



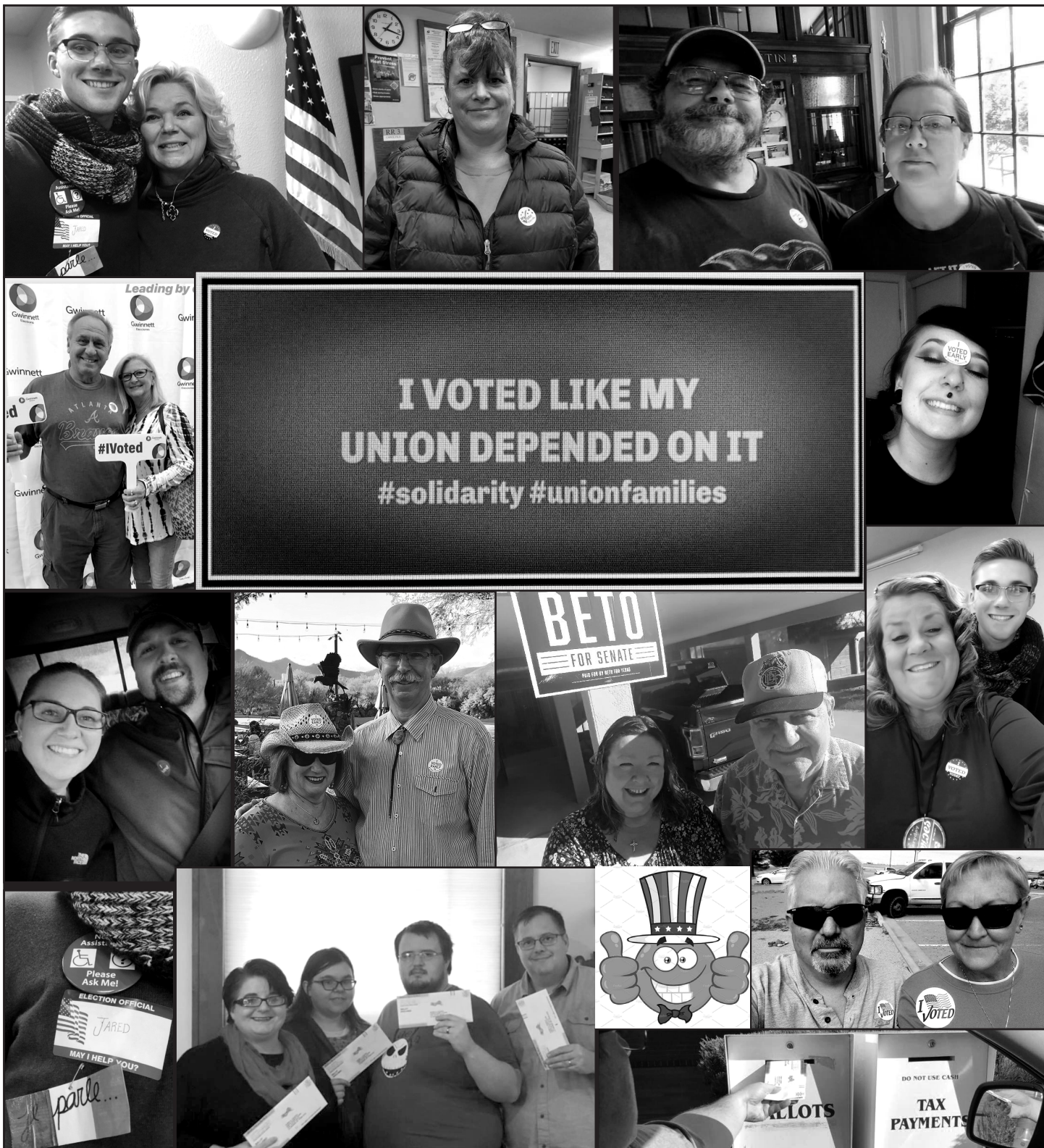
# BLET Auxiliary News

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

Volume 9, Number 4

Winter 2018

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](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)



## From the President - BY KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

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*"You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality."*

— Walt Disney

For as long as I can remember, every summer my family and I traveled to a union regional convention someplace fun and exciting, or, if it was a special summer, we headed to a national general convention. I can remember the details of arriving at that summer's destination and seeing all the familiar faces that I saw every summer. My father knew everyone, and so in turn did I, or so I thought. The union made up such a large and vital part of my childhood that when I finally left home and went on my way, I missed it.

Thankfully, I eventually met and married my husband Jason, and by coincidence, he was a railroader. I don't know who was happier, my dad or me. At that time, we didn't have a local auxiliary in my area, but it wasn't long before my friend Susie Burrola started Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary, and we were "off to the races." Our auxiliary has always had lofty goals, and we met each one head-on, trying every way we could to raise money, support one another, educate rail families, and award scholarships to our local youth.

Shortly after we formed, I took a lesson from my dad, and ran for Delegate to the Auxiliary National Convention that was going to be held in Reno in 2010. I took my family because I wanted to share with them the same experiences I remembered from my childhood; there is something so exciting about the National Convention. They were not disappointed. Driving home from Reno that year, I told my husband, "I'm going to be the National President someday." Susie and I both came home from Reno excited about everything that we had learned, and four years later, we both went to Las Vegas for the 2014 convention, where we were elected as national officers. On the way home from

that convention, I again told my family, "someday I will be the National President."

Over the four years I served as the National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative, I learned that the work of the national officers can be rewarding; however, it is time-consuming and at times it can feel as if you are getting one door after another slammed in your face. It takes someone special to do these jobs; it's not for the faint of heart.

As we prepared for the 2018 convention, I silently watched as now Past-President Sereena Hogan did all of the behind-the-scenes work that had to be done before, during, and after the convention, and I wondered if I could do what she had done. I did not make the decision to run as National President lightly because it's not a job where 50 percent could ever be enough; it's all or nothing.

It is an honor to have been elected as the National President this last October in Las Vegas, and it means so much to me to have a goal I had set for myself eight years earlier come to life. I know that the Auxiliary has its work cut out for it over the next four years if we are going to continue to do the vital work that needs to be accomplished, but I feel confident in the officer team that stands beside me. They are each talented in unique ways, and they each offer an opinion and a solution to every problem that comes our way.

