



# BLET Auxiliary News

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

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Winter 2020

Kathleen Bisbikis, President • Rachel Pharris, 1st Vice President • Lawana Poss, Secretary • Terri Fleming, Treasurer  
Jessica Cole, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative • [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)

## Spouses of SEPTA Employees Organize Auxiliary in Philadelphia to Address Safety Concerns in the Midst of Pandemic

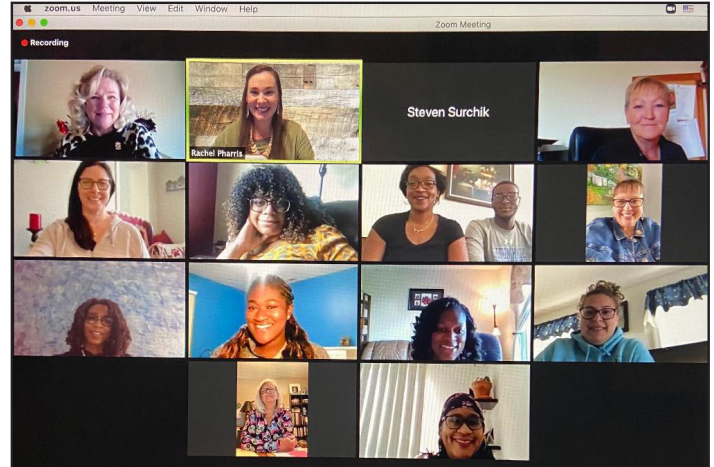
*By Kathleen Bisbikis, National President*

What do you do when you have a new auxiliary ready to be organized and install its officers, but the country has shut down due to the pandemic and travel is not an option? In the spring of this year, a very motivated group of SEPTA rail families in the Philadelphia and New Jersey area were motivated to organize a local auxiliary. SEPTA (Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority) is a regional public transportation authority that operates bus, rapid transit, commuter rail, light rail, and electric trolleybus services in five counties in and around Philadelphia.

Erica Hill, the guiding force for organizing a Philadelphia auxiliary, is the wife of SEPTA General Chairman Don Hill. Erica states, "COVID was the catalyst that compelled me to organize like-minded railroad family members to work together to support the safety of our Engineers." The COVID-19 pandemic was profoundly impacting the health and safety of SEPTA employees, and consequently their family members as well.

In April of this year, Erica joined forces with another SEPTA spouse who was very concerned about the number of SEPTA employees who were contracting the virus. Susan Lafferty, the wife of BLET member Dennis Lafferty, teamed up with Erica, and together they reached out to other spouses, encouraging them to get involved. In May, they began holding meetings via Zoom with their prospective members. Erica's husband Don joined the meetings and gave a history of the railroad and the union. BLET National Division Vice President Jim Louis also joined one of the Zoom meetings to explain current railroad activities and encourage the auxiliary members to stand strong when faced with adversity.

Had we been able to travel, our 1st Vice President/Outreach Coordinator and I would have traveled to Philadelphia in the Spring to organize this new auxiliary. We kept hoping that we would perhaps be able to travel later in the year, but as time went on, we realized that was not going to happen. We then made the decision, along with the members of the newly formed auxiliary, to do something we had never done before. On October 18, 2020, we held an organizational meeting via Zoom to install the new officers and welcome all of the new members.



**1st row:** National President Kathleen Bisbikis; National 1st Vice President Rachel Pharris, Alternate National Secretary Rose Surchik (on husband Steve's computer); National Treasurer Terri Fleming. **2nd row:** Susan Lafferty, Aux. 71 Vice President; Amanda Arnold, Aux. 71 Delegate; Aux. 71 President Erica Hill and Associate Member Eric Jackson. **3rd row:** Auxiliary 71 Treasurer Felicia Wallace-Benton, Aux. 71 Legislative Rep. Zhane Austin, Aux. 71 Secretary Sharay Austin, President, Pacific NW Aux. 503 Jessica Keene. **4th row:** National Secretary Lawana Poss, Aux. 71 member Jewell Hill.

We wanted this experience to be as memorable as possible for our new auxiliary, so we asked other national officers to join the call. We also had some presidents of other local auxiliaries across the country join in for support. Victoria Delahay, President of Yellow City Auxiliary in Amarillo, Texas, offered words of encouragement to the new members, and several other members of the that auxiliary also said hello and sent warm wishes. Jessica Keene, President of Northwest Auxiliary No. 503 in Salem, Oregon, also joined the meeting, as did our Alternate National Auxiliary Secretary Rose Surchik, who is also the President of Twin Ports Auxiliary No. 6388 in the Twin Ports area of Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin. Also on the call was National Secretary Lawana Poss and National Treasurer Terri Fleming. In the days before the meeting, many of our national officers sent greeting cards welcoming the new members and officers. The cards were presented and read aloud on the Zoom call.

As is customary at any organizing meeting for a new local auxiliary, our National 1st Vice President/National Outreach Coordinator Rachel Pharris and I discussed the many programs offered by the Auxiliary and the benefits of membership. We talked about the challenges and

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# From the President

By KATHLEEN BISBIKIS

*“Enjoy the little things for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things”*

- Robert Brault

As I begin to write this, Thanksgiving is just a few days away, and it has me thinking about all the things that I am grateful for in this year of years. Some might say 2020 has been one of the most challenging years in our recent history, but I think perhaps we needed to slow down to appreciate the small things taken for granted each day and the time that this year has given back to us to spend with our loved ones.

For instance, because of 2020, I feel fortunate to have discovered the magic of Zoom. This technology has provided me with the unique opportunity to meet and chat with members all over the country. Zoom allowed us to have a great time this summer playing Auxiliary Trivia with our members. We even held an organizing meeting for a new auxiliary in Philadelphia and installed their officers (see cover story). I have been invited to virtually attend auxiliary meetings in other states, talk to members, hear their ideas, and answer their questions. I was asked to join a group of railroad wives in Texas for a “ladies’ night” to talk about what is going on in everyday life. I also attended the annual National Association of State Legislative Board Chairman’s Meeting via Zoom... a meeting I look forward to attending each year (see story on Page 5).

Because of the travel limitations this year and the cancellation of the regional meetings, our national officers were forced to think outside the box and, in doing so, we came up with the two raffle fundraisers that were held online this year, enabling us to continue to fund the programs that we offer to our membership. To all of you who purchased tickets, posted flyers in your local terminals, and shared the

information on social media, we are so very grateful.

As the year comes to an end, we enter 2021 with uncertainty. I urge you to remain positive in your thoughts and actions. We will hopefully be back to “normal” soon enough. For now, enjoy those close to you and take time this holiday season to bring back traditions that time has gotten in the way of in recent years, or start a new tradition that you can enjoy for years to come.

