Sweeping legislation addresses BLET limbo time, BWMed camp cars

By a vote of 377-38, Representatives in the U.S. House passed the Railroad Safety Improvement Act (H.R. 2095) on October 17, eliminating camp cars and decreasing limbo time, both important issues for Teamsters rail conference members.

“Our rail members, the engineers, trainmen and maintenance of way workers who ensure that this nation’s rail system runs safely, won a major victory with the passage of H.R. 2095,” said Jim Hoffa, Teamsters General President.

“We’ve been fighting Norfolk Southern for years about eliminating their disgusting camp cars and finally Congress is backing us up,” said Fred Simpson, President of the Brotherhood of Way Employees division of the Teamsters Rail Conference. “NS was the last railroad to keep these substandard accommodations and we will be glad to see them go. Our members should never have had to endure the cramped and unsanitary conditions in those cars.”

Camp cars are mobile dormitories that are used to house maintenance of way crew members while on assignment repairing tracks. Usually the cars house eight men each and most are not equipped with indoor toilets or potable water. Men assigned to these cars must walk outside, even in the dead of winter, to use porta-johns and drink bottled water because the water in the cars is unfit to drink.

Another part of the far-reaching act sets new limits for limbo time for locomotive engineers and trainmen. Currently, engineers and trainmen can work up to 20 hours or more per shift before they take eight hours of rest. Since their full work day can last up to 12 hours, they might spend 8 hours or more in limbo time where they can’t sleep, must remain vigilant and are not paid for that time.

“...” is a step in the right direction to impede the rail carriers’ abuse of our much needed rest time,” said Don Hahs, President of the BLET. “The passage of H.R. 2095 means that engineers and trainmen may eventually be paid for all of the time they spend on the job. They will also have the chance to obtain adequate rest between assignments, reducing fatigue.”

BLET Vice-President & National Legislative Representative John Tolman thanked involved for their efforts in this major legislative achievement.

“This victory would not have been possible without the help and support of BLET and ILG Auxiliary officers and members who traveled to Capitol Hill to make our case, and phoned and wrote their Representatives,” he said. “I also thank our BWMed counterparts and to the Teamsters Government Affairs Department who worked tirelessly with us.”

Among other provisions in H.R. 2095 are:

• Restructuring of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), placing greater emphasis on its safety role and increasing substantially the number of qualified inspectors;
• Creation of fatigue management programs, a guarantee of 10 hours of uninterrupted rest, and a guarantee of one 24-hour off-duty period every seven days;
• Strengthened whistleblower protections; a worker may refuse to authorize the use of equipment the employee reasonably believes to be unsafe or hazardous to operate or work with;
• Implementation of positive train control, a technology serving as a backup device to improve the safety of locomotive engines for all rail workers;
• Vast improvement in safety for operations in un-signaled track, or dark territory;
• Certification of train conductors;
• A study of locomotive cab conditions;
• A requirement for emergency breathing apparatus in all locomotive cabs; and
• New regulations that would put an end to the harassment and intimidations of rail workers who report personal injuries.

Flexible Benefits program allows members to save on health care

An important health care benefit secured by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen during the most recent national contract is in danger of falling by the wayside unless membership participation increases.

The Railroad Employees Flexible Benefits Program allows members to use pre-tax dollars to pay for certain medical expenses or dependent care expenses. The plan would allow members to save anywhere from $120 to $5,000 per year on dependent care expenses, or $120 to $3,600 per year on medical expenses.

However, Side Letter #8 of the National Contract specifies that at least five percent of eligible BLET members must participate in the plan or it will be terminated as of December 31, 2009. The deadline to register for the 2009 benefit year is October 26, 2007. The BLET is encouraging all members to contact United HealthCare for details on participating in the plan.

“There are many positive aspects of the Flexible Benefits Program and it is not something that we want to lose,” BLET National President Don M. Hahs said.

Members may choose to participate in one of two programs.

The first program, Health Flexible Spending Arrangement (Health FSA), allows members to use tax-free dollars to pay for health care benefits such as the following: doctor co-pays, drug co-pays, dental

Continuous good standing required to run in 2009 division elections

Although the 2009 Triennial Elections are more than two years away, BLET members must prepare now to ensure their eligibility to run for elected positions.

