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Honoring first responders

Spanning the ex-Virginian Railway bridge at Slab Fork, Norfolk Southern's "Honoring First Responders" EMD SD60E No. 911 leads empties toward Alloy Yard from Mullens on Watco's Kanawha River Railroad on January 24, 2017.

Photo: Chase Gunnoe

BLET files joint comments regarding rail industry automation

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) was one of five rail Brotherhoods to file joint comments on May 7 in response to the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) March 29 Request For Information (RFI) regarding automation in the railroad industry.

In general, the unions asserted that public and worker safety is their top priority, and also stressed that any roll-out of new technologies and/or automation should only be done cautiously under well-defined government safety regulations.

Signatories to the 26-page joint submission were: National President Dennis R. Pierce, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET); President John Previsich, SMART Transportation Division; President W. Dan Pickett, Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS); President F. Leo McCann, American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA); and General President Richard A. Johnson, Carmen Division/TCU.

The unions noted that safety should be the top goal of all involved stakeholders — especially the FRA — when considering the future of rail automation. The unions reminded the FRA of

its mandate from Congress, which reads in part: "[i]n carrying out its duties, the Administration shall consider the assignment and maintenance of safety as the highest priority, recognizing the clear intent, encouragement, and dedication of Congress to the furtherance of the highest degree of safety in railroad transportation."

"As such, safety must be first and foremost when discussing the future of automation of our nation's railroads," the unions wrote. "It would be unethical and would violate the mandate of Congress to sacrifice safety for potential profits."

The unions also noted that their duty

to protect the jobs and incomes of their members should not be used to discount their arguments on behalf of safety.

"Discounting our safety concerns because we fight to preserve jobs and earnings is the most extreme form of double standard, given the profit-seeking goal of the industry underlying its support of automation it may advocate," the unions wrote.

Another major assertion from the unions is that a tight regulatory framework with clearly defined terminologies is a must when exploring the future of automation.

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"DISCOUNTING OUR SAFETY CONCERNS BECAUSE WE FIGHT TO PRESERVE JOBS AND EARNINGS IS THE MOST EXTREME FORM OF DOUBLE STANDARD, GIVEN THE PROFIT-SEEKING GOAL OF THE INDUSTRY UNDERLYING ITS SUPPORT OF AUTOMATION IT MAY ADVOCATE." – RAIL BROTHERHOOD JOINT STATEMENT



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BLET PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY DENNIS R. PIERCE

BUILDING STRENGTH FROM THE GROUND UP

As many of you know from having met with me in the field, getting to know our rank and file members on a one-to-one basis is a top priority for me as your National President. As I write this message for our May 2018 issue of the *Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen News*, I am energized from having attended BLET State Legislative Board meetings in Michigan, California, Ohio and Missouri, as well as a meeting of BLET's Western General Chairmen's Association. It is always invigorating to participate in Brotherhood events where the membership is so actively involved and dedicated to the union movement.

I have worked very hard to be accessible to all members because it enables me to better understand what is going on in the industry through your experiences. This is one of the most important parts of my job, because we are at our strongest as a Union when more and more members become directly involved in our shared future.

One of the best ways to be involved with your Union is to be involved in the activities of your Local Division. This is where the ground level democracy of our union is exercised



President Pierce addresses delegates attending the California State Legislative Board's quadrennial meeting in April.

each and every month.

It's important to remember that our Brotherhood is a member-run and member-led organization. As such, our success depends on the membership being involved, and more importantly, requires that a sufficient number of members be involved as officers of each Local Division.

With the Brotherhood's triennial Local Division elections coming up later this year, I would encourage you to be involved in the process to ensure that your Local Division fills all officers' positions with the most qualified members. This local election process is where energetic members gener-

ally get their first chance to get involved at the ground level of union involvement. The desire of these proud Brothers and Sisters to make a difference and to make our Union stronger is the backbone of our Organization, and it is also what makes us different from most other organizations.

There is no CEO in a labor union who selects the next generation of the union's young officers; it is the members who own that right. There also is no top down directive as to who should hold key positions in our Local Divisions; again, it is the membership's right to select their own representatives and

leaders. This bottom-up structure is the foundation of our strength today and the basis of our success in the future.

When I first became a Local Chairman, it was because I was tired of the way I was being treated by the railroad, and thought I could make a difference. I was told that I was too young, that I didn't have enough seniority, and when I got elected I was tested by members who did not support me. None of that diminished my support of the Union movement, or my desire to do right by all members that I represented. I still remember the pride I felt the first time that I

settled a member's wrongly denied claim; taking hard earned money back from the railroad and putting it into the member's pocket, where it belonged.

The BLET National Division is here to help those who are elected. Our Education and Training Department helps our newly-elected Division officers get the training they need in order to succeed. Our specialized training classes can help the newest Local Chairman learn to be successful in representing members during investigations. Legislative Representatives learn how to effectively lobby legislators and to guide worker-friendly bills through the halls of government. Secretary-Treasurers learn the proper way to handle dues reporting and how to file the necessary paperwork to keep their financial records in order. More advanced courses are offered to officers with more experience.

With Local Division triennial elections just months away, now is the time for the next generation of union members to step up and make their contribution to the Brotherhood's 155-year-old record of distinguished service. I strongly urge you to be a part of that process.

DENNIS R. PIERCE
BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

BLET CELEBRATES 155TH ANNIVERSARY

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) proudly marked its 155th anniversary on May 9. The union was founded as the Brotherhood of the Footboard on May 8, 1863 in Marshall, Mich. In 1864, the union changed its name to Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), the name it retained for 140 years until merging with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters on Jan. 1, 2004, when it became the BLET. The BLET is the oldest labor union in the Western Hemisphere.

The organization was formed in the early 1860s when locomotive engineers on the Michigan Central Railroad became discouraged with pay cuts and the dismissal of their firemen. During that time, locomotive engineers at the Michigan Central were paid at the rate of \$60 a month on the condition that they ran at least 2,500

miles each month, regardless of the time consumed.

The BLET was the first labor organization to obtain contracts with railroads. Among the earliest was an agreement with the former New York Central in 1875. Today, the BLET has hundreds of contracts with railroads large and small, and represents locomotive engineers on 98 percent of rail trackage in the United States.

In the three decades before the founding of the BLET, locomotive engineers suffered abominable working conditions. The 24-hour workday was commonplace. Railroad magnates ran roughshod over employees. Strikes were mercilessly crushed.