On behalf of myself and the entire officer team, we thank you for putting your trust in us to manage this 134-year-old organization over the next four years. We will do everything within our power to help it flourish and thrive.

I wish all of our union families a wonderful holiday season and a happy and safe new year.

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**Kathleen "Kat" Bisbikis, National President**  
**BLET Auxiliary**  
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Whatever is beautiful,  
 Whatever is meaningful,  
 Whatever brings you happiness . . .  
 May it be yours this Holiday Season,  
 and throughout the coming year.  
**BL&ET Auxiliary National Officers**

*Kathleen Bisbikis*  
 BL&ET Auxiliary National President

*Jodi Wallace*  
 National 1st Vice President

*Lawana Poss*  
 National Secretary

*Terri Fleming*  
 National Treasurer

*Jessica Cole*  
 National 2nd Vice President

*Becky Schneider*  
 National 3rd Vice President

*Velma Williams*  
 National Chaplain

*Roseanna Surchik*  
 Alternate National Secretary

*Helen Brand*  
 Alternate National Treasurer

*Sereena Hogan*  
 Past National President

## The Life of a Railroad Wife

By Whitney Ballard

Tonight, I scraped every bit of beef tips and rice into a Tupperware container. Why didn't I just start supper sooner? I beat myself up for not knowing the things I couldn't have known and for not controlling the things I couldn't control. It's only 6 p.m., but I could've had this done at 5. I didn't need to stay out on the porch swing to watch everyone play. We could have eaten together earlier.

The sound of the weed-eater and my husband's cell phone were synonymous as I peeked my head out of the door to tell him that supper was ready, just for him to tell me that he had been called into work. You see, I was certain that after we played in the yard until the sun dimmed and the mosquitoes started biting, that my husband and I could break off just long enough that he trim a few grassy spots around the house and I finish the gravy. Then we'd eat together and eventually put the kids to bed. Afterwards, we'd have a couple minutes to think/talk. We'd go to bed at the same time, in the same bed.

You would think I'd have learned by now. It's those

exact moments when you're sitting on the porch swing, watching kids and winding down that the quiet is pierced by the ringtone. Sometimes it's a false alarm; the ringtone isn't as much of a stoplight as it is a sign to yield/proceed with caution.

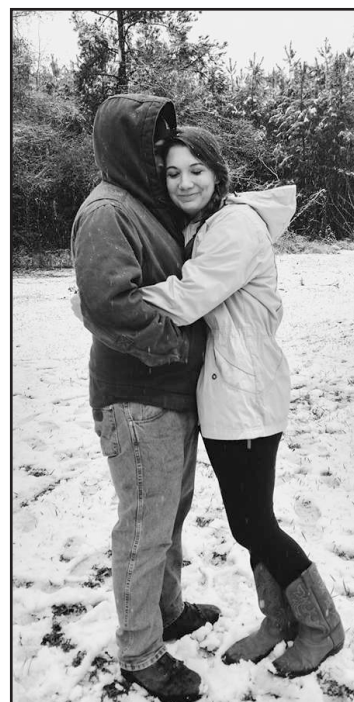
"Mmm, no thank you," is my green light. My sigh of relief. This job wasn't a necessity.

But sometimes I can hear the automated voice. This message is for.... There are the details of the job, but I don't read into those too much. No matter what information the robotic, automated voice decides to give, I could see my husband again tomorrow morning. I could see him again in a few days.

Tonight, the automated voice won. I heard the shower running. I walked into our bedroom and saw the black work bag half-packed on the floor.

I quickly checked the dryer for two pairs of work pants because I hadn't once thought about laundry today.

— continued on Page 9



Chase and Whitney Ballard



### 3rd Quadrennial Convention: United, Moving Forward!

"United, Moving Forward" was the theme set forth by the BLET National Division for their 4th National Convention. In keeping with tradition, the BLET Auxiliary adopted the same theme for our 3rd Quadrennial Convention, held simultaneously with the BLET Convention, in Las Vegas, Nevada, October 1 – 3. Our 11 delegates and 9 national officers accomplished much during our three full days of meetings, deliberating on the 37 resolutions that were presented for consideration, and electing new national officers to lead this organization for the next four years. Acting National Chaplain Jessica Cole did an outstanding job opening the General Session each day and offering meaningful and inspiring poems and devotional readings to set the tone and keep us grounded. One of the significant changes that resulted from these proceedings was a \$5.00 dues increase, which will go into effect in 2019. Another major shift is the change in the term that the National Secretary must serve. In the past, that position held an eight-year term. It has now been lowered to a four-year term in hopes that it will draw more interest with a shorter time commitment. Also, associate members have now been given the opportunity to hold office in their local auxiliaries. We have so many active associate members, it was voted on and passed with enthusiasm, opening the window for so many more members to become involved. Associate members, however, are not qualified to run for a national office. All of these changes are reflected in the revised Constitution & Bylaws which will be in print and posted on the website in early January 2019.

Our new national officers include President Kathleen Bisbikis, 1st Vice President Jodi Wallace, Secretary Lawana Poss, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Jessica Cole, 3rd Vice President Becky Schneider, Chaplain Velma Williams, Alternate Secretary Roseanna Surchik, and Alternate Treasurer Helen Brand. Terri Fleming will remain in her position as National Treasurer for the next four years and, of course, Sereena Hogan became our immediate Past President.

We are forever grateful to those national officers who served for the previous term, from 2014 to 2018. Your service is much appreciated, and we hope that you will all stay in touch!

On the final day of the convention, BLET National President Dennis Pierce took time out from the BLET Convention to address our delegation, thanking us for the work we do, thanking our previous administration, and congratulating our newly elected officers. President Pierce also spoke of the importance of staying involved in the political process as we may be facing some tough times ahead.

We were fortunate to have other guest speakers, including Susan Tukul, President of LECMPA; Andy Haley, President of Cornerstone Assurance Group; and Jesse Taylor, President of BRCF. We appreciate all of them taking the time to speak to our delegation to ensure we are all educated on the importance of the different types of insurance policies available to railroaders.

