



DAILY NEWS UPDATES  
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# Locomotive

## ENGINEERS & TRAINMEN NEWS



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### Stormy Weather

Rolling through downtown Hurricane, West Virginia, CSX Q135 heads west into the center of a severe thunderstorm. Featuring a storm top of more than 22,000 feet above the surface, an impressive lightning show turns darkness into daylight as the cell treks east across the C&O mainline. Photo: Chase Gunnoe



SAVE THE DATE:

## 2017 BLET REGIONAL MEETINGS

The BLET National Division is pleased to announce the dates and locations of its 2017 regional meetings: June 5-9 in San Antonio, Texas; and August 14-18 in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

The San Antonio regional meeting will be at the Hyatt Regency-San Antonio Riverwalk in Texas and the Myrtle Beach regional meeting will be at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort in South Carolina.

As with the 2016 regional meetings, the 2017 meetings will be arranged on a Monday through Friday schedule. Travel to the meeting, registration and a welcome reception for each of the two meetings will be on Monday (June 5 for San Antonio and August 14 for Myrtle Beach). Meetings, training classes and other events will be scheduled throughout the remainder of the week and

will include a closing banquet on Thursday night. Travel home is on Friday for each meeting (June 9 for San Antonio and August 18 for Myrtle Beach).

Per the BLET Bylaws, regional meetings are held for the purposes of membership training, education and discussion of matters of importance to the membership. Additionally, the meetings are structured to include options for fellowship with

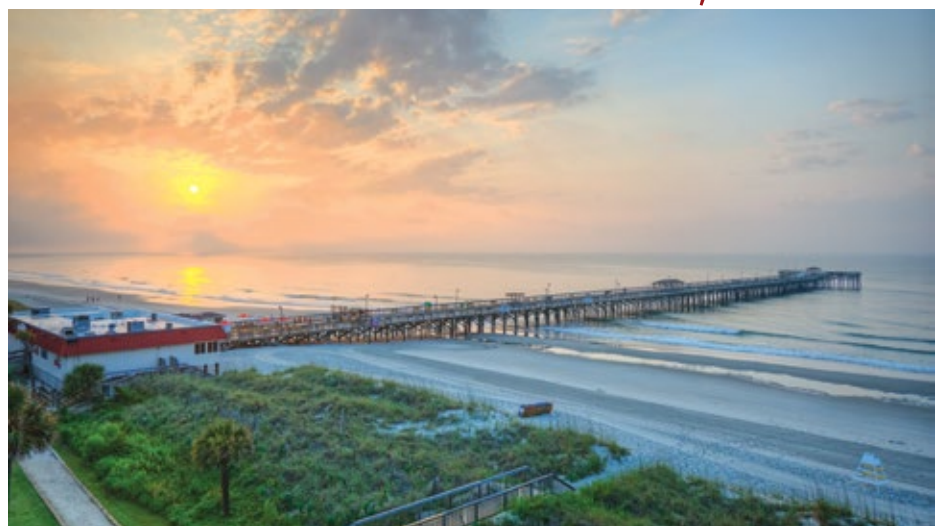
other members and their families, entertainment, fun and relaxation.

More specific details will be announced at a later date. Registration information will be available online at the BLET National Division's regional meeting website ([www.bletregionals.org](http://www.bletregionals.org)). All members are encouraged to attend one or both of these regional meetings in 2017. ©©

JUNE 5-9 • SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



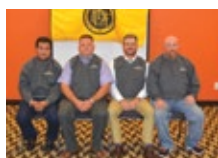
AUGUST 14-18 • MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO: [WWW.BLETREGIONALS.ORG](http://WWW.BLETREGIONALS.ORG)



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**BLET PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY DENNIS R. PIERCE**

# Now Is The Time To Address RAIL WORKER FATIGUE

**O**n behalf of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, I applaud the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) for including rail worker fatigue as one of the 10 items on its 2016 Safety Watchlist. Similar to the Most Wanted List published annually by the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the TSB's Safety Watchlist identifies critical issues impacting transportation safety.

Kathy Fox, Chair of the TSB, said: "Fatigue has been a factor in numerous railway investigations, most notably regarding freight train operations. Too many train crews aren't getting the rest they need, whether it's shifts that are too long or irregular scheduling that interferes with normal sleep times. It's time for the railway industry to start applying fatigue science to crew scheduling, instead of calling for more studies."