As I end this final report for 2020, I am grateful for the Executive Council members who have humored me with every idea I brought to them this year. I am blessed to have Past National President Sereena Hogan still at the newsletter desk, helping to make this publication as eye-pleasing and informative as ever. I am also forever grateful to those individuals and companies that have supported us this year. You are vital to our growth and we can’t thank you enough!

Lastly, thank you to our fantastic membership, new and old. There would be no auxiliary if not for you!

I wish you all a very happy holiday season!

**Kathleen “Kat” Bisbikis**  
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Find us on the web at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)  
Also...

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THE NATIONAL B.L.E.T. AUXILIARY



## New Auxiliary off to a Great Start!

*By Susan Lafferty, Vice President, Auxiliary 71*

Philadelphia BLET Auxiliary 71 is headquartered in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Our auxiliary is unique in that most of our loved ones are crew members for passenger rails. Working during and through a pandemic has highlighted the importance of essential employees, engineers and trainmen included. One of the primary goals of the newly formed Auxiliary 71 in Philadelphia was to help improve crew morale.

Our crews, who are deemed essential workers, have been safely transporting the public while trying to stay safe and healthy themselves. We see, hear, and feel their concern, motivation, and energy each and every day. The members of Auxiliary 71 feel it is an honor to advocate and support the needs of our crew members in any way possible. What better way to make our loved ones feel better than tapping into their sweet tooth?

Together, we pooled resources to pack individual sweet treat bags which were available to our crew members shortly after Auxiliary 71 became official on Sunday, October 18, 2020. Our devoted auxiliary member Jewell Hill delivered 112 treat bags to the new main crew room in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday, October 21, 2020. Included was a flier to help spread the news of our mission.

We wish everyone a safe, happy and most importantly, healthy holiday season!



*In late October, Auxiliary 71 Member Jewell Hill delivered and distributed 112 Halloween treat bags to the new main crew room in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

## Compliments OF YOUR *Philadelphia* BLET Auxiliary #71

Our organization provides support and promotes issues that affect the health, safety, welfare, and quality of life of Railroaders and their families. Additionally, we promote higher education within Railroad families and give assistance to widows, widowers, sisters, and brothers when needed. We are striving to create a safer work environment for Railroad employees and a positive life-style for BLET members and their families.

FOLLOW US TO STAY UPDATED:



 /phillybletaux

# What a year it's been! *It's times like these that we really appreciate each other!*

By Victoria Delahay, President  
Yellow City Bomb Squad Auxiliary #99, Amarillo, Texas

As 2020 draws to a close, I find myself thinking about what a year this has been and how thankful I am that 2021 is right around the corner. This year started off great for me as I was able to organize a new local auxiliary in Amarillo, Texas, in January.

In February, we had our very first meeting at which we planned an entire year of events. And then boom, Covid-19 made an appearance and put the brakes on everything. At first, I was in a state of panic; however, I quickly realized that it was not about me. It was time for our new auxiliary members to band together and rally around all of our families and our community and ask ourselves, "What is the next step; how can we help?" We had several Zoom meetings and then, in May, when we finally had approval from local government, we all met for the first time in a park and planned out what we needed to do. Since then, our auxiliary members do what we can to make sure that anyone who was furloughed is okay. When any of us found extra cleaning supplies, we made sure that our families were stocked up and then we checked in with the depots to make sure that supplies had been ordered and they had what they needed to keep the area disinfected and safe. Local businesses helped us with hand sanitizer and other supplies for our community in need.

In August, we were able to assist with the Annual Railroaders Golf Tournament here in Amarillo, and we have continued to hold

regular meetings and plan other events for the remainder of this year. We share our lives, celebrating our individual successes, and supporting each other when challenges and hard times occur. The ways in which we've adapted and helped each other and our community through this pandemic are a prime example of who we are and what we do. We discuss what is happening nationally, locally, and right here in our own community. While we take care of our own, we also reach out to other local auxiliaries to make sure that their members and families are okay as well. We may be separate auxiliaries, but we are all one family, united.

Covid-19 has taken so much from all of us this year, but it also reminded me of everything that I still have, and I needed that reminder, as we all do. I am grateful for my auxiliary family in Amarillo and around the country. If you are thinking of organizing a local auxiliary in your area, please understand one thing - there is no right or wrong way to get started. You just need a few people and the drive to want to make a difference for railroad families, support our BLET members, and possibly even be of service in your community. It's about priorities and what is important in your life. We have several women in our group who can't come to meetings, but they are members and still volunteer their time and donate services. We find ways to be creative; everyone does their part in ways that work for them. If our group in Amarillo, Texas, can succeed, so can



**Victoria and Kevin Delahay**

you! I encourage you all to step out of your comfort zone and join the Auxiliary. If you don't have a local auxiliary in your area, get one started! No one else knows this life better than us, so why wouldn't you want to surround yourself with other railroad spouses so that you can laugh and cry together and share this strong bond that I am so grateful for. If you have any questions, please reach out to me. I am happy to help any way I can.

Thank you to the spouses in Amarillo. Thank you for joining this group and standing together during one of the hardest years we've ever seen. I am proud, not only to be your sister but also your friend, and I couldn't imagine getting through this year without each of you! Happy Holidays to all of our sisters and brothers across the nation, and a Joyous New Year to all! Cheers to new beginnings in 2021!

## LECMPA PRESIDENT SUSAN TUKEL RETIRING

Susan Tukel, President of Locomotive Engineers & Conductors Mutual Protective Association (LECMPA), is retiring, effective December 31. Susan worked with LECMPA in a variety of capacities since 1982. She served as the Association's vice-president and general counsel from 2003-2004, and has served as president since 2005. After retiring, she will continue to serve as a trustee and provide legal counsel. Prior to her time with LECMPA, Tukel was a litigation partner with Williams Mullen Law Firm, specializing in contracts, insurance, and complex litigation from 2001-03, and a partner/shareholder of various private law firms as general counsel to insurance companies for more than 20 years.

Rod Bloedow, currently an LECMPA trustee, becomes president January 1. "I've seen many changes in the transportation industry," said Tukel. "It has been an honor to serve our members and our staff. I have every confidence in Rod's integrity and leadership going forward. LECMPA is in good hands."

Susan has been a good friend and generous supporter of the BLET Auxiliary. We have enjoyed working with her on various projects, especially the Scholarship Program. Each year since 2017 the Auxiliary has administered a minimum of two \$2500 scholarships funded entirely by LECMPA. We are grateful for Susan's willingness to extend these scholarships to deserving children of BLET families who have one parent who is a BLET member as well as an LECMPA member, and one parent who is an auxiliary member. We wish you all the best in your retirement, Susan!