Several attempts to organize locomotive engineers were made between 1855 and 1860. It wasn't until April 1863, however, that William D. Robinson, a Michigan Central locomotive engineer, brought



19 men of the craft together at his home in Marshall, Mich., and inspired them to found the organization, which survives today. A monument marking the event still stands in Marshall.

At a meeting in Detroit the following month, a dozen men agreed to tie their destinies together. They cemented a common bond on May 8, 1863,

elected Robinson as their Grand Chief Engineer (president), and named the group the Brotherhood of the Footboard. By August 1863, 10 Divisions had been established — Detroit and Marshall, Mich.; Michigan City, Ind.; Adrian, Mich.; Norwalk, Ohio; two in Chicago, Ill.; Lafayette, Ind.; Crestline, Ohio; and La Porte, Ind. The name

Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) was adopted at the first national convention held in Indianapolis in August 1864.

Greater safety on the job and greater safety for the shipping and traveling public have always been BLET's goals. Legislative activities by the BLET and other rail unions have resulted in the Locomotive Inspection Act and statutes requiring the use of air brakes, automatic couplers, electric headlights, power-reverse gears and other technological improvements. The BLET was again at the forefront in persuading Congress to include implementation of Positive Train Control technology to make the rail industry safer and more efficient, and important whistleblower provisions to protect workers who report unsafe conditions while on duty, in the Railroad Safety Improvement Act of 2008. ©©

BLET NATIONAL DIVISION ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Official communications between BLET members and the National Division require a hard copy of the correspondence, bearing a signature, being received by the National President to be considered an "official communication." This is to provide that the actual question(s) are addressed, and ensures that when official interpretations are made they have

reference to a specific request and can be used in future correspondence.

The volume of e-mails received makes it impossible for the National President to answer all unofficial communications. Therefore, it is the policy of the BLET that e-mails addressed to the National President will be reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate officer or staff for a timely

response; however, an e-mail message is not considered an official communication.

Moreover, anonymous e-mails and e-mails that do not provide sufficient information concerning the sender to enable National Division staff to confirm the sender's membership status will not receive any reply or acknowledgement. This policy is intended to allow the National

President to be aware of the opinions and suggestions of the membership, while at the same time providing a timely response to the member's unofficial communication, if a response is necessary, without needlessly expending limited BLET resources.

ADOPTED AT CLEVELAND, OHIO ON JULY 22, 2010. ©©



GENERAL PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY JAMES P. HOFFA

WORKERS NEED A WAY TO RISE UP

The falling U.S. unemployment rate is not creating a path to prosperity for low-wage workers who continue to struggle to make ends meet.

A recent staff report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York finds that the nation's 65 million workers currently scraping by in low-paying service jobs have few ladders to career success. As technology and globalization have increasingly taken hold, many traditional middle-class jobs that used to support a family have vanished.

The result is workers in low-wage jobs are more likely to become unemployed or exit that workforce than move into a better-paying job. Only about five percent will be able to find a job that allows them to enter the American middle class.

As the document notes, the country's economy would be functioning properly if workers were moving from low-wage jobs to better paying opportunities. Instead, too many hard-working Americans are getting trapped in such employment, with nowhere else to go. It's a sign that

more investment is needed in education and worker training.

Unfortunately, too many elected officials seem to be ignoring these facts. They relish the latest job numbers even though they do little to improve the quality of life for their constituents. Meanwhile, families continue to struggle to keep a roof over their heads.

That's why some are demanding change. This week, pro-worker advocates announced a plan to recreate the "Poor People's Campaign," which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was planning at the time of his death in 1968. While the campaign went forward later that summer without him, the loss of the movement's leader undermined the effort.

The Teamsters have spent much of the first half of 2018 reviving its role as a supporter of MLK's legacy to bring dignity to working Americans. It's time for pro-worker advocates to join together to show there is strength in numbers.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
TEAMSTERS GENERAL PRESIDENT



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RAIL INDUSTRY AUTOMATION COMMENTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"New technology does not always mean automated and it is important to make distinctions when and where they exist. Automation does not always mean fully autonomous operation, which is why FRA needs to provide clear definitions when it reduces the real world adoption of automation to written regulations. FRA's power to define cannot be overstated in any instance, but when dealing with automation the agency must take care to understand what is being explained and defined, as do all the stakeholders in the industry, in this complex arena.... We also believe there is no appetite on the part of the public, regulators, employees or railroads to have a fully automated system," the unions wrote.

The unions also warned that what widespread replacement of human labor by autonomous technology could create severe societal disadvantages. They pointed out that hourly inflation-adjusted wages received by the typical worker have barely risen, growing only 0.2% per year since the 1970s, and that the percentage of private-sector workers participating in an employment-based de-

finied benefit retirement plan plummeted from 28% in 1979 to just 2% in 2014, a period during which increases in productivity far outstripped increases in worker compensation.

The unions predicted that automating a significant sector of the American economy will exacerbate these negative trends, because incomes from that sector are likely to decline precipitously. Further, that automating a high-wage sector or industry like the railroad industry would produce an outsized effect on the national economy, and that the railroads would suffer declines in traffic as the purchasing power of workers whose jobs are automated out of existence disappears.

As a part of its March 29 RFI, the FRA also sought comment on a list of 25 specific questions regarding automation. The unions noted that many of those questions because they could only be answered by the rail carriers, and they reserved the right to request an extension of the May 7 deadline in order to have reasonable time to review and comment on the rail industry responses. @@

A COPY OF THE 26-PAGE SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE AT: WWW.BLE-T.ORG/PR/PDF/JOINT_LABOR_COMMENTS_050718.PDF

NS sues its own employees after March 18 accident

On April 9, 2018, the *Herald-Leader* newspaper in Lexington, Ky., reported that the Norfolk Southern Railway Co. had filed suit against two crew members whom it says were negligent and failed to prevent a March 18 train crash and derailment in Georgetown, Ky.

The suit filed April 5 in U.S. District Court in Lexington says the locomotive engineer and conductor failed to reduce the speed of the moving southbound train and prevent the collision with a stopped northbound train.

The crash damaged two NS locomotives and caused the derailment of 13 rail cars. The suit says the two crew members ignored a

signal that required them "to be prepared to stop." The suit says the two were negligent in failing to maintain a reasonable lookout, including a watch for wayside signals that govern the movement of the train.