My counterpart Doug Finsson, President of Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, said: "We've always believed that fighting fatigue should be based on sound science, not operational efficiency." We in the BLET could not agree more. It's time to stop putting profits ahead of safety. The time is now to address rail worker fatigue.

The TSB Watchlist notes that safety management systems should include a process for scheduling the work of certain employees, such as employees whose schedule is not communicated at least 72 hours in advance, or who are required to work beyond their normal schedule, or who are required to work between midnight and 6:00 a.m. Moreover, TSB says that process should be based on the principles of fatigue science.

In the U.S., the NTSB's 2016



President Pierce addressing members at a BLET Education & Training Department's training class for Legislative Representatives at Teamsters headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Most Wanted List also included a call to "Reduce Fatigue-Related Accidents" across all modes of transportation. The NTSB noted that: "Some of our earliest recommendations called for research to better understand the problem of fatigue in transportation, and, over the past three decades, a great deal of research has been done. But research only goes so far; we must implement what we have learned."

Similarly, the TSB notes: "Even though the railway industry and Transport Canada have known sleep-related fatigue to be a problem for over 20 years, the initiatives taken to date have been inadequate to fully address the issue. As a result, fatigue continues to pose a risk to the safe operation of trains."

I'll say it again: the time is now to get serious and put an end to worker fatigue in the rail-

road industry.

As all rail workers know, fatigue can seriously degrade work performance and can contribute directly to accidents. Fatigue leads to slower reaction times, memory problems, poor decision-making, and inefficient information processing.

A main cause of fatigue for operating employees is the variable work schedules that rail crews are forced to endure. Unreliable schedules result in unpredictable and inconsistent patterns of awake and sleep time for locomotive engineers and trainmen, resulting in rail worker fatigue. Due to the unpredictable nature of their assignments, compounded by glaring deficiencies in the railroad's train lineups as compared to actual call times, engineers and trainmen are more frequently subjected to situations where they

are not adequately rested through no fault of their own.

The situation is made even worse by punitive carrier attendance policies that threaten employees with discipline for attempting to avoid hazardous conditions by taking time off due to fatigue. Under current attendance policy rules, engine and train service employees could be suspended from work or even fired for taking time off due to fatigue.

Allowing engineers to take time off due to fatigue — without fear of disciplinary retaliation — would be a good first step toward reducing fatigue. More accurate train line-ups would be an excellent second step. As the NTSB has noted, fatigue has been studied to death; indeed, many BLET members have participated in the various studies sponsored

by the FRA and other government bodies for many years. Everyone knows what needs to be done, but the industry has not yet shown the willpower to manage their operations in a way that meaningfully addresses this scourge.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) recently published a regulation establishing the conditions for design and implementation of System Safety Plans (SSPs) by the nation's passenger and commuter railroads. Also pending is a FRA regulation mandating that Class 1 and other freight railroads adopt Risk Reduction Plans (RRPs), which is a requirement pending since enactment of the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008.

All SSPs and RRs must include fatigue mitigation plans as a matter of law. In preparation for discussions that will take place with the various railroads next year, the National Division is hosting a program for passenger and commuter rail General Chairmen on December 12. That program will equip our General Chairmen, and their General Committees of Adjustment, with the tools necessary to fight for fatigue management plans within the SSP/RRP construct that will provide genuine relief from this significant safety hazard. A similar program will be offered to our General Chairmen of freight railroads required to implement RRs once FRA's final rule has been published.

The time for talk is over, and the need to act is more imperative today than ever before. We will provide future updates on this subject as developments warrant.

**DENNIS R. PIERCE**  
BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

66 Due to the unpredictable nature of their assignments, compounded by glaring deficiencies in the railroad's train lineups as compared to actual call times, engineers and trainmen are more frequently subjected to situations where they are not adequately rested through no fault of their own. 99

## BLET NATIONAL DIVISION ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

**O**fficial 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 poli-

cy 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

# TPP Would Be Another Blow To U.S. Manufacturing

**U**.S. manufacturing jobs, or the lack thereof, is a central concern for many hard-working Americans who toiled for years on factory floors across the country, earning a fair wage with decent benefits that allowed them to support their families.

For too many, these employment opportunities are no longer a reality. Companies have increasingly moved their facilities overseas due to bad trade deals like NAFTA or the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), decimating many communities. That's why the Teamsters and other unions have been so outspoken in their opposition to the TPP.