# NASLBC Virtual Meeting, October 20, 2020

*By National President Kathleen Bisbiskis*

Each year, the National Auxiliary President and National 2nd Vice President/Legislative Representative are invited to attend the BLET National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen's annual meeting. This year, things were a bit different for several reasons. The meeting, which is usually held in the Spring, was held on October 20, 2020, via Zoom. The tone was not as bright and cheerful as usual as we had to say goodbye to some notable members of the board due to their upcoming retirements. Of course, it was wonderful to see everyone and say hello. Attending this meeting each year is like going to a class reunion. No matter what's going on, it's always great to see and talk to old friends and get caught up on what's going on. It's always an educational, enlightening, and sometimes even shocking experience to hear about issues affecting different railroads in different states and getting caught up on topics from the National Division.

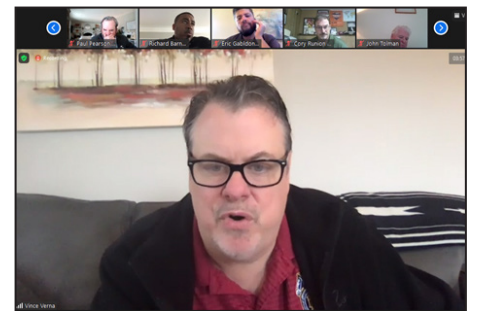
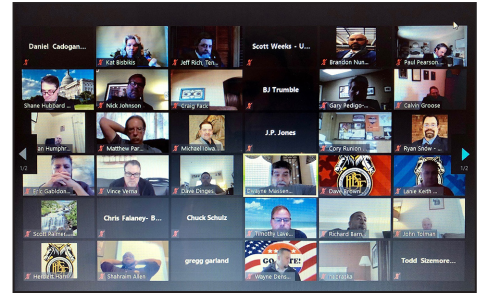
It was my honor to be able to start the morning off at this year's meeting by speaking to the chairmen. I greeted everyone and thanked them for their support of the Auxiliary over the last year. It was apparent, without a doubt, that the legislative officers were big supporters of our recent raffles and I thanked them, not only for purchasing tickets, but also for helping us get the word out. I thanked the state chairmen who continue to pay for subscriptions to our newsletter for their division legislative reps. I updated everyone on what we have done since the start of 2020, which included the installation of a new local auxiliary in Amarillo, Texas, and another in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; awarding of seven scholarships; and continuing with the Care and Assistance Program. I spoke about our efforts to involve our members in legislative matters by educating them as to how the issues affect them and their families. I also spoke about the upcoming presidential election

and how important it was, as well as it being my son Jared's first time to vote in a national election, and how the union had influenced him over all these years.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President/National Legislative Rep. Jessica Cole spoke next, sharing her reflections on the Amtrak event she attended earlier this year (see story, Page 9), and the importance of getting back to civil discussion of ideas and issues versus the tribalism and fanaticism that currently dominates any difference of opinion on any potentially political issue in the current climate.

BLET National President Dennis Pierce addressed the attendees, reminding us that "when people attack unions, they attack, you, the member" - something I think everyone should be reminded of from time to time. President Pierce also updated everyone briefly on the two-person crew issue, Amtrak, cross-border issues, and what union contracts provide to the members that some take for granted, such as seniority, hotels at the away-from-home terminals, and the big one, healthcare.

President Pierce also spoke warmly about outgoing Vice President John Tolman, who recently announced he would be retiring after the presidential election. The union and the auxiliary will greatly miss Vice President Tolman. John has always been a friendly face, offering a hug when you needed it, and words of encouragement to all of us whenever we saw him. Not only was he excellent at his job as a national officer and the BLET's National Legislative Representative, a presence to be dealt with in Washington D.C., but he is a good person who you never doubted had the best interest of his union brothers and sisters as his priority. We all wish John many, many great years in his new role as Grandpa. Replacing Vice President Tolman will be Vince Verna. Vince has worked with John in Washington, D.C., as Director of Regulatory Affairs for the last nine years, and while the shoes he will be filling are considerable, he is skilled and ready for the job.



**Top:** NASLBC Meeting on Zoom; **Middle:** Bob Hagan, BLET Director of Political and Legislative Affairs; **Bottom:** Vince Verna, Director of Regulatory Affairs.

It was sad to know that this was the last meeting at which we will be seeing Dave Brown, Minnesota State Chairman; and Scott Palmer, Oregon State Chairman. Both of these chairmen have been huge supporters of the Auxiliary. We knew we could always depend on these two brothers for anything that we needed and seeing them go was very disturbing. They have both spoken on behalf of the Auxiliary many times to our benefit. We will miss them both immensely. We wish all of these union brothers only the best on their retirements; they have definitely earned it.

We hope that in 2021 we will be back together again in person for the NASLBC meeting, but for now, we are just grateful to have been able to see and talk to everyone, if for only a short time.

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



By JESSICA  
COLE,  
NATIONAL  
LEGISLATIVE  
REPRESENTATIVE

## October Senate Testimony Spotlights Areas of Concern

On October 21, 2020, the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing on the status of the U.S. freight and passenger railroad industry. Testimony was given by representatives of the unions, shipping entities, and the rail carriers. Discussion was held on the impact of COVID-19, Amtrak's struggles, and legislative considerations.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce spoke on the impact of COVID-19 from the workers' standpoint and asked for support for additional emergency Amtrak/Commuter Railroad funding. He also expounded on negative consequences of the new Precision Scheduled Railroading model currently in vogue with rail management, and he warned the Committee of problems and failures in the new technologies that are supposed to make the rails safer and less susceptible to human error.

"On the freight side, traffic plummeted as significant portions of the country—and the world—shut down to manage the explosion of COVID-19 cases in the early months. Record numbers of Teamsters Rail Conference members and their co-workers were furloughed in response to the cratering of demand. This was on top of historic furloughs that occurred prior to the pandemic, which were a function of the industry's current business model. In recent months, traffic has rebounded sharply—evidence of a V-shaped recovery—but recalls from furlough have been minimal

and continue to lag. Thus, while railroad employment levels were a leading indicator of the COVID-19-related recession, they are a trailing indicator of the recovery," said President Pierce.

In regard to Rail Carriers providing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to fight the pandemic and protect the health and safety of rail workers, Pierce told the committee, "Some railroads have been diligent about providing appropriate PPE, but others have been less successful. We believe the root of the problem lies in the fact that the appropriate Executive Branch agencies have not yet established mandatory PPE guidelines. This failure continues to place our members and their families at risk."

Addressing operation protocols such as Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) and new technologies such as Positive Train Control (PTC), Pierce's comments were as follows:

"Finally, and several decades after the National Transportation Safety Board first recommended the implementation of anti-collision technology, the industry is approaching full compliance with your mandate that key routes have a working Positive Train Control system. However, instead of using this technology as a safety complement to crews, the railroads want to use it to replace crew members, even though the technology cannot, and is not designed to, do many of the things the second crew member does."

