



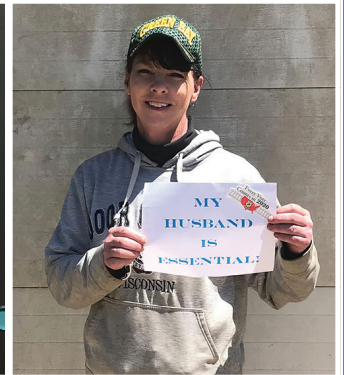
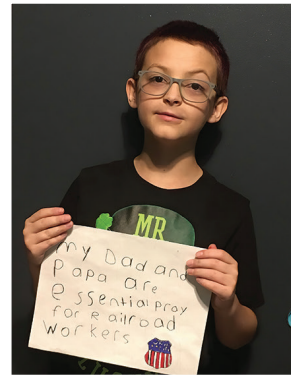
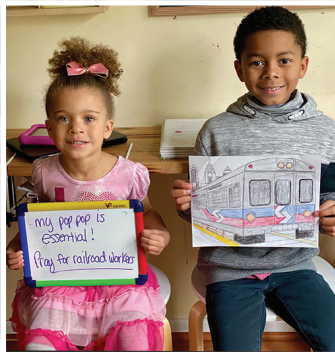
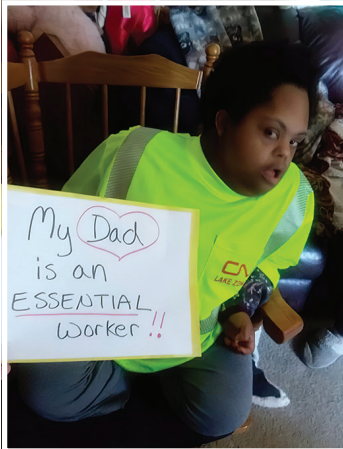
BLET Auxiliary News

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

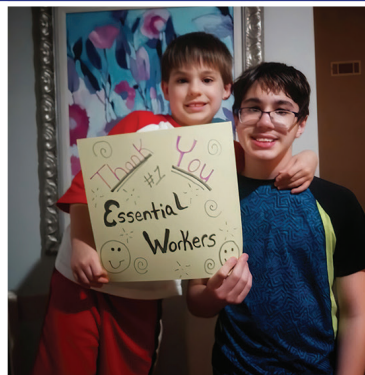
Volume 11, Number 2

Summer 2020

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



Children, grandchildren, and spouses in railroad families across the nation join in support and prayer for the health and safety of railroad workers during the Covid-19 Pandemic.





From the President

By KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

"One day you will tell your story, of how you overcame what you went through, and it will be someone else's survival guide"

— Unknown

Thank you to all of our auxiliary members across the country who are doing everything they can to keep their "essential railroad employees" and families healthy and safe during this unprecedented and challenging time. I hope that this is something that we never have to endure again, but during this struggle, we have been resourceful and found ways to be more engaged and more informed as a group and as a rail community.

The use of the Zoom Meetings, something new to most of us, has become an everyday activity in the workplace and the auxiliary. We are proud that the auxiliary has been able to keep in touch with its members through Zoom. If you attended our "Game Night," you know how good it felt to have that connection with everyone. We are also happy that our local auxiliaries across the country have started using Zoom to continue to have monthly meetings while they are quarantined.

I know that our railroad lifestyle has trained us to be strong as well as flexible to change. Nobody knows better than us that plans can change in a heartbeat. The railroad instilled that lesson early on and reminds us of it daily. However, this current COVID-19 pandemic was not something that any of us could have speculated would cause the widespread devastation and changes it has prompted to the communities, states, and day-to-day life we formerly took for granted. In addition to the pandemic, we face record numbers of furloughs as carriers make cutbacks due to drops in shipping demands and other issues.

In this edition of the newsletter, we are concentrating on celebration. Please help me congratulate the young men and women who, despite the early closure of schools and having to use alternative learning methods, still shined bright. On pages 4-5, you will meet this year's 2020-2021 BLET Auxiliary scholarship winners. We would also like to send well wishes to the graduates of 2020 whose names are listed below. We are sad that you did not get the graduation ceremonies that you all deserved, but we are proud of your accomplishments and wish you a very hearty kudos on a job well done.

We are also celebrating our Member-At-Large Naomi Muscha from North Dakota, who is making a run for the North Dakota District 24 House seat once again. Naomi and her husband Mike have been strong and vocal supporters of the auxiliary, and we wish her a very successful campaign.

We are excited to announce that we have two new auxiliaries currently in formation. The adding of more names and locations to our growing list of auxiliaries is always a cause for celebration. Thank you to Erica Hill in Philadelphia, and Mely Byerly and Rachel Zentz in La Crosse, Wisconsin, for taking on this endeavor.

We are sad that we won't be able to talk to everyone this summer due to the cancellation of the regional meetings in Ohio and Wisconsin. We are confident we will see you all again next summer, and it will be a true celebration when we arrive in Nashville and Austin and can be together again.

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

Congratulations to the Class of 2020

SENIORS FROM YELLOW CITY BOMB SQUAD AUXILIARY #99

HANNAH WINBOLT - CANYON HIGH SCHOOL, CANYON TEXAS

KATELYN DENNEY - BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE IN HISTORY WITH A MINOR IN ENGLISH - WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

CHRISTY SNIDER, TREASURER BLET AUXILIARY 99 - BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN GEOGRAPHY - ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

SENIORS FROM BLET AUXILIARY #417 SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

KENSON HANDLEY - HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL, SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

BRIAN WALTERS JR. - WILLARD HIGH SCHOOL, WILLARD, MISSOURI

SENIOR FROM BLET AUXILIARY EASTERN OREGON #362 LA GRANDE, OREGON

JOHN CARRIER - KAMIakin HIGH SCHOOL, KENNEWICK WASHINGTON

About the Cover Page:

In late March, as news of the COVID-19 pandemic escalated, Kylie White (central photo, in green shirt), the daughter of rail operating crew member Jason White in West Virginia, expressed concern to her mother about her dad's safety. On March 25, Kylie's mother Leah White, posted the photo of Kylie on her Facebook page with the following words: *"Kylie has been worrying so much lately about the world. I hear many times a day that she worries for her dad since he travels to highly infected areas for his job. I told her today we would do a project to bring awareness to our forgotten railroad workers. Kylie wrote this message she wanted to share."*

The photo of Kylie holding the sign she made, was re-posted on The National BLET Auxiliary Facebook page, and prompted other railroad families to join with Kylie in showing their support for our railroad workers during these uncertain times.

How The 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic Helped Shift the Right to Vote

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

As COVID-19 spun world society into chaos, we began to hear more and more about the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic. I'll admit I had little knowledge or interest in the 1918 pandemic and truthfully cannot even recall if it was touched on in my high school American History class. As the COVID-19 crisis became more and more urgent though, we heard more and more about what had happened in 1918-1920.