We extend a great big THANK YOU to the BLET National for all their help before and during the convention and for all that they provided for us to conduct our business on behalf of the BLET Auxiliary. Congratulations to President Pierce and the other members of the BLET Advisory Board who were elected or re-elected by acclamation, and to all the national officers elected to serve the BLET for the next four years.





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# Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

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2018 is quickly coming to an end. It truly means that it is time for new beginnings. I am extremely honored to serve as National Secretary again. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call or e-mail me.

If you would like to view our newsletter online instead of receiving it by mail....GO GREEN! Just let me know of your preference!

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

David Geisler — Lakewood, CO; Laura Reihm — Lake St. Louis, MO; Karen Urban — Superior, WI; Susan Garland — Thompsons Station, TN; Christine Baldwin — La Grande, OR; Shelby Ostrander — Des Moines, IA; Rhonda Groose — Olean, MO; Nikki Walker — Bridgewater, IA; Shila Borchert — Sanger, TX; Brandy Hyde — Florence, SC; Kristel Myers — Shepherdstown, WV; Marketa Wells — Las Vegas, NV; Steven Wells — Las Vegas, NV.

## CARE AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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

Please 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!

## MEMBERS AT LARGE

Dues notices will be mailed soon. Please make sure that all of your information is correct. Dues payments must be received in my office by March 1, 2019.

## AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

You will receive your Auxiliary Packets soon.

Please have these back to me BEFORE March 1, 2019. If you have any questions about the forms, please call or e-mail me. I will be more than happy to assist you in getting these forms properly filled out and processed.

## SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have children who are college bound, they may be eligible to apply for the BLET Auxiliary Scholarship. Scholarship information and applications can be obtained on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). You can also find a link from the BLET website at [www.ble-t.org](http://www.ble-t.org) under "Departments," then "BLET Auxiliary." Scholarship applications for the 2019-2020 academic school year are due in my office on or before April 1, 2019. Late applications will not be considered.

Please read ALL instructions! Changes have been made to the application and eligibility.

## OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

Our heartfelt condolences are extended to Helen Brand, Alternate National Treasurer. Helen's brother, Patrick Hicks, passed away on November 14. Please keep Helen and her family in your thoughts and prayers. Helen is a member of Helen Gould Auxiliary, Osawatomie, Kansas.

Our sympathies to the Barto family. Heather Barto's mother-in-law, Elaine Barto passed away. Heather Barto is a member of NorCal 39 in California.

Please call or e-mail 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!

I send warm wishes to you and your families for a beautiful Christmas and a safe happy New Year!!



*Lawana Poss can be reached at 770-497-8898, or [Lewp2007@bellsouth.net](mailto:Lewp2007@bellsouth.net).*

*"Just be yourself. Let people see the real, imperfect, flawed, quirky, weird beautiful, magical person that you are."*

*— Mandy Hale*



Jessica Cole

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY JESSICA COLE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE, AND  
BECKY SCHNEIDER, ASSISTANT NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE



Becky Schneider

## JESSICA'S UPDATE:

Greetings from your newly-elected Second and Third Vice Presidents. It is a formidable task to take up where Kathleen Bisbikis left off when she vacated this post to become BLET Auxiliary National President. As the saying goes, "she left big shoes to fill."

Your new legislative reports will have two sections, one submitted by me, which will cover about 50% of the recurrent and new national issues, along with state news from the eastern states. The other will be submitted by Becky Schneider, 3rd Vice President/Assistant National Legislative Rep., and will cover the remaining 50% or so of national issues, along with news from the western states.

It's an impossible task to find everything that is potentially relevant, so we wholeheartedly invite submissions from members!! Submit items to Jessica at [jcts1987@gmail.com](mailto:jcts1987@gmail.com).

### Midterm Election Recap

The 2018 Midterm Election drew a large and divided electorate across the country. Many positions, from governorships and Senate seats, to local and regional offices, were very close and heated races, with results not clear until the following day.

Never let it be said that one vote doesn't matter, because in the 2018 Midterms, it certainly did!

Overall, the end picture is cautiously encouraging for the BLET, whose position tends to agree with and thrive under Democratic policies. On the national stage, Republicans increased their majority in the U.S. Senate, but the House of Representatives gained a Democratic majority, insuring a potential balance for the GOP stranglehold on National politics. Overall, on a state and national level, many Teamster-friendly candidates came out swinging hard and won back seats lost in 2016, and workers made their voices known at the polls

in record numbers, and it MATTERED!

The scourge of Right to Work legislation has been sweeping the country and threatens to become national law. Should this happen, most of the benefits we take for granted as railroad families will disappear, for without a strong Union, our contracts will be null and void.

Wisconsin was one of the key genesis states for Right to Work, with the very popular GOP Governor Scott Walker, a man funded mostly by out-of-state business moguls, reneging on his promise to not promote Right to Work after demonizing public sector workers and decimating their unions. Walker targeted Right to Work next and got that done too. But his stranglehold reign surprisingly ended in the 2018 Midterm. The man who couldn't begin to beat him in 2014, State Schools Superintendent Tony Evers, won by a razor thin margin in a 90% voter turnout in 2018. This gives some encouragement for union minded folks and also proves the importance of never giving up the fight and never thinking one vote doesn't matter. In the end, Walker and all the money behind him was taken out by a teacher, a member of the educational community he had attacked with special aggression. Karma?

### Retired BNSF Engineer Makes Good In 2018 Election

Fort Madison Democrat Jeff Kurtz secured a seat representing House District 83 in the Iowa Legislature Tuesday after defeating his Republican opponent.

Kurtz, a retired locomotive engineer for BNSF, came out ahead of Montrose Republican Jeff Reichman, a small business owner and reserve officer with the U.S. Marine Corps who works at Roquette America in Keokuk. Kurtz secured 60.58 percent of the district vote, compared to Reichman's 39.29 percent.

"I'm just an ordinary guy that has a lot of extra friends," Kurtz said. "I had so

much support during the race."

Kurtz and Reichman were vying for a seat long held by Democratic Rep. Jerry Kearns of Keokuk, who announced in January he would not seek re-election this year."

