Auxiliary News

Working to bring about safer working conditions for Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen, educate spouses, and enhance the lifestyles of railroad employees and their families.

Volume 10, Number 2

Summer 2019

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

Park bench dedicated to local motor bike enthusiast two years after his death



Front row left to right: Hector Morales, Katryna Hughes, Molly Morales, Kendra Lampe. **Back row left to right:** Todd Gager, Amanda Rivas, Dave Perrigo, Naro Rivas, John Kavanaugh, Gina Kuenning, Corbin Znaniecki, Travis Kuenning, James & Drew Lampe, Randy Cauffman, Greg Otzel, Mike McVay, Patti McVay, Jerry Cahill, and Jennifer Otzel

By Katryna Hughes, President, Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8

May 22, 2019 - Members of Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 in North Platte, Nebraska, and friends and brothers of the BLET gathered together to commemorate a fellow UP Employee and BLET Member, Antony (Tony) Znaniecki, who passed away in a tragic motor bike accident at his home February 2017.

Tony was near and dear to many and touched the lives of so many in his community. After his passing, Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 decided there was no better way to honor Tony and his family than with a memorial piece at one of the local parks. Through Lincoln County trash pickups, fundraisers, and generous donations from Tony's BLET brothers and friends, the plans were put into action. Through our efforts, we were able to purchase playground equipment, which includes a spring car and spring motorcycle, as well as a beautiful custom, bright orange memorial bench. We worked together with the City Parks Office and decided on Centennial Park, as our community was in dire need of updated equipment for that particular park.

The installation was completed a few weeks ago, just in time for hundreds of children to enjoy the new addition for soccer and baseball season, as well as end-of-year school picnics.

This Memorial is a great example of the mission and purpose of our Organization: Providing a support system, education, friendship, and love during times of need; standing up and speaking out for our families and communities; and promoting active community involvement and betterment.

A little more info about Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8:

Flatrock Auxiliary is proud to be a local and state advocate for many legislative issues that arise, standing up and speaking out for our railroaders, our families, and our community. Our local auxiliary has played an active role in contacting our Senators to support the two-man crew bill, a bill that would restrict freight train crews to no fewer than two qualified crew members.

— continued on Page 3



From the President - BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

"Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of those acts will be written the history of our generation"

—Robert F. Kennedy

When the year began, we were hopeful it would be a time of growth and expansion with the addition of new auxiliaries opening across the country. We were very fortunate to be able to add two in Oregon in January, and we are excited to announce that we will be traveling to Springfield, Missouri, before the St. Louis regional meeting to induct Auxiliary # 417. I would like to thank Rachel Pharris for her hard work making this new auxiliary a reality. Rachel and 1st Vice President Jodi Wallace have spent countless hours communicating on the phone and via e-mail making sure everything is prepared for their organizing meeting in June. I believe the key to success for any new auxiliary is taking the necessary time and not rushing the crucial things that need to be aligned before establishing a charter. I feel confident that Rachel has done that in Springfield. We are very excited to see what the future holds for Auxiliary 417 and its members.

Editor Jodi Wallace and I decided to take a different approach with this edition of the newsletter. We wanted to spotlight some of the giving back that our auxiliaries do within our railroad family and also in the communities that we all call home. On the cover of this edition, we have spotlighted our Flatrock Auxiliary #8 for their charitable contribution to a local park in honor of a fallen brother. On page 3, Rose Surchik, President of Twin Ports Auxiliary #6388, gives us an update on the many contributions of time and money that their Auxiliary has donated to their small town. And, on page 4, our Flatrock Auxiliary gives us a sneak peek into their very successful annual "Casino Night" fundraiser.

In March, I was fortunate to travel with 2nd Vice President/ National Legislative Representative Jessica Cole to San Diego for the 33rd Annual National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen's Convention. It was an informative meeting, and all of the chairmen made Jessica and I both feel at home and welcome as they do every year. This was Jessica's first year attending the NASLBC, and she gave a moving extemporaneous speech, reminding everyone that nothing good comes without a fight. You can read more about that meeting on page

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

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

9, and also in this edition's legislative report on page 6. We were also honored to be invited to the Minnesota State Legislative Board meeting by Chairman Dave Brown. Third Vice President Becky Schneider traveled to Bloomington, Minnesota, to represent the Auxiliary and share information about the benefits of the Brotherhood and Auxiliary working together in the legislative fights we are currently up against.

Lastly, I would be amiss if I did not mention the events that took place on May 24 when the Federal Railroad Administration announced that it would withdraw the proposed rule requiring a two-person crew on certain freight and passenger trains. Also, the FRA is attempting to preempt state laws that mandate a minimum crew size in states such as California, Colorado, Arizona, and Nevada. The Auxiliary has since taken a proactive role in encouraging all members of the Auxiliary, as well as friends and neighbors, to contact their congressman and ask for their support of H.R. 1748, The Safe Freight Act of 2019-2020.

Brothers and Sisters, I implore you to join together in solidarity and become one voice for the same common goal rather than to fight amongst each other. I see so many of us on social media arguing with one another over irrelevant information when the bottom line is that the safety of our crew members, as well as the safety of the communities in which we live, is being threatened as the trains get longer and the crews get smaller. All the while, the public is left in the dark. Who better to educate our friends and neighbors in Anytown America than us, the families whose lives revolve around these trains? Please stop waiting for someone else to fix this and realize that this time, **you are that someone!** Pick up your phone and call, or e-mail your congressman and tell them you support H.R. 1748 because the safety of communities and the environment are important and it would only take one train derailment to put all of that at stake. If it matters to you, it should matter to them!

Kathleen "Kat" Bisbikis
National President, BLET Auxiliary
7367 Stabulis Road
Valley Springs, California 95252
209-786-7367, Biz4413@gmail.com

Park Bench Dedication, continued from front cover . . .



We have conducted local trash pickups a few times a year to help keep North Platte beautiful. We also were able to donate money to a family to help with travel expenses after a sudden death in their immediate family so they could travel to the funeral, states away, to lay their loved one to rest.

Each year, our Auxiliary has been honored to give out \$250 to \$500 scholarships to local graduating students, and this year was no exception. Our 4th Annual Casino Night fundraiser was held this March (*see story on Page 4*).



This past fall, we hosted a Railroad Retirement Board meeting right here in North Platte to help educate Union Pacific Railroad employees and their spouses on their retirement benefits, arming them with the tools and knowledge needed to plan for their future.

It's amazing what we can accomplish through willingness and teamwork!

Pictured at left: Katryna Hughes (seated in spring car); Standing: Amanda Rivas, Gina Kuennig, Molly Morales, Kendra Lampe, and Jennifer Otzel.



Flatrock Auxiliary Scholarship Winner

Tyra Otzel, pictured above, is the recipient of the 2019 Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 Scholarship in the amount of \$500. Tyra is the daughter of Greg & Jen Otzel from Hershey, Nebraska. Greg is a long-time employee of Union Pacific Railroad, and a member of BLET Division 388. Tyra will be attending college at the University of Nebraska at Kearney in the fall.

Nor Cal 39 Members Participate in Community Fundraising Event



Auxiliary members from Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary, Stockton, California, attended a Mother's Day Bingo Fundraiser for the high school marching band in their community. In the middle of the photo is Jared Bisbikis, a band member and recent graduate of Calaveras High School in San Andreas, California. To his left is Victoria Delahey, and behind her is Heather Barto. On the right is Jennifer Balentine and behind her is Kathleen Bisbikis.