The numbers are staggering: 500 million people worldwide were estimated to have been infected between January 1918 and December 1920. Death toll estimates ranged from 17 million to 50 million, with some estimates as high as 100 million. Hospitals were completely overwhelmed, and makeshift outdoor field hospitals were set up to try to deal with the overflow. Ironically, you had a better chance of surviving if you were sent to a rudimentary outdoor hospital than if you were indoors. The virus didn't like sunshine and fresh air.

It is no accident that this pandemic intersected with women finally gaining the right to vote. After a most ugly 80-year battle, the National Legislature passed the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote in 1919, and it was ratified by the requisite two-thirds of the states, passing by only one vote, in August of 1920.

Why was the Spanish Flu Pandemic relevant? Interestingly, the Spanish Flu killed a disproportionately high number of young men versus women. Up to five times more men died of the 1918 Flu than women. And a disproportionate number of men had already been killed serving in World War 1.

This left society light on a workforce, so many able-bodied women who had previously been homemakers entered into the paid workforce. As a result, society's norms for appropriate places and roles for women changed out of necessity, and it became harder to deny a voice to those women who were proving competence and intelligence in paid roles.



Just as current times are peppered with misunderstanding of an unseen enemy and division of opinion about how careful people should be in any type of gathering, similar issues tore at the fabric of American Society in the 1918 to 1920 Flu Pandemic. In many places, gatherings were discouraged, yet the Suffragettes continued on in their public protests for the right to vote, until it was awarded in 1920. The fight had been very long and very ugly, with women ostracized, jailed, and beaten for speaking out for the right to vote. These women broke many norms, rules, and laws, and were largely seen as completely radical for much of the fight. It is ironic to think that it took a virus to help their cause, and their continued public protests in the pandemic probably spread the virus in some cases.

In the end, as I look at it from my safe chair in front of my computer in 2020, I am disappointed that these women had to risk their lives and the spread of a deadly virus to make their voices heard, but I fully understand why they did it. And I am profoundly grateful. Ladies, never miss the chance to vote - not for anything! So much was put on the line so you could have that right.

And if you are worried about COVID-19, you are **smart**, and today is as good a day as any to request your absentee ballot of any local election coming up, and for the big one in November. No need to risk your life to make your voice heard, unlike the state of affairs some 100 years ago.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO
OUR BLET AUXILIARY
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS
FOR SCHOOL YEAR
2020-2021**

~

*We wish you all the best
in the year ahead
as you pursue your goals
for a successful future!*



*Congratulations
Jared Bisbiki's*

2020-2021 Leona A. Louis Memorial \$1000
Scholarship Recipient

Jared will be attending
the University of San Francisco. His father is
Jason Bisbiki, a member of Division 839 and
his mother, Kathleen Bisbiki, is a member of
Auxiliary 39 in Stockton California.



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*Congratulations
Danielle Fincham*

2020-2021 LECMPA \$2500 Scholarship Recipient

Danielle will be attending
the University of Nebraska. Her father is
Fredrick Fincham, a member of Division 224
and the LECMPA, and her mother, Nancy
Fincham, is a BLET Auxiliary Member at Large.



Made with PosterMyWall.com



*Congratulations
Lilly Hyde*

2020-2021 \$1000 National BLET Auxiliary
Scholarship Recipient

Lilly will be attending
the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Her father is Christopher Hyde, a member of
Division 314 and her mother, Brandy Hyde, is a
BLET Auxiliary Member at Large.



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Congratulations Cami Price

2020-2021 LECMPA \$2500 Scholarship Receipt

Cami will be attending Lake Erie College. Her father is Timothy Price, a member of Division 607 and the LECMPA, and her mother, Tetianna, is a BLET Auxiliary Member at Large.



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Congratulations Hilary Sanchez

2020-2021 \$1000 National BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Receipt

Hilary will be attending San Francisco State University. She is the daughter of Mike Altman a member of Division 839 and her mother Lynnette is a member of Auxiliary 39 in Stockton California.



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Congratulations Rachael Strube

2020-2021 \$1000 National BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Receipt

Rachael will be attending Minnesota State University. She is the daughter of John Strube, BLET Member, deceased. Rachael is a BLET Auxiliary Member at Large



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Congratulations Maysa Walters

2020-2021 \$1000 National BLET Auxiliary Scholarship Receipt

Maysa will be attending the University of New Mexico. She is the daughter of Russell Walters, a member of Division 232 and her mother, Terri is a BLET Auxiliary Member at Large.



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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



FROM JESSICA COLE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE

A Personal Note: This is the Legislative Report I could never have imagined needing to write, even three months ago. COVID-19 has changed our lives, our jobs, our prospects for the future, and our world forever.

FRA Offers Relief from More Than 80 Regulations

Three rail carrier associations representing the overwhelming majority of the railroads in the United States petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration on March 21, 2020, seeking relief from numerous requirements of the FRA's safety regulations due to the pandemic.

Citing President Trump's COVID-19 National Emergency Declaration, and the World Health Organization's characterization of COVID-19 as a pandemic, on March 13, 2020, FRA Administrator Ronald Batory had activated the Emergency Relief Docket (ERD) FRA-2020-0002. This action permits the FRA to grant a petition for waiver without prior notice and comment if three conditions are met: 1) the Administrator deems it is in the public interest; 2) the waiver is not inconsistent with railroad safety; and 3) the waiver is necessary to address an actual or probable emergency situation or event.

A copy of the petition is available for review and comment in the online ERD.

In justifying their request for relief, the petitioners noted the Declaration of National Emergency, reiterating that the pandemic presents risks to public health and safety, and that railroads expect their available staff to be reduced by illness and quarantine requirements. This, in turn, is expected to affect railroads' ability to keep freight trains carrying essential goods and materials operating effectively and efficiently. Petitioners stated that compliance with all federal rail safety regulations would significantly inhibit operations with a reduced workforce.

The FRA granted the Petitioners' request for relief from more than 80 regulatory requirements. However, some conditions do apply:

1. With certain exceptions, the relief is conditional on workforce shortages due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Railroads must document the basis they used for concluding that relief was necessary.

2. Railroads using any aspect of the waiver must file a weekly report with the following information: name of railroad and territory/subdivision/yard, and list of each individual waiver used including date of occurrence, anticipated duration, and list of manpower shortages or other conditions necessitating the use of the waiver

The blanket of waivers was issued with no input from rail unions and has been met with much objection by unions, including the BLET and others.

Among regulations and rules covered by the waiver are: part or all of the rules on track safety, track and bridge maintenance, railroad record-keeping, train and engine protection, switches, what to do following derailments, testing for drug and alcohol use, keeping radios and wireless communications working, limits on hours of service for passenger train crews, locomotive inspection tests, and grade crossing rules. Some commuter trains also fall under the waiver provisions.