(Source: *The Hawkeye*, November 7, 2018)

### Safe Freight Act

The Safe Freight Act of 2017 is H.R. Bill 233 and prohibits the movement of trains with fewer than one certified engineer and one certified conductor. The 103 Democratic co-sponsors have been joined by 16 Republican co-sponsors who appreciate the dire safety concerns associated with one-person crews.

In the meantime, the never-ending profit motive driving carrier management has stirred up talk of autonomous crewless trains in the future, a truly terrifying thought, not just for safety reasons, but also for job security fears.

Autonomous passenger trains already operate routinely in places such as the U.K. and Japan, and an Australian mining company operates autonomous freight trains on a 60-mile stretch of track. Autonomous trains are not currently in operation in the U.S.

Safety concerns are many, including fears that the autonomous systems would be targets for hackers. In addition, no crew means no first responder on the scene of a wreck or a Haz Mat spill. Furthermore, the immense weight and speed of a freight train, combined with the sight distance range required for a human engineer to react to variables in a timely fashion, make the idea that a computer could do it as well or better seem quite dubious.

### Right to Work

Spurred by the recent Supreme Court Janus decision, National Right to Work Act has gained a great deal of momentum since 2017, when H.R.

785 was introduced. In essence, this bill will financially starve unions into nonexistence. If unions disappear, all of the contractual benefits your union secures for you, from good healthcare to held-away pay, to seniority rights will also disappear.

This bill has 129 Republican co-sponsors and no Democratic co-sponsors. Much of the future success of this bill will hinge on the outcome of the 2018 midterm election.

On a state level, Ohio has a new fight brewing over Right to Work, with Republican-sponsored HB 53 entering hearings early in November, this despite the fact that Ohio's electorate overwhelmingly defeated a similar proposal in 2011. Unions are putting up a good fight and it appears the bill may not go much further than initial hearings for the time being, but workers must not let their guard down.

### Positive Train Control

Check the FRA website at [fra.gov](http://fra.gov) for a Positive Train Control Implementation Dashboard that shows the progress of many carriers on various parameters needed to be fully compliant.

The following article was published by The Transportation Review Board in September 2018 as a nationwide overview of the general status of PTC Implementation:

### *Positive Train Control: Most Railroads Expect to Request an Extension, and Substantial Work Remains Beyond 2018*

*Forty railroads including Amtrak, commuter, and freight railroads are currently required by statute to implement positive train control (PTC), a communications-based system designed to slow or stop a train that is not being operated safely. PTC must be interoperable, meaning trains can operate seamlessly on the same PTC-equipped track, including "tenants" that operate on track owned by another "host" railroad. Although*



the deadline for PTC implementation is December 31, 2018, railroads may receive a maximum 2-year extension to December 31, 2020, if they meet certain statutory criteria. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) was asked to review railroads' PTC implementation progress. This statement by Susan Fleming, Director, Physical Infrastructure, discusses (1) railroads' implementation progress and Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA's) steps to assist them and (2) how railroads and FRA plan to approach the 2018 and 2020 deadlines. GAO analyzed railroads' most recent quarterly reports covering activities through June 30, 2018; sent a brief questionnaire to all 40 railroads; and interviewed officials from FRA and 16 railroads, selected in part based on those identified as at-risk by FRA. In March 2018, GAO recommended FRA take steps to systematically communicate extension information to railroads and to use a risk-based approach to prioritize agency resources and workload. FRA has taken some steps to address these recommendations, such as recently communicating and clarifying extension requirements to all railroads during three symposiums, and GAO will continue to monitor FRA's progress.

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Summary URL:  
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/694473.pdf>  
Corporate Authors:  
U.S. Government Accountability  
Officem 441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

FRA has awarded millions in grants to help railroads work toward compliance, but there are still numerous delays in getting this accident prevention technology in place across the country. Nonetheless, progress is being made. Chicago-based passenger carrier Metra recently began revenue service demonstrations (RSDs) of its PTC system on the Rock Island District Line which runs from Chicago southwest to Joliet, Illinois.

RSDs are the last step before fully implementing PTC and involve running some of the full-service trains with PTC engaged to see if the system is working. If the RSDs are successful,

Metra targets full implementation of PTC in January 2019.

(Source: *Progressive Railroading*, Published October 17, 2018)

### **Taxi/Transport**

The most dangerous part of working for the railroad is not always on the rail. Unsafe crew transport taxis have been an issue for years, sometimes in the form of ill-maintained vehicles, and other times because of sleep deprived or impaired drivers.

Much of this issue has been dealt with on a state-by-state basis, but this leaves the obvious door open that a crew taxi company based out of a lenient state can be contracted by a carrier for work in a stricter state, and the more stringent safety laws will not necessarily carry over to the out-of-state taxi.

Progress has been made on a national level through carrier companies themselves. Union Pacific, for example, now gives employees the right to refuse transport in vehicles they deem unsafe or with drivers they believe to be impaired by sleep deprivation or other causes.

(Source: *Wisconsin State Legislative Board*)

### **Union Pacific Job Cuts**

In an effort to mitigate expected 2019 shortfalls versus projected profit targets, Union Pacific plans to cut 475 jobs in the fourth quarter, with more cuts likely in the future. The reductions will be across the board and will affect both union and nonunion workers and are expected to continue through 2020. 85% of Union Pacific's 42,000 employees are union members represented by 14 unions.

(Source: *Wall Street Journal*, October 23, 2018)

### **National Mediation Board and Railroad Retirement Board Funding to Remain Steady**

The "minibus" budget bill signed by President Trump will leave 2018 funding levels in place for the National Mediation Board and Railroad Retirement Board going forward into 2019.

The National Mediation Board (NMB) handles dispute resolution between carriers and rail unions through mediation and arbitration. A backlog

of unresolved Section 3 cases has resulted in closure of unfunded, unresolved cases more than three years old. The board has been awarded a boost in funding to nearly \$14 million in 2018 to try to address the backlog, and some closed but unresolved cases may be eligible for reopening if the aged-out party writes a letter to NMB.

NMB had 6400 open cases at the end of October 2018.