Those who have tried to minimize the influence of lousy trade agreements have tried to play up the angle that many of these jobs would have been lost to automation anyway. Many also stress that

any future manufacturing growth in the U.S. will demand heavily on fewer workers and more robots. But that is simply not the case.

Economist Susan Houseman, in a published interview with Vice President Joe Biden's former chief economist Jared Bernstein, told him that automation is centered in computer manufacturing. Meanwhile, she noted overall U.S. manufacturing is still down five percent since the start of the Great Recession.

"Manufacturing employment has not recovered from the Great Recession, and now is 29 percent lower than in 2000," Houseman said. "That decline is historically unprecedented. And those large-scale job losses are the reason for the focus on manufacturing in the presidential campaign."

Such declines have been particularly hard felt in communities of color. The Alliance for

American Manufacturing said that it was union manufacturing jobs that help grow wealth in the African American community during the last century. But due to industrial flight, minority workers are suffering more than anyone.

It will be challenging to undo past harms due to poor policy decisions. That's why everyday Americans must rise up to vehemently oppose TPP. This country can't afford to have more of its jobs shipped overseas and more towns hollowed out due to the loss of employers.

Stand up and let lawmakers know they must vote no if TPP comes before Congress!

Fraternally,

**JAMES P. HOFFA**  
TEAMSTERS GENERAL  
PRESIDENT



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## Arlin Todd reelected by acclamation in Louisiana

**B**rother Arlin S. Todd was reelected by acclamation to his fourth term as Chairman of the Louisiana State Legislative Board at quadrennial meetings in New Orleans, La., on October 18, 2016.

Brother Todd is a member of BLET Division 914 (Baton Rouge, La.) and he joined the Brotherhood in May of 1974. He was first elected Chairman in 2004, and was reelected by acclamation at quadrennial meetings in 2008, 2012 and 2016.

Also elected were: 1st Vice Chairman Kermit G. Adams, Division 219 (Shreveport, La.); 2nd Vice Chairman, Richard D. Barnett, Division 531 (New Orleans, LA.); Secretary-Treasurer Steve E. Lott, Division 326 (Bossier City La.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Stephen W. Prator Jr., Division 599 (Shreveport, La.).

In attendance were: BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce; First Vice President E. Lee Pruitt; BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; BLET Director of Regulatory Affairs Vincent G. Verna; Arkansas State Legislative Chairman Terry L. Todd; Texas State Legislative Board Chairman Gary R. Pedigo; Mississippi State Chairman W.D. (Billy) Evans; Union Pacific-Western Lines General Chairman D.W. (Bill) Hannah; CN/



Members, officers and guests attending the Louisiana State Legislative Board's quadrennial meeting in New Orleans on October 18, 2016.

IC General Chairman Clay E. Craddock; Kansas City Southern General Chairman David A. Spradlin; and Union Pacific-Central Region Vice General Chairman Kyle J. Bagby.

"I offer my sincere congratulations to Brother Todd and all officers of the Lou-

isiana State Legislative Board, and thank them for their dedication to our Brotherhood," President Pierce said. "Brother Todd is one of our veteran leaders and I know he will continue doing an excellent job of representing our Brothers and Sisters in Louisiana."

The Louisiana State Legislative Board encompasses 13 BLET Divisions from six different railroads (CN, Union Pacific, BNSF Railway, Kansas City Southern, Amtrak and Mid-South) and represents approximately 870 active and retired members. ©



## Pearson elected Colorado State Legislative Board Chairman

**B**rother Paul E. Pearson of BLET Division 133 (Denver, Colo.) was elected by acclamation to serve as Chairman of the Colorado State Legislative Board at its quadrennial meeting on September 19, 2016, in Golden, Colo.

A Union Pacific locomotive engineer, Brother Pearson hired out with the Southern Pacific in August of 1994. He earned promotion to locomotive engineer in 1995 and joined the Brotherhood effective August 1, 1995. Over the years, Brother Pearson has served Division 133 as Legislative Representative, Trustee, Alternate Secretary-Treasurer and Alternate Legislative Representative. His service to the Colorado State Legislative Board began in 2008 when he was elected to serve as Secretary-Treasurer, an office he was reelected to by acclamation in 2012. Brother Pearson serves as Mobilization Captain for the BLET's Union Pacific membership in Colorado.