Twin Ports Auxiliary No. 6388

— a driving factor in their community

By Rose Surchik, Aux. 6388 President

The Twin Ports Auxiliary is proud to announce what's been happening in our neck of the woods. We live in a small city compared to most, so it is important to be a driving factor in our community. We have done reverse trick-or-treating with our youth in the auxiliary to teach the children to give back to the community. They visited a nursing home and gave all the residents wool socks and handmade book markers. We recently donated money to two homeless shelters, one of which is owned and run by a railroad family. We donated money to a battered women's shelter, and next month the Twin Ports Auxiliary will be donating our time to fill food boxes at a local food pantry.

Our Chaplain/Vice President Katy Dorin sends cards of encouragement, along with a gift card, any time we become aware of a sick, injured, or in-need railroad employee (engineer or conductor) to help ease whatever they are going through. In addition, she never misses a member's birthday.

We are getting our name out in our community as an organization that is making a difference. We could not do all that we do without the support of BLET Divisions 163 & 188, for they are a constant support of our Auxiliary.

FLATROCK AUXILIARY HOSTS CASINO NIGHT FUNDRAISER

By Katryna Hughes, President
Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8

On March 30, 2019, Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8 in North Platte, Nebraska, hosted our fourth annual Casino Night Fundraiser. We sold 134 tickets for the event and had well over 30 baskets and prizes donated by local businesses to be raffled off at the end of the night to lucky winners! We had six poker tables, ten blackjack tables, one roulette table, and two craps tables set up and the event room was full of eager participants.

In 2016, we had the idea to try a fun event as a fundraiser, a "Casino Night." We hired a small local group to come in and deal cards and we used their equipment for a fee. For the first two years, we invited only railroad employees and their family members to purchase tickets. Then, in 2018, we opened up ticket sales to the general public. Making this into a community event has provided the opportunity for people from other walks of life to get to know the wonderful members of the auxiliary and the purpose of our organization, and has had the added benefit of getting our name out into the community. The proceeds benefit our local scholarship fund, help assist and support our brothers and sisters in need, and gives us the means to address issues that affect our families and our community.

This event has been an extremely successful hit and has grown tremendously over these few short years. We have been able to build our own beautiful craps tables and purchase poker chips and nice equipment so that we can run it ourselves, creating a true casino feeling atmosphere. Owning our own equipment has allowed us to put more back into our organization to be used to better the lives of our fellow members and BLET families, and make a difference in our community. If it weren't for so many wonderful individuals/members choosing to play an active role in our auxiliary and donate their time and resources, this event would not be possible! The camaraderie and teamwork are immeasurable here at Flatrock Auxiliary No. 8; it is humbling to experience.



Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

The warm weather has finally arrived and it brings a new season of Regional Meetings! Please check the following websites for locations, dates, and more information: www.bletauxiliary.net and www.ble-t.org. Regional Meetings are very busy and exciting. We always learn something new and meet someone new. Please stop by the Auxiliary table to say hello and purchase tickets for the raffle drawings. I do hope you plan to attend! We look forward to seeing you!

MAL REMINDER

Thank you to the members-at-large who have sent in their dues. The Second Notice of Dues letters have been mailed. Please respond as soon as possible.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Congratulations to all of the BLET Auxiliary and LECMPA Scholarship recipients! We are so very proud of all of the students who sent in

applications. The recipients will be listed in the Autumn edition of this publication.

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.

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

Please let us know what is happening in your life!!

Thank you for your support and membership!

Make this a summer full of fun and lasting memories!



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

If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves.

— Thomas Edison



Seth Ryan Langel

CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATIVE BOARD ANNOUNCES ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

On May 8, 2019, the California State Legislative Board Executive Committee met in Sacramento, California, for the first time in their new office. Faced with the daunting task of deciding on the scholarship winners, the committee graciously agreed to two \$1000 winners and two \$500 winners.

Committee members were informed by Chairman Ryan Snow that the scholarship applicants' personal info

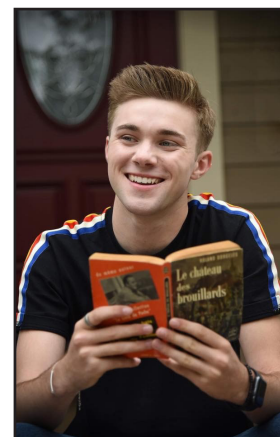
was omitted from the applications to allow outside influences to be removed. The process was also separated into four categories and voted on by each of the five members of the committee. Then those numbers were added up. Out of a total possible score of 175, the following winners were revealed. Pictured above are the top two winners: Seth Ryan Langel and Jared Bisbikis.

Jared Bisbikis is the son of Jason and Kathleen "Kat" Bisbikis. Jason is a member in good standing of BLET Division 839 and works for the BNSF. Kathleen is the National President of the BLET Auxiliary. Before being elected as President last October, Kathleen served four years as the Auxiliary's National Legislative Representative.

Seth Langel is the son of Anthony "Tony" and Vivian Langel. Anthony is a member in good standing of BLET Division 664 and works for the UPRR. Anthony is a key officer in his division and board. Seth Langel is very active in the Boy Scouts and has earned the rank of Eagle Scout.

The third-place winner is Kazzandra Bolanos, whose father is a member of BLET Division 20. Crystal Barrera and Nathan Landeros tied for fourth and fifth place, hence the reason for a fifth position. Crystal's father is a member of BLET Division 660, and Nathaniel's father is a member of Division 398.

Chairman Snow states that all the applicants did an incredible job and thanked all who applied. He further expressed his pleasure in the professionalism and dedication of the members of the Executive Committee during the meeting and the selection process. Two changes were implemented for the 2020 applications process. Applicants will be able to submit their applications via e-mail, and the deadline has been moved back from May 1 to May 15, 2020.



Jared Bisbikis



Jessica Cole

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY JESSICA COLE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE, AND

BECKY SCHNEIDER, ASSISTANT NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



Becky Schneider

JESSICA'S UPDATE:

NASLBC Meeting

The March 2019 annual meeting of the BLET National Association of State Legislative Chairmen (NASLBC) was packed with outstanding speakers and enough information for a book on current legislative issues. I left feeling honored and humbled to be a part of such a well-informed, intelligent, and passionate group. In brief, some of the major speakers and points were:

National President Dennis Pierce:

Union Pacific has requested numerous exemptions to FRA hours of service rules in Nebraska and other areas where tracks have been compromised by spring flooding. In several instances, employees have been told to work excessive hours before any exemption had been secured.

Right to Work continues to be a threat in most states, and nationally as well. In many cases, naïve workers are enticed with the promise of better wages and working conditions, and not being required to pay dues, but as soon as the union is dismantled, the contract goes away, as do the benefits, and in some cases, the workers are replaced. We live in an era of emphasis on corporate interests, and this means it's the era of weakening the voice, the value, and the rights of workers. Educate your fellow railroaders.

The Southern Border issue with regard to Mexican crews running up to 10 miles into the U.S. is ongoing, primarily because of complete apathy by the very administration that shut down the government over the need to build a border wall. These trains cross the border having been inspected under Mexican safety rules, with Mexican crews managed and trained by Mexican standards, not U.S. regulations. Just as important, this directly represents taking work away from U.S. crews for no reason beyond corporate convenience and cost-cutting.