Railroad Retirement Board will receive \$123.5 million, —\$113.5 million to be used for administrative expenses and the \$10 million remainder to support efforts to upgrade its information technology system.

(Source: *SmartUnion*, published October 29, 2018)

### **Random Drug Test Increase**

Due to a 2017 increase in percentage of positive test results, the Federal Transit Authority will step up the minimum number of random drug screenings from 25% to 50% for covered employees effective January 1, 2019.

Alcohol testing is not affected by increased screening scrutiny and will remain at 10%.

(Source: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/n>)

### **Western States Regional News from the Members**

Sister Cheri Brown reports that her home state of Minnesota had a 64% voter turnout, 2.6 Million people, which is the largest midterm turnout in Minnesota history. Democrats took control of the House but the GOP still holds the Senate. According to Cheri, many friends of Labor were elected and she is hopeful they will push rail issues forward.

*Jessica Cole lives in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She can be reached at [Jcts1987@gmail.com](mailto:Jcts1987@gmail.com) or 262-672-9742.*

### **BECKY'S UPDATE:**

Thank you to the delegates and national officers for their vote of confidence in electing me to the office of 3rd VP/ANLR. Keeping up with legislation as it pertains to railroaders can be a lot of work, but

a totally worthwhile endeavor. As Jessica's assistant, I will be reporting on issues pertaining to Amtrak, Railroad Retirement and Cross Border Train issues in addition to various issues as they arise west of the Mississippi. I look forward to fulfilling this office in the manner it was first imagined and providing assistance to our National Legislative Representative in keeping our members informed and up to date. If any member has information they would like to contribute, please don't hesitate to let us know.

### **AMTRAK**

With the election now behind us and control of the House of Representatives coming in January, we are hopeful that we can see progress made in infrastructure improvements. Many Democratic representatives have tagged this issue among several others as issues on which they could work with the President. Connecting America, not just by highways and airports, but also by rail, would provide a much-needed service, especially for rural Americans. Amtrak's long-distance train, the "Empire Builder," that travels between Chicago and the Pacific Northwest, through the Big-Sky Country and most of the Lewis & Clark Trail, is a prime example of how much train service is needed in the "fly over" part of our great Nation. At their recent Fourth National Convention, the BLET delegates endorsed a resolution of their strong support of Amtrak and against any attempts to downgrade service or eliminate it completely.

As reported by now National President Kathleen Bisbikis in the Autumn Newsletter, the Senate passed a "mini-bus" spending package, which included Amtrak funding. The bill was referred to conference committee to reconcile the differences in spending between the House and Senate bills. Hopefully, the committee will be able to reconcile the bill during the remaining lame duck session. House conferees are Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), Aderhold (R-AL), Simpson (R-ID), Calvert (R-CA), Cole (R-OK), Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Graves (R-GA), Young (R-IA), Rutherford (R-FL), Lowey (D-NY), Price (D-NC), Bishop (D-GA), McCollum (D-MN), Quigley (D-IL) and Pingree (D-ME). Senate conferees are Murkowski

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## One Person CAN Make a Difference!

*By Becky Schneider, BLET Auxiliary National 3rd VP/ANLR*

In today's highly charged political climate where Americans are constantly bombarded by the 24-hour news cycle and cable television networks that often cater to the fringes of both conservatives and liberals, it seems easier than ever to let apathy take hold. Of course, we all have to resist that tendency because apathy solves nothing.

One person can make a difference in our lives and

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*Never ever doubt the power of one person, as it is each drop that fills the bucket.*  
— Mala Venkateswaran, Quora

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our country. One person's choice made all the difference in our fight for reforming Railroad Retirement and provides some insight into that crazy place we call Congress. In January of 2001, the Senate was evenly split (50-50) between the two parties with out-going VP Al Gore representing the tie vote before the new Congress was sworn in. After the inauguration of President George Bush on January 20th, the tie vote changed to the new Republican VP.

In June of 2001, Republican Senator Jim Jeffords got cross-wise with his party and declared himself an independent who would caucus with the Democrats. That one Senator's actions took away from the Republicans the power of the tie-breaking vote to a Senate majority of 51 Democrats to 49 Republicans. Tom Daschle was the Majority Leader but with that one change he became able to set the agenda. If these events had not occurred, it's doubtful Railroad Retirement Reform would have been accomplished for years, if ever, forcing railroaders to work longer before being able to retire and widows to lose two-thirds of their household income when the employee passed away.

Like her or not, if only two voters per precinct in the 2016 election in the State of Michigan had voted for Hillary Clinton, the winner-take-all electoral votes would have gone to her instead of Donald Trump. Proof positive that EVERY vote matters.

Aside from the political examples above, there are so many people great and small who have made a big difference in our world — maybe not single-handedly, but they were the catalyst to great things. The list is long, but here is a list of some of the more notable ones in history:

- Sir Isaac Newton – Natural Philosopher, key figure in Scientific Revolution
- Albert Einstein – Theoretical Physicist
- Leonardo DaVinci – Inventor and Renaissance man
- Nelson Mandela – Political leader, activist, philanthropist, dismantled Apartheid
- Mahatma Ghandi – Activist for Indian independence through non-violent disobedience
- Martin Luther King, Jr. – Father of the Civil Rights Movement
- Malala Yousafzai – Advocate for education, shot in the head for going to school

Although it's not likely any of us will be Einsteins or Ghandis, that doesn't mean that we cannot make a difference in our world. Each of us is making a difference in our families, by inspiring and raising our children, working, taking care of our elderly, and contributing our time and money to the cause that is closest to our hearts. The most immediate and best way to make a change is to exercise your civic right and duty to vote, and do all we can to see that everyone we know votes.

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## Every Vote Counts!

*By Cami Price, Wickliffe, Ohio*

Tim Piatt was running for the 36th House District in the State of Ohio against the incumbent Anthony Devitis. I was fortunate enough to help Piatt out in his race for the Statehouse. My task involved canvassing to get Piatt's message across. His message is: safer and better school systems, working to fix the opioid crisis, and equality of the sexes. It was really inspirational to see how passionate Mr. Piatt is about making the world a better place for future generations.