A copy of President Pierce's written testimony is available for download as a PDF: [https://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Pierce\\_IBT\\_Rail\\_Conference\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Pierce_IBT_Rail_Conference_Testimony.pdf)

Meanwhile, Ian Jefferies, President and CEO of the American Association of Railroads, gave Congress an alternative version of the industry,

urging Congress that its oversight of the industry needs to be further loosened even as the FRA has granted regulatory waivers at the railroad's urging, in some cases reversing its prior held positions regarding safety practices. Further, FRA has shown little interest in rigorous enforcement of current safety regulations.

In his testimony, Jefferies stated, "First, regulatory barriers must be overcome in ways that are more enduring than waivers. Congress should direct DOT to make permanent long-standing waivers whose value has been proven through successful implementation or to issue final rules if equivalent or improved safety has been demonstrated. Short-term waivers from existing regulations do not give industry sufficient confidence to invest in new technologies.

"Second, to the greatest extent possible, railroads and equipment manufacturers should be permitted to continue to create voluntary standards for safety technology. No one has a greater stake in the success of new safety technologies than railroads and their suppliers, and market pressures already incentivize them to create and implement safety technologies that work.

"Third, new regulations governing automated operations in the transportation sector should be performance-based, rather than prescriptive. Performance-based standards would give industry discretion to experiment with new ways to improve safety, while the FRA would still oversee goal setting, ensure that measures and data are accurate, and impose sanctions if railroads failed to meet their safety targets. Rail employees, customers, and the public-at-large would still be fully protected.

"Fourth, regulation of automated operations and other technolo-

gies should occur at the federal level to avoid a patchwork of state and local rules that would create confusion, inhibit the deployment of new innovations, and undercut the efficient functioning of the national rail network."

Additionally, Jefferies painted a rosy picture of Rail Carriers' response to COVID-19, telling the committee that, "First and foremost, railroads want to keep their employees safe. Teleworking is now available for those employees who are able to work remotely, and social distancing, rigorous cleaning protocols, and the use of protective devices are now ubiquitous on railroads to protect those employees that must be on-site as part of ongoing operations. Access by visitors to rail facilities has also been sharply curtailed, and railroads are communicating regularly with their employees about health and safety protocols. My understanding is that the number of COVID-19 cases among rail employees has remained relatively low."

This statement by Jefferies is in direct opposition to firsthand comments from my husband and from other rail workers who spoke at the recent NASLBC Zoom meeting. Telework is not available to railroad engineers and conductors. They are essential workers who move the nation's freight. Issues mentioned included lack of PPE, refusal of carriers to allow employees to bring their own sanitizing wipes to work, and carriers regularly providing sanitizing wipes that are dried out and therefore useless.

The Senate Committee also heard testimony from several speakers representing shipping interests. Among them were Kent Fountain, President of The National Cotton Council; Randy Gordon, President and CEO of the National Grain and Feed Association; and Frank Chirumbole, VP of Global Supply

Chain, Olin Corp, on behalf of the American Chemistry Council. The common theme across these varied industries that share a common dependence on the rails to move their products was concern over lack of timeliness caused by Precision Scheduled Railroading and being held captive to unfair fees and poor service by lack of competition in the rail industry.

Randy Gordon's testimony sums it up. "NGFA wishes to raise two specific policy matters the Committee may wish to explore with the STB with respect to its future rail regulatory framework."

"First, we believe there is a pressing need to clarify what the railroads' common-carrier service obligation means in the current rail environment that is characterized by reduced rail competition and PSR-related operational changes that raise serious concerns about whether carriers are indeed providing 'transportation service upon reasonable request.'"

"A second topic that NGFA believes Congress should consider is to give higher priority to the importance of rail-to-rail competition within the Staggers Rail Act's Rail Transportation Policy," Gordon said.

"Finally, there is one more significant factor that needs to be acknowledged. And that is the reluctance of most rail customers to formally challenge the behavior of their rail carriers at the STB, a court, or in private-sector arbitration, even when justified, because they have no alternative competitive transportation mode and, therefore, don't want to strain the working relationship with their railroad."

**Editorial comment:** On behalf of the BLET Auxiliary, I want to take a moment to thank BLET President Dennis Pierce for his well-reasoned, fact-based, passionate testimony on behalf of all rail workers and all rail families. In a political world dominated by

distrust, self-interest, fake news, and "alternative" facts, it is often doubtful that the truth resonates when someone finally tells it, but at least it was told. Bravo, President Pierce!

**Source:** Railway Age. [https://www.railwayage.com/regulatory/senate-commerce-gets-an-earful-of-rail/?fbclid=IwAR1UItXTaz\\_ZIKCCch7wlCksGivGrKhysaOWW\\_-ScRD6wut13OodMa\\_Zw1M](https://www.railwayage.com/regulatory/senate-commerce-gets-an-earful-of-rail/?fbclid=IwAR1UItXTaz_ZIKCCch7wlCksGivGrKhysaOWW_-ScRD6wut13OodMa_Zw1M)

**Last Note from Jessica:** 2020 feels more like a century than a year for a lot of us. So many bad curve balls have been thrown on a global scale, a national scale, a state scale, and, for a lot of us, on a personal scale.

I want to take a moment to say to you all how much I value my rail family. I pray for your safety and your good fortune in all areas. I wish you a Happy and Safe Holiday Season, and as we all sprint for the New Year, eager as can be to be done with 2020, I hope the future really is brighter for everyone.

*Jessica Cole lives in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She can be reached at [jcts1987@gmail.com](mailto:jcts1987@gmail.com), or 262-672-9742/*



By BECKY SCHNEIDER,  
3RD VP/NLR

### Election Results

While working on my legislative update, we finally received word on the election. Regardless of who you voted for, the President-elect is at least supportive of workers, infrastructure repair and improvements, and a big fan of Amtrak and what they can do for transportation in this country. Our Vice President-Elect, being from California, is keenly aware of what high-speed rail can do. Once we get a handle on COVID, we can bring back our economy, our furloughed employees, Amtrak, and some needed

regulations. (See the Staggers Act section for more detail.)

One remaining issue on moving our country forward is the make-up of the Senate. As of this writing, the count stands at 48 Republicans, 46 Democrats, and 2 Independents, who are former Republicans who now caucus with the Democrats. Two seats are still in play in Georgia, and because no candidate received 50% of the vote, run-off elections in January are expected to determine those seats. If the Senate ends up in a tie, the Majority Leader will be from the Vice President's party and will set the Agenda for the Senate. No longer will the current Majority Leader be able to allow dust to collect on House-passed bills on his desk because they are never brought to the floor. Let democracy work.

We need to unite as a country for the good of the country, and ALL our elected representatives need to re-learn the art of compromise and putting country above party. Lock them in a room together and don't let them out until they've done right by the people.