According to BLET by-laws, to be eligible to run for division office in 2009, a member will have to have been in continuous good standing for 24 months prior to the month of nominations. Specifically, such member would have to be sure to pay full dues from September 2007 through August 2008 in order to run in the 2009 Triennial Elections.

The Office of Labor Management Standards (OLMS), an office of the U.S. Department of Labor, requires unions to provide proper notice to all members regarding eligibility for office. This notice is posted on the BLET website and will appear in the October 2007 issue of the BLET monthly newsletter to satisfy that requirement.

Any members with questions regarding this policy or the dates outlined above should contact the BLET National Division in writing: BLET National Division Nat’l Sec.-Treas. 1370 Ontario St., Mezz. Cleveland, OH 44113-1702

The Electronic Communications Policy of the National Division, as published on the BLET website, is that official communications between members and the National Division require a hard copy of the correspondence — with 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 responded to. This process has ensured that when official interpretations are made they have reference to a specific request and can be used in future correspondence.

Flexible Benefits Program and it is not something that we want to lose,” noted BLET National President Don M. Hahs.

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See Flexible Benefits, Page 3
J.T. Little IV of BLET Division 781 (Erwin, Tenn.) was elected Chairman of the Tennessee State Legislative Board on September 20 at the Board’s quadrennial session in Nashville. Brother Little was elected by acclamation.

Little will serve a four-year term in accordance with the Board’s bylaws. He joined the BLET on February 1, 1952, and has been a member of Division 781 since July 1, 1978.

“I am my goal to see that our Legislative Representatives receive the tools needed to safeguard our members,” Brother Little said. “To convey a message that the LR is more important today than ever before, we will give direct assistance to our Divisions with visits, training, and other issues. Brother Tim Smith, Chairman of the National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen, shared with our Board a grand training presentation that we will adopt. We will also challenge our members to make contact with their representatives within their home districts as well. We need to establish ourselves as the authority to speak to the railroad industry issues.”

Also elected was First Vice Chairman Jim Day (Division 170-Memphis, Tenn.). The following officers were elected by acclamation: Second Vice Chairman and Legislative Representative Barry Faulkner (Division 41-Nashville, Tenn.); Secretary Rusty Jones (Division 230-Knoxville, Tenn.); Alternate Secretary Treasurer Tony Barr (Division 255-Chatanooga, Tenn.); and elected to the newly created position of Executive Committee Member-at-Large was Bill Davis (Division 198-Chattanooga, Tenn.).

“The present Executive Board and our members are a blend of rail properties and talent that will serve quite well,” Little said. “Our Board has elected a Legislative Representative, Barry Faulkner that will serve the Board on the bill. Brother Faulkner, presently is the Mayor of Cross Plains, Tenn., located within minutes of the Capitol. His prior visits to the current Governor’s office is exciting and this option will give our BLET membership a more personal, specialized and immediate service as needed.”

Representing the BLET National Division were: National President Don M. Hahs; National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert; Vice-President & National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; and Coordinator of Education and Training Ken Kroeger.

President Hahs addressed the delegates regarding affairs of the National Division, including the recently ratified national contract and organizing, among other items. NST Walpert provided a report on the financial status of the Brotherhood and current membership statistics. VP & NLR Tolman discussed the state of unions in the country and current rails before Congress. Tolman also presented a plaque to outgoing Tennessee State Chairman Mike McClary and ST Gene Myhan, thanking them for their years of dedicated service to the Brotherhood.

Brother McClary of the Tennessee State Legislative Board Chairman Tim Smith was in attendance and gave a condensed version of the Legislative Representative training class to the delegates in session.

Patty Abate, executive director of Citizens for Rail Safety, spoke to delegates about the group’s origin and what it is doing for rail safety. She encouraged all BLET members in attendance to join her organization. Gray Sasser, Chairman of the Tennessee Democratic Party, emphasized the need for political action and stressed the importance of contributing to your union PAC fund. (As a side note if you are not already a contributor please get in touch with your Division Legislative Rep who can tell you how to contribute.)