Although canvassing seems like an easy task, it became clear just how important it was. In politics, name recognition is everything regardless of how well (or not) a candidate works. Many of the individuals I spoke to were pleasantly surprised with just how active Piatt is without coming from a background in politics.

Along the way I was able to meet some very influential political figures such as the candidate for Lieutenant Governor in Ohio, Betty Sutton. In talking with Sutton, it was evident that she too just wants to see Ohio be the thriving [political] state that it is.

After the November election results came in, the races were astonishingly close. With a great voter turnout, this election cycle was one of the most well-participated in Ohio history.

*Cami Price is the daughter of Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman Tim Price and Member-at-Large Tetiana Ruggles-Price. She frequently accompanies Tim on his trips to the Ohio State House to lobby on behalf of BLET and Teamster members and, in July 2017, she had the opportunity to lobby on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Cami is a sophomore at Lake Erie College, and has been the recipient of BLET Auxiliary scholarships for the last two years.*



**Photo on Left:** Cami Price with Tim Price and Tim Piatt, who sought election to the Ohio House of Representatives to represent District 36.  
**Photo on right:** Cami Price with Betty Sutton, who ran for the position of Lieutenant Governor of Ohio.



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## The Life of a Railroad Wife, continued from front cover . . .

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I shook them one by one, folded them, and placed them in the chair in our bedroom. Followed by two pairs of long, black, thick socks. Followed by two solid-colored shirts with pockets. Followed by gym shorts because you just never know. He'll put them in the bag his way in a haste before rushing out the door.

Our oldest son is sitting at the kitchen table with his school notebook out, ready to do homework. You can play and we'll do this in thirty minutes. Our baby boy followed me around while I gathered up clothes; he whined long enough to end up on my hip while I placed two plums and a bag of chips on top of the Tupperware container. It went onto the counter so that my husband wouldn't miss it while he's already seeing railroad signs and doing mental safety checks on his way out the door.

I know that none of this seems very extraordinary to you. Wives packing lunches/dinners/breakfasts. Husbands going to work. It's the game we play to do it. The guessing game. The waiting game.

Surprises keep a marriage alive, right?! I like eating hamburgers for breakfast. I like having our "weekend" date on a Monday.

Surprises also keep the stress alive. The day before Thanksgiving is spent compulsively refreshing the board to see when the next train goes out/next train comes in/next job comes open just for Johnny to commit a foul by calling in sick.

The playing field is never ending. Sometimes the team completes a fifty-yard rush in mere minutes. Other times, they hit every fourth down as they inch toward the end zone. Sometimes a sack knocks them on their feet. Wheels stop turning. Engines stop running. A crackhead ran into the train and I'm watching it unfold via live news video in my living room.

Being a railroad wife is having a breadwinner husband who can be the sole provider for a family of four if need be. It's nice vacations two weeks per year. It's firing insurance and health insurance and retirement.

It's also going out to eat and knowing your husband is half there while he checks his phone to try and guess whether he'll be able to enjoy a meal or only a half. It's knowing he'd rather you

have made a home-cooked meal because his last three were on the road. It's herding two kids at the ballpark by yourself while people who don't know this life cast judgment on why their dad has only made three games.

It's listening to marriage advice tell you to sync your calendars when in reality, you haven't had a calendar since saying I do. It's also listening to your preacher tell you never to go to bed angry when the night before, your husband left for a 36-hour trip after a screaming argument about I-don't-even-remember-what. It's having a pity party on the way to family functions when you know your cousins' spouses will be there. And then it's hating yourself because you think about how some husbands are overseas for months or how some return to their heavenly home instead of their red-bricked one.

I feel like a single mom is something I've heard among women with husbands who work these hours. I get it. I really do. I take my kids everywhere with me, and oftentimes alone. When I even think about adding a third child, it's not so much a question of whether or not my husband and I can handle it. It's a question of whether or not I can handle it when he's gone. But I've been a single mom, and it isn't one and the same. And maybe it's this characteristic about my past that allows me to tap into a grateful mindset when all I want to do is scream while I'm getting the kids ready for church by myself.

In the mornings when he's home sleeping at 6 a.m. while I'm dealing with before-school attitudes, I have scrambled eggs with a huge side of envy. In the same way, I'm sure he glares at me sleeping under warm covers while he puts on his big coat and yellow vest at 3 a.m.

That's the thing about marriage, and especially marriage that's poked and prodded with constant sleep deprivation from jobs/kids. On Monday, I'm home with a feverish baby waking every hour while my husband sleeps in a silent hotel room. On Tuesday, I'm napping in a quiet house while rain hits the tin, the same rain hitting my husband's hat and shoulders as he's switching cars in the rail yard.

Meanwhile, we pull in opposite directions and our engines move only slightly to the left and then the right, left, right. The railroad crossing gates are still triggered and the cars

continuously pile up while we each tug in our own direction. But when we move in the same direction . . . still connected, we move toward a new goal, lifting the crossing gates and allowing the cars to enter into our yard/time/hearts.

To my hardworking railroad husband: I promise that I will \*try\* to keep quick, easy-to-grab leftovers in the fridge for those nights when you so graciously let me sleep as you creep around the bedroom and out the door at midnight. I promise to hold things down at home while you're out there making our lives better. I promise to include you in the things you miss as much as I can, even if it's just by sending pictures. I promise to always think you're so cute when you walk through that front door in that yellow vest and work boots. (Most. Attractive. Thing. Ever.)

I promise to be ready for however you come through that door and I'm getting better every day at reading the faces that show me how the 10-minute car ride home wasn't enough to wash off 12 hours on the tracks.

Most days, my husband comes in and heads straight to the shower. Sometimes he falls asleep on the couch in dirty jeans. You see, no matter how hard it is for me, the constant availability/anxiety/apprehensiveness must be that much harder for him. While he's snoring on the couch, my eyes often go to the company's slogan printed on the back of his vest: I'm coming home. I try not to ask when. And instead be thankful that he is. He is coming home.

I will keep staying up during late night hours to spend time with him when he's home and try not to regret it the next morning when little feet pitter patter down the hall all too early.