The suit says the two men are liable for damages to the railway's property, including, but not limited to, damages to the locomotives, rail cars, tracks, right of way, communications and signal equipment, expenses related to getting the train and car back on the track, transporting the locomotives for repair, and damages for loss of use of the locomotives and rail cars. (Reporting from the Lexington *Herald-Leader*) @@

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gin receiving the most current news from the BLET National Division.

It is a great way to keep informed on the most recent issues impacting your job, your contract and your Brotherhood.

Ryan Snow reelected to second term as Chairman of California State Legislative Board

Ryan K. Snow was elected to his first full term as Chairman of the California State Legislative Board during the Board's 8th quadrennial session in Lake Tahoe, Calif., April 24-26, 2018.

A member of BLET Division 126 in Bakersfield, Calif., Brother Snow is a Union Pacific locomotive engineer. He first joined the Brotherhood on December 1, 1999. He hired out with the Union Pacific at Bakersfield, Calif., in 1998 and earned promotion to locomotive engineer in 1999, learning from former Vice Chairman Ron Marney. Brother Snow was elected to the office of 1st Vice Chairman at the California State Legislative Board's 2010 quadrennial meeting and was re-elected by acclamation in 2014. Brother Snow began serving his first term as Chairman following the retirement of Timothy L. Smith on January 31, 2017.

Also elected during the quadrennial session were: 1st Vice Chairman John B. Mobley, Division 398 (San Bernardino, Calif.); 2nd Vice Chairman Jose M. Vargas, Division 214 (Long Beach, Calif.); and Secretary-Treasurer A. O. (Tony) Langel, Division 664 (San Luis Obispo, Calif.). Brother Langel was elected by acclamation.

The delegates elected the following members to serve on the Board's Executive Committee: R. L. (Rick) Rodriguez, Division 20 (Los Angeles, Calif.); Jose M. Vargas, Division 214 (Long Beach, Calif.); Robert J. Tuttle, Division 692 (Tracy, Calif.); and Joshua S. Faulkner Division 739 (Bakersfield, Calif.).

The following were elected to serve on the Rules Committee: Christopher D. Ca-



Officers, members and guests attend the California State Legislative Board's quadrennial meeting in Lake Tahoe, April 25, 2018.

mara, Division 283 (Oakland, Calif.); Chad E. Castagnetti, Division 800 (Portola, Calif.); Lon Simmons, Division 660 (Los Angeles); Christopher J. Delgado, Division 415 (Roseville, Calif.); and R. L. (Rick) Rodriguez, Division 20 (Los Angeles, Calif.).

Three members were elected to serve on the Board's Audit Committee: Joshua S. Faulkner, Division 739 (Bakersfield, Calif.); Christopher D. Camara, Division 283 (Oakland, Calif.); and Stefan Alexis, Division 56 (West Colton, Calif.).

National Division officers at the meeting were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; First Vice President E. Lee Pruitt; and Vice President & National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman. Also representing the BLET National Division were: Director of Regulatory Affairs Vincent G. Verna; and Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Robert F. Hagan.

"I am pleased to congratulate Brother

Snow and all officers of the California State Legislative Board," President Pierce said. "I thank them for making time in their busy lives to serve our Brotherhood, and I have every confidence that they will do an excellent job of representing the interests of our members in the proud State of California."

Special guests included: Mathew Parker, Nevada State Legislative Board Chairman; Brian Carr, Union Pacific-Western Lines General Chairman; Susie Burrola, National 1st Vice President, BLET Auxiliary; and Kathleen Bisbikis, 2nd Vice President and National Legislative Representative, BLET Auxiliary.

David O. Cameron, Assistant to the Director of the Teamsters Rail Conference, was in attendance and gave a presentation on the California high-speed rail project. Additional guest speakers included: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Re-



Chairman Snow addresses delegates

gion Seven Chief Inspector Mark Gallegos; and Brian Lewis and John Herriman of the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE).

Many spouses of BLET members were in attendance to hear the presentation by Kathleen Bisbikis of the BLET Auxiliary, and various BLET members were also in attendance, including Oscar A. Burrola, Local Chairman of Division 839 (Richmond, Calif.). Retired Brother Darrell Azarcon, the long-serving former First Vice Chairman of the California State Legislative Board, was also in attendance.

Brother Snow is a U.S. Navy veteran, having proudly served from 1982-1986. He and his wife Verna were married in 1987.

The BLET California State Legislative Board represents nearly 3,000 active and retired members in 19 different Divisions. @@



PIERCE, PRUITT AND JOYNT ELECTED TO LEAD TEAMSTERS RAIL CONFERENCE

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce was reelected by acclamation to his third term as President of the Teamsters Rail Conference at the Rail Conference's Fourth Quadrennial Convention in Las Vegas on May 2, 2018.

BLET First Vice President E. Lee Pruitt was also reelected by acclamation to his third term of office as Vice President of the Rail Conference.

BMWED Vice President David D. Joynt was also elected by acclamation to the office of Rail Conference Secretary-Treasurer. He replaces Perry Geller, who has announced his retirement later this year. Brother Geller was recognized by the delegates, officers and guests in attendance at the convention for his 12 years of service as Rail Conference Secretary-Treasurer.

"Brother Pruitt, Brother Joynt and I are all honored to serve the Teamsters Rail Conference, and I look forward to advancing the causes

of rail workers represented by the BLET and BMWED," President Pierce said.

Teamster International Vice President John Murphy serves as Rail Conference Director and was on hand to address the convention delegates and to conduct the swearing in of Brothers Pierce, Pruitt and Joynt following the election.

As Rail Conference President, Pierce is the principal officer of the group and is responsible for conducting its day-to-day affairs. He also presides over meetings of the Rail Conference Policy Committee and all meetings of the Conference.

The Teamsters Rail Conference represents more than 70,000 rail workers employed as locomotive engineers, trainmen and maintenance of way workers across the United States as members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen and Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division. @@



From left: John Murphy, David Joynt, Dennis Pierce and Lee Pruitt

Tim Price reelected Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman

Timothy T. Price was elected by acclamation to his first full term as Chairman of the Ohio State Legislative Board at the Board's 16th quadrennial meeting held in Columbus, Ohio, April 22-24, 2018.

Delegates from all across the state of Ohio gathered with guests and guest speakers from throughout the United States to reflect on the Ohio State Legislative Board and BLET's successes over the past four years, while delegates charted the Ohio SLB's course for the future.