Also elected during the 2016 quadrennial meeting were: 1st Vice Chairman Michael C. Bevirt, Division 940 (Denver, Colo.); 2nd Vice Chairman Christopher J. Sherwood, Division 505 (La Junta, Colo.); Secretary-Treasurer Robert L. Montoya, Division 940 (Denver, Colo.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Richard A. Aguilar, Division 256 (Denver, Colo.).

"Congratulations to Brother Pearson and all officers of the Colorado State Legislative Board," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. "I thank them for their willingness to actively serve our Brotherhood, and I have every confidence they will do an excellent job of representing our Brothers and Sisters in Colorado. Also, I wish to thank Brother Jim Wilmesher for his years of service to the Colorado State Legislative Board. I am also pleased to extend best wishes to long-serving 1st Vice Chairman Kevin Utterback on his pending retirement."



**Seated, from left:** Robert Montoya (Div. 940); Kenny Linn (Div. 727); Eric Johnson (Div. 215); and Colorado State Legislative Board Chairman Paul Pearson (Div. 133). **Standing, from left:** Zach Dunbar (Div. 47); Michael Bevirt (Div. 940); Chairman Emeritus Jim Wilmesher (Div. 256); Rich Aguilar (Div. 256); Michael Dunkelberger (Div. 256); Jared Hollis (Div. 430); Kevin Utterback (Div. 47); Chris Sherwood (Div. 505); and Ryan Parker (Div. 29).

Special BLET guests at the meeting included: General Chairman Dave Geisler, Union Pacific-Eastern District General Committee of Adjustment; and Local Chairman Mike J. Quick, Division 133 (Denver, Colo.). Representing the BLET Auxiliary at the meeting were officers of the Mile High Auxiliary #5280 out of Denver: Steffiny Quick, President; and Karyn Beisner, Legislative Representative. J.D. Archie, Federal Railroad Administration Region 6 Field Safety Inspector, was also in attendance.

Outgoing chairman Jim Wilmesher, Division 256 (Denver), did not seek reelection due to family obligations.

"I am honored to follow in the (large) footsteps of past Legislative Board Chairmen Brothers George Last, Mike Weston and Jim Wilmesher," Brother Pearson said. "I especially want to thank Brother Wilmesher for his eight years spent as

Chairman. We all benefited from Jim's time and dedication spent working on behalf of the Brotherhood, more so than many realize. To me, he was much more than just my boss, he was a mentor and has become a close friend. Jim will continue to be a valuable resource and I won't hesitate to seek his advice and opinion."

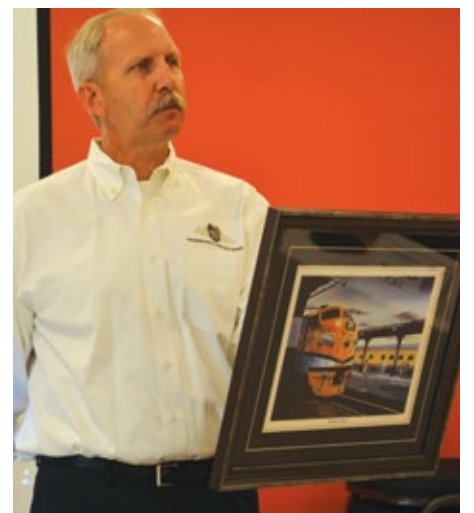
Brother Wilmesher will continue to serve the Board as Chaplain, replacing Brother Mike Weston, Division 186 (Denver, Colo.).

Brother Pearson said the newly-elected Executive Board will continue to focus on member participation, safety, education and training as well as a specific focus on Railroad Retirement, national crew-size legislation, as well as potential Positive Train Control implementation.

The Colorado State Legislative Board represents 11 BLET Divisions and approximately 550 active members. ©©



Kevin Utterback (Division 47 Amtrak) with a painting of Denver & Rio Grand Western Railroad (DRGW) locomotive #5771 at Denver's Union Station. Earlier in his career, Brother Utterback ran this locomotive on the DRGW's California Zephyr. Today, Brother Utterback continues to ply the same rails as the engineer on Amtrak's #5 and #6, the California Zephyr, between Denver and Grand Junction, Colo.



Outgoing Colorado State Legislative Board Chairman Jim Wilmesher presents a retirement gift to outgoing 1st Vice Chairman Kevin Utterback.

## Lavery reelected to sixth term as Florida State Legislative Board Chairman

**B**rother David S. Lavery was re-elected by acclamation to his sixth term as Chairman of the Florida State Legislative Board at the Board's quadrennial meeting in Tampa, Fla., on September 13, 2016.