I will keep growing into an independent person because it's a trait I will continue to need in my marriage. I will keep rolling with the punches/embracing the changes/enjoying the time I'm given between coming home and crew calls. That's the thing about time. You always think you have a lot of it.

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*Whitney Ballard is a railroad wife and blogger. Her husband, Chase Ballard, is a conductor for Norfolk Southern. They live in Selma, Alabama, with their two boys, Briar and Gideon. Find this article and more at [trainsandtantrums.blog](http://trainsandtantrums.blog).*

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## First-hand Experience Leads to Re-Affirming Lesson in the Value of Unions

*By Mariah, Burrola, Vancouver, WA*

August 29, 2018 was scheduled to be the first day of school for Battle Ground School District in Battle Ground, Washington. It was the beginning of my teaching career and I was excited. For weeks, the other teachers and I had worked hard to get our rooms ready. After a tumultuous summer of teacher contract negotiations, we hoped that an agreement would be reached by the time morning came on August 29.

Teacher contracts in virtually every school district in Washington state had re-opened for negotiations earlier in the year and some districts and their teachers unions had struck deals early in the summer to provide raises for educators. However, as the opening day of school approached, the majority of districts in southwest Washington had yet to come to an agreement. On the evening of August 28, we received the call we were all dreading; no agreement had been reached and school would not start the next day.

Instead of welcoming kids to our classrooms, teachers woke up and headed to school to walk the picket line. This is when I started to really see the importance of what a union can do. Every single teacher in my building came together and embraced the journey that lay ahead. In the days that followed, our bargaining team worked day and night to make sure we finally got what we deserved and would not give in. As each day passed, we grew stronger and closer and remained hopeful that it would come to an end soon. On the picket line, we built a family, and when it got hard, there was always someone there to pick you up.

The strength of the union really showed when an injunction was passed for us to return to school even though no agreement was reached, and we voted to continue to strike no matter the consequences. Our union president Linda Peterson was ready to go to jail and do whatever it took to make sure we did not give in to a district that was trying to wait us out.

Our union wasn't just teachers; we had our fellow brothers and sisters from other unions come out to walk the line with us. Our local

firefighters and iron workers unions sent people every day to walk with us and to attend meetings where we were not allowed. Our union was bigger than just the Battle Ground Education Association; it was every single union in Washington and Oregon coming to support us in this battle for our rights. That is what a union family is—we are connected across the country, giving each other support in the fight for what is right.

Finally, on September 15, 2018, Battle Ground Public Schools and its union reached a tentative agreement, and on September 16, 2018, by a vote of 687-6, teachers with the Battle Ground Education Association overwhelmingly ratified a new two-year salary contract, ending the strike. Our first day of school finally came on September 17, 2018, and it was the best first day ever. School families throughout the district were stronger and were determined to provide the best year for our students.

What I learned from this strike is that the fight is worth it. The long days of walking and the emotions that came with not knowing what was going to happen next were all worth it. A union brings people together; it changes people's lives. I know that my job will always be protected and that my union will always fight for what I deserve. That is the beauty of a union; you gain a family and you gain knowing your worth. We are not just little fish in a big pond, we are an organized, unified school of fish that sticks together and can weather any storm. Thirteen days we spent on that picket line, but it only took one day for us to all learn what a union is all about.

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*Mariah Burrola is the daughter of Susie Burrola, President of Nor Cal 39 Auxiliary, and Oscar Burrola, BLET Division 839 Local Chairman. She is living in Vancouver, Washington, and will be a member of the newly forming Pacific Northwest Auxiliary in northwestern Oregon. Mariah was the recipient of a \$1000 Auxiliary Scholarship for School Year 2017-18, and a \$2500 LECMPA-BLET Auxiliary scholarship for School Year 2018-19. In addition to her teaching job in Battle Ground, Washington, she is currently pursuing a double Masters Degree in teaching and social work.*

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## New Local Auxiliaries in Formation

*By Jodi Wallace, 1st Vice President and National Outreach Coordinator*

Currently, we have three auxiliaries that are either almost ready to charter, or are now ready and will be official in the upcoming months. We have two that have just started the process of getting members to start a local auxiliary in their area.

### Oregon:

We have two new auxiliaries that will become official in Oregon in January 2019. The Pacific Northwest Auxiliary is based out of western Oregon and Washington. The contact person to join this auxiliary is Jessica Keene, and her e-mail is [Jessica.keene.bletauxiliary@gmail.com](mailto:Jessica.keene.bletauxiliary@gmail.com).

Eastern Oregon Auxiliary 362 is located in the La Grande and Hermiston, Oregon area. The contact person to join this auxiliary is Chris Baldwin, and her e-mail is [Chrisb2129@hotmail.com](mailto:Chrisb2129@hotmail.com).

### Ohio:

Another auxiliary that is getting closer to becoming official is in the Cleveland, Ohio area. The contact for that one is Tim Price, and his e-mail is [Vow1970@yahoo.com](mailto:Vow1970@yahoo.com). Please reach out to him if you're in the Cleveland area and would like to become a member of this auxiliary.

We also have promising prospects to start a new auxiliary in Lima, Ohio, with spouses of BLET Division 678 members. The contact person for this auxiliary is Jani Fischer and her e-mail is [janifischer1978@gmail.com](mailto:janifischer1978@gmail.com).

### Indiana:

Another one that is beginning to organize is in Indiana. Once I get more information I will post it on the National Auxiliary Facebook page for anyone in the Indiana area who might be interested.

If you are in any of the above areas or you know anyone who wants to join in these areas, please e-mail the appropriate person and ask them about joining.



## Greetings from your Editor, Jodi Lynn Wallace



*"Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind"*

— Dr. Seuss

Greetings everyone! I am excited about my new position as National 1st Vice President/National Outreach Coordinator. I live in a small town in Eastern Oregon and refer to myself as a stay-at-home grandma (meaning I take care of my grandkids while my son is at school and his wife is working). My husband, William Wallace, and I have been married for 26 years.

William hired out for Union Pacific Railroad in March of 2004 and has worked his way up in the union. He is currently serving as the 1st Vice General Chairman for the Union Pacific Western Region General Committee of Adjustment.