"Our delegates gathered with excitement and resolve to continue the fight for Rail Labor, our members and their families," Brother Price said.

A Norfolk Southern locomotive engineer, Brother Price is a member of BLET Division 607 (Cleveland, Ohio). He has held continuous BLET membership since December 1, 1993. In 2006, he was elected 2nd Vice Chairman of the Ohio State Legislative Board, moving up to 1st Vice Chairman a short time later. He was re-elected by acclamation to the office of 1st Vice Chairman in 2010 and 2014. In 2015, Brother Price was elevated to the office of Ohio State Legislative Board Chairman.

Also elected during the quadrennial



Members and guests of the Ohio State Legislative Board on a tour of the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus.

meeting were: 1st Vice Chairman Tom Davis, Division 511 (Portsmouth, Ohio); 2nd Vice Chairman Kevin McGinty, Division 3 (Cleveland, Ohio); Secretary-Treasurer Brian D. Garrison, Division 306 (Crestline, Ohio); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Luke Tuckerman, Division 4 (Toledo, Ohio). Brother Garrison was reelected by acclamation.

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; 1st Vice President E. Lee Pruitt; National Secretary-Treasurer Stephen J. Bruno; and Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman. Robert F. Hagan, BLET

Director of Political and Legislative Affairs, was also in attendance. Brother Hagan is a member of BLET Division 757 and served for many years as an elected official in the both the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio State Senate.

"I am proud to thank and congratulate Brother Price and all officers and members of the Ohio State Legislative Board," President Pierce said. "I am sure they will do an excellent job of representing our members in Ohio and educating elected officials regarding railroad safety and other issues of importance to the BLET."

Delegates also heard from BLET Auxiliary National President Sereena Hogan.



Officers and members attending the Ohio State Legislative Board's quadrennial meeting in Columbus, Ohio, April 23, 2018.

Numerous special guests representing various BLET General Committees of Adjustment and State Legislative Boards were also in attendance.

On the first day of the session, delegates, spouses, and guests participated in the Ohio SLB's inaugural visit and tour of the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, Ohio. They were met by: Ohio House Representative Michelle Lepore-Hagan, District 58 (Youngstown, Ohio), who is the wife of BLET member Bob Hagan; and John Patterson, Ohio House Representative, District 99. Representative Lepore-Hagan discussed the importance of rail legislation currently in the House and Senate and the process of educating the BLET membership in contacting their District Representatives and Senators as to how they should vote on these issues. Representative Patterson spoke on a brief history of the Ohio House of Representatives and their procedures while in session. "It was a fantastic experience for all of us," Brother Price said.

The Ohio State Legislative Board is comprised of 22 BLET Divisions and represents approximately 2,700 active and retired members. @@



Groose elected Chairman of Missouri State Legislative Board

Calvin L. Groose was elected the new Chairman of the Missouri State Legislative Board at its quadrennial meeting in Jefferson, Mo., May 6-8, 2018.

Brother Groose is a Union Pacific locomotive engineer and member of BLET Division 609 in Jefferson City, Mo. He has held continuous membership in the Brotherhood since January 1, 2000. He replaces outgoing Chairman Brian P. Kelley, who did not seek reelection due to his pending retirement. Brother Groose was elected to serve on the Board's Executive Committee in 2010 and again in 2014.

Also elected at the quadrennial meeting were: 1st Vice Chairman Steven C. Gillett, Division 107 (St. Joseph, Mo.); and 2nd Vice Chairman Michael A. McGill, Division 42 (St. Louis, Mo.). Re-elected by acclamation were: Secretary-Treasurer Tim L. Morgan, Division 86 (Moberly, Mo.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer William D. Honeycutt, Division 285 (Thayer, Mo.). Elected to serve on the Executive Committee were: Brian J. Young, Division 48 (St. Louis, Mo.); and Alan J. Primanzon, Division 83 (Springfield, Mo.).

The following Brothers were elected to serve on the Auditing Committee: Jeffrey M. Gassen, Division 502 (Kansas City, Mo.); J.S. (Shawn) Early, Division 8



Officers, members and guests attending the Missouri State Legislative Board's quadrennial meeting in Jefferson, Mo., May 7, 2018.

(Slater, Mo.); and Michael A. McGill, Division 42 (St. Louis, Mo.).

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; 1st Vice President E. Lee Pruitt; National Secretary-Treasurer Stephen J. Bruno; Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; and Vice President Cole W. Davis.

"I am proud to congratulate Brother Groose and all officers of the Missouri State Legislative Board," President Pierce said. "They will have their work cut out for them, but I have every confidence in their ability to rise to the challenges that lie ahead. Also, I wish all the best to outgoing Chairman Brian Kelley. It has been

a pleasure to work with him over the years and I thank him for his years of distinguished service to our union. On behalf of the entire BLET, I wish Brian Kelley a long, happy and healthy retirement. You have earned it, Brother!"

Special guests included: Pat Pfeifer, Nebraska State Legislative Board Chairman; and Tyler Jones, Kansas State Legislative Board Chairman. Brother Pfeifer and Brother Jones acted as parliamentarians for the business portion of the meeting.

The Missouri State Legislative Board's 2018 quadrennial meeting in Jefferson City began with an "ice breaker" welcome reception/pizza dinner on May 6, followed by a full day of business conducted by the delegates and officers on



From left: Bob Burns, Missouri House of Representatives; Calvin Groose, new Missouri SLBC; and Brian Kelley, outgoing Missouri SLBC

May 7. On May 8, the Board concluded its meeting by visiting the State Capitol where several Brothers climbed the 200-plus stairs to the top of the dome before heading back to their respective homes around the Show-Me State.

"Although the quadrennial only ran for about 42 hours total, it was a very productive and festive event filled with camaraderie and brotherhood," outgoing Chairman Kelley said. "Thank you to all who attended. I commend you for your dedication and involvement to our Union and our Board."

The Missouri State Legislative Board represents more than 2,000 active and retired BLET members in 22 different Divisions. @@

Disability annuities for railroad employees

The Railroad Retirement Act provides disability annuities for railroaders who become totally or occupationally disabled. Medicare coverage before age 65 is also available for totally disabled employees and those suffering from ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) or chronic kidney disease.

The following questions and answers describe these disability benefits, their requirements, and how to apply for them.