### Staggers Act marks 40 years

If you are like me, you may be a little unclear on what the Staggers Act is or what it was intended to do. Here is a very brief overview. President Carter signed the Act into law in October of 1980, ending 93 years of strict federal regulation of the railroad industry. The Act drastically diminished the influence of the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), which was established in 1887, to oversee railroads and curb the Robber Barons' abuse of their market power. The Act came at a time when railroads were literally going bankrupt because federal oversight did not keep pace with market conditions. The deregulation brought us to where we are today, with only a handful of Class I Carriers left because of mega-mergers that were approved by the ICC's successor – the Surface Transportation Board (STB).

Staggers also brought about a robust short line industry, which benefitted the railroads and shippers but resulted in fewer employees who were paid less and had less beneficial work rules. According to Freight Waves Jim Blaze, the Staggers Act "truly revitalized the railroad industry." Between 2000 and 2016 though, he believes the railroads "lost the mission of Staggers" by focusing more on dividends and stock buybacks, and less on delivering lower rates and service improvements to customers, much less protecting railroad employees. Before the Act, most railroads earned around a 2% return on investment, and investing in maintaining infrastructure just did not happen. Forty years later, things are far rosier capturing 40% of their revenue as profit – a 20-year run of historic profits for the railroads and record returns for their shareholders.

As pointed out in a recent BLET News Flash, the Staggers Act was never celebrated by railroad workers who have experienced the loss of half of the jobs held in 1980. During the 90s the ICC and the STB dramatically increased their regulation of Rail Labor by "allowing the merging and commonly controlled rail carriers to . . . gain dramatic changes in rates of pay, rules, and working conditions outside the procedures of the Railway Labor Act."

With the exception of the mega-railroads, the beneficiaries of reduced regulation are now in a period of diminishing returns as customer service has declined, if not all but disappeared for some customers, and rates are becoming prohibitive along with the elimination of an additional tens of thousands of railroad jobs because of implementation of the Precision Scheduled Railroading model. Under the model, costs and services were dramatically cut focusing on easy to serve/high profit ratio customers, elimination of flexibility for pickups and deliveries, requirement that customers conform to rigid schedules, and

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## Regulations, Regulations, Regulations! - Words from the Chairman

*By Calvin Groose, Missouri State Legislative Board Chairman*

Yesterday, when I slid into the seat of my brother's pickup truck that I was using, I noticed that the seat belt was already buckled on the driver's seat. I wondered why it was left this way and knew it was of no value buckled behind the driver. I soon figured out that, as long as the seat belt was buckled, there would not be the annoying "ding" if I did not have it buckled around me. It also dawned on me that he is getting in and out frequently and this was his way around an inconvenience. I know it is just a farm truck and spends most of its time off-road and rarely sees a highway, but it made me think about why this annoying, noisy feature was on the truck in the first place. I began to wonder if it were not there, would I be apt to drive a vehicle forgetting to fasten my safety belt?

We live in a world of regulations. Every aspect of our lives is affected by regulations. From the very second we wake up to the time we go to bed, regulations affect us. When you take the first drink of water in the morning, there is a regulation on water safety testing. The food you consume for breakfast and throughout the day has been held to a food safety standard. Even your stairway steps have a riser height regulation. When you get into your car, a myriad of regulations apply such as safety belts, crashworthiness, brakes, and even fuel mileage standards. At the workplace, another massive set of textbooks of regulations come

into play. With all of these regulations, how do we keep up with them all?

Every regulation that is in place today began with one or more of us being injured or killed because of the issue being addressed by that specific regulation. The regulatory agency tasked with addressing the injuries or deaths associated with the problem took regulatory action on our behalf to prevent it from happening again. A recent example of this in our industry is the tragic event at Lac Magentic, in Quebec, Canada, where a loaded oil train caught fire and rolled into the town killing forty-seven people. Canadian officials mandated two-person crews and many other regulations to prevent a recurrence. In the U.S., we enacted securement regulations but failed to mandate two-person crews, an issue that is haunting us today as the industry pushes for single crew operations.

There are many entities who resist regulation. The rail industry is one of them. Death and injury to employees and the public have a long and sad history with the railroads. Because of this and the massive quantities of hazardous materials we transport through our communities, the need for oversight is clear. Just like my "cut-corners" brother, do we think a profit-driven industry, void of safety concerns, would put public and employee safety first without regulatory oversight? We know the answer.

I hear people say that if the government would stay out of my way it would be better. Well, I know what the lack of government oversight looks like and it is not pretty. The current FRA administrator, a Trump appointee charged with rail safety in the U.S., has chosen to not regulate at all or roll back current regulations in place which protect public and employee safety. When I speak with people in other industries, I hear similar concerns regarding de-regulation.

As Missouri State Legislative Board Chairman, part of my responsibility is to report railroad violations to our FRA. I use the word "our" because the agency works for the citizens of the United States. Although the current administrator seems to work for the railroad corporations, which he was formally a COE of one, I still must report violations and get rail safety issues addressed. We all look forward to a new administrator, a presidential appointee, who will once again take rail safety seriously. Hopefully, until then, we can avoid tragedy.

Taken from one of us who has to read them, regulations are boring. If you have trouble falling asleep at night, I recommend getting out a copy of the CFR (Code of Federal Regulations). No one has ever said "this is so exciting that I can't put it down!" I can be at my desk in the middle of the day and my mind will drift off anywhere but the page in the CFR that I am trying to read. I

sometimes just give up and call a specialist within the FRA. Even then, when they get technical, I get drowsy. But, there is a safety agenda within each of those monotonous CFRs.

If anyone doesn't understand the value of government oversight, just look at some of the nations who cannot afford or do not have the resources to enact or enforce public safety regulations. Third world countries are not known to be the safest on the planet. That is why many corporations take advantage of the low wage and lack of environmental laws giving them the freedom to abuse workers and pollute at will. We, on the other hand, have regulations addressing nearly every issue and will continue to create more oversight as our industries and societies evolve. Without them we are no better than the third world countries. In fact, that is precisely what sets us apart from them. We charge our agencies to have the foresight to take actions before tragedies occur.

Getting back to the truck, when I got out of the vehicle, the seat belt was unbuckled and retracted as it should have been. Many lives were lost before this "annoying" incentive was mandated. I guess my brother will just have to listen to the annoying "ding" until he once again connects it into the receiver with no one in the seat. Maybe he will just do the right thing and buckle up even though it takes a whole two seconds. Then again, maybe not. Those darn regulations!



# A Refreshingly Purple Event in Wisconsin

*-by Jessica Cole, 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative*

I train horses professionally - I give riding lessons, serve as a judge at horse shows, and grow hemp. **And** I am a rail wife! Rarely do those two distinctly separate worlds intersect, but this past September they did, in a most encouraging way.