The recent fatal Granite Canyon crash in Wyoming was discussed to a somber room. It is a prime example of the dangers of long trains and the limitations of PTC. Essentially, train length outdistanced two-way telemetry, and pinched air hoses prevented air from reaching all the way to the rear of the train, causing a runaway that never should have happened.

Communication losses with the rear end of the train are a daily occurrence on long trains. PTC cannot shut down a rear end it can't reach, only a human can. This boosts the cause for Two-Man Crew laws. Additionally, PTC is being implemented differently by different railroads because there is no FRA oversight of how it's being done.

Vice President/National Legislative Rep. John Tolman:

State legislative work affecting railroads and their employees is at an unprecedented high. Two-Man Crew legislation is being considered in more than 20 states. Right to Work is in effect at some level in 28 states and is a threat at the national level. Numerous other issues are also on the table in various states.

Tolman voiced concern that FELA laws may need new protections from corporate interests who might benefit financially if injury compensation for rail employees was not stringently enforced. He noted that Senator Orrin Hatch's son had been in a position to protect FELA for many years, but is no longer there. It remains to be seen what a new administrator will mean going forward.

Worker fatigue was discussed in numerous contexts by multiple speakers, and every railroad family knows full well just what a scary and relentless issue it is. Vice President Tolman reminded us that the Rail Safety Act has language mandating better fatigue management and reduction, but it is not addressed in practice. And don't expect that situation to improve under the current administrative climate.

Director of Regulatory Affairs Vince Verna:

Mr. Verna tackled the long trains issue and shared ideas that are being discussed as relevant to future regulations that may be proposed. The first issue, of course, is what the definition of a long train is.

In general, Mr. Verna feels a long train is one that is too long to comply with regulations. Communication loss with rear cars and kinked air hoses are two of the biggest safety pitfalls for long trains. Electronic Control Pneumatic (ECP) Brakes may be less susceptible to communication loss, but railroads prefer to use something else. Mr. Verna feels it's essential that long trains have working electric brakes.

Bob Aparicio of the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railroad Employees (NARVRE):

Mr. Aparicio spoke about NARVRE's work to protect our retirement benefits, a role they've taken an active part in for 80 years. They have a membership that is aging out and are interested in boosting membership. NARVRE fights for other worker concerns as well, such as Two-Man Crew legislation. More information can be found at www.NARVRE.com.

Lastly, by the time this report comes out, it will, amazingly, be about the time that presidential candidate debates are starting. It's that close already.

Keep in mind a quote that Vince Verna mentioned, from late Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis: "The greatest menace to freedom is an inert people." Remember that. Act. Educate your fellow rail family where needed. Mobilize the vote. As Bob Hagen, Political Director, suggested during the meeting, make sure people know what we do, which is to fight for safety and fair wages. Additionally, know who your IBT lobbyist is in each state and be a squeaky wheel with that person.

DOT Publishes Drug Testing Rule (DOT sent this bulletin at 04/23/2019 10:23 AM EDT)

On April 23, 2019, the Department of Transportation (DOT) published a final rule that makes minor technical corrections to the OST, FAA, FTA, and PHMSA regulations governing drug testing for safety-sensitive employees to ensure consistency with the recent amendments made to the Department of Transportation's regulation, "Procedures for Transportation Workplace Drug and Alcohol Testing Programs," which added requirements to test for oxycodone, oxymorphone, hydrocodone, and hydromorphone to DOT-regulated drug testing programs. The changes to the Department's regulation make it necessary to refer to these substances, as well as the previously covered drugs morphine, 6-acetylmorphine, and codeine, by the more inclusive term "opioids," rather than "opiates." This rule amends the term in the FAA, FTA, and PHMSA regulations to ensure that all DOT drug testing rules are consistent with one another and with the Mandatory Guidelines for Federal Workplace Drug Testing Programs. In addition, this rule makes a conforming amendment to include the term "opioids" in the wording of the Department's annual information collection requirement and clarifications to section 40.26 and Appendix H regarding the requirement for employers to follow the Department's instructions for the annual information collection.

To learn more about this final rule, visit DOT's web page at <https://www.transportation.gov/odapc/frpubs>.

**Nevada Two-Man Crew:
Next Stop, Governor's Desk!**
(Submission by Nevada SLB Chairman Matt Parker)

Brothers and Sisters,
By a 13-8 party-line vote (all Democrats yes, all Republicans no), Assembly Bill 337 passed out of the Nevada Senate yesterday.

We are again grateful to the Democratic Caucus of the Senate for listening to and agreeing with our concerns regarding our safety as well as that of the public with regard to the issue of crew size. Conversely, we find it both disappointing and alarming that Senate Republicans chose to ignore the facts we presented in testimony concerning these concerns. Their refusal to listen was demonstrated when the Minority Leader made a statement on the Senate floor regarding his opposition to the bill which parroted one of the talking points used by the railroads regarding crew consist on Amtrak that was patently false and which we attempted to set the record straight on.

Following enrollment, a process which usually takes one to two days, the bill will be delivered to Governor Sisolak for his signature of approval.

Minnesota Two-Man Crew Law Gains Momentum

(Source: quoted directly from mnpoliticalreport.com) Published April 30, 2019 - Last updated on May 8, 2019

SMART Transportation Division Minnesota State Legislative Director Phillip Qualy reports that two-person crew legislation has passed in his state's House of Representatives as part of H.F. 1555, an omnibus transportation bill, and that a push by members and retirees alike will be needed to get it through the state Senate to the governor.

The bill passed Monday, April 29, by a 74-52 party-line vote, and now moves on to the Minnesota Senate's Transportation Conference Committee. Section 93 of the bill contains a provision setting a minimum crew size for freight trains operating in the state and also contains other important rail safety provisions, including Section 90, which sets forth the Minnesota Department of Transportation's enforcement of state safety regulations and maintenance of way track equipment crossing protections

"The outcome of that conference committee will most likely determine whether minimum train crew language is passed into law," Qualy said.

Qualy said that the effort of every SMART TD member and retiree in

Minnesota is necessary to pass this important legislation to keep the state's communities safe. Members, retirees, and their friends and family are encouraged to call or e-mail their state senators to talk about the important public safety aspects and assistance to first responders that two-person crews provide on the state's rails in the case of a railroad emergency. . . .

"We need all railroad workers standing together in support of this legislation," he said. "We need our members at the capitol. Please make your calls and e-mails today."

Misleading Report Fuels the Push Against Two-Man Crew

In 2015, the Association of American Railroads (AAR) hired the Oliver Wyman consulting firm to do a study that presents the case that one-man crews are as safe or safer than multi-person crews. The study attempts to use railroads in Europe and other foreign countries as examples of safe one-man crew operations but leaves out many differences with the railroads in the U.S. that make valid comparisons impossible.

To name just a few:

Hazardous Materials are hauled by truck in Europe, not by train as they are in the U.S.

There are just shy of 140,000 rail line miles in the U.S. compared with most countries in the study being under 6,000 miles, and the next highest total being only 21,000 miles.

U.S. freight trains haul more tonnage per mile than any country in the report. U.S. trains can weigh more than 20,000 tons and surpass 3 miles in length. European trains are often no more than 1700 to 2700 feet in length.

These are just a few of the discrepancies not addressed by the study. More will be shared in the next legislative report. The AAR, by its own admission, says not enough data exists regarding the safety of one-man crews.