1 How do railroad retirement provisions for total disability and occupational disability differ?

A total disability annuity is based on disability for all regular work and is payable at any age to employees with at least 10 years (120 months) of creditable railroad service and, under certain conditions, to employees with 5 to 9 years of creditable railroad service after 1995.

An **occupational** disability annuity is based on **disability for the employee's regular railroad occupation** and is payable at age 60 if the employee has 10 years (120 months) of railroad service, or at any age if the employee has at least 20 years (240 months) of service. A **current connection with the railroad industry is also required for an occupational disability annuity**. The current connection requirement is normally

met if the employee worked for a railroad in at least 12 of the 30 months immediately preceding his or her annuity beginning date.

If an employee does not qualify for a current connection on this basis, but has 12 months of service in an earlier 30-month period, he or she may still meet the current connection requirement. This alternative generally applies if the employee did not have any regular employment outside the railroad industry after the end of the last 30-month period which included 12 months of railroad service, and before the month the annuity begins. Full or part-time work for a nonrailroad employer in the interval between the end of the last 30-month period including 12 months of railroad service, and the month an employee's annuity begins, can break a current connection.

2 Under what conditions can disabled employees with 5 to 9 years of service be eligible for railroad retirement disability annuities?

Employees with 5 to 9 years of service after 1995, if at least 5 years were after 1995, may qualify for an annuity based on total, but not occupational, disability if they have a disability insured status under social security law. A disability insured status is generally established when

an employee has social security or railroad retirement earnings credits in 20 calendar quarters in a period of 40 consecutive quarters ending in, or after, the quarter in which the disability began.

Unlike the two-tier annuities payable to a 10-year employee, disability annuities payable to five-year employees are initially limited to a tier I social security equivalent benefit; a tier II benefit is not payable in these cases until the employee attains age 62. And, the employee's tier II benefit will be reduced for early retirement in the same manner as the tier II benefit of an employee who retired on the basis of age, rather than disability, at age 62 with less than 30 years of service.

3 How do the standards for total disability and occupational disability differ?

An employee is considered to be totally disabled if medical evidence shows a physical and/or mental impairment preventing the performance of **any** regular and gainful work. An employee is considered to be occupationally disabled if a physical and/or mental impairment prevents the employee from performing the duties of his or her **regular railroad occupation**, even though the employee may be able to perform other kinds of work. An employee's regular occupation is generally that particular work he or she has performed for hire in more calendar months, which may or may not be consecutive, than any other work during the last five years; or that work which was performed for hire in at least one-half of all the months, which must be consecutive, in which the employee worked for hire during the last 15 years.

4 How does the amount of a railroad retirement disability annuity compare to a social security disability benefit?

Disabled railroad workers retiring directly from the railroad industry at the end of fiscal year 2017 were awarded almost \$2,920 a month on the average, while awards for disabled workers under social security averaged over \$1,295.

5 When is early Medicare coverage available for the disabled?

In general, Medicare coverage before age 65 may begin after a disabled employee annuitant has been entitled to monthly benefits based on total disability for at least 24 months and has a disability insured status under social security law. There is no 24-month waiting period for those who have ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. The fact that an employee is **initially** awarded an occupational disability annuity does not preclude early Medicare coverage, if the employee's physical and/or mental condition is such that he or she is totally disabled.

Medicare coverage on the basis of permanent kidney failure requiring dialysis or a kidney transplant is available not only to employee annuitants, but also to employees who have not retired but meet certain minimum service requirements, as well as spouses and dependent children. For those suffering from chronic kidney disease, coverage may begin with

the third month after dialysis treatment begins, or earlier under certain conditions. The Social Security Administration usually has jurisdiction of Medicare for those eligible on the basis of permanent kidney failure.

6 Do the railroad retirement disability annuity requirements include a waiting period similar to the one required for social security disability benefits?

Yes. A five-month waiting period beginning with the month after the month of the disability's onset is required before railroad retirement disability annuity payments can begin. However, an applicant need not wait until this five-month period is over to file for benefits.

An employee can be in compensated service while filing a disability application provided that the compensated service is not active service and terminates within 90 days from the date of filing. When an employee files a disability application while still in compensated service, it will be necessary for the employee to provide a specific ending date of the compensation.

Compensated service includes not only compensation with respect to active service performed by an employee for an employer, but also includes pay for time lost, wage continuation payments, certain employee protection payments and any other payment for which the employee will receive additional creditable service.

7 What documentation is required when filing for a railroad retirement disability annuity?

Employees filing for disability annuities are required to submit medical evidence supporting their claim. Applicants should be prepared to furnish dates of hospitalization, names and dosages of medication, names of doctors, etc. Applicants may also be asked to take special medical examinations given by a doctor named by the RRB. If a disability applicant is receiving workers' compensation or public disability benefits, notice of such payments must be submitted.

Sources of medical evidence for railroad retirement disability purposes may include, but are not limited to, the applicant's railroad employer, personal physician and hospital, the Social Security Administration, or the agency paying workers' compensation or public disability benefits. This evidence generally should not be more than 12 months old. In addition, proof of age and proof of any military service credit claimed and a description of past work activity will also be required.

8 What is the best way to apply for a railroad retirement disability annuity or early Medicare coverage?

Applications for railroad retirement disability annuities are generally filed at one of the RRB's field offices, or at one of the office's Customer Outreach Program (CORP) service locations, or by telephone and mail. However, applications by railroad employees for early Medicare coverage on the basis of kidney disease have to be filed with

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an office of the Social Security Administration, rather than the RRB.

To expedite filing for a railroad retirement disability annuity, disabled employees or a family member should call, write, or send a secure message via Field Office Locator to the agency's nearest field office to schedule an appointment. For the appointment, claimants should bring in any medical evidence in their possession and any medical records they can secure from their treating sources, such as their regular physician. Employees who are unable to personally visit an RRB office or meet an RRB representative at a CORP service location may request special assistance, such as having an agency representative come to a hospital or the employee's home. RRB personnel can assist disabled employees with their applications and advise them on how to obtain any additional medical evidence required, or any other necessary documents or records.

9 Can an individual continue to receive an employee disability annuity even if he or she does some work after it begins?

Special earnings rules apply to disability annuitants and they are more stringent than those that apply to annuitants who have retired on the basis of age and service. Disability annuities are not payable for any month in which the annuitant earns more than \$920 in 2018 in any employment or self-employment, exclusive of work-related expenses. Withheld payments will be restored if earnings for 2018 are less than \$11,500 after deduction of disability-related work expenses. Failure to report such earnings could involve a significant penalty charge.