The members in attendance also worked on updating their by-laws with such as the new position of Executive Committee Member-at-Large and established a Legislative Representative position to represent their members at the state capital. Outgoing Chairman Mike McClary said: “Unfortunately I was unable to run again for Chairman but I believe the work the delegates did to update our by-laws will be of great benefit to our membership in our state. I am confident the current Executive Committee can move this Board forward.”

UP-Western Lines GC Bill Hannah re-elected by acclamation

D.W. “Bill” Hannah was re-elected by acclamation as General Chairman of the Union Pacific-Western Lines General Committee of Adjustment at triennial meetings in San Diego on September 27.

Brother Hannah is a member of BLET Division 56 in Colton, Calif., and joined the Brotherhood on February 1, 1979. He first became General Chairman in September of 2001.

Also elected were: 1st Vice Chairman N.C. Carson (Division 445-Dallas); 2nd Vice Chairman L.R. Law of Division 56 (Colton, Calif.); 3rd Vice Chairman W.E. Hill of Division 592 (Dalhart, Texas); Secretary-Treasurer C.H. Fleming III of Division 192 (El Paso, Texas); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer C.V. Houston of Division 415 (Roseville, Calif.). In addition to Chairman Hannah, Brothers Carson and Hill were re-elected by acclamation.

BLET National President Don Hahs attended the meeting and addressed delegates regarding National Division issues. Vice President E.L. “Lee” Fruit also addressed delegates and discussed the BLET’s short term disability program and ongoing negotiations with UP regarding incentive based compensation.

Other invited guests included: Tim Smith, Chairman of the BLET California State Legislative Board; John Conklin, Locomotive Engineer certification specialist from the Federal Railroad Administration; and Dell Butlerfield, President of the Union Pacific Employees Health Association.

The Union Pacific-Western Lines General Committee of Adjustments represents 2,000 BLET members from 18 Divisions throughout California, Texas, Kansas, Arizona and Nevada.
Brown elected Chairman of Minnesota SLB

David Brown of BLET Division 517 was elected Chairman of the Minnesota State Legislative Board by acclamation on September 28 at the Board’s quadrennial Session in Minneapolis.

Brother Brown hired on with the Burlington Northern in 1971 in the operating crafts and became a locomotive engineer in 1993. He is currently a Regional Trainer/Instruction for Hazmat, Radiological and Security with the National Labor College / George Meany Center.

Brother Brown will serve a four-year term in accordance with the Board’s bylaws. Also elected by acclamation were: First Vice Chairman Keith Staubert (Division 163); 2nd Vice Chairman William Croyer (Division 302); Secretary Treasurer Mark Anderson (Division 333); and Alternate Secretary Treasurer Rick Johnson (Division 357).

“As a major priority, I will work to enhance the education of our Division LRs and our members,” the newly-elected Chairman said. “This Board will dynamically promote the legislative issues that will advance the safety and health of rail labor.

“We have a diverse and experienced group on the Board that I am confident will represent and serve these interests. Through the training and assistance our LRs will receive, we can impact upon the membership the significance of representing the BLET in local, state and national union issues.”

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: Vice-President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman; Vice-President Dale McPherson; and Coordinator of Education and Training Ken Kroeger.

Vice President Tolman discussed the state of unions in the country and current rail bills before Congress. He also presented a plaque to outgoing President and National Legislative Representative Ken Kroeger thanking him for his years of dedication to the Board.

Brother Perkovich did not seek re-election due to his upcoming retirement.

“I got involved in the BLET at the Division level and through that involvement I was able to do things during my railroad career that I never thought I would be part of,” he said. “Hopefully, through that involvement, I have made a difference for BLET members.”

North Dakota SLB Chairman Mike Muscha and ex-Colorado SLB Chairman George Last were also in attendance. Brother Muscha gave a presentation on the importance of contributing to the PAC fund. (As a sidenote, if you are not already a contributor to the PAC Fund, please get in touch with your Division LR or call us to sign up.)