Sources: Memo from the FRA to the three rail carrier Petitioners for Waiver; RTandS.com.

Unions' Counterproposal to FRA Relief Waivers

A broad coalition of unions countered the FRA Waivers with a letter demanding the return of furloughed employees as the first line of action in dealing with a workforce shortage before implementing any of the relief waiver options recently granted by the FRA. "If a carrier finds itself short on active employees, its first option must be found in the abundant supply of out-of-work railroaders, not in administrative intervention to be exempted from safety-critical regulations," the unions' letter states.

Further, in cases where furloughed workers cannot return to work because they lack required retraining, the unions have asked the FRA to issue them a temporary waiver from certain training requirements, giving them the option to return to work conditioned on meeting those requirements within 60 days.

The FRA has also been asked to require rail carriers to report weekly on each regulatory waiver used, when and where it was used, and the list of conditions, including manpower shortages, that made the waiver necessary.

The BLET, the American Train Dispatchers Association, the SMART Transportation Division, and the BMWED were all included as signers of the letter.

Sources: National BLET website; Progressive Railroadings.

Declining Shipment Volume Leads to Furloughs, Closings

Ironical as it may be, in the same moment that railroads have secured regulatory relief waivers from the FRA with overstated concerns that the existing workforce will not be able to keep on schedule without such waivers, many carriers are also closing segments of their operations and furloughing workers.

Union Pacific has recently closed its Jenks Locomotive Facility in Little Rock, Arkansas, and has furloughed most of its staff. This facility maintains and refurbishes UP locomotives and is being closed as a direct result of "an unprecedented decline in business volume" due to the pandemic, according to company spokeswoman Kristen South.

Citing halted or reduced production, South stated that the furloughs were proactive to prevent ongoing economic impact to the company. She stated in an e-mail that volumes are anticipated to return over time and that the situation will be reassessed on May 18 to see if June 1 is a possible reopening date for the facility.

The Jenks facility is Union Pacific's largest heavy locomotive repair facil-

ity and is one of the largest of its kind in the whole world.

Source: Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

Intermodal Shipments Volume Plunges as Demand Freefalls

In a related story, The Journal of Commerce recently reported that North American Intermodal Shipment volumes for March 2020 were the lowest in 10 years, declining 15% from last year.

The dramatic falloff in imported containers will subsequently result in declines in domestic container shipment by rail or trailer.

Optimistic intermodal industry analysts say that a quick rebound can occur if people go back to work promptly and companies begin production again or increase production that is currently stalled. These analysts say that the recession may actually help the intermodal transportation industry in the long run, because as shipping budgets get cut, companies will look to cheaper means of transport, i.e. intermodal, as an alternative to more traditional shipment by trucks.

However, some see the outlook as anything but rosy. "The unprecedented shut down of businesses is going to last through April and probably longer. Then, when it is lifted, I think it's going to be a struggle for intermodal business to come back, not a V-shaped snapback. People are out of work, we won't be able to turn that switch back on in a heartbeat," said Larry Gross, an intermodal analyst and JOC contributor.

Source: Journal of Commerce

Individual Experiences, Carrier Responses, Vary Greatly

Precautions to protect rail workers during the COVID-19 crisis range from "at least they are trying to do something" to absolutely horrifying. Below are a few comments I've heard from fellow families, in no particular order and sharing no names, no regions, and no carriers to protect everyone's privacy and their jobs.

"They always have us stay in the crappiest hotels, but this last trip, the hotel

was the cleanest I've ever seen it, so at least places are trying."

"Each employee is given a baggie with two sanitary wipes in it at the start of each job, and that is supposed to be sufficient to sanitize anything the worker might come in contact with during that shift, on the train, in the office, in the taxi cab, in the hotel, or anywhere else, but at least they are handing out something."

"There were way too many people crowded into our yard office, making six-foot social distancing impossible. The manager didn't understand why I complained."

"I had to work with someone who showed up sick to work because of the attendance policy."

"They hand out their own homemade sanitizer and it is so pathetic I actually feel kind of sorry for them...really runny alcohol sort of mixed with lumpy aloe lotion. But at least they are giving us something."

The BLET has asked the FRA to issue a directive to companies to implement more stringent sanitation requirements, but this request has been deemed unnecessary by the FRA. So, for now, it is everyone for themselves as the first line of defense. Carry your own disinfectant wipes, insist on six feet of social distance, wear a mask, wash your hands, and report any illness.

Source: Multiple and various

Plea for FRA Best Practices Sanitation Order Falls Flat

A joint request for an explicit protocol requirement for carrier workplace sanitation practices was recently denied by the FRA.

The BLET and SMART Transportation Division teamed up in a joint request to the FRA in the wake of numerous instances of poor sanitation practices and disregard for employee safety in the face of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"Although FRA believes that many safety precautions included in [the unions'] petitions could constitute best practices that should be applied in the railroad industry, FRA does not believe that an emergency order is justified," FRA Administrator Ronald Batory wrote,

according to a BLET press release.

The BLET and SMART-TD unions petitioned the FRA to issue an Emergency Order specific to employee protections after the agency announced it would temporarily waive certain railroad regulatory safety requirements during the pandemic.

Union officials say the FRA has "yet to mandate safety protocols to protect the health of railroad workers during the national COVID-19 outbreak," according to the press release. The FRA has responded with a Safety Advisory rather than the far more stringent Emergency Order sought by the unions.

Sources: BLET Website, Progressive Railroading.

Unions' Request for Extension of Certification Petition Filings Granted by FRA

The BLET and SMART Transportation Division (SMART-TD) jointly petitioned the FRA to extend time limits for filing petitions for review with the Operating Crew Review Board (OCRB) and the Locomotive Engineer Review Board (LERB).

Ordinarily, under FRA regulations, a petition to review a railroad's decision to deny certification or recertification must be filed with the LERB no more than 180 days after the railroad's denial decision. A petition to review a railroad's revocation of certification must be filed within 120 days of the decision. Similarly, petitions to deny certification or recertification, or revocation of conductors, must be filed with the OCRB within 120 days.

Under the terms of the April 7 waiver, FRA granted temporary emergency relief from the 180- and 120-day filing deadlines, so that the deadline for any petition for review that becomes due to be filed during the duration of the waiver is extended 60 days.

Source: BLET Newsflash.

Rail Crew Taxis are a Potent Vector for COVID-19

BLET President Dennis Pierce, in criticizing the FRA's blanket relief waivers for safety regulations, commented specifically on taxicab crew transport, which often occurs in small four-person minivans where social distancing is nearly impossible.

Source: RTandS.com.

In addition, such taxis routinely carry multiple crews from job site to job site in quick succession and without thorough sanitizing between crews. Furthermore, in many instances, the drivers themselves are becoming ill with COVID-19 and unknowingly exposing crews who then go on to expose other rail workers and family members, and everyone else they come in contact with on the way to work and on the way home.