(Source: Minnesota State Legislative Board Chairman Dave Brown)

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

BECKY'S UPDATE:

Amtrak

Celebrating its 48th birthday, Amtrak issued a statement touting a 1.3% increase in ridership for Fiscal Year 2019 compared to the same time last year. Meanwhile, CEO Richard Anderson and his cohorts are still up to no good implementing their version of vulture capitalism. The corporation continues to sell off rolling stock that could be repaired, thereby reducing the number of available seats and accommodations heading into the busy summer travel season. In a statement released for the birthday celebration, they tout new markets of baby boomers and millennials, as well as the building of a successful company; however, their actions seem to indicate their lack of interest in making Amtrak more viable. *(Source: RPA)*

In a recent salvo against its police officers, Amtrak leadership is proposing a 20% reduction in the number of officers beginning in June and continuing over the next 3 years. William Gonzalez, President of Amtrak's Fraternal Order of Police, said "We don't have enough cops now to cover all the stations and tracks . . . if we cut the number of cops we have, it will jeopardize the safety and security for the passengers and employees." A statement was issued by Amtrak indicating they are "currently evaluating the deployment of our Amtrak Police Department staff to ensure we have appropriate staffing levels for the safety and security of our customers . . . across our network." Representative John Katko (R-NY) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) have both spoken about the potential slash in the workforce, with Rep. Katko saying that this is a time when Amtrak should be increasing their security. Amtrak has promised there will be no layoffs, but attrition alone won't result in a 20% reduction. *(Source: NY Post/RPA)*

After successfully saving the Southwest Chief from bustitution, in a letter dated April 5, 2019, 11 Senators are demanding clear answers about long term plans for long-distance trains. They have asked for clarification from Amtrak regarding the contradictions being set forth, including claims that long-distance ridership is down despite growing ridership in the states

represented by these Senators (and contrary to their birthday celebration statement).

Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) has placed a hold on 3 appointees to Amtrak's Board until he receives a commitment to keep the Southwest Chief running in its present form (no buses). We can only assume that the 4th and newest nomination will also be held. It has been reported that a meeting has been scheduled with Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson for May 22 and that Senator Moran is still waiting for the answers to his 11 questions.

Amtrak's Hoosier State line wasn't as lucky as the Southwest Chief. Despite a last-minute push to save the 4-day-a-week train service, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb's budget eliminated the \$3 million annual payment to Amtrak to provide the service. Senator Ron Alting (R-Lafayette) joined efforts by Representatives Sheila Linker (D-Lafayette), Chris Campbell (D-West Lafayette), and Sharon Negele (R-Attica) in trying to secure funding for the Hoosier State. As proffered by Steve Coxhead of Public News Service Indiana, "it's kind of a Catch 22." According to Coxhead, to increase ridership, you would need 2 trains a day in each direction as opposed to the current 4 trains a week. He argues that a more sophisticated analysis of the travel market clearly demonstrates the value of the train. "For example, if 59% of the Hoosier State passengers switch to automotive trips when the service ends, that is the equivalent to more than 4 million additional vehicle miles. Monetizing the wear and tear cost of all those extra cars, the train actually saves the state about \$3.1 million in road maintenance and congestion costs each year." I guess it's a situation where you can't see the forest for the trees.

It's not just the loss of the train that is affected by this move. At Amtrak's Beech Grove maintenance facility, approximately 500 jobs will be at risk by the reduction to only 3 weekly deliveries of rail equipment by the Cardinal. Amtrak is a government entity which exists to serve not only growing communities but as much of America as it can. While Amtrak may not make a profit, passenger trains create economic

— continued on Page 14

THAT'S JUST HOW IT IS!

AUXILIARY SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY BY JACOB HOLDEN

When my family has dinner, there's always one question on everyone's minds. Will there be leftovers?

My family is very competitive about our food. Like a wild savannah, we prowl in search of the next meal, and leftovers are the primary struggle. Everyone wants the scraps. From pizza to pasta, there's never enough to go around. But when my dad gets called to work, like the biggest lion in the pride, he takes his share with him, and no one stops him.

He's gone a lot, of course. There are bills to pay and mouths to feed, which means long late-night trips. He can be gone for days at a time or gone for 12 hours. Regardless of how long he's gone, though, he's missed. My sister especially notices his absence.

At two years old, Brynn loves her dad. She's not quite as good at "the quiet game" as her big brother is yet, but still hisses "Daddy's sleeping!" at the dog when she decides that he's making too much noise for her liking. When he's gone, she quietly mumbles about it to herself. She asks when Daddy will be home; she asks if Daddy will pick her up from daycare; when someone tells her something, she answers with a quizzical, "Daddy said so!"



Dinner time at the Bencivengo household: Jacob Holden, Michael Bencivengo, and Brynn Bencivengo

I'm a college student at Sacramento State University. I work hard to keep my grades up, and I work part-time to ease the burden on my family; it's the least I can do. I do know; however, that I wouldn't be able to attend college without the railroad.

This source of frustration, of schedule mishaps, of "the quiet game," of my dad's nights away from home, of "Daddy's sleeping!" ... that is the railroad ... it's how we pay the bills. It's tuition, and groceries, lights and gas, the occasional toy for my sister or part for my car. Sometimes I feel like my world, my family, revolves around the railroad. Maybe it does.

So, when my dad asks me to watch my sister while he lays down for work, I understand. He doesn't get as much sleep as he should.

So, when my mom asks Dad if he'll be home so that he can attend a family event and he confesses that he doesn't know, she understands. It's hard to plan around the boards.

So, when my sister asks if Daddy will pick her up, and I must explain that he's at work again, she understands. She misses him, but he has to go to work sometimes. That's just how it is.

When my dad takes the Tupperware to work, full of leftovers from the past few days, no one stops him. That container of chicken and rice is the only homemade meal he'll have for the next three days. After all, it's the railroad that buys the groceries — he's earned it, hasn't he?

Jacob Holden has completed his Freshman year at Sacramento State University and will be returning as a Sophomore in the Fall of this year. He received \$1000 BLET Auxiliary scholarships for the 2018-2019 school year, and also for the 2019-2020 school year. His mother, Lori Bencivengo, is a member of Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary in Stockton, California, and his father, Michael Bencivengo, is a member of BLET Division 839.

We are proud to support the
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen



BENEFITS THAT PAY. IT'S HOW WE DO IT.

We provide the most comprehensive and affordable group insurance plans in the industry. A Cornerstone group plan helps further protect members from loss of income due to injury or illness.

ADMINISTRATION. WE MAKE THINGS EASY!

We handle all aspects of the group administration. This includes premium payments, enrollment services, claims advocacy, administrative services and union support.

CONSIDER THE FACTS. PROTECT YOUR FINANCIAL SECURITY.

Your income isn't just a paycheck; it is usually the primary source of funding for your life and your needs. Income protection provided by Cornerstone can go a long way to protect you and your family for years to come!



DISABILITY ■ LIFE INSURANCE ■ ACCIDENT
CRITICAL ILLNESS ■ RETIREE BENEFITS

CORNERSTONE BENEFITS MANAGEMENT
22333 CLASSIC COURT, LAKE BARRINGTON, IL 60010
P: 847.387.3555 F: 815.425.5349
UNIONDISABILITY.COM INFO@UNIONDISABILITY.COM

ANDREW M. HALEY
PRESIDENT
EDWARD P. HALEY
NATIONAL DIRECTOR

2019 ANNUAL NASLBC MEETING

San Diego, California

The 33rd Annual National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen's (NASLBC) Meeting was held March 25 – 27, at the Bahia Resort in San Diego California. National Auxiliary President Kathleen Bisbikis and National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Jessica Cole were both in attendance.