The meeting marked 20 years since the Board was reestablished in Florida. Brother Lavery, a CSX locomotive engineer from Division 216 (Tampa, Fla.), has the distinction of continuously serving as the Board's chairman since 1996. He first joined the BLET on October 1, 1985.

Also elected during the meeting were: 1st Vice Chairman Brendan P. Sullivan, Division 769 (Sanford, Fla.); 2nd Vice Chairman P.S. (Shawn) Sausville, Division 309 (Jacksonville, Fla.); Secretary-Treasurer David P. Wyatt, Division 216 (Tampa, Fla.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Nicholas E. Diorio, Division 49 (Miami, Fla.).

Elected to serve as Trustees were: P.S. (Shawn) Sausville, Division 309 (Jacksonville, Fla.); Matthew E. Rahn, Division 35 (Jacksonville, Fla.); Nicholas E. Diorio, Division 49 (Miami, Fla.); and Cameron D. Razi, Division 216 (Tampa, Fla.).



**Officers, delegates and guests at the Florida State Legislative Board's quadrennial meeting on September 13, 2016. From left:** Shawn Sausville, Div. 309; Gil Gore, National Vice President; Nickolas Diorio, Div. 49; John Tolman, Vice President & National Legislative Representative; Dennis Pierce, BLET National President; Brendan Sullivan, Div. 769; David Lavery, Florida State Legislative Board Chairman (Div. 216, Tampa); David Wyatt, Div. 216; Matt Rahn, Div. 35; Lee Pruitt, BLET First Vice President; and Gary Best, CSXT Eastern Lines General Chairman.

Representing the National Division at the meeting were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; First Vice President E. Lee Pruitt; Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; and National Vice President Gil L. Gore.

"Brother Lavery has served BLET members in Florida with distinction for many years. I am proud to offer my congratulations and thanks to him and all officers of the Florida State Legislative Board," President Pierce said. "They will

have their plates full between now and November 8, but I have every confidence that they are up to the challenge."

Additional guests included: General Chairman Gary D. Best, CSXT-Eastern Lines General Committee of Adjustment; Retired Local Chairman M.L. Tanner, Division 769 (Sanford, Fla.) and former Secretary-Treasurer of the CSXT-Eastern Lines GCA; and Tampa City Council Member Guido Maniscalco (District 6).

Immediately following the quadrennial meeting, the National Division officers participated in a Town Hall meeting with members of BLET Division 216 at the Teamsters Local 79 union hall in Tampa. The National officers spoke of the many issues facing the Brotherhood, including the national elections coming up in November. Also, Brother Gore and Brother Best discussed some of the local issues facing the members of Division 216 and the CSXT-Eastern Lines GCA.

The BLET Florida State Legislative Board represents approximately 400 locomotive engineers and conductors from six Divisions throughout the state. They work for CSX and Amtrak. ©©



## DISASTER RELIEF

### TEAMSTERS OFFER DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE IN FLORIDA

The Teamsters Disaster Relief Fund is offering assistance to members living in Florida regarding Hurricane Matthew, which caused major damage to homes and property beginning on October 3, 2016.

Available from the BLET website are Teamster "Disaster Relief Alert Notices" and "Request for Help" forms. If you live in the affected area and experienced a loss due to this FEMA-declared major disaster, please download and submit the forms. For questions, contact the

Teamsters Disaster Relief Fund office at (202) 624-8971.

Members living in the following Florida counties are eligible to apply: Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns and Volusia.

Download the "Request for Help" form from the BLET National Division website: [www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/FL\\_Disaster\\_Relief\\_101816.pdf](http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/FL_Disaster_Relief_101816.pdf).

Be sure to include all requested documentation. The deadline for application is December 31, 2016. ©©

[WWW.BLE-T.ORG/PR/PDF/FL\\_DISASTER\\_RELIEF\\_101816.PDF](http://WWW.BLE-T.ORG/PR/PDF/FL_DISASTER_RELIEF_101816.PDF)

### TEAMSTERS OFFER DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE IN GEORGIA

The Teamsters Disaster Relief Fund is offering assistance to members living in Georgia regarding Hurricane Matthew, which caused major damage to homes and property from October 4-11, 2016.

Available from the BLET website are Teamster "Disaster Relief Alert Notices" and "Request for Help" forms. If you live in the affected area and experienced a loss due to this FEMA-declared major disaster, please download and submit the forms. For questions, contact the Teamsters Disaster Relief

Fund office at (202) 624-8971.