Kevin Jaycox, who works for Hallcon, a Kansas City based firm that handles rail crew transportation, initially felt the COVID-19 shutdown responses were overreactions and unwanted inhibitors to business. And he readily admits he is no fan of Ohio Governor Mike Dewine, who closed nonessential Ohio activities early on.

However, from November 2019 to March 2020, Jaycox's views on the situation changed. "I'll be the first to admit: When this all started, I thought this was being blown way out of proportion," he said. "But once you know someone who has it, or you get quarantined, it makes everything real."

Jaycox himself became very ill in December and, once recovered, he got a call from a Houston hospital following up on COVID-19 contact research and was told there was a good chance he had fought off the coronavirus. Over the next few months, his work took him to several southern states and he found out on his way back home that a teammate he had been traveling with had become very ill and tested positive for COVID-19, which led Jaycox to spend two weeks in quarantine. He was able to work from home during his quarantine, and he now feels that Hallcon has stepped up for its employees and taken precautions.

"Without us, the railroaders can't move," he said. "They have hours-of-service issues and we need to move them from train to train to keep the railroads going." But not all of his drivers have remained on the job. "I have 130 people (out of 2,800) who aren't working because they got scared," he said. "I got a lot of retirees who drive for me."

Source: Sandusky Register.

An additional story about taxi crews comes from Northern Wisconsin, where

a cab driver tested positive for COVID-19 after transporting several crews in one day. To make it all the more disturbing, the carrier did not notify the crews of their exposure and their need to quarantine for three days following receiving the information of the positive test.

The ramifications are inexcusable: Not knowing they had been exposed, these crew members continued to go to work, exposing other coworkers, and they went home to unsuspecting families at night, potentially spreading disease to them, not to mention the fact that any stops along the way to and from work, whether for gas, groceries, or any other reason, also created more vectors to unsuspectingly spread the disease.

Source: Wisconsin State Legislative Board Conference Call, 3-31-20

BLET Backs Proposed Essential Workers' Rights Bill
Taken directly from the BLET National Website as written: The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) is supporting an Essential Workers Bill of Rights that has been proposed in the United States Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives that is designed to help better protect the health and safety of frontline workers and provide hazard pay during the coronavirus pandemic.

Senator Elizabeth Warren (MA) and Representative Ro Khanna (CA) have unveiled this proposal and have called for the next coronavirus relief legislation to include the policies contained in the Essential Workers Bill of Rights.

According to the press release introducing the Essential Workers Bill of Rights, these workers are on the frontlines of this pandemic, and many are working under high-risk conditions without appropriate equipment, safety standards, or job protections. They include doctors, nurses, home care workers and other healthcare workers, grocery store and drug store employees, domestic workers, food service workers, federal, state, and municipal employees, janitorial staff, farm workers, delivery drivers, warehouse workers, transportation workers, and child care workers.

Reports indicate that these workers
— continued on Page 13



Making the Connection - Words from the Chairman

By Shahraim Allen, BLET Washington State Legislative Board Chairman

You never know where life is going to take you, or how your past experiences will have an impact on your future accomplishments. For everything I have been a part of so far, this statement continues to remain true: "Today is simply shaping tomorrow." In the current day and time, we could never have predicted where we are today as a people, a society, and in our case, a workforce of rail employees, under the constraints of the pandemic.

I began my career in the railroad town where I'd grown up, Tacoma, Washington, as a third-generation railroader. Because of my diverse upbringing, the lifestyle, necessary work ethic, and the learning of railroad etiquette came naturally to me. Two months after my 20th birthday, I obtained my certification as a Locomotive Engineer, the youngest in the rank and file of Burlington Northern Railroad.

With a long-standing place in American history and the backbone in the shaping of our nation, this rail industry has stood the test of time amidst all the changes this world has brought our way. We are the essential workforce, bonded to the framework of the main lines that connect this vast network, supplying the movement of essential goods to every corner of our nation, and we should never let ourselves forget that.

Our Brotherhood, founded during the height of the American Civil War in 1863, was born from the need for fair representation for railroad workers as many felt they were not being fairly paid

or looked after by the large rail companies, a common problem from that era before labor laws, when employees of most all trades were generally treated quite badly. It has evolved in endless ways since that time in May of 1863 when 19 men gathered together in Marshall, Michigan, near Detroit, to discuss the idea of organizing. That meeting led to what would later become the BLET, North America's oldest rail labor union.

Today, those of us who step up to become union officers of this organization find our place in one of two branches, either the Collective Bargaining/ Protections Branch or the Legislative Branch. Both are working toward the same goal, the sustainability and the welfare of our organization and its members. The Collective Bargaining Branch creates contracts and agreements between our union and the carriers, written specifically to safeguard the skills that those in our craft bring to the table. The Legislative Branch works to promote and/or establish laws to hold the carrier accountable and, conversely speaking, they hold us accountable as well. This system was created to be certain there is some type of checks and balances between the two parties, labor and the carrier, on amicable terms.

If and when you receive the call to step up, take it! When you feel unsure about something even though in your gut you know it's the right thing to do, don't let the seed of doubt sow itself and grow into existence. In my case, there I was, in the year 2013,

the path laid out in front of me to step up and "take my place at the table" of the BLET National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen (NASLBC), as the Washington State Legislative Board Chairman. I knew this was the way I could better assist my union, by working to establish legislation on behalf of our membership.

Before this time, I had served as a legislative representative for seven years, handling safety issues of my division and additional responsibilities, learning all that I could, gaining experience through trial and error. No situation was perfect, but I participated just the same, because I saw there was greater purpose in what I was doing and proven avenues to establish my goals.

At some point, I watched a video created in 2012 about the history of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, narrated by now-retired California State Legislative Board Chairman Tim Smith. Included in that video was a short and sweet detailed account of how laws established on our behalf leveled the playing field in the railroad industry, safeguarding our members and the public, based on the lives lost over time. The video included ways to continue to preserve our way of life, and how the assistance of the BLET Auxiliary members furthered the possibilities of success when making our issues known to the Carrier without fear of reprisal, and helping to promote legislation to bring about safer working conditions in the rail industry. This was all very inspiring.

With an upbringing surrounded by family members who were involved in local and state politics and witnessing their work for agencies that protected the people, this once childhood runt of a man, now tasked with the protection of his railroad family, gladly stepped up to the challenge. Little did I know then that I would go on to lead in the establishment of two laws in my state, the first in 2017, ESHB 1105, concerning passenger carrying vehicles for railroad employees, and the second in 2020, HB 1841, establishing minimum train crew size on certain trains - two of the strongest state laws in the nation. None had seen the like for over 40 years.