Monday morning started with the traditional roll call of the states and the seating of new members. Brothers, Shane Hubbard (Indiana), Calvin Groose (Missouri), Jeff Rich (Tennessee), Brendan Sullivan (Florida), and Tim Laveing (Pennsylvania) all took their seats at the table of chairmen. The first speaker of the day was BLET President Dennis Pierce, followed by 1st Vice President Lee Pruitt and National Secretary-Treasurer Steve Bruno. For an overview of their presentations, please visit the Legislative Update on Page 6. Lunch was sponsored by the Brotherhood's Relief and Compensation Fund (BRCF) and served on an outdoor patio. Following lunch, BLET Vice President/National Legislative Representative John Tolman, Regulatory Affairs Director Vince Verna, and Political Director Bob Hagan all gave animated and passionate talks about the state of affairs in Washington D.C. That evening, a dinner cruise hosted by the FELA sponsors was enjoyed by all in attendance.

Tuesday, March 26, started with Guest Speaker, National Auxiliary President Kathleen Bisbikis, who discussed the installation of two new auxiliaries in Oregon, as well as the dominant force the Oregon families, guided by Oregon State Legislative Board Chairman Scott Palmer, played in the fight for a Two-Person Crew Bill in their state. Jessica Cole, Auxiliary National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative, followed with a moving speech reminding everyone that despite the battles we are currently fighting, we need to stay strong in solidarity. Tuesday's lunch was sponsored by the Bank of Labor and was served outside in the beautiful San Diego weather.

Tuesday afternoon was full of informative talks by Ed and Andy Haley from Cornerstone Assurance, Jesse Taylor from BRCF, and Angela Pullekines from United HealthCare. Also speaking Tuesday was retired Missouri State Legislative Chairman and a longtime supporter of the Auxiliary, Brian Kelley. Since his retirement from the railroad, Brian has taken a job with the law firm of Schlichter, Bogard & Denton.

Brothers Toni Diamond and Matt Kroynak spoke on behalf of the Auxiliary and passed the hat around for donations to help raise funds to support the Auxiliary and



2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Jessica Cole and National President Kathleen Bisbikis

the work it does. They later presented the Auxiliary with a donation in the amount of \$1033.00. We are very thankful for the generosity of the brothers who make up the NASLBC and their continued support and belief in the work that the Auxiliary does on behalf of the families that make up the Brotherhood.

Rich Conners from the FRA, as well as Victor Russon from Hildebrand, McLeod, & Nelson; Jerome Schlichter from Schlichter, Bogard & Denton; John Kujawski from Kujawski and Associates; Sam Capizzi from Collins and Collins; and Bob Aparicio from NARVE, were also all in attendance.

The 2020 NASLBC meeting will be held in Austin, Texas.



UNIONS WORKING HARD FOR TWO-PERSON CREWS

By Jodi Wallace, National 1st Vice President

Before the ruling from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to withdraw the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on May 23, 2019, there was an organized movement across the country supported by both the BLET and SMART unions. Members worked together, putting in long hard hours behind the scenes to attempt to get passed the Two-Person Crew Legislation in their states. There was success in some states; other states chose to table the issue and bring it back in their next session. One constant in every state was our Brothers and Sisters, alongside the local BLET Auxiliaries in some areas, working hard, traveling back and forth from their homes to their state capitals, taking time away from their families, all in an attempt to secure the Two-Person Crew Bill in their state. We don't want the FRA announcement to put a dark cloud over the accomplishments of the legislative boards and their members who went to battle to protect the safety of their members and the public. Below we have featured three different stories from three different states. One state that had the success of it passing, one that had it pushed to the next session, and one that was just beginning the battle.

Contacting Your Representative in the State of Ohio

**By Timothy Price, Chairman
BLET Ohio State Legislative Board**

Following is an overview on how to contact your representative in Ohio for a particular piece of legislation.

1. Find out who your representative is at <http://www.ohiohouse.gov>. There is a member search at the top left.
2. Make the call! Be aware that 99.9% of the time you will get a staff person not the actual representative.
3. Tell the staff person that you are calling to give your support to Ohio HB 186 and would like the representative to support it as well.
4. Be aware the staff person might not know what Ohio HB 186 is and may ask. The answer is that it is a rail safety bill.
5. They are not going to try to debate or change your view on the bill, but they may ask you why you support it. Your response should be simply put, that you "support safe trains in Ohio," or "safe rail operations in Ohio are critical to our communities." Basically, keep to the theme of rail safety and don't get into a bunch of unsupported facts or personal thoughts. The time to debate will be in testimony!
6. Thank the staff person for their time.

We have a great opportunity to pass this bill and everyone's support and effort will be the difference as this legislation moves forward.

AB337 Nevada Two Person Crew Bill

By Matt Parker, Nevada State Legislative Chairman

Thirty-four years ago, a Nevada statute specifying minimum crew sizes for freight trains was repealed. On May 15, 2019, Governor Steve Sisolak approved Assembly Bill 337, restoring a minimum train crew size statute back to Nevada law.

When crews from the Las Vegas and Tonopah Railroad approached the Nevada Legislature in 1909 voicing concern that inadequate staffing of trains was creating a threat to the safety of the public, lawmakers responded by enacting a crew size statute. The title of that act began with the words, "An act to promote public safety." Those lawmakers recognized that train crew size is, in fact, a matter of public safety; it is just as much a matter of public safety today.

Through conversations with lawmakers and testimonies in committee hearings over two legislative sessions, rail labor has sought to focus discussion on the matter of safety, providing many examples of how train crews of at least two persons have resulted in increased safety, both for us as well as for the public, which is at risk every day as the result of the movement of freight by rail through our state. By contrast, never once has the opposition provided even a single example of how reducing train crew size will increase safety. Instead, they have persisted in attempting to change the subject while presenting a witches' brew of arguments which are largely false, misleading, threatening, and/or irrelevant.

We are grateful for those legislators and this Governor who have listened to and agreed with our concerns regarding safety as it relates to the issue of crew size.

Our success in getting this measure passed in the current legislative session and approved by this Governor has perhaps more to do with electing the right people last November than with any other factors. It is a testament to something written by author Ronald M. James in his book, "The Roar and the Silence: A History of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode." In that book, Mr. James wrote: "Mine owners may not always have wished to concede points at the negotiating table, but the union realized its goal by divorcing the capitalists from the sources of power needed to enforce oppressive positions. The lesson that the Comstock taught miners throughout the West for years to come was to control local offices to ensure that they not be used against organized labor." The repeal of Nevada's original crew size statute and the substantial fight we have had to wage to restore it should also serve as a reminder to our members to be very cautious of what you may be willing to concede in the present; it is often much easier to give something away than it is to get it back.

With Colorado and Nevada joining California in enacting crew size legislation, and the existing law in Arizona, we hope that other western states including Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington will now take a more serious look at enacting this legislation.