Members living in the following Georgia counties are eligible to apply: Bryan, Bulloch, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, McIntosh and Wayne.

Download the "Request for Help" form from the BLET National Division website: [www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/GA\\_Disaster\\_Relief\\_101816.pdf](http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/GA_Disaster_Relief_101816.pdf).

Be sure to include all requested documentation. The deadline for application is December 31, 2016. ©©

[WWW.BLE-T.ORG/PR/PDF/GA\\_DISASTER\\_RELIEF\\_101816.PDF](http://WWW.BLE-T.ORG/PR/PDF/GA_DISASTER_RELIEF_101816.PDF)

## Railroad Retirement benefits will increase in 2017

Most railroad retirement annuities, like social security benefits, are scheduled to increase slightly in January 2017 on the basis of the rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the third quarter of 2014 to the corresponding period of the current year.

Cost-of-living increases are calculated in both the tier I and tier II benefits included in a railroad retirement annuity. Tier I benefits, like social security benefits, will increase by 0.3 percent, which is the percentage of the CPI rise. Tier II benefits will go up by 0.1 percent, which is 32.5 percent of the CPI increase. Vested dual benefit payments and supplemental annuities also paid by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) are not adjusted for the CPI change.

In January 2017, the average regular railroad retirement employee annuity will increase \$6 a month to \$2,628 and the average of combined benefits for an employee and spouse will increase \$9 a month to \$3,815. For those aged widow(er)s eligible for an increase, the average annuity will increase \$4 a month to \$1,327. However, widow(er)s whose annuities are being paid under the Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001 will not receive an-

nual cost-of-living adjustments until their annuity amount is exceeded by the amount that would have been paid under prior law, counting all interim cost-of-living increases otherwise payable. Some 46 percent of the widow(er)s on the RRB's rolls are being paid under the 2001 law.

If a railroad retirement or survivor annuitant also receives a social security or other government benefit, such as a public service pension, the increased tier I benefit is reduced by the increased government benefit. Tier II cost-of-living increases are not reduced by increases in other government benefits. If a widow(er) whose annuity is being paid under the 2001 law is also entitled to an increased government benefit, her or his railroad retirement survivor annuity may decrease.

However, the total amount of the combined railroad retirement widow(er)'s annuity and other government benefits will not be less than the total payable before the cost-of-living increase and any increase in Medicare premium deductions.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is expected to announce any Medicare Part B premium changes in mid-November, and information will be available then at [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). ©©

**"In January 2017, the average regular railroad retirement employee annuity will increase \$6 a month to \$2,628 and the average of combined benefits for an employee and spouse will increase \$9 a month to \$3,815."**

## Railroad retiree earnings limits to rise in 2017

Railroad retirement annuitants subject to earnings restrictions can earn more in 2017 without having their benefits reduced as a result of increases in earnings limits indexed to average national wage increases.

Like social security benefits, some railroad retirement benefit payments are subject to deductions if an annuitant's earnings exceed certain exempt amounts. These earnings restrictions apply to those who have not attained full social security retirement age. For employee and spouse annuitants, full retirement age ranges from age 65 for those born before 1938 to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later. For survivor annuitants, full retirement age ranges from age 65 for those born before 1940 to age 67 for those born in 1962 or later.

For those under full retirement age throughout 2017, the exempt earnings amount rises to \$16,920 from \$15,720 in 2016. For beneficiaries attaining full retirement age in 2017, the exempt earnings amount, for the months before the month full retirement age is attained, rises to \$44,880 in 2017 from \$41,880 in 2016.

For those under full retirement age, the earnings deduction is \$1 in benefits for every \$2 of earnings over the exempt amount. For those attaining full retirement age in 2017, the deduction is \$1 for every \$3 of earnings over the exempt amount in the months before the month full retirement age is attained.

When applicable, these earnings deductions are assessed on the tier I and

vested dual benefit portions of railroad retirement employee and spouse annuities, and the tier I, tier II, and vested dual benefit portions of survivor benefits.

All earnings received for services rendered, plus any net earnings from self-employment, are considered when assessing deductions for earnings. Interest, dividends, certain rental income, or income from stocks, bonds, or other investments are not considered earnings for this purpose.