These disability work restrictions cease upon a disabled employee annuitant's attainment of full retirement age (age 65 for those born before 1938 to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later). This transition is effective no earlier than full retirement age, even if the annuitant had 30 years of service. Earnings deductions continue to apply to annuitants working for their last pre-retirement nonrailroad employer.

If a disabled annuitant works before full retirement age, this may also raise a question about the possibility of that individual's recovery from disability, regardless of the amount of earnings. Consequently, any earnings must be re-

ported promptly to avoid overpayments, which are recoverable by the RRB and may also include penalties.

10 Does employment with a rail labor organization affect eligibility for a disability annuity?

Payment of an employee's disability annuity cannot begin earlier than the day after the employee stops working in compensated service for any railroad employer, including labor organizations. Such work includes service for **more than \$24.99 in a calendar month** to a local lodge or division of a railway labor organization. Also, work by a local lodge or division secretary collecting insurance premiums, regardless of the amount of salary, is railroad work which must be stopped.

11 Must an employee relinquish employment rights in order to receive a disability annuity?

An employee can be in compensated, but non-active, service while filing a disability annuity application as long as the compensated service terminates within 90 days from the date of filing. However, in order for a supplemental annuity to be paid or for an eligible spouse to begin receiving benefits, a disability annuitant under full retirement age must relinquish employment rights.

12 How can individuals get more information about disability annuities?

More information is available under the Benefits tab (**Disability**). Field Office Locator provides easy access to any field office web page where the street address and other service information is posted, as well as the option to contact the office directly by using the feature labeled send a secure message. The agency's toll-free number (1-877-772-5772) is equipped with an automated menu offering a variety of service options which include finding the street address for a local field office, hearing general information about benefits, and being transferred to an office to speak with a representative or leave a message. Most RRB field offices are open to the public on weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., except on Wednesdays when offices are open from 9:00 a.m. to noon. All RRB offices are closed on Federal holidays. @@

STB investigates as shippers complain of deteriorating rail service

On March 16, 2018, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) requested that all Class I railroads provide their service outlook plans in the near term and for the remainder of 2018 due to increased concerns over deteriorating service.

One shipper's association accused railroads of trying to impress Wall Street investors rather than investing in their train crews and networks. In a March 10 letter to the STB, the National Grain and Feed Association complained about deteriorating rail service due to lack of locomotives and train crews.

"[T]here is a fundamental concern among rail customers that the underlying root cause of these service... issues is Class I railroads' aggressive effort to reduce their operating ratios to impress Wall Street investors and shareholders. This, in turn, has resulted in the systemic shedding of resources by Class I carriers, including locomotives and crews, that has degraded service to unacceptable levels, and resulted in virtually non-existent surge capacity to meet rail customers' needs."

The STB asked for information about each railroad's network, including locomotive availability, employee resources,

local service performance, service demand, communication strategies, and capacity constraints. The STB said it was "increasingly concerned" about the state of freight rail service in the U.S.

"In recent weeks, the Board has become increasingly concerned about the overall state of rail service based on the weekly data collected by the Board pursuant to 49 C.F.R. pt. 1250," the STB wrote. "Although there are exceptions, most Class I railroads' data indicate that service is deteriorating, while system average dwell time has climbed. For those same railroads, other key metrics—such as the average number of cars in revenue service that have not moved in 48 hours or more—are trending in an unfavorable direction. The Board's Rail Customer and Public Assistance Staff will begin holding weekly calls with these carriers."

STB leadership requested that each Class I railroad carrier to provide a written response related to their respective outlooks for rail operations across their networks to address various issues related to rail service adequacy, including: locomotive availability; employee resources; local service performance; demand; communication; and capacity restraints. @@



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News Briefs

BEGEMAN BECOMES STB CHAIR

On March 20, 2018, the White House designated Ann Begeman chair of the Surface Transportation Board (STB). A Republican, Begeman is serving her second five-year term on the STB, following her nomination by President Barack Obama on December 7, 2016, and her unanimous confirmation by the U.S. Senate of December 9, 2016. Her current term will expire on December 31, 2020.

CLASS I EMPLOYMENT UP A BIT IN MID-APRIL

As of mid-April, U.S. Class railroads employed 145,959 workers, up 0.59 percent since mid-March, but down 2.11 percent compared with April 2017, according to Surface Transportation Board data. All but one employment category — professional and administrative — reflected slight increases in the workforce on a month-over month basis. The number of transportation employees (train and engine) was up 0.99 percent to 60,891 when compared to mid-March 2018.

HOMENDY NOMIATED TO SERVE ON NTSB

In mid-April, the White House announced its intention to nominate Jennifer L. Homendy to serve a five-year term on the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). She currently serves as Democratic Staff Director of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials for the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, U.S. House of Representatives, a position she has held since 2004. She advises members of Congress on legislation involving railroads, the safety of oil and natural gas pipelines, and the transportation of hazardous materials. She is certified by the International Association of Fire Fighters on Core HazMat Operations and Missions-Specific PPE and Product Control. From 1999 to 2004, she was a Legislative Representative for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Prior to that, Ms. Homendy worked for the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, the American Iron and Steel Institute, and the National Federation of Independent Business. @@



Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen News Brotherhood Of Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen

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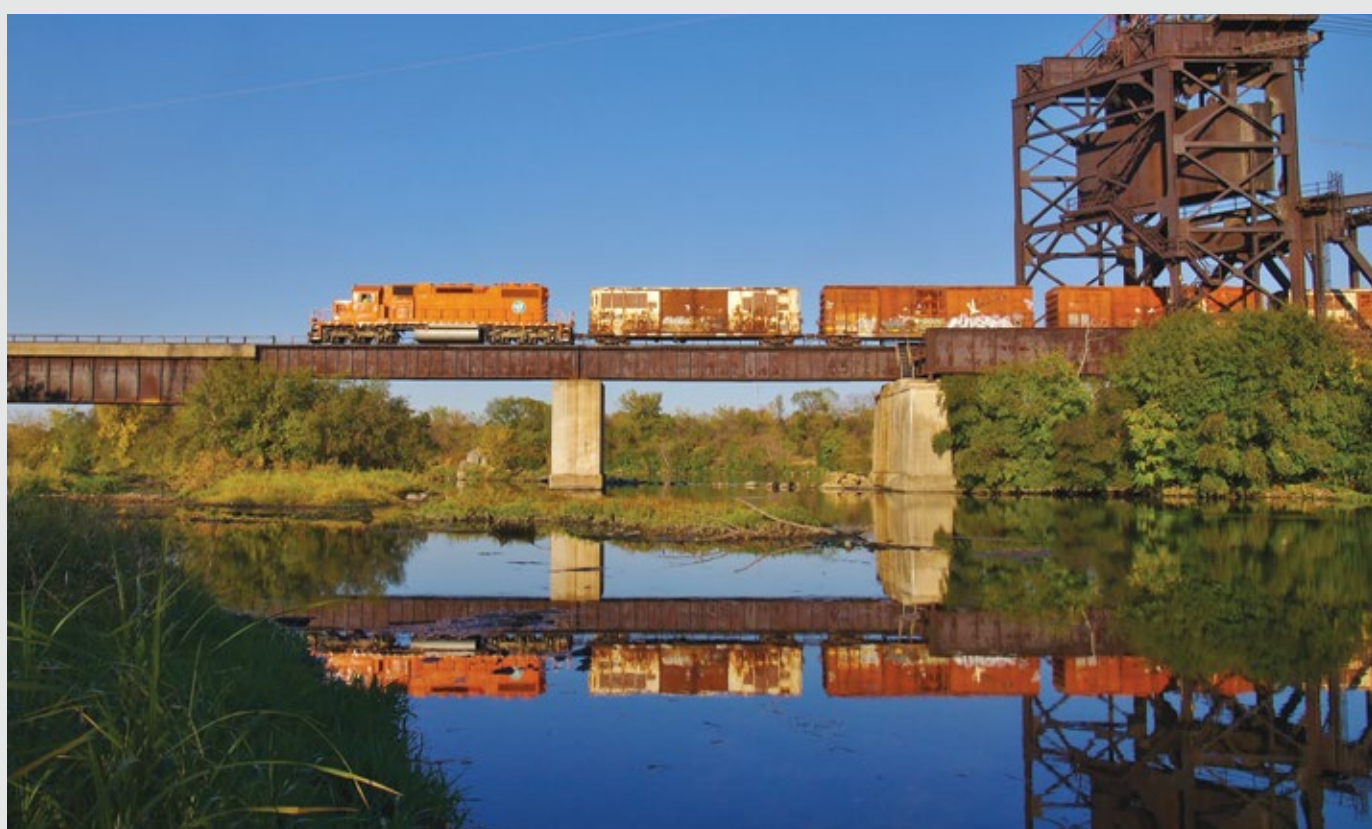
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5/18

Photo of the Month: May 2018



EJ&E REFLECTIONS: An Elgin, Joliet and Eastern (EJ&E) locomotive (EMD SD 38) is crossing the Des Plaines River at Joliet, Ill., headed west-bound with a Joliet-to-BNSF Eola, Ill. transfer. **Photo:** taken with a Pentax K5II on October 12, 2012, by Brother Jay Norton, a member of BLET Division 404 in Chicago, Ill.



Are you a photographer? The National Division's Public Relations Department, which produces the Newsletter each month, has received numerous inquiries lately from BLET members volunteering to contribute their

images to the "Photo of the Month" section of the Newsletter. If you'd like to submit a photo for consideration, you may call Editor John Bentley at (216) 241-2630, ext. 248, or you can email: Bentley@ble-t.org.

Please note only high resolution images can be used. Members are also encouraged to review their employer's policies regarding the use of cameras and other electronic devices while on duty.

Advisory Board April 2018 Activity

In accordance with the BLET Bylaws, summaries of BLET Advisory Board members' activities are published monthly:

NATIONAL PRESIDENT DENNIS R. PIERCE: National Division Office, Independence, Ohio; General supervision of BLET activities; General office duties; Correspondence and telephone communications; Supervision of Office Administration; General Supervision of Special Representatives; President, Teamsters Rail Conference; Policy Committee, Teamsters Rail Conference; CEO meeting, BNSF, Fort Worth, Texas; Ohio State Legislative Board mtg., Columbus, Ohio; California State Legislative Board mtg., Lake Tahoe, Calif.; Advisory Board and Rail Conference mtgs., Las Vegas.

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT E.L. (LEE) PRUITT: National Duties include but not limited to: Shortline Organizing Dept.; Trainmen's Dept.; National Publications Committee; National Legislative Board; Teamsters Rail Conference Policy Committee; PRAC; and National Negotiations; National duties, Independence, Ohio; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; Ohio State Legislative Board mtg., Columbus, Ohio; California State Legislative Board mtg., Lake Tahoe, Calif.; Rail Conference and Advisory Board mtgs., Las Vegas.

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER STEPHEN J. BRUNO: General supervision of Accounting Dept., Record Dept., Online Services Dept., Tax Compliance Dept.; Safety Task Force; PAC and FEC reports and filings; Implementation and training for BLET membership database/Union Track; Pension, STD, 457 plan Trustee; Division, General Committee and SLB monthly Trustee reports; Mtgs. with vendors and financial institutions; Union Track issues, testing, status updates, etc.; Triennial election planning and oversight issues; Ohio State Legislative Board mtg., Columbus, Ohio; Vacation; Rail Conference and Advisory Board mtgs., Las Vegas; BNSF online training class.

VICE PRESIDENT & NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN P. TOLMAN: Assigned to BLET Washington, DC office; General office duties, telephone and correspondence communications; Presentation on autonomous vehicles by Duke University Dr. Cummings, Washington, D.C.; Ohio State Legislative Board mtg., Columbus, Ohio; California State Legislative Board mtg., Lake Tahoe, Calif.; Attended Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee confirmation hearing on Patrick J. Fuchs, Washington, D.C.; OneRail mtg., Washington, D.C.; Advisory Board and Rail Conference mtgs., Las Vegas; Mtgs. w/ candidates for Governor and Congress, Washington, D.C.; Various meetings with U.S. Senators working on rail issues; Numerous receptions and office visits with members of Congress and the leadership of both the GOP and Democratic parties, Washington, D.C.