Important Message from William Wallace, 1st Vice General Chairman, BLET Union Pacific Western Region General Committee of Adjustment and Member of Eastern Oregon Auxiliary No. 362

On March 4, 2019, in Salem, Oregon, I had the pleasure of attending the Joint Committee on Transportation public hearing of HB 2970 or, as it is commonly known, the Two-Person Crew Bill, with BLET Oregon State Legislative Chairman, Brother Scott Palmer; BLET Members and SMART-TD (Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation - Transportation Division) Members from all over Oregon, and several members of the BLET Auxiliary.

This bill is extremely important to everyone, from railroaders to the general public. We need to get a law passed in Oregon to mandate that there will be at least two people on every train, for everyone's safety. Now is not the time to allow the railroads to put profits above safety, which is exactly what

will happen if we cannot get this bill out of the committee and to the floor for a vote.

It is clear that the railroads are looking to a future with nobody on the train. They will spend whatever it takes to fight laws like this that are starting to pop up all over the country. The railroads are using such tactics as stating that crew size should be left for contractual bargaining between the parties and should not be forced by the state. Safety is non-negotiable; we need to stand united and fight for laws that mandate a minimum crew size for everyone's safety, not only in Oregon but all over the country.

We had people speak in support of the bill, expressing their concerns about the need for

having the second person on the train for the safety of not only the employees on the train but also the communities through which our trains operate. Several people gave testimony about situations that had happened and how thankful they were that there was a second person on the train at a time of crisis.

There are derailments all over this country that could have been much worse had there not been that second or third crew member on board to investigate what happened and who had the ability to relay the information to local police, fire, and rescue. We, the crew members, are the first responders when something bad happens. We need to make sure that we are there in the future to protect our communities and each other.

One such example is the derailment that occurred in Mosier, Oregon, where oil cars derailed and caught fire. Had there only been one person on that train, there would have been no one to perform the initial investigation into what happened and no one to relay information about the cars that were derailed or to clear up any crossings so that the emergency responders could get across the railroad tracks.

The Two-Person Crew Bill in the state of Oregon was unable to make it out of committee and is scheduled to be discussed in the next session of the Legislature.

Please get the information out that we not only need support from all railroaders, but we need it from our friends, our families, and members of our local communities. We need to keep at least two people on all trains!



Following a public hearing in Salem, Oregon, on March 4, 2019, 1st Vice General Chairman, UPRR Western Region, Will Wallace (far right) and Oregon State Legislative Board Chairman (2nd from right) gathered together with BLET, SMART TD, and Auxiliary members for a celebratory fist pump affirming their support of the Two-Person Crew Bill in the state of Oregon.

Wisconsin State Legislative Board

The Wisconsin State Legislative Board (WISLB) met in Madison, Wisconsin, in May, for their Quadrennial Convention. Auxiliary National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Jessica Cole attended the meeting and spoke to the attendees on behalf of the Auxiliary. The WISLB has been a good friend to the Auxiliary, with frequent invitations to speak and to participate in a wide range of Board business and activities. At their meeting, they authorized a \$500 donation to the Auxiliary. Thank you, WISLB!

In the photo at right: *Front row, left to right:* Paul Dinauer, WISLB ALT S/T; Anthony Dimond, WISLB 1st Vice; Chuck Schulz, WISLB Chairman; Joshua Weatherford, WISLB 2nd Vice; Eric Stroik, WISLB S/T. *Back row, left to right:* Jeffrey Hackett Fraser, Andrew Doney, Jeff Loveland, Jason Limatta, Dave Loesch, Kory Hansen, Larry Winchell, Bernard Olson.



Minnesota State Legislative Board Meeting

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

The Minnesota State Legislative Board (MN SLB) held its Quadrennial Meeting April 28 – May 1, 2019, in Bloomington, Minnesota. Thanks to Chairman Dave Brown for inviting the Auxiliary and to the Board for helping out with airfare and hotel expenses. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to participate and to spread the word as to our work in support of the BLET.

Auxiliary Member-at-Large Naomi Muscha, also a former North Dakota Assembly Member, and the wife of retired North Dakota SLB Chairman Mike Muscha, spoke to the delegates about the importance of establishing relationships and the necessity of political action committees (PACs). Mike Muscha and Tom Perkovich, both of whom are former SLB chairmen, spoke about the importance of the legislative arm of the BLET when it comes to safety issues on the railroad.

National Association of Retired & Veteran Railway Employees President Tom Dwyer, and Gary Nelson, who is the Area 4 Director, spoke about ways their organization works to protect our retirement system from assaults by Congress, in addition to their support of current railroad safety issues and Amtrak. Job income protection information was presented to the delegates by Jesse Taylor, President of BRCF, and Jim Surma, Minnesota State Manager for LECMPA. Andy Haley, President of Cornerstone Benefits Management, detailed the various insurance products offered to active BLET members and also some available to retirees. He is currently working with the BLET to potentially provide “Benefits of Belonging” for retirees including vision, dental, pet, and term life insurance. LECMPA and BRCF sponsored breakfast and lunch, respectively, and an off-site dinner was sponsored by Cornerstone Assurance Group.

BLET National President Dennis Pierce led off day two discussing issues the Brotherhood is currently addressing, including the continued siege to destroy unions and the push for Right-to-Work (for less) legislation at the national and state levels. He emphasized that it is our job to ensure members understand the importance of unions and what is at stake. Without union negotiations there would be no seniority, no standard rates of pay, away-from-home lodging could be lost, and there would be no representation at disciplinary

hearings. President Pierce also spoke about the issues of extra long trains and two-person crew legislation.

First Vice President Lee Pruitt polled the delegates as to whether their members were more concerned with local issues or political ones. Most indicated that local issues were more important to their members. Brother Lee suggested talking to members about issues affecting their jobs, like the Federal Railroad Administration and National Mediation Board, rather than getting into disputes on hot-button issues.

Vice President/National Legislative Rep. John Tolman rounded out the Advisory Board speakers discussing work in Washington on behalf of the BLET, including national Right-to-Work legislation, which is now stalled in the House, as well as two-person crew laws. He also offered a suggestion for officers to talk to members about the new tax law and how it directly affects them, including their inability to claim legitimate away-from-home expenses and equipment needed to do their jobs. Other speakers included Vince Verna, BLET Director of Regulatory Affairs, Bob Hagan, Director of Political Affairs, and Ed Reynosa, Political Director for the IBT Joint Council 32

For my part, I focused on what the Auxiliary could do to help and support the delegates in doing their jobs as it relates to legislative issues. I gave a very brief history of the Auxiliary, and how it has morphed into the organization it is today. I also shared some of my personal experiences as a lobbyist in the hope it would provide some insight to the board members when they received training on lobbying and then put their lobbying skills into action at the State Capital on Wednesday, May 1. I also briefly outlined our membership and the fact that, in addition to the work of our local auxiliaries, members-at-large can also make a difference, citing Jessica Cole, our 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative as an example.

That afternoon, Dave Brown was re-elected by acclamation to his fourth term as MN SLB Chairman. Also elected were 1st Vice Chairman Joel Mueller, 2nd Vice Chairman John Toth, and Secretary/Treasurer Mark Anderson.

Thanks to FELA Attorneys Randy LeNeave and Fred Bremseth for providing lunch and dinner! It was great to see so many new faces and catch up with old friends.





Life on the Extra Board

By Railroad Wife Dacia M. Arnold - Denver, Colorado

Much like military family life, the railroad has many challenges. A common struggle is being on call 24/7 and the effect of not having a set schedule of constant travel has on a family. There is no easy way to explain to people why I always anticipate my husband being gone on

weekends, holidays, and special occasions. Wives of railroaders seek each other out for solidarity and this is my ode to them.