The catalyst for my involvement in this connection of my worlds was a fellow trainer, who is a fairly conservative guy with whom I do not usually discuss politics. When we are together, we mostly discuss horses, and a few world issues thrown in now and then - issues, not politics. I think he has a well-reasoned, common sense take on just about every issue we've ever talked about, and there's no doubt he has a huge heart and a kind and ethical soul. That he reaches a different political conclusion than I do is of no great concern to me. The world is way better off and more interesting with him in it.

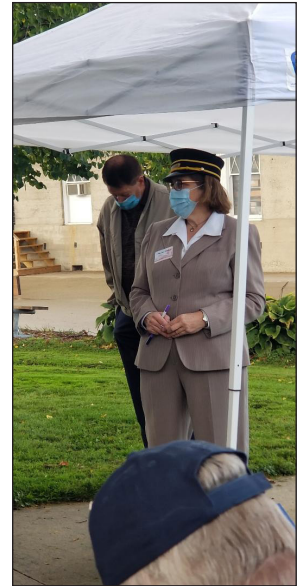
Early in September, I received a random phone call from a lady I didn't know, Margo Miller, from neighboring Columbia County Democrats. It turned out that she had gotten my name and phone number from my conservative horse trainer friend because he knew she was putting together a rail event that would interest me. Margo is a vocal proponent for Amtrak for very personal reasons. Her adult son is legally blind and takes the Amtrak train to commute to work every day. Cuts that became effective in October meant that the train that ran seven days a week would now only be available three days a week.

Margo organized a local informational and promotional event that was part of a nation-wide series of such events designed to promote Amtrak in hopes of continuing service. She reached out to Republican and Democrat voters alike and invited several local candidates running for office in the upcoming election to speak briefly on their view regarding Amtrak.

Amtrak has huge financial losses in 2020 due to ridership being substantially down as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic. I would think that all of us, regardless of our political affiliations, can agree that a program that is losing money should be scrutinized. However what is interesting to consider is all the places that Amtrak services are saving money and to realize that just about all of us, if we are moderate and rational people, can agree that the benefits provided are substantial, necessary, and more valuable than the taxpayer money the service costs.

We can all agree that society is better off when all of its members, especially disabled members such as Margo Miller's blind son, can be independent and connected to the places they need to go. We can all agree that society is better off when people who do not own an automobile, whether they are too poor or simply unable to drive, can get to work and hold down viable jobs versus being on taxpayer funded disability or welfare.

We can all agree that, even in an imaginary world where every Amtrak rider owns a car and is magically able to start driving on the days that trains are no longer available, significant wear and tear will be added to the roads, which will require repair more often at taxpayer expense. We can all agree we don't like driving through orange construction barrels and we would definitely like to do less of it than we do now, not more.



***Clockwise from top left: Wisconsin State Legislative Board provided gift bags for the event, Event Organizer Margo Miller, Attendees listening to speakers.***

We can all agree that more traffic volume means more accidents and more expense for cleaning up such accidents and treating injuries that occur in such accidents. We can all agree that more driving means a bigger carbon footprint, more damage to the environment, and potentially higher fuel prices due to increased demand. We can all agree that more people driving individual passenger cars to the places they need to go will cause a need for more parking options, and that this will cost substantial taxpayer money.

As divisive as politics have been in recent years, I had nearly forgotten what it can be like when people who think differently about issues come together to share and to listen, with common courtesy and common sense.

One of my high school classmates recently referred to my county as "the swingiest county in the swingiest state in the country." Maybe so, and maybe that's a good thing in many ways. Diversity of opinion and perspective, so long as it is grounded in fact and in common sense critical thinking, is a most refreshing thing.



## North American Railway Foundation®

*founded by the BR&CF*



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

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

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

### North American Railway Foundation

**Philip J. Sullivan II, Executive Director**

**300 Sterling Parkway, Suite 105**

**Mechanicsburg, PA 17050**

**(717)695-0284, [narf2216@gmail.com](mailto:narf2216@gmail.com)**

### Brotherhood's Relief & Compensation Fund

**Jesse E. Taylor, International President**

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NATIONAL DIRECTOR



The National BLET Auxiliary  
**Congratulates**  
**Lisa & Jeff Rich**  
**in Nashville TN**  
on their winning of  
the Yedi 125 Tundra  
Cooler raffle





# Transitions and Appreciation



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



**Clockwise from Upper Left:** BLET National Vice President/National Legislative Rep. John Tolman and grandson Hunter William Lowell (Is this how you hold a golf club, Papa?); Illinois State Legislative Chairman & Former NASLBC Chairman Paul Piekarski and wife Joyce; Oregon State Legislative Board Chairman Scott Palmer and wife Christine; Minnesota State Legislative Board Chairman Dave Brown.

The year draws to a close with three of the BLET's front-line champions for rail safety and workers' rights entering most well-deserved retirements. We thank them all, not just for the jobs they have done, but for the time and skill they have invested in mentoring and inspiring incoming new elected officers over the decades.

Former Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman has been the steadfast, gritty, quietly funny, and wonderfully warm face of rail worker advocacy for nearly half a century and has mentored everyone in union offices with a fatherly kind of affection and discipline. After almost 50 years as a railroader and a representative of the BLE, now BLET, he has had a long and distinguished career. His successor, Vince Verna, was elected as Alternate Vice President/National Legislative Representative in 2018 and elevates to the office vacated by John, effective November 5. Vince has also already had a distinguished career spanning 26 years as a railroader and union representative at various levels, with his last assignment as Director of Regulatory Affairs based out of Washington, D.C. He is well prepared for the role, having worked alongside John with passion and conviction for many years. Good luck to both in their future endeavors! For more information about both of our brothers' careers, please read the BLET Newsflash dated October 30, 2020.

The BLET also wishes a happy and well-deserved retirement to three outgoing State Legislative Board Chairmen cut of the same sort of cloth as John Tolman. Dave Brown, Minnesota State Legislative Board Chairman; Paul Piekarski, Illinois State Legislative Board Chairman; and Scott Palmer, Oregon State Legislative Board Chairman, are all ending decades of impressively thorough, well-researched, and important work on behalf of their BLET brothers and sisters. Like John, they have mentored many others coming up the ranks to ensure the BLET remains in good hands.

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**Thank you brothers, for your service to the nation as locomotive engineers and for your service on behalf of your BLET brothers and sisters as union officers! Enjoy retirement!**

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# Tidbits from National Secretary Lawana Poss

## SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

If you have children who are college-bound, they may be eligible to apply for a BLET Auxiliary Scholarship. Scholarship information and applications can be obtained on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). Applications for the 2021-2022 academic school year are due in my office April 1, 2021.