VICE PRESIDENT MARCUS J. RUEF: Vice Chairman, National Railroad Adjustment Board (NRAB); National Mediation Board (NMB) Arb. Adv. Forum; Department Head, BLET Arbitration Department; Assigned to Illinois Central, Wisconsin Central, CN-Cedar River, Indiana Harbor Belt, Belt Railway of Chicago, Metra, GRR, Illinois RR and Union Railroad; Vacation; Assist GC Craddock, Semenek, and Balonek w/ Rule 16 issue, Metra, Chicago; Adopt awards PLB 7154, IC, Chicago; Assist GC Reynolds w/ NYD, Section 6 issues and discipline issues, WC, Chicago; Assist GC Burns w/ NRAB filing, IHB, Chicago; Assist GC Sexton w/ rules issues, LIRR, Chicago; Assist GC Craddock w/ TA Synopsis, IC, Chicago; BNSF party pay issue, ND, Chicago; Assist GC Bangham w/ approval process for TA, URR, Chicago; Rail Conference and Advisory Board mtgs., Las Vegas; Work on Circular 1-88, NRAB, Chicago.

VICE PRESIDENT MIKE TWOMBLY: Assigned to all Union Pacific GCAs (Eastern District, Northern Region (former C&NW), Western Lines (Pacific Harbor Lines), Western Region (Portland & Western), Central Region, Southern Region; Tacoma Belt RR, Utah RR, Longview Portland &

Northern NO & Longview Switch, Portland Terminal; On duty at home office; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; UP General Chairman's update passenger extra, Long Beach, CA to San Luis Obispo, CA; Vacation; Advisory Board and Rail Conference mtgs., Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT GIL GORE: Assigned to all CSX; Grand Trunk Western; Union Pacific-Southern Region GCA special assignment; Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) issues, CSXT; General office duties, paperwork, correspondence, emails, telephone calls, etc.; Assist GC Kerley, IDRR agreement; CSXT and GTW paperwork; Time Limits; FDV CD to SBRR; Conference call; IRR ratification mtg., Sullivan, Ind.; Rail Conference and Advisory Board mtgs., Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. PRIESTER: Assigned to all BNSF (former ATSF, former C&S, CRI&P, FWD, former STL-SF, BNSF/MRL), Panhandle Northern, Missouri & North Arkansas, Montana Rail Link, Great Western; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; Santa Fe Secretary-Treasurers workshops, BNSF, Phoenix, Ariz. And Fort Worth, Texas; MRL contract negotiations, assist GC LaPrath, Billings, Mont.; PLB 7771 Executive Session conference call w/ Arbitrator Myers and BNSF LR, Henderson; Advisory Board and Rail Conference mtgs., Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT COLE W. DAVIS: Assigned to: Kansas City Southern (MidSouth Rail, SouthRail, Gateway Western, Illinois & Midland), Texas Mexican Rwy.; CP Rail System/US (Indiana Southern, Iowa, Chicago & Eastern, Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern); Springfield Terminal (St. Lawrence & Atlantic, Delaware & Hudson), Louisville & Indiana, Huron & Eastern; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; DM&E and CP issues, assist GC Semenek; Soo Line contract issues, assist GC Semenek; Mid South and I&M issues, assist GC Craddock; W&LE mediation/arbitration, assist GC Fannon, Chicago; D&H and Springfield Terminal issues, assist GC Moore; Tex Mex issues, assist GC Heise; KCS issues, assist GC Sexton; Louisville & Indiana issues, assist GC Hogan; WLE issues, assist GC Fannon; Division 599 mtgs. w/ GC Spradlin, Shreveport, MS; Advisory Board and Rail Conference mtgs., Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT R.C. (RICK) GIBBONS: Assigned to: All Norfolk Southern General Committees; Wheeling & Lake Erie; Chicago, Fort Wayne & Eastern; New York, Susquehanna & Western; New England Central; Connecticut Southern; Western New York & Pennsylvania; Indiana & Ohio; RSAC/RSIA Fatigue Management Group; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications; Vice President duties; On duty at home office; Division 120 mtg., assist GC Dehart, North Kansas City, Mo.; Chicago, Ft. Wayne & Eastern mtgs., assist GC Dehart, Tampa, Fla.; Advisory Board and Rail Conference mtgs., Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT JAMES P. LOUIS: Assigned Amtrak; Long Island Rail Road; New York & Atlantic; Metro North; New Jersey Transit; PATH; SEPTA; Metra; National Division Department Head, Education & Training Dept.; National Division Department Head, Internal Organizing, Mobilizing & Strategic Planning Dept.; Union Track mtgs. and training; Education & Training issues; BLET Regional Meeting planning; BLET National Convention planning; PLB 7739, Conrail GCA; LIRR issues, assist GC Sexton; SEPTA issues, assist GC Hill; WNY&P investigation and GCA issues, Meadville; MBOR contract talks, assist GC Kenny, Boston; SEPTA contract talks, assist GC Hill; NY&A contract talks, assist GC Sexton; Advisory Board and Rail Conference mtgs., Las Vegas.

Plan ahead for BLET's Washington D.C. regional meeting

The deadline for hotel reservations is approaching soon and BLET members and guests are encouraged to register now for the BLET's regional meeting at the Capital Hilton in Washington, D.C., which will be held August 13-17, 2018.

Guests at the Washington D.C. regional meeting will stay at the Capital Hilton (1001 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C., 20036, (800) 774-1500). BLET convention registration as well as hotel registration can be made through the BLET's regional meeting website, www.bletregionals.org. If making reservations by telephone, you must mention the group code "BLET." Room reservations must be made by July 7, 2018.

Photo: courtesy of washington.org



The Capital Hilton is situated in the heart of Washington D.C. just blocks from the White House, the National Mall, and a multitude of significant national attractions. Museums include the National Air and Space Museum, International Spy Mu-

seum, National Museum of American History, and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. National monuments in the area include the Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, National World War II Memorial, and the Wash-

ington Monument.

The Washington D.C. regional meeting kicks off with registration and a welcome reception on Monday, August 13 for those who purchased tickets for the event. Opening ceremonies will take place the morning of

Tuesday, August 14, with a closed meeting for BLET members that afternoon. A golf tournament will be held on Wednesday, August 15, at the National Golf Club in Fort Washington, Md. There is an additional cost to register for the golf tournament. Non-golfers will be on their own to explore the many entertainment options that Washington, D.C. has to offer.

Workshops will be held for Local Chairmen, Secretary-Treasurers and Legislative Representatives throughout the day on Thursday, August 16. The BLET's Washington D.C. regional meeting will conclude with a banquet the evening of August 16. Attendees will travel home on August 17. @