Twelve hours dragged on like a lame dog. Red lights had the train stopped with the view of a cow pasture to the left and a highway on the right. The middle of nowhere. Two hours into the trip and dispatch had the train stopped in a siding to let another train, likely hauling the mail, run around it. With no one else around but the engineer for ten hours of the day, the conductor stared out the window, hoping they wouldn't be too long in that siding. The next day was his son's fourth birthday, but at a standstill there was little chance he would make it home before the little tike went to bed. He had only seen his daughter roll over for the first time on a video recording his wife sent. Tapping his knee anxiously, he waited for the green light. The two men sat on the motionless train waiting for a van to deliver their relief and transport them to their destination: a dirty hotel in a small town surrounded by the Great Plains without consistent wifi. Bored and tired, he was ready for the day to be over. A video call with his son would have to do. He missed his wife, his two kids, and their dogs, but knew the sacrifice of being away was only temporary and worth giving his family everything.

Twelve hours came like a slap to the face. The railroader's wife could use a few more hours in the day. With two little ones' tummies full, her dinner was cold as usual. The baby chatted in her high chair while she packed the dishwasher and ate. The boy played with toys on the floor. With bottles washed and bags packed ready for the next day, she ran down a mental list of things left to do to prepare for another solo go at parenting. Her own lunch prepared to grab for the morning, she took

a few more minutes to clean up the living room before she scooped up the baby and carried dirty clothes with her upstairs.

Then baths, PJs, teeth brushed, stories told, milk refilled, bedtime snack given. She cuddled the babe back to sleep, and offered more milk to the boy, pleading for him to stay in his bed. Finally, she took her shoes and work clothes off.

The next day was her son's birthday, and she had to wake up early to bake his cake before work. The mother collapsed onto her bed, which was far too big for one person, and moved to his side to find his scent still on his pillow. A deep breath reminded her she could do this. He did not leave them because he wanted to, but so they could live comfortably and give their children everything they ever wanted. TV served as a nightlight while she went through photos on her phone, deleting what she could spare to make room for the ones she needed to take for her husband the next day. She hardly made it to 9 p.m., exhausted.

12 a.m, a little boy appeared. Too tired to fight, she let him snuggle until she woke up enough to return him to bed. 2 a.m., a sleepy baby girl cried for milk. Twenty minutes to satisfy her hunger and then back to bed. She glanced at the clock. Three more hours until her alarm went off and no idea what day of the week it was. She missed her husband, but understood her sacrifice was only temporary and worth giving their family everything.

Dacia M. Arnold is an award-winning, Amazon Bestselling American novelist, freelance writer, mother, medical professional, and ten-year Army Veteran. 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. This short story and many others can be found in Dacia M. Arnold's new book, "The Brightest Firefly: A Collection of Short Works." <https://daciarnold.com>

BLET Eastern Oregon Auxiliary No. 362

Doing Business and Creating Fun and Fellowship

By Jodi Wallace, President, Auxiliary No. 362

On April 6, 2019, BLET Eastern Oregon Auxiliary No. 362 held their first official meeting in Hermiston, Oregon. After the business of the auxiliary was completed, members participated in a couple of games of bowling. A great time was had by everyone in attendance and it quickly became apparent that no one in our group is a professional bowler. In any case, it was a great opportunity for our members to get to know one another better in a social setting and create fellowship and solidarity.



Legislative Update, cont'd

wealth by enabling the creation of jobs, increased retail sales, expanded mobility, increased tourism, and enhanced real estate development.

The current network was not created to maximize service for those who need it, but more to benefit railroads' divestiture of their common carrier obligation to provide passenger rail service.

Amtrak is fighting back against the Class I carriers and their incessant delaying of passenger trains by issuing a report card and issuing alerts through its @AmtrakAlerts twitter account. Norfolk Southern (NS) received an "F" with its abysmal 29% on-time performance rating. NS demanded that the tweets stop, but Amtrak responded that "our passengers had every right to know why they were being delayed and Amtrak is duty-bound to tell them." Part of the reason to issue grades for the Class I Carriers is to bring clarity to the public perception as to why Amtrak trains are always late. A goal of the Rail Passengers Association is to establish an enforcement mechanism for Amtrak's preference. (Source: RPA)

Lastly, in Amtrak news, our sympathy goes out to Joanne Boardman and family following the passing of Joe Boardman at the age of 70. Mr. Boardman, a Vietnam veteran, had been with the transportation industry since driving a bus after his military service. He went on to be the longest-serving Commissioner of the New York State DOT before moving on to head the FRA. He headed Amtrak, being the second longest serving administrator. He was a tireless advocate for passenger rail and the nation's mobility. (Source: Railway Age)

It was Infrastructure Week - Again! On April 30, House and Senate leadership and advisors met with the President to discuss a potential infrastructure deal. The President himself said, "It may not be typically Republican." At one point, the President noted that he "liked the \$2 trillion figure because it sounded better than \$1.9 trillion." Apparently, he is still trying to fulfill a campaign promise that resonated with voters in both parties. Before the meeting, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate



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
300 Sterling Parkway, Suite 105
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
(717) 695-0284, narf2216@gmail.com

Brotherhood's Relief & Compensation Fund

Jesse E. Taylor, International President
300 Sterling Parkway, Suite 105
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
(717) 657-1890

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer sent a letter to the White House describing the need for "massive" infrastructure investment and outlining the need for "substantial, new and real revenue." They also added that any proposal would need to "include clean energy and resiliency priorities" and "must have strong Buy American, labor, and women, veteran, and minority-owned business protections."

While most of the country supports rebuilding our aging infrastructure, including improvements to our national rail network, the rub is in how to pay for it -- a common theme in both parties, and it seems to be falling squarely on the President's shoulders. The 18.4 cent gas tax has not increased since 1993 and was never tied to inflation (which has increased 73% since 1993), so the buying power of those funds have decreased substantially over the last 25 years. Democratic leadership has said they would consider raising the gas tax, but only if some of the recent tax cuts are rolled back, which is a non-starter for Republicans, some of whom believe that federal transportation spending disproportionately benefits urban (blue) areas. Sen. John Thune (R-SD) said that even if there was a 35 cent increase in the gas tax and indexed for inflation, "it only gets you to half

a trillion." It's puzzling that a tax cut doesn't have to be paid for, but the infrastructure that provides so many benefits for so many citizens does?

The GOP prefers relying on public-private partnerships to revitalize the country's infrastructure; however, the President has called that type of collaboration a "stupid" idea. A history lesson into the Interstate Highway System created by the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act would indicate that is how funding was found. The Federal government paid 90% of the cost while the private sector paid the other 10%, and the gas tax was increased by a penny.

Senator Schumer (D-NY) also announced they had agreed to meet with the President again in three weeks to present ideas on funding. This meeting came on the heels of the President's budget for FY 2020 that calls for a 39% cut to funding for new transit projects, and a 23% decrease for Amtrak funding even as increases in highway spending, and calls for eliminating long-distance train service replacing it with buses. (Sources: New York Times; CNN; History Channel; Politico)

Presidential Budget Requests

The President's budget proposal for 2020 has been submitted and below

are some notable excerpts which will affect transportation and social programs. According to Gary Faley, Legislative Director for NARVRE, "the Medicare Rights Center is on the mark with their summary and statement that the President's annual budget request is a statement of values. Further, they state that it is incredibly troubling," that the President's budget for FY 2020, "again prioritizes deep cuts to programs on which older adults and people with disabilities rely, including Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act."