William and I have two children. Our firstborn is Tucker, who is now 25 and is married to Nicole. They have blessed us with two grandkids: Brody who is five and Kennedy who is two. Tucker is studying computer science, and Nicole works in the insurance industry. Our second child is Allison. She is 20 and is married to Devan. They have blessed us with one grandson Liam and he is almost a year old. Allison and Devan are both serving in the United States Air Force.

I have been a member of the Auxiliary since 2009 when I signed up as a member-at-large at one of the regional meetings. I served as a proxy delegate to represent Auxiliary 134 at the 2014 National Convention. In 2016, I was asked to step into the Alternate National Treasurer position. In the past couple of years, I have learned a lot about how the Auxiliary works and what our purpose is as a group, and I hope to spread the wisdom I have acquired from all of our members through the years, to all of you.

Through my attendance at regional and national meetings, I have enjoyed getting to know so many of the wonderful people we have in our organization, and I look forward to meeting more of you in the future. I am also looking forward to growing our membership, whether it is by starting new local auxiliaries or by increasing our member-at-large membership. To me both are equally important.

Please e-mail me if you have any upcoming events in your local area that you would like us to feature in the newsletter. I would like to be able to showcase what all the auxiliaries are doing to facilitate improvements in their local areas. If you have photos from events in your area and do not wish to submit an article, please go to our Facebook page and post the photos so everyone can see what you are doing. Perhaps others will get ideas for things to do in their local area.

We are hoping that by the time you get this we have a forum up and running on the Auxiliary website, and we hope that you all will utilize it as a tool for getting to know each other and helping to grow and share ideas.

If you need to get ahold of me for anything, you can text or call me at 1-541-663-6966, or send me an e-mail to [jodi\\_wallace@bletauxiliary.net](mailto:jodi_wallace@bletauxiliary.net), or you can send "snail mail" to 1804 Washington Ave., La Grande Oregon, 97850.

If you have not checked out our updated website, please take a look. You can find it at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). You will find links to great information and links to the Facebook pages for some of our Local Auxiliaries.

## Ohio Operation Outreach

*By: Cami Price*

December 2017 was the first year Ohio BLET Division 34 held a gift drive for local struggling families. An abundance of donations poured in to give back just in time for the holiday season. The event was organized by Anita Ferguson of Division 34 in Columbus, Ohio. Anita is a CSX engineer and was inspired to help local families. This year Ohio hopes to give back to the community even more!

All of the families have been through various forms of hardship and need our help more than ever. The hardships range from: a father with small cell lung cancer with three children, to a father who was tragically killed in a car accident leaving behind his wife of fourteen years and three daughters. When asked about the event, Ferguson responded, "All very tragic turns of events in the children's lives. The common denominator is that Christmas and gifts are a luxury that cannot be afforded by the parents. We hope to ease the financial burden by buying the gifts."

Overall, a huge thank you goes out to the Ohio BLET members and all those who have, and continue to, participate in the event! If you would like to donate to this project, please contact Anita Ferguson at 614-537-3511.

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

**Jodi Wallace, Editor  
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**The next issue will be published in March 2019. Please have your submissions to Jodi on or before February 28, 2019.**



## **BLET Auxiliary**

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### **Legislative Update, continued from Page 7**

(R-ND), Shelby (R-AL), Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Udall (D-NM), Reed (R-RI), Coons (D-DE), Merkley (D-OR) and Leahey (D-VT). If one of these representatives is from your district or state, please let them know that we support HR 6147, especially as it relates to Transportation.

Also included in this bill is a passenger route near and dear to my heart – the Southwest Chief. As a young girl, I rode this route many a mile with my grandparents and while its funding is just a small portion of the funding requested, HR 6147 would preserve Amtrak service over the entire route from Chicago to Los Angeles.

Congress averted the last government shutdown in September, but of course it wasn't a permanent fix for this fiscal year. There are agencies such as Homeland Security that still require funding prior to December 7.

#### **Railroad Retirement**

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) issued two news releases in October. The first addressed the increase in benefits, and the second pertained to an earnings limit increase, both for 2019. The Tier I (our Social Security Equivalent benefit) will increase 2.8%, and Tier II benefits will go up by 0.9%. (Note: Vested dual benefits and supplemental annuities are not adjusted for the Consumer Price Index increase). The Board indicates that the average retired railroader's annuity will increase \$60 a month and the average combined employee and spouse benefit will increase \$86.

Just as when Railroad Retirement Reform was enacted in 2001, there are still widow(er)s whose current annuity payment exceeds the amount due after being recalculated under the 2001 formula. Until the formula amount exceeds the benefit currently received, there will not be any adjustment. According to

the RRB, 52% of the widow(er)s are affected by this. Medicare Part B premiums for 2019 are also increasing slightly to \$135.50 from \$134 for most retirees. (Note: Cost of Living increases prior to 2001 are the reason benefit payments are still trying to catch up).

Earning restrictions for 2019, which apply to retirees who have not reached full retirement age under Social Security (65 for those born prior to 1938, and it inches up from there), exempt earnings are \$17,640, an increase of \$600 in earnings exemption. Earnings from interest, dividends, certain rental income, or other investments are not considered earnings under the restrictions. There are special work restrictions that continue to be applicable to disability annuitants next year. The monthly disability earnings limit increased by \$30 to \$950. For more detailed information, please visit [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov) for their list of FAQs or contact your regional RRB office.

Gary Faley, National Legislative Representative for the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE), sent out an alert about the "Know the Lowest Price Act of 2018," S.2553, signed into law on October 18, 2018. According to Mr. Faley, this "legislation stops private insurers from using so-called gag orders that 'restricts' pharmacies from offering customers the same drug but at a lower price if they paid out of pocket" instead of with a co-pay. For example, if your co-pay was \$20 and the price of the medication without the co-pay was \$8, the pharmacist was prohibited from sharing that information. Twenty-five states had already made that practice illegal, but this bill will now save the entire nation from this misdeed.

Note to all our readers: Please send your state and regional news to keep this section interesting!

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*Becky Schneider lives in El Paso, Texas. She can be reached at [beckybat@att.net](mailto:beckybat@att.net), or 915-581-1373.*