Sereena Hogan, 1st Vice President and Legislative Representative of the BLET Auxiliary, gave a presentation explaining the purpose and mission of the Auxiliary and what it can do to help BLET members. She encouraged every division LR to take the information packets she distributed back to their divisions to make every effort to get an Auxiliary started in their area. The delegates had a very packed agenda. Besides the normal business there were several presentation.

Dave Brown gave a condensed version of the National Labor College’s hazmat workshop.

Shanta Schmitt from the Railroad Retirement Board, delivered a presentation on what is new with regard to Railroad Retirement.

John Smullen from the Federal Railroad Administration gave an overview of the FRA, Hours of Service, Locomotive Horn Sounding and SACP and SOFA.

Randy Croce from the University of Minnesota gave a presentation on the history of labor and focused on the history of the BLET. Tom Deyer, from the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railway Employees, gave a presentation on the importance of keeping retired members involved in legislative matters.

During a special ceremony during the concluding banquet, the State Legislative Board gave Brother Perkovich a large framed painting of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald, the famous Great Lakes freighter that sank in Lake Superior on November 10, 1975, claiming the lives of 29 men. Brother Perkovich actually worked on and sailed on the Edmund Fitzgerald after completing his service with the armed forces. The ship was immortalized by the Gordon Lightfoot ballad, “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.”

BA-6 update: Members must notify Railroad Retirement when claims cases are pending

In the June/July issue of the BLET News, we discussed the importance of members checking their Railroad Retirement Board form BA-6 form for accuracy — the form that lists your total earnings as creditable compensation that may not be paid. If your BA-6 is incorrect, the Railroad Retirement Board will follow through with the Railroad Retirement records as creditable compensation which would adversely affect an annuity.

Each June, the RRBI issues a Form BA-6 to your home mailing address. If any of the earnings are not properly reported to the RRBI, then your annuity will be affected or you will not receive the proper amount. Therefore, it is your responsibility to check this form each year — do not wait until you retire to discover a mistake! The RRBI has a four-year window in which corrections can be made.

By law organizations must retain records for only seven years then the old records can be destroyed. Please report any discrepancies to the National Division’s Tax Compliance Department, who will follow through with the Railroad Retirement Board.

Flexible Benefits

Continued from Page 1
tal co-pays or other dental expenses not covered in our dental plan; vision co-pays or additional eye care not covered under the national plan; and over-the-counter medications (cold medicine, decongestant medicine, aspirin, Tylenol or their generic equivalent, etc…). This program offers savings of $120 to $3,600 per year.

The second program, Dependent Care Assistance Program (DCAP), allows members to use pre-tax dollars for certain dependent care expenses, such as out-of-pocket dependent care expenses for childcare or care for physically or mentally handicapped dependents. This program offers savings of $120 to $5,000 per year.

“The advantage of these programs is that it allows members to save on their taxes and increase their net-spendable income,” Bahr said.

“Please take the time to check with United HealthCare to see how these benefits may pertain to your individual situation so that we are able to have this plan in the future.

Members should have received an enrollment packet from United HealthCare regarding the Flexible Benefits Program. To obtain another copy, or for more information on the program, please contact United HealthCare at (877) 311-7949.”
The BLET Education and Training Department will conduct its final Secretary-Treasurer Compliance Workshop of 2007 in Cleveland from December 2-5. The class will start at 7 p.m. on Dec. 2 and conclude at noon on Dec. 5. The meeting will be held at the Hyatt Regency at the Arcade, 420 Superior Ave., which is within walking distance of the BLET’s National Division headquarters.

As most STs already know, many changes have been implemented regarding the filing of LM reports this year. The changes to the LM Report along with the new 990-N and EPTPS will be explained in class. STs will be shown how to use the BLET National Division’s web-based reporting system. STs use the online system for membership reporting and tax compliance.

During the three-day session, members will learn proper record keeping techniques, computer applications, and minute-taking. They will also learn methods for filing various Department of Labor, and Railroad Retirement reports, as well as Internal Revenue Service Federal tax returns. A representative from the Department of Labor will be on hand to answer ST questions and provide tips regarding the preparation of LM reports.