The first law took five years to get passed. It stemmed from the loss of a friend and brother of my Division 238 in Tacoma. He was one of three people who were fatally injured in a vehicle accident while being transported in a crew shuttle to the away-from-home terminal following his tour of duty. The second law took seven years, in the wake of the tragic oil train accident that killed 47 people in the town of Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, Canada, with a train operated by only one person. Both encompassed the loss of human life that will forever have a rippling effect in the minds of the many family, friends, and loved ones left to remember them.

I have learned much about the working of our state and national legislature and the world of politics. The one thing you must know about politics is this - be ready to be uncomfortable,

and here is why. Politics equals personalities - a lot of them! Many you will agree with and many you won't. Another aspect to understand - you must like people, at the very least to a degree that will allow you to maintain and maneuver when faced with adversity, to find another way to see the job through with the desired outcome.

So often in the process to get a bill passed, just when you think all is well, it then takes a turn for the worst. Sound familiar? I can recall many days and nights of planning leading to soundbites of conversations, with even more preparations to make sure all of the pieces on the chess board are moving in sync while lobbying in my state's capitol, only to have it upended by one of our opponents and immediately needing to formulate yet another plan to recover the ground potentially lost.

I, and those who worked with me to get these bills passed, are forever grateful for all that was accomplished, and will never forget what it took to see the job through to completion. The moral to the story is this - through adversity comes opportunity, from opportunity comes prosperity, from prosperity comes the ability to influence and establish new possibilities toward progress in the movement for our existence. All a person has to do is make the connection.

From the lyrics of a well-known song written by Don Schlitz and recorded by Kenny Rogers: "You gotta know when to hold'em, know when to fold'em, know when to walk away and know when to run. You never count your money when you're sitting at the table, there'll be time enough for counting when the dealing's done."



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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

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Naomi Muscha Running for State Office In North Dakota

By Becky Schneider, National 3rd Vice President

Member-at-Large Naomi Muscha, from Ft. Ransom, North Dakota, is once again throwing her hat in the ring to run for North Dakota House District 24. I have known Naomi since 2001 when I was working with her now-retired husband Mike on Railroad Retirement Reform. Mike was not only Local Chairman of his division, but also North Dakota State Legislative Board Chairman.



The daughter of missionaries, Naomi has volunteered a number of years helping to build houses for the less fortunate in Mexico. Last year, she came to El Paso for a seminar and worked with immigrants across the border who were seeking asylum. She wanted to understand first-hand what was occurring on our southern border. She stayed with us a few days and we really got to know one another. I am forever thankful for that opportunity.

As an auxiliary sister, Naomi facilitated the organizing of a local auxiliary in Enderlin, North Dakota, in 2004. While the original auxiliary only lasted a few years, she and another railroad spouse are currently making plans to restart it. When traveling with Mike, who now works for a FELA attorney, she recruits every chance she gets, explaining what the Auxiliary is about and encouraging new members to join. Most recently, and in part because of her legislative background, she advocated on behalf of Canadian Pacific Railway employees for supplies needed to keep crews safe during the COVID-19 outbreak.

I wanted to give a shout out to our sister for not only her bravery, but also for her belief in participating where you can in order to make a difference. She served a term in the State House from 2012 to 2016, so she knows what she is getting into. Because so many of her former colleagues and residents of Enderlin have been asking her to run again, she finally asked for signs as to whether she should. Apparently, the signs were clear, so she decided to go for it. She is running as a Democrat in a very red state, but that shouldn't make that much of a difference because her constituents know her, what she has done, and the good person that she is - a representative of the citizens of District 24, not a political party.

One of her favorite quotes from Gary Lew sums it up: "This is your world. Shape it or someone else will." Best of luck to you, and for your election, Naomi. The Auxiliary and its members support you and all of your efforts.

Answers to General Questions About Your Health Care Plan

The responses to these questions submitted by our members have been provided by Angela Pullekines, Manager, Member Relations, United Healthcare. Angela is focused exclusively on the National Railroad Accounts membership in all railroad plans and policies.

She is responsible for coordinating and representing United Healthcare at all labor meetings and railroad benefits fairs and conventions to assure members have a solid understanding of their current benefits and to explain any benefit changes for actively working railroad employees and retirees.

She is also responsible for assisting members approaching retirement to explain their medical coverage options and the process they need to follow to assure they get the most from their retirement benefits.

Angela can be reached at her office in Hartford, Connecticut, at 412-262-8078, or by e-mail at angela_pullekines@uhc.com.

Q. Can you explain the difference between UHC and BCBS?

A. You have up to three medical benefit administrators to choose from depending on your employer, location (i.e., zip code), and union. They are Aetna, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) and UnitedHealthcare (UHC). The benefits are the same through all three medical benefit administrators. The only basic differences would be provider network and customer service. In addition, UnitedHealthcare

has administrative responsibility to maintain and communicate eligibility for all members and all coverages.

Telemedicine Questions

Q. Can Teladoc prescribe medication or is it more of a general advice line?

A. Teladoc gives you access to US board certified doctors 24/7. You can use Teladoc for non-emergency issues and to be treated for conditions such as cold and flu symptoms, allergies, skin problems, and more. Teladoc doctors can also write prescriptions and have them sent directly to your local pharmacy.

Q. What is the copay for the Teladoc service and the phone number to call, and are there different numbers for BCBS vs UHC?

A. The copay under the MMCP (Managed Medical Care Plan) is \$10. If you are covered under the CHCB (Comprehensive Health Care Benefit), the deductible does not apply but you would have the 20% coinsurance. You can talk with a Teladoc doctor through the Teladoc app, website (Teladoc.com), or by calling 1-800-Teladoc (835-2362). You can also find more information on the Your Track to Health Website. This information would be the same no matter which medical benefit administrator you have (Aetna, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, or UnitedHealthcare).

Q. Is baby formula covered?

A. Normal every-day baby formula is not covered.

Q. Are there any specific medical guidelines in which formula

would be covered, such as allergies etc.?

A. The guidelines would be for those individuals (infants or adults) with metabolic disorders that necessitate the use of enteral formula (enteral nutrition formulas are used as nutritional replacements for patients who are unable to get enough nutrients in their diets).

Q. Is that done through Express Scripts at the local pharmacy via a prescription, or is it done through the mail?

A. In the event this falls under the guidelines for the use of enteral formula or enteral nutrition, it would not be covered under the medical plan. Those services would fall under Express Scripts through mail order.

Insurance and Furlough Questions

Q. My husband started working for the railroad in January, then got furloughed in September. I know you don't get vision or dental until you have been with the railroad a year. Does this time he is furloughed count as part of the year when he gets called back?

A. Yes, as long as the employee maintains their employment relationship and returns to work with the same railroad, it would count as part of the year. The employee needs to return to work and work the requisite amount of compensated service in the prior month before benefits begin.