**Incomplete and Late applications will not be considered! Please read ALL instructions! Changes have been made to the application and eligibility.**

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!

Philadelphia BLET Auxiliary 71 members: Amanda Arnold, Sharay Arnold, Zhane Austin, Jewell Hill, Erica Hill, Eric Jackson, Susan Lafferty, Patricia McShea, Stephanie Morris, and Felicia Wallace-Benton.

Member-at-Large Jennifer Lorch, San Antonio, Texas.

## 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 soon be mailed to all members-at-large. Please make sure to send your dues to me and check to be sure that all of your information is correct so that you will continue to receive your newsletter.

I should receive all dues payments by March 1, 2021. Checks should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary, or you may use PayPal. The PayPal link is located on our website.

## AUXILIARY SECRETARIES

I will be mailing the Year-end Reports to you soon. Please have the reports back to me **BEFORE March 1, 2021**. This is for 2020 Dues. 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. All checks should be made payable to BLET Auxiliary, or you may use PayPal. The PayPal link is located on our website.

## OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES

Susan Fuller, member of Auxiliary 99, Amarillo, Texas. Susan's mother passed away October 15, 2020.

Ryan Snow, Member-at-Large. Ryan's stepmother passed away November 1, 2020.

Velma Williams, Auxiliary National Chaplain and Secretary/Treasurer of Auxiliary 37. Velma's youngest sister, Hazel Matthews, passed away November 15, 2020.

Auxiliary 37 member Ellen DeGroodt, of North Little Rock, Arkansas, passed away December 5, 2020, at the age of 93. She was former President of BLET Aux 37 for many, many years. We send our condolences to her Auxiliary 37 sister, her daughter Ms. Nadine Helton, and all her family.

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](mailto:Lewp2007@bellsouth.net)*

*"We cannot become what we want by remaining what we are"*

*Max Depree*

## Legislative Update

Continued from Page 7

institution of penalty fees. While the STB held hearings and tinkered with complaint programs, they did little to fix the problem citing the de-regulatory environment. From 2015 to 2020, rail employment was again reduced by 45,000 jobs.

Twelve rail labor unions have joined together to explain why America is where it is today, leading to the problems experienced by shippers, rail workers, and communities. As the Act marks its 40th anniversary, Members of Congress, the STB and Industry Stakeholders should consider whether current circumstances and the financial interests currently driving the industry have tossed aside the spirit of the Act, and the reasons it was passed. They assert that a return to the heavy regulation developed before the railroads had competition from aviation and trucking would not be appropriate. However, an approach recognizing the reality of the industry as it is today is certainly warranted and necessary to ensure that customers receive adequate and responsive service as mandated by the railroads' common carrier obligation, and that the industry continue to provide good, middle-class jobs for railroad workers with their record profits.

For more detail and in-depth explanation of the Staggers Act and how it affects railroad employees, please refer to the BLET News Flash, October 19, 2020.

**Sources:** Freightwaves, October 14, 2020; BLET Newsflash, October 19, 2020

### Amtrak

As reported last issue by former Amtrak President Tom Downs, "you can't cut yourself into prosperity." Effective October 1st, Amtrak cut most long-distance routes to three days a week, further decreasing available revenues because of missed connections

and the traveling public's need for daily trains. As Jim Matthews, President and CEO of the Rail Passenger Association (RPA) said, "... Amtrak's move to three-times weekly service is penny-wise and pound-foolish and that by running shorter consists 57% less often they're leaving badly needed money on the table. What's worse is that until now long-distance routes have been consistently the largest single contributor to Amtrak's revenues in every single month since the coronavirus crisis began."

Since the COVID-19 crisis came on to the scene, ridership has been hit hard as more employees teleworked and stay-at-home mandates were enacted. According to Amtrak CEO William Flynn, "ridership is not returning as quickly or at the levels that we had hoped for." Business remains at about 25% of pre-COVID levels even though new travelers are turning to Amtrak in part of because of their aggressive marketing as a safer and more socially distanced alternative to other kinds of travel. However, with shorter and less frequent trains, Amtrak is squandering the opportunity to show its unique value. As Jim Matthews pointed out, "They're wasting the crisis."

Progressive Railroaders on November 9, 2020, cites "Some Amtrak advocates hope that the national intercity passenger railroad will see more federal support under a President Biden administration. The railroad has furloughed more than 2,000 employees and reduced service frequency on various routes across the country to address a catastrophic revenue loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the railroad does not receive \$2.8 billion in emergency funding by December, the railroad may have to cut another 2,400 employees, Amtrak officials have warned."

Communities across our country, railroad workers and their fami-

lies, and Amtrak need Congress, specifically the Senate, to act and pass emergency funding before things get even worse in almost every sector of our economy.

**Sources:** Rail Passengers Association; BLET Newsflash, October 21, 2020; Railway Age, October 8, 2020

### Railroad Retirement Changes for Fiscal Year 2021 (Oct. 1, 2020 – Sept. 30, 2021)

**Unemployment and Sickness Benefits:** The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has reported that mandated cuts to railroad unemployment and sickness benefits for FY 2021 will be reduced by 5.7% as required by sequestration under the Budget Control Act of 2011. As reported by Jessica last issue, rail unions have united in an attempt to secure sponsorship of legislation that would change the existing inequity. Success was realized when Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) co-sponsored the Railroad Employee Equality and Fairness (REEF) Act, S. 4860, which was filed during the last week of October. Senator Portman said, "Because railroaders' payroll taxes are diverted to the RRB, unemployed railroad workers are not eligible for federal unemployment insurance benefits, which was not subject to the sequester. This legislation would remove the harmful sequester that largely singled out railroad workers' unemployment benefits that are due to them." In 2019, the RRB received 35,030 unemployment claims, but this year the board has witnessed a fourfold increase of 133,899 claims. Senator Klobuchar said, "Our workers are facing enormous challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic and railroad workers have been hit particularly hard."

The Teamsters Rail Conference and the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, reacted to the news by writing a joint letter to all Senators, asking them to join S.

4860 as co-sponsors. In addition, the BLET is mounting a nationwide mobilization of the membership to lobby Senators for support.

**COLA Increase in 2021:** Like Social Security, most Railroad Retirement annuitants will see a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase of 1.3% in their Tier I benefit. Tier II benefits will go up 0.4%. Vested dual benefit payments and supplemental annuities also paid by the RRB are not adjusted for CPI changes. Widow(er)s whose annuities are being paid under the Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001 do not receive annual COLAs until their annuity amount is exceeded by the amount that would have been paid under prior law, counting all interim COLA increases otherwise payable. If an annuitant also receives Social Security or other government benefit such a public service pension, COLA increases will be offset for Tier I, but not Tier II. The RRB will mail notices to annuitants in late December providing a breakdown of the annuities payable to them in January 2021.