Presenters will include Bill Walpert, BLET National Secretary-Treasurer; Ken Kroeger, BLET Special Rep & Coordinator of the Education & Training Department; Bob Broka, Director of Records; Dr. Elaine Reese, Director of Compliance; and Walt Schmidt, BLET Webmaster.

The BLET National Division pays the costs of books and equipment, while STs who attend are responsible for their transportation costs as well as their room and board.

Upon successful completion of the course, attendees will qualify for a $100 per day stipend from the North American Railway Foundation (NARF). The stipend will be paid directly to the participant. NARF is a non-profit organization formed by the Brotherhood’s Relief and Compensation Fund (BRCF) to support rail history, education, safety and technology in the United States and Canada. With initial funding and continued Board of Directors stewardship coming from the BRCF, NARF has supported many varied non-political projects throughout the United States and Canada over the past ten years. The primary focus of these efforts has been in support of organized railroad labor—giving back to all of the men and women of the railroad community across North America.

STs must register for the workshop online through the BLET website at: http://www.blet.org/st. Hotel registration information will be made available to those who sign up on the website.

Registration for the workshop is on a first-come, first-served basis with class size limited to the first 25 who register. For details, contact Ken Kroeger at (216) 272-0986 or kroeger@blet.org.

General Chairmen complete intensive Education & Training workshop

Because of the overwhelming response to the sign up of the first General Chairman workshop sponsored by the BLET Education & Training Department earlier this year, a second GC workshop was held September 9-13 at the Hyatt Regency Union Station in St. Louis. Attendees at the second workshop are pictured above.

Front row, from left: Gary Perren, Vice General Chairman UP Southern Region; James Louis, Alt. General Chairman CSX N.D./Conrail SAA; Rick Radek, Vice President & Director of Arbitration; Ken Kroeger Coordinator of Education & Training / Special Representative; John Koence, General Chairman CN/IC; Michael Clark, General Chairman Tex Mex (KCS); Karl Draper, General Chairman Utah Railway.

Back row, from left: Daniel Burgess, Vice Local Chairman 456 NS Eastern Lines; Doug Davidson Assistant Director of Arbitration / Labor Member – NKAB; Donald Hill, Vice General Chairman SEPTA; Mark Whitchurch, 1st Vice General Chairman & Sec/Treas CN/IC, Paul Osick, Vice General Chairman SEPTA.

The focus of the workshop was the preparation of submissions for arbitrations conducted pursuant to Section Three of the Railway Labor Act (RLA). During the four-day workshop, participants learned about the history of the Railway Labor Act, along with the collective bargaining and arbitration provisions it. There were classes during the workshop on Duty of Fair Representation, suspension and discharge cases, and applicability of common law in back pay awards. The attendees were given an assignment of writing a mitigation argument letter and these were critiqued in class the last day.

There are still some General Chairmen that have not been able to attend the class and a third class is planned for 2008. Details regarding that workshop will be made available soon.

BLET members are encouraged to keep the following dates and locations in mind when planning their vacations for 2008.

BLET regional meetings offer plenty of family fun but also important educational opportunities. So far, dates and locations for next year’s meetings are as follows:

**Southeastern Meeting Association June 15-19, 2008**
Embassy Suites — Montgomery
300 Tallapoosa Street
Montgomery, Ala. 36104
(334) 289-5005
Rate: $119
Chair: Jason Poppwell (Member 485)
E-mail: popwellj@yahoo.com

**Eastern Union Meeting Association July 6-10, 2008**
Samwill Creek Resort
400 Samwill Creek Dr
Huron, OH 44839
Rate: $154 ($144 Sunday Arrival)
Arrangements Chair: Rodney Cutlip (LC Div 395)
E-mail: lc095@aol.com

**Southwestern Convention Meeting September 14-19, 2008**
St. Louis Hilton at the Ball Park
One South Broadway
St. Louis, MO 63102
Rate: $124
Chair: Dave Grimes (LC Div 42)
E-mail: dgrimes@boycomonline.com

All BLET regional meetings offer plenty of activities for families, plus important educational opportunities for BLET members and their spouses. The meeting also gives the members the opportunity to meet with BLET officials to exchange ideas and information. More details regarding these meetings will be made available in coming months.
The crane with the broken neck: Fable or reality?