Q. When a railroad employee goes onto furlough, how long after that do they still have their health insurance benefits?

A. If you are furloughed after you become an eligible employee and you have rendered compensated service for three months, you will be covered for Employee and Dependents Health Care Benefits during the furlough until the end of the fourth month following the month in which you last rendered compensated service.

Q. For wives who are pregnant and the husband gets furloughed, will there still be coverage for the "pre-existing pregnancy" at the time of delivery?

A. If the employee returns to work before the four months of furlough coverage ends there will be no break in the coverage. If you are pregnant on the date your coverage ends, benefits will continue to be payable for eligible expenses related to that pregnancy. Also, if the employee is the one who is pregnant, and the coverage is termed due to the furlough, we would cover the baby for 14 days. If the dependent is the one who is pregnant, then we would not be able to add the 14 days for the baby. You would want to give notification of the extension and also the due date so the records can be updated.

Flexible Spending Account (FSA)

Q. What happens to FSA money when a railroad employee goes on furlough? Will it remain on the card or just the portion that is paid into date?

A. When the member indicates how much he or she wants to contribute to the Healthcare FSA during open enrollment, they have the full amount available the beginning of January of the following year. By enrolling

in the Healthcare FSA, you agree to have a certain amount deducted from your wages that would otherwise be paid to you during the program year. These payments are deducted from your paycheck on a pre-tax basis. If you are out on furlough and your employer ceases to make deductions/contributions because you are not earning wages, you can continue the coverage on a self-pay after-tax basis.

Emergency Room

Q. My husband recently went to the ER for pain he thought might be pancreatitis or gallbladder issues. After about 20 minutes of consultation, he was sent home with a Zofran. Rather than the usual \$100 copay, he was charged the whole deductible that was left, \$275.00. Did the hospital make an error or did the insurance? Who do I call to get this fixed?

A. Due to the specific nature of this question, we would not be able to answer member-specific questions for the newsletter. If someone has a question about a bill received from a provider or facility, they should always contact the number on the back of their identification card.

This information should not be relied upon to determine coverage under your health plan. You must refer to the Summary Plan Description document for eligibility requirements, benefit coverages, limitations and/or exclusions. If differences exist between the benefits described in this Q&A and the Summary Plan Description document, the Summary Plan Description document governs.

Medical Benefits and Claims Contact Info

Aetna

Railroad Employees National Plan: 1-800-842-4044
United Transportation Union: 1-888-332-8742

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield

Railroad Employees National Plan: 1-866-267-3320
United Transportation Union: 1-866-267-3320

UnitedHealthcare

Railroad Employees National Plan: 1-800-842-9905
United Transportation Union: 1-888-445-4379

24/7 Nurse Support & Wellness Programs and Support

Railroad Healthlink - 1-866-735-5685

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Benefits and Claims

United Behavioral Health - 1-866-850-6212

FSA Benefits and Claims

1-888-298-9754

Prescriptions Benefits and Claims

Express Scripts – 1-800-842-0070

Additional Benefits and Services

Teladoc (Telemedicine)
1-800-Teladoc (835-2362)

Best Doctors (Expert 2nd Opinion)

1-866-904-0910

Health Advocate (Member Advocacy)

1-866-799-2690

Vital Decisions (Advanced Care Planning)

1-833-364-6896

Dental Benefits and Claims

Aetna Dental Member Services – 1-877-277-3368

Vision Benefits and Claims

EyeMed Member Services – 1-855-212-6003

Supplemental Sickness Benefits and Claims

Aetna Member Services
1-800-205-7651
Trustmark Member Services
1-800-504-9052

Life Benefits and Claims

MetLife Call Center - 1-800-310-7770

Retiree Planning and Benefits

UnitedHealthcare Retirement Specialist Services
1-800-842-5252
Railroad Employees National Early Retirement Major Medical Benefit Plan (ERMA)
1-800-842-5252
Supplemental GA-23111 Plans A, B, C, and E
1-800-842-5252
Medicare Supplemental Plan F
1-800-809-0453
Railroad Medicare (Palmetto GBA)
1-800-833-4455

Enrollment Support

Railroad Enrollment Services
1-800-753-2692
Railroad Eligibility Fax
1-248-733-6080
Railroad Enrollment and Eligibility Services
PO Box 30775
Salt Lake City, UT 84130-0775

Discount Programs

Aetna Discount Program
1-800-842-4044
Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield (Blue 365)
1-866-267-3320
UnitedHealthcare - UnitedHealth Allies
1-800-860-8773



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

Raffle tickets are still on sale 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" on August 20, 2020. Grill will be shipped directly to the winner.

Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

During this pandemic, please stay safe and well. Follow the guidelines that we are given. Please wear a mask when you go out and wash your hands often! Hopefully, we will adjust to our “new normal” because we can’t wait to see your smiling faces!!

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Heather Yates — Conway, AR ; Kelli Calala- Amherst, OH; Dena Gregory-Burchett —Donnellson, IA; Jeffery Spangle- Ft Wayne, IN; Kristina Hendricks — Beaver Falls, PA

CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Dues 2nd notices have been mailed to members-at-large who have not paid 2020 dues as yet. Please make sure to send your dues to me and that all of your information is correct so that you will continue to receive your newsletter. Dues payment deadline was March 1, 2020. ALL checks should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary or you may use PayPal. The PayPal link is located on our website.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships have been awarded. Please see the recipients on page 4-5. Congratulations to the winners and thank you so much to everyone who applied. It would be wonderful if we could offer a scholarship to everyone who applies; unfortunately we are not able to do this. We wish you all continued success in your desire to further your education.

AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

Thank you to those who submitted their Year-end Reports!

If I can help you or answer any questions, please let me know!!

Please send me all new members’ applications as you get them so we can add them to our mailing list.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

Gina Kuenning , VP of Flatrock Auxiliary 8 in North Platte, NE, has a beautiful grandson. Axle was born on May 5, 2020: weight 7 lbs, 15 oz., and 21 inches long. We are so happy for you and your family!!

OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

Member-at-large Donna Milford from Greenwood, SC - Donna’s mother, Claudine Sorrow, passed away on Monday March 16.

Georgia State Legislative Board Chairman Dwayne Massengale - Dwayne’s brother, Stephan Michael, passed away on Friday, March 27.

Michael R. Harting passed away on March 25. He leaves behind a wonderful family, wife Kathy of 25 years, and their two daughters. Mike worked as a locomotive engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and was a 25+ year active BLET member. He was a member of BLET Division 745 out of Elkhart, IN, currently serving as the Legislative Representative and as the Delegate to the National Division, as well as serving on the Indiana State Legislative Board Executive Committee.

Auxiliary 37 Member Brooksie Read-Duncan’s youngest son, Michael Read, passed away on the morning of April 13.