As set forth above, Streetblog USA notes that the budget proposal calls for a 23% decrease in Amtrak funding and a 31% decrease in funding for the FRA. The Capital Improvement Grant program providing federal matches for funding major rail, commuter rail, and other transit projects would be cut by \$1 billion, down from \$2.5 billion. Separate grants to Amtrak for the Northeast Corridor would be cut in half, dropping to \$325.5 million. Unlike the President's comments made at the April 30 infrastructure meeting, the budget reflects "the far-right talking point that transit projects are a local concern, but highway funding is a national priority."

On the social services side, Medicare would effectively be cut by \$845

billion over ten years, and although some of those cuts may be made up elsewhere, it would still result in a decrease of just over \$500 billion. As to student loans, his budget calls for colleges and universities to share a portion of the financial responsibility associated with student loans." The AP reported that details are thin on how all of that would work, but the budget proposes it could save \$207 billion over the next 10 years.

Medicaid would be cut by \$241 billion over 10 years with the hope of morphing the program into block grants to the states, and the food stamps program proposes food box delivery service in lieu of cash benefits. As measles is quickly becoming an epidemic despite its previous eradication, and the Ebola outbreak in the Congo, the budget calls for a 10% cut to the CDC's budget.

Our only saving grace is that it is doubtful the President's budget proposal as submitted would become a reality, but as noted above, this budget does seem to be a statement of his values.

Oil Train Safety Update

In the Spring issue, I reported on Washington State's bill to reinstate oil train regulations rolled back last year that required controlled braking systems. A bill requiring a lower vapor pressure limit for crude shipped by rail in the next two years was signed by Washington Governor Jay Inslee on May 9. Lowering the vapor pressure would decrease the intensity of explosive derailments like the one in 2013 in Quebec that killed 47 people. North Dakota claims that removing one of the components, Butane, required for winter gasoline blends would devalue their product. North Dakota will likely sue since North Dakota ships their oil to refineries in the Pacific Northwest. (Source: Associated Press)

New Mexico Right to Work

On March 29, New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed a bill prohibiting counties from passing their own right to work (for less) laws. House Bill 85 invalidates resolutions passed over the last 14 months in 10 New Mexico counties and one village that bar union membership as a requirement for employment. Americans for Prosperity turned to local governing bodies to pass their own right to work measures when their efforts failed in the 2015 State Legislature. There will likely be court challenges, and both sides believe they have viable arguments. (Source: Albuquerque Journal)

Railroad Retirement News

A recent Supreme Court decision found that the portion of a damages award attributable to lost wages for a workplace injury is considered to be taxable compensation under the Railroad Retirement Act. Plaintiff BNSF indicated it would withhold railroad retirement taxes from the lost wages portion of an award. The defendant disagreed, stating that the compensation must be for services rendered in order to be taxable and that portion was compensation for an injury. The Court disagreed and ruled that if part of the settlement is designated as compensation for lost wages, taxes must be paid. (Source: RRB News)

— continued on Back Cover

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 September 2019. Please have your submissions to Jodi on or before August 15, 2019.

Greetings from your Editor, Jodi Wallace



"My friends, it is solidarity of labor we want. We do not want to find fault with each other, but to solidify our forces and say to each other: We must be together; our masters are joined together, and we must do the same thing."

— Mother Jones

In this day and age, with social media being so prevalent, it has become much too easy to write negative and unfactual commentary with no consequences. We are in an ongoing battle in the war on workers and unions; now is a time to bond together and unite not divide and conquer!

I belong to a few pages on social media that are railroad-related, and it amazes me the number of people who blatantly blame the union for everything that goes wrong. These, in my opinion, are the same people who do not step up and take an active role in the betterment of their union. They would rather be an antagonist and speak badly while hiding behind a computer screen. Usually, the person with the most complaints is also the one who fails to attend union meetings, instead using their time complaining about an issue rather than asking how they can become involved for the betterment of the cause. Now more than ever is the time to step up and make your voice heard and be an advocate for your job, your family, and your union.

You often hear people say, "my union does nothing for me, so why do I have to pay dues?" Simply put, without the union there are no contracts, no trip rate, no company-provided lodging at the away-from-home terminal, no healthcare, no collective bargaining. Also, belonging to a union includes someone to fight with you and for you when the carriers decide that you should be disciplined. This is just a small list of things that the union has fought for and accomplished over the last 156 years.

There are also the numerous behind-the-scene things you might not realize are going on, but trust me these men and women who have taken on the role of a union officer are always working for you, taking time away from their families to make sure you keep your job, taking calls all hours of the day and night when you need assistance, all without complaint. They often are required to spend considerable amounts of time traveling, spending time away from home to learn how to better perform their duties and how to make your job better.

In the end, if you have time to sit at home and complain, then you have time to help. Instead of whining via the internet, put your keyboard down and attend a union meeting, offer to help where needed - it's the members who determine the strength of the union. Working against the union is working against yourself.

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.



BLET Auxiliary

Sereena Hogan, Publisher, BLET Auxiliary News
8720 N. Myrtle Drive
Tucson, AZ 85704-3340

Published at the above address regularly

**Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Tucson, AZ
Permit No. 2216**

Return Service Requested

***Moving?** Please notify us of your new address*

Legislative Update, continued . . .

The National Railroad Retirement Investment Trust published its Quarterly update for the period ending March 31, 2019. According to the report, Investment Performance, Net of Fees, for the first quarter was 7.36%. This is a much better rate of return than the 2% we earned on Treasury Securities before the establishment of the Trust in 2002. *(Source: NRRIT Investment Trust)*

Reports on the financial standing of the Trust from the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) have consistently stated that even under the worst scenarios, the Trust maintains financial stability. Projections are that the railroad retirement system will remain solvent for another 25 years. According to NARVRE, the RRB Inspector General recommended that the Trust be dissolved. Rail Labor and Management both responded to leave the Trust Fund alone. It is not in danger of imploding because of mechanisms written into the law that trigger an increase in employer taxes if it falls below a stated level. *(Source: NARVRE)*

To see the differences between Railroad Retirement and Social Security, log onto www.rrb.gov – News Releases, April 2019. Railroaders pay in more over the span of their career, but it definitely has its benefits. *(Source: Railroad Retirement Board)*

For those of you who plan to attend one of the regional meetings this year, I highly encourage you to stop by and talk to the RRB Representatives who are usually in attendance, especially if you are not far from retirement and have a job other than working for the railroad. Finding out exactly what I should do and having contact information certainly paid off for me!

The Big Boy is Back!

The Union Pacific 4-8-8-4 Locomotive, weighing in at a modest 500 tons is once again riding the rails. According to the Salt Lake Tribune, the world's largest steam locomotive returned to the rails on May 1 for the first time in nearly 60 years. It was christened in Cheyenne, Wyoming, before departing on its journey to Ogden, Utah, arriving on May 8, where it will be part of the 150th celebration of the first Transcontinental Railroad on May 10. Following its return to Cheyenne, the Big Boy will prepare for a tour of the UP system this summer. Details of the tour are expected to be released soon, and Trains Magazine will probably have that posted on their website once it's available. *(Source: Atlas Obscura)*

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