Legend has it that some workers were secretly blacklisted following Pullman strike of 1894

By Frederick C.Gamst, Ph.D.
BLET Division 660 Member

During the severe economic de-
pression of 1893, desistite men walked
the streets and rode the rails looking for
work. In 1894, the Pullman action, “back in ’94,”
cut across the nation’s railroads divided the house
coast to coast. Railroaders and their families from
landing at Espee’s West Oakland terminus actions such as the U.S. Marines
saw the largest marshalling of troops
the nation’s railroads divided the house
decisively to the federal government
Railway Union (ARU) mounted and lost
V. Debs and his industrial American
vided no relief and expected each citi-
tion of President Grover Cleveland and
pression of 1894, destitute men walked
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employee when s/he first becomes subject
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ments are ratified.
nonmember of the Union. Nonmembers
States has the legal right to be or remain a

The fees objector policy shall be pub-
a. Any employee covered by a union
b. All expenses concerning the nego-
c. Conversion expenses and other
d. Social activities and union business
e. Publication expenses to the extent
f. Annual membership dues, initiation,

The BLET shall perform an indepen-
dent audit of the escrow accounts and
of the existence and the audits of money in any
shall give an opinion concerning the ad-

A copy of the record of the proceeding shall be
available for inspection at the Na-
d. Social activities and union business

e. Appellants may , at their expense, be
f. The National Division shall have the

The earliest published allegation of “the crane” in an account featuring
from the ARU’s
Railroad Times of November 15, 1984, page 1, as
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amounts that objects may be replaced, and shall be
notified in the legal and
basis for such decisions.

The earliest published allegation of “the crane” in an account featuring
from the ARU’s
Railroad Times of November 15, 1984, page 1, as

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ary. Moreover, local railroad
had the power to hire and when short-
handed to meet operational and per-
carpenters would not ask.

Where were you in the summer of 1894?”
The earliest published allegation of “the crane” in an account featuring
from the ARU’s
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if a railroad has the bookings of establishing that the reduced fees
not be set in the report are not.

In this arbitration, it shall determine that
more than one day’s hearings in connection
earnings all be scheduled to continue from
day to day until completed. The parties to
the appeal shall have the right to file a brief
within fifteen (15) days after the
the hearing is available, but in no case
more than thirty (30) days after the
hearing close. The
shall be provided with a copy of the
transcript, a copy shall be
available for inspection at the Na-
tional Division during normal business
time.

Both parties may, at their expense, be
represented by counsel or other represen-
tatives. Appellants and
be written
at the hearing and shall be permitted to
file written statements with the arbitrator in-
stead of appearing at the

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BLET tells CSX: Don’t put aggressive investors ahead of rail safety

By Diane Shifflett

BLET Auxiliary
Virginia State Legislative Rep.

These are heady times for the railroad industry in the United States. Thanks in part to the dedication of hard-working railroaders like the 55,000 members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, the industry is making money like never before. And as a side effect of these high dollar times, the industry is attracting new investors like never before.

In recent months, high-profile investors such as Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway Inc., have invested millions of dollars in railroads like BNSF Railway, Union Pacific, and Norfolk Southern. Two of the hard-working railroaders that the 55,000 members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), the “Voice of the Railway Worker,” represent are active in the legislative side of railroading. For example, BLET Vice President Stephen Speagle helped lobby the bill. Also representing the legislative side was Norfolk Southern Vice General Chairman Bob Linsey. Working in teams of at least three, we set out to cover as many offices as possible over a three-day period. Working as a team gives you a variety of perspectives to the same problems, and provides different ways the rail safety bill can correct those problems and why it is so important.

The great thing about the Auxiliary is that we are invited to participate in those joint lobbying efforts is that it gives us a chance to let our legislators know about life on the railroad from a different perspective. We cannot give first-hand accounts of working conditions, but we certainly have second-hand knowledge because our spouses come home and tell us about all of the things they see or hear. They are the ones who usually end up keeping the home fires burning and trying to be both a mom and a dad because our spouses are either gone, sleeping, or are just too tired.