Member-at-Large Carol Perkins’ husband, Richard, passed away on April 6. Richard worked for NS out of Louisville, KY. He retired about 17 years ago.

Auxiliary 417 Sister Robyn Handley lost her father, Larry Joe Webb, on May 17, 2020.

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

Please contact me or any national officer when there is a death of a member or the death of one of their family members. We want to be able to send our condolences to the family. We would like to also share in the joy!! Please let me know of any exciting happenings!

Thank you 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

may be contracting COVID-19 at a higher rate than the general public. The BLET is supporting the Essential Workers Bill of Rights in part because it would mandate hazard pay for essential workers along with specific health and safety protections, appropriate compensation, paid sick leave, whistleblower protections, and protections for collective bargaining agreements.

"We would like to say thank you for supporting the hardworking women and men who are essential workers the nation cannot live without," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce wrote in letters to Sen. Warren and Rep. Khanna. "They are keeping the country going during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our members are on the front lines of this crisis and are helping to ensure delivery of critical food, personal protective equipment and hospital equipment in the effort to save lives. Railroad workers also are ensuring that the public can move safely on America's passenger rail network, so workers in other industries also are able to work and help America."

A copy of the proposed Essential Workers Bill of Rights can be found here (PDF): https://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Essential_Workers_Bill_of_Rights_List.pdf

Source: BLET National Website.

Two-Man Crew Efforts Stalled by COVID-19 Shutdown of Louisiana State Legislature

On March 31, 2020, Louisiana legislators introduced HB-776, a Two-Person Crew Bill, in the state House of Representatives according to SMART Transportation Division Louisiana Legislative Director Chris Christianson. With the exception of hostler service or utility employees, the bill would require two persons on all freight trains. Penalties for infractions would be a minimum of \$500, but not more than \$1000 for the first infraction, with penalties increasing for habitual repeat offenders up to \$10,000.

With the Louisiana Legislature adjourned until further notice, Christianson admits that there is a tough road ahead of this bill. However, he vows to continue working on it and

states that its chances for advancement will depend on how much time there is for it once the legislature reconvenes to address the avalanche of business that is piling up during COVID-19 limbo.

Source: Louisiana House Of Representatives

Victory For Two Person Crew in Washington State

The BLET and Washington State Legislative Board Chairman Shahraim Allen scored a recent big victory in the fight for Two-Person Crew with the State House and Senate passing HB 1841, which establishes minimum crew sizes for certain trains. Governor Jay Inslee signed this into law on March 27.

Right up to the Governor's signature, it was a continued fight, however, as reported by Progressive Railroading on March 18, 2020:

"Even at this endpoint the railroad lobbyists continue to make attempts to stifle the progress of this much needed safety legislation," said Washington SLB Chairman Shahraim Allen in a press release. "Despite this fact, we are taking counter measures to ensure once and for all that this bill makes it across the finish line in the behalf of our membership."

The Association of American Railroads (AAR) opposes state and federal legislative attempts to establish minimum train crews. Such requirements would "freeze evolution of railroad operations that might affect crew size, removing the incentive for future innovation," AAR officials said in a statement posted on the association's website.

Source: Progressive Railroading.

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



FROM BECKY SCHNEIDER, ASST. NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE

With the country currently re-opening in phases, everyone must continue to do

their part to keep each other and our families as safe as possible. It would be easier if the railroads felt as strongly about keeping their workforce safe, equipped, and rested, but that doesn't support their precision railroading models. KCS and NS, for instance, are doubling down on PSR and mothballing even more engines, as reported by Supply Chain Dive. Without railroads and the employees who keep them running, the "broken supply chain," as declared by the Chairman of Tyson Foods, would actually be broken, yet rarely are railroad employees singled out for their "essential services" that keep our country's suppliers and consumers connected.

Railroad Retirement

Effective Monday, March 16, 2020, all 53 field offices of the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) were closed until further notice with RRB employees working onsite and remotely out of an abundance of caution. Access to the Board can be done either via telephone or through the website. In addition, the RRB has cancelled all Pre-Retirement Seminars scheduled March through June. They have advised that they will continue to monitor the situation as it evolves and provide event details and updates as they are finalized. In the meantime, seminar materials are available online at www.rrb.gov.

Following passage on March 27, the next iteration of the CARES Act boosted unemployment and sickness benefits for railroaders. The one-week waiting period for these benefits was temporarily eliminated and applies to the first two-week registration period. Also, RRB Form SB1-1b, Statement of Sickness, normally requires a doctor's signature; however in lieu of Form SB1-1B, a written statement can be submitted for the first claim. Unemployment benefits under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act (RUIA) benefits are paid at the current rate, and extended benefits are available for those currently receiving benefits from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020.

The CARES Act also provides for additional benefits through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) which increases two-week RUIA unemployment benefits by \$1,200 beginning April 1, 2020, through July 31, 2020, and, if eligible, can be collected

even if they were denied benefits under the RUIA. The Board recommends contacting state unemployment services to see if they are eligible for PUA benefits. While these adjusted and expanded benefits sound helpful for furloughed employees, the devil is in the details. Bureaucracy, both at the Board and state levels, make claiming these benefits difficult at best.

Workers who have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, or are subject to quarantine, are eligible to receive sickness benefits and, in some cases, unemployment benefits. For those applying for disability benefits, the RRB announced they have hired Dr. Elizabeth Bonson as Chief Medical Officer, hoping to make the process more efficient.

For more details on any of the information contained above, including FAQs, please visit www.rrb.gov/benefits/coronavirus, or contact a field office at 877-772-5772, for more information and/or clarification. As with every agency and most businesses right now, wait times are longer than usual, so bring your patience.

Railroad Retirement as It Pertains to Disabled Children

Recently, a situation arose involving the need for an application for survivor benefits for a disabled child following the passing of the railroad employee. The RRB provided the following information which may be useful in homes with a disabled child.

Disabled children are not paid directly while the employee is alive; however, a survivor benefit is paid directly once the employee passes. If an employee has a child who was disabled prior to the age of 22, a survivor benefit will be paid to that child if the employee predeceases the child. The RRB requires the medical records and/or school records dated prior to the age of 22. A problem they have encountered is that sometimes the disabled child is 40 or 50 years old when the employee passes, so when applying for the direct benefits, obtaining those records can be challenging since doctors may be retired and it's been many years since the child attended school. To ease some of the challenge, the RRB suggests collecting these records now and submitting them to the Board.

They will be imaged and kept with the employee's records so that if the time comes to apply for direct benefits, they will be available when needed. Having that peace of mind at an already difficult time makes the process of applying much smoother, and negates the problem if the disabled child is not able to obtain and submit this information on their own.

RRB News Release; RRB Office; BLET Newsflashes; Railway Age.