Retired employees and spouses, regardless of age, who work for their last pre-retirement non-railroad employer are also subject to an additional earnings deduction, in their tier II and supplemental benefits, of \$1 for every \$2 in earnings up to a maximum reduction of 50 percent. This earnings restriction does not change from year to year and does not allow for an exempt amount.

A spouse benefit is subject to reduction not only for the spouse's earnings, but also for the earnings of the employee, regardless of whether the earnings are from service for the last pre-retirement non-railroad employer or other post-retirement employment.

Special work restrictions continue to be applicable to disability annuitants in 2017. The monthly disability earnings limit increases to \$910 in 2017 from \$880 in 2016.

Regardless of age and/or earnings, no railroad retirement annuity is payable for any month in which an annuitant (retired employee, spouse or survivor) works for a railroad employer or railroad union. ©©

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# Credit for military service under the Railroad Retirement Act

**M**any railroad employees have at some time served in the Armed Forces of the United States. Under certain conditions, their military service may be credited as rail service under the Railroad Retirement Act.

The following questions and answers provide information on how military service may be credited towards railroad retirement benefits.

## 1 Under what conditions can military service be credited as railroad service?

The intent behind the crediting of military service under the Railroad Retirement Act is to prevent career railroad employees from losing retirement credits while performing active duty military service during a war or national emergency period. Therefore, to be creditable as compensation under the Railroad Retirement Act, service in the U.S. Armed Forces must be preceded by railroad service in the same or preceding calendar year. With the exceptions noted later, the employee must also have entered military service when the United States was at war or in a state of national emergency or have served in the Armed Forces involuntarily. Military service is involuntary when an employee is required by law, such as Selective Service System conscription or troop call-up from a reserve unit, to leave railroad service to perform active duty military service.

Only active duty military service is creditable under the Railroad Retirement Act. A person is considered to have been on active duty while commissioned or enrolled in the active service of the Armed Forces of the United States (including the U.S. Coast Guard), or while ordered to Federal active duty from any reserve component of the uniformed Armed Forces.

## 2 What are some examples of creditable service performed by a member of a reserve component, such as the Army Reserve?

Any military service a reservist was required to perform as a result of a call-up to active duty, such as during a partial mobilization, would be creditable under the Railroad Retirement Act, so long as the military service was preceded by railroad service in the same or preceding year.

Annual training duty as a member of a reserve component of a uniformed service is also considered active duty and may be creditable, provided the employee service requirement is met. The period of active duty for training also includes authorized travel time to and from any such training duty. However, weekend alone or evening reserve duty is not creditable.

Active duty in a State National Guard or State Air National Guard unit may be creditable only while the reservist was called to Federal active duty by the Congress or President of the United States. Emergency call-up of the National Guard by a governor for riot or flood control would not be creditable.

## 3 What are the dates of the war or national emergency periods?

The war or national emergency periods are:

- August 2, 1990, to date as yet undetermined.



Photo: Chase Gunnoe

- December 16, 1950, through September 14, 1978.

- September 8, 1939, through June 14, 1948.

If military service began during a war or national emergency period, any active duty service the employee was required to continue in beyond the end of the war or national emergency is creditable, except that voluntary service extending beyond September 14, 1978, is not creditable.

Railroad workers who voluntarily served in the Armed Forces between June 15, 1948, and December 15, 1950, when there was no declared national state of emergency, can be given railroad retirement credit for their military service if they:

- performed railroad service in the year they entered or the year before they entered military service, and;
- returned to rail service in the year their military service ended or in the following year, and;
- had no intervening nonrailroad employment.

## 4 How can military service be used to increase benefits paid by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB)?

Railroad retirement annuities are based on length of service and earnings. If military service is creditable as railroad service, a person will receive additional compensation credits for each month of creditable military service and railroad service credit for each active military service month not already credited by actual railroad service.

Creditable military service may be used in addition to regular railroad service to meet certain service requirements, such as the basic 10-year or 5-year service requirements for a regular annuity, the 20-year requirement for an occupational disability

annuity before age 60, the 25-year requirement for a supplemental annuity, or the 30-year requirement for early retirement benefits.

## 5 Can United States Merchant Marine service be creditable for railroad retirement purposes?

No. Service with the Merchant Marine or civilian employment with the Department of Defense is not creditable, even if performed in wartime.

## 6 Are railroad retirement annuities based in part on military service credits reduced if other benefits, such as military service pensions or payments from the Department of Veterans Affairs, are also payable on the basis of the same military service?