**Earnings Limit Increases:** Earnings for annuitants who have reached full Social Security retirement age (depends on when you were born) prior to FY 2021 can earn \$18,960 without offsetting deductions. Interest, dividends, certain rental income or income from stocks, bonds, or other investments are not considered earnings subject to restrictions. Disability Annuitants can earn \$1020 per month. Regardless of age and/or earnings, no Railroad Retirement annuity is payable for any month in which an annuitant works for a railroad employer or railroad union.

### Pre-retirement Seminar

**Information:** John Bragg, Labor Member of the RRB, issued a statement announcing that the Pre-Retirement Seminar presentation can now be viewed online. Because of the pandemic, in-person events had to be cancelled,

so the Labor Member's Office took the opportunity to create a web version of the seminar. To access the video, go to [www.rrb.gov/prs](http://www.rrb.gov/prs). The entire presentation is over an hour long, but shorter segments can be viewed separately.

**RRB Financial Reports:** The RRB issued a news release of Questions and Answers pertaining to its Annual Report to Congress on its financial condition. Barring a sudden, unanticipated, large decrease in railroad employment or substantial investment losses, the railroad retirement system will experience no cash-flow problems during at least the next 25 years. Several scenarios were set forth in the release, but overall, our retirement system is in good shape as long as we can get everybody back to work as the pandemic eases.

For more detailed information regarding COLA and earnings increases or any information pertaining to the RRB, please visit [www.rrb.gov/newsroom/newsreleases](http://www.rrb.gov/newsroom/newsreleases).

**Sources:** RRB.gov; BLET Newsflash, October 29, 2020

To all of you old, legislative types retiring, I wish you happy trails. Larry said it is the best job he ever bid in. To all.. be careful and stay safe during this holiday season. Wishing everyone a blessed Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanza, and a way better 2021!

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

## ***New Local Auxiliary in Philadelphia Continued from front cover***

rewards of having a local auxiliary and the work that could benefit all rail families in their area.

Auxiliary 71 members wasted no time getting started on projects in their area to improve morale and help promote safety for the rail employees in their area. In a very small timeframe, members of this group have met with SEPTA management and safety staff to discuss safety issues and working conditions, especially as they relate to COVID-19. They have written letters to state politicians asking them to support the passage of H.R. 6800, the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, a stimulus package designed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Later in October, Auxiliary 71 members provided sweet treats to the crew members at the local terminal, in an effort to introduce them to their new local auxiliary (see story on Page 3). All this while dealing with a pandemic and a malware attack affecting railroaders' paychecks at SEPTA.

The Philadelphia Auxiliary is a wonderful example of how enthusiasm, resilience, and dedication on a local level can help bring about safer working conditions and enhance the lifestyles of railroad workers and their families. We are so proud to welcome them to our organization, and we are confident they will continue to grow and accomplish great things with each passing year.



## ***The National BLET Auxiliary extends a huge thank-you to the following for their support and generous donations this year:***

*BLET National President Dennis Pierce and  
the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen*

*Andy and Ed Haley of Cornerstone Assurance*

*Jessie Taylor and the Brotherhood's Relief & Compensation Fund*

*Phil Sullivan and the North American Railway Foundation*

*Susan Tukel and Locomotive Engineers & Conductors Mutual Protection Association*

*Angela Pullekines and United Healthcare*

*Jacquelyn Edgar, Member, Auxiliary 591, El Paso, Texas*

*BLET Division 163, Proctor, Minnesota*

*The National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen and the State Legislative  
Boards of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Wyoming, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Missouri*

*James and Janet Louis*

*Autumn Creek, Manufacturer of High Quality American-Made Soft Luggage Items*

*Schlichter, Bogard & Denton Law Firm*

*Chod Law Firm*



## Holiday Greetings from Your Editor, Rachel Pharris

*"You'll never do a whole lot unless  
you're brave enough to try."*

*-Dolly Parton*

Holiday Greetings from your editor, Rachel Pharris

I hope this newsletter finds you all in good health and ready to celebrate the holiday season. This is my first newsletter as the 1st Vice President/Outreach Coordinator. I am excited to report that we installed a new Auxiliary in Philadelphia/New Jersey within my first few weeks of office. The ladies in Philly have some great ideas and make an excellent addition to our auxiliary family.

In the first month of my position, I have spent time becoming acquainted with the other officers, working with them on fundraisers, becoming familiar with companies and organizations that support the Auxiliary, diving into some of the Auxiliary's history, and planning for 2021 with my fellow executive officers.

I know 2020 has been challenging and will affect us all in how we celebrate, but I encourage each of you to look to your family to see what traditions are important and continue those. Often when we reflect on what is most important and focus on that, we make the best memories and feel good about how our time and efforts are being spent.

I challenge each of you to gather with your auxiliary members, friends, or family and reach out to your community to help in some way. Many things can be done safely. These are a few things we have done in our community:



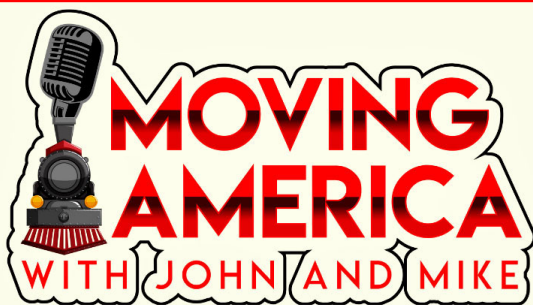
**The Pharris Family: Rachel, Braley, Brynlee, and Brad**  
**Brad is a member of BLET Div 237, Springfield, Missouri.**

- Cookies for the Crews
- Operation Christmas Child Boxes
- Holiday food basket delivery
- Random acts of kindness
- Sponsoring children/families in need through schools or local agencies

These are things that can bring families, friends, and auxiliary members closer together. By working in unison, you are creating memories, building bonds, and creating new traditions.

We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy 2021!

**Rachel Pharris can be reached at 1-417-872-9641, [rachel-rae@live.com](mailto:rachel-rae@live.com), or by snail mail at 404 South, Willard, Missouri, 65781.**



Moving America is a railroad podcast hosted by two locomotive engineers and BLET Local Chairmen, John Belcher (Div. 73) and Mike Necessary (Div. 37).

Their podcast covers various topics including industry news, personal stories from their many years of experience, and questions submitted by listeners.

The podcast can be found on various platforms including: Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, and several others. You can find Moving America Podcast on Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit as Moving America Podcast.

You can also reach them via email at [MovingAmericaPodcast@outlook.com](mailto:MovingAmericaPodcast@outlook.com)

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

**Rachel Pharris, Editor  
BLET Auxiliary News  
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417-872-9641**

**The next issue will be published in March 2021.  
Please have your submissions to Rachel on or  
before February 15, 2021.**



## **BLET Auxiliary**

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