While visiting with the legislative aide for Congressman Tom Davis (R-VA), I was asked how the time at work affected the families. I told him that there was no time to plan activities because there is no schedule and you never know when your husband will actually be home from work because of limbo time. I did add that we all make the best of our time together, it’s just not enough. I was also fortunate to be invited by Vice President Tolman to attend a meeting with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV). I want to thank him for the opportunity, and I would also like to thank Herb Harris, Buddy White, Terry Todd, and all State Legislative Board Chairmen and members for their help in making the trip possible.

In representing the Auxiliary, I have done my best to make sure that our legislators understand the problems railroad families live with every day and that these safety bills go a long way in taking care of some of those problems. I have been lucky and fortunate to have had this experience, but even as rewarding as it is, our real power comes from our grassroots efforts by our members. This is the first time in 13 years that we have a safety bill that begins to deal with the problems that exist on the railroad. We must all do our part now and in the future.

From left: BLET Vice President & National Legislative Representative John Tolman. BLET Auxiliary Virginia State Legislative Representative Diane Shifflett, and Danny Shifflett.

BLET Auxiliary News

Lobby for rail safety bill is a labor of love

By Diane Shifflett

BLET Auxiliary
Virginia State Legislative Rep.

While it may make good fiscal sense to run a safe railroad. As a citizen of the United States, you make money to do things. While visiting with the legislative aide for Congressman Tom Davis (R-VA), I was asked how the time at work affected the families. I told him that there was no time to plan activities because there is no schedule and you never know when your husband will actually be home from work because of limbo time. I did add that we all make the best of our time together, it’s just not enough. I was also fortunate to be invited by Vice President Tolman to attend a meeting with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV). I want to thank him for the opportunity, and I would also like to thank Herb Harris, Buddy White, Terry Todd, and all State Legislative Board Chairmen and members for their help in making the trip possible.

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In representing the Auxiliary, I have done my best to make sure that our legislators understand the problems railroad families live with every day and that these safety bills go a long way in taking care of some of those problems. I have been lucky and fortunate to have had this experience, but even as rewarding as it is, our real power comes from our grassroots efforts by our members. This is the first time in 13 years that we have a safety bill that begins to deal with the problems that exist on the railroad. We must all do our part now and in the future.

From left: BLET Vice President & National Legislative Representative John Tolman. BLET Auxiliary Virginia State Legislative Representative Diane Shifflett, and Danny Shifflett.

BLET Auxiliary News

Lobby for rail safety bill is a labor of love

By Diane Shifflett

BLET Auxiliary
Virginia State Legislative Rep.

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DESIGNATED LEGAL COUNSEL

Our union has designated attorneys who are qualified to serve as counsel for BLET members in accordance with the Federal Employers’ Liability Act (FELA) governing workplace accidents.

In the event of an injury or death and before reaching any settlement with a railroad, members or surviving families should contact an attorney listed to get competent advice regarding their legal rights under the FELA.

In addition, if you or any members of your family have questions concerning medical malpractice, product liability or other types of injury cases, please don’t hesitate to contact one of these law firms for a consultation concerning your rights and remedies.

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R.L. Pete McKinney
In September I wrote every member of the U.S. House to urge them to oppose Norfolk Southern’s attempt to strip language from H.R. 2055, the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2007, which does away with the use of camp cars.

In the letter, I told House members that maintenance of way workers employed by Norfolk Southern (NS) are the last group that must endure the use of these camp cars, which are outdated, cramped, lacking potable water and inside toilet facilities. I explained that workers housed in these cars after a long hard day on the job must bathe, cook, wash dishes, and make ice with non-potable water. And, that other railroad players transport their maintenance crews to suitable housing.

In addition to the conditions of the camp cars, I let Congress know about the surrounding area. Finally, I told Congress about how workers must also trudge through the rain or snow with Congress about how workers must also use outside toilet facilities — at times trudging through the rain or snow with a flashlight to find a port-a-john in the dark.

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Add the report about the Norfolk Southern's attempt to use outdated camp cars for its workers.

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