Amtrak Update

Amtrak's day-to-day ridership is down 95% compared with last year. However, Amtrak and commuter railroads are still essential services needed to get other essential workers to and from their jobs. Passenger rail and mass transit have received some additional funding, but well below what is needed in the coming months. As of this writing, Amtrak is proposing a nearly 20% reduction in its workforce.

The inclusion of true infrastructure funding has been proposed in Congress, but has yet to make it into any of the CARES bills. Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has declared that any future legislation must be directly related to the pandemic. It does not include rebuilding our infrastructure and replacing jobs that may be gone forever because of it — jobs that cannot be exported. House T & I Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) disagrees with the Majority Leader, saying that addressing the infrastructure crisis facing our country is a necessary component of addressing an economic recession that could turn into the next Great Depression without decisive action.

As set forth above, freight and commuter operating crews are essential workers during this crisis, but transit workers are scrambling to access the personal protection equipment (PPE) they need to stay safe. According to the Rail Passengers Association, Amtrak is doing its best to distribute masks, gloves, sanitizer, and other vital PPE to on-board service personnel and have stepped up sanitization efforts on coaches and sleepers and creating spaces to ensure passengers are physically separated. Even with their efforts, service on the California Zephyr was cut when a worker on the route tested positive for the virus. The week of April 6, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in New York City confirmed that more than 7% of their workforce have either needed to quarantine or have tested positive. Nearly 125 of their workers have died from COVID, even though the MTA has been doing what they can to keep their workers safe by providing almost 250,000 N95 masks and ramping up disinfection system-wide. The money appropriated by Congress needs to be used to keep these essential workers as safe as possible.

As with any crisis, there are always those few who act in bad faith. Such is the case with a group of Texas lawmakers who are opposed to the Texas Central Railroad (TCRR), a privately funded high speed rail project between Dallas and Houston. This group has failed for the last six years to stop the project, so now they are resorting to using the COVID-19 outbreak to stop the rule making process, saying taxpayer funds shouldn't be wasted by continuing further dealings with TCRR. The process has been in the works since 2016. In September, the FRA approved the petition to issue a Rule of Particular Applicability (RPA), which addresses the fact that current standards are written for conventional systems that operate on shared rights-of-way with freight railroads. The Texas Central would not only make the trip between Dallas and Houston comparable to flights between the two cities, it would be an integral addition to the national passenger rail network.

— continued on back cover

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ANDREW M. HALEY
PRESIDENT
EDWARD P. HALEY
NATIONAL DIRECTOR

In-Formation

We are proud to announce that we have two new Local Auxiliaries that are currently In-Formation.

If you are in these areas and would like to join you can reach out to the point of contact listed below

La Crosse, Wisconsin
Mela Byerly - melab23@yahoo.com
Rachel Zentz - rachelzentzbnsf@gmail.com

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Erica Hill - mrsericahill@yahoo.com



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT JODI WALLACE AT
JODI_WALLACE@BLET-AUXILIARY.NET

Greetings from your Editor, Jodi Wallace

Sisters and Brothers,

Summer is upon us! Who thought we would never get here? Ever since March, it has been a crazy whirlwind around our country and the world. We have adapted as a group and found new ways to have meetings. Technology such as Zoom has become our new best friend. In some of the areas that have opened up, members are meeting in parks, keeping social distancing guidelines in mind.



We had a family trivia night on Zoom, inviting all the members-at-large, and members of local auxiliaries, as well as those that are still in the process of organizing, to join in the game. Much fun was had by all and hopefully it will be something we keep doing every once in a while.

With the implementation of these new technologies, our Executive Council has been able to conduct meetings online, as well as meetings with potential new auxiliaries. Members of our local auxiliaries are keeping in contact with each other via online meetings as well.

I would like to give a shout-out to some of our local auxiliaries: Auxiliary No. 417 out of Springfield, Missouri, has switched from "Cookies for the Crews" to "Cleaning for the Crews." They made sure their railroaders had disinfectant wipes to clean the cabs of their locomotives. Auxiliary No. 503 out of Salem, Oregon, made masks for their commuter crews. Mela Byerly, a member of our newly forming auxiliary in La Crosse, Wisconsin, made masks for people in her community. Thank you to all of you for making it easier, not only on our railroaders, but also for people of your community.

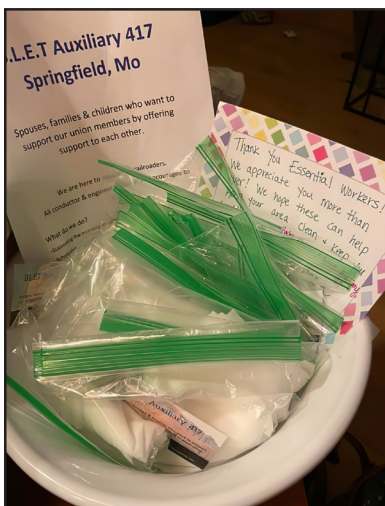
Jodi Wallace can be reached at 1-541-663-6966, jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net, or by snail mail at 1804 Washington Ave., La Grande, Oregon, 97850.



Auxiliary No. 503 out of Salem, Oregon, made masks for commuter crews.



Members of Auxiliary No. 99 in Amarillo, Texas, practice social distancing by holding meetings in a local park.



Wipes provided by Auxiliary 417 for crews to clean the cabs of their locomotives.



Face masks made by the members of Auxiliary 503 for the commuter crews in their area.

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 2020. Please have your submissions to Jodi on or before August 15, 2020.



BLET Auxiliary

Sereena Hogan, Publisher, BLET Auxiliary News
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Legislative Update, Continued from Page 14

If there is any teeny, tiny silver lining in the shutdowns in our country, it would be that most people have seen a marked difference in air quality in our urban areas. Maybe this sliver of hope could accelerate a global shift from planes to trains in this country. We just need the trains in place to accomplish that.

Source: Rail Passengers Association/Business Green

BNSF Loses Medical Privacy Fight

For some good news, ten rail labor unions working together since 2012 announced on April 2 that they successfully won a recent victory against BNSF Railway, forcing the carrier to change its return to work medical reporting requirements. In a settlement agreement, they have agreed to restrict the information required for employees to return from Medical Leave of Absence to only the specific information relating to the reason they were off work, and only as necessary to determine their fitness for duty. In most cases, a returning employee will need to fill out a short form verifying that

the employee can return without restriction, eliminating the onerous long form previously required by the Carrier.

Source: BLET Newsflash

Coronavirus Bringing Issues to the Forefront

Regardless of your political affiliation, the pandemic has affected most aspects of our daily life, including opinions on some of the major issues in this election cycle. Issues concerning: access to health care for those whose insurance is job connected; the ability to vote by mail because of future uncertainty (56% believe anyone should be able to vote by mail); and even keeping the post office afloat to handle those ballots, a problem made more precarious when Congress required their pensions to be fully funded. While these may not be railroad issues per se, they affect all of our friends, families, and even ourselves in one way or other.

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