No. While railroad retirement employee annuities are subject to reductions for dual entitlement to social security benefits and, under certain conditions, Federal, State, or local government pensions, as well as certain other payments, railroad retirement employee annuities are always exempt from reduction for military service pensions or payments by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

## 7 Are the unemployment and sickness benefits payable by the RRB affected if an employee is also receiving a military service pension?

Yes. The unemployment and sickness benefits payable by the RRB are affected if a claimant is also receiving a military service pension. However, payments made by the Department of Veterans Affairs will not affect railroad unemployment or sickness benefits.

When a claimant is receiving a military

service pension or benefits under any social insurance law for days in which he or she is entitled to benefits under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act, railroad unemployment or sickness benefits are payable only to the extent to which they exceed the other payments for those days. In many cases, the amount of a military service pension precludes the payment of unemployment or sickness benefits by the RRB. Examples of other such social insurance payments are firefighters' and police pensions, or certain workers' compensation payments. Claimants should report all such payments promptly to avoid having to refund benefits later.

## 8 Can proof of military service be filed in advance of retirement?

Railroad employees are encouraged to file proofs of their military service well in advance of retirement. The information will be recorded and stored electronically until they actually retire. This will expedite the annuity application process and avoid any delays resulting from inadequate proofs of military service.

If employees do not have an official record of their military service, their local RRB office will explain how to get acceptable evidence. All evidence brought or mailed to an RRB office will be handled carefully and returned promptly.

## 9 How can an employee get more information about the crediting of military service by the RRB?

More information is available by visiting the agency's website, [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov), or by calling an RRB office toll-free at 1-877-772-5772. Persons can find the address of the RRB office serving their area by calling the RRB's toll-free number or at [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov). ©©

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# RRB financial reports

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) is required by law to submit annual financial reports to Congress on the financial condition of the railroad retirement system and the railroad unemployment insurance system. These reports must also include recommendations for any financing changes which may be advisable in order to ensure the solvency of the systems. In June, the RRB submitted its 2016 reports on the railroad retirement and railroad unemployment insurance systems.

**THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SUMMARIZE THE FINDINGS OF THESE REPORTS.**

## 1. What were the assets of the railroad retirement and railroad unemployment insurance systems last year?

As of September 30, 2015, total railroad retirement system assets, comprising assets managed by the National Railroad Retirement Investment Trust and the railroad retirement system accounts at the Treasury, equaled \$26.3 billion. The Trust was established by the Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001 to manage and invest railroad retirement assets. The cash balance of the railroad unemployment insurance system was \$108.9 million at the end of fiscal year 2015.

## 2. What was the conclusion of the 2016 report of the financial condition of the railroad retirement system?

The conclusion was that, barring a sudden, unanticipated, large decrease in railroad employment or substantial investment losses, the railroad retirement system will experience no cash-flow problems during the next 25 years. The long-term stability of the system, however, is still uncertain. Under the current financing structure, actual levels of railroad employment and investment return over the coming years will largely determine whether corrective action is necessary.

## 3. What methods were used in forecasting the financial condition of the railroad retirement system?

The 2016 report projected the various components of income and outgo of the railroad retirement system under three employment assumptions, intended to provide an optimistic, intermediate and pessimistic outlook, for the 25 calendar years 2016-2040. The projections of these components were combined and the investment income calculated to produce the projected balances in the railroad retirement accounts at the end of each projection year.

Projecting income and outgo under optimistic, intermediate and pessimistic employment assumptions, the report indicated no cash-flow problems occur throughout the 25-year projection period under any of the three employment assumptions.

## 4. How do the results of the 2016 report compare with the 2015 report?

The projected tier II tax rates for each calendar year are either the same or higher than in last year's report. (Railroad retirement payroll taxes, like railroad retirement benefits, are calculated on a two-tier basis.) The projected combined account

balances are lower at the end of each year.

The unfavorable comparison with last year was due to overall unfavorable economic and employment experience, with the largest impacts resulting from declining employment and actual investment return of approximately 0.2 percent falling below the expected investment return of 7 percent in calendar year 2015.

## 5. Did the 2016 report of the railroad retirement system recommend any railroad retirement payroll tax rate changes?

The report did not recommend any change in the rate of tax imposed by current law on employers and employees.

## 6. What were the findings of the 2016 report on the financial condition of the railroad unemployment insurance system?

The RRB's 2016 railroad unemployment insurance financial report was also generally favorable. Even as maximum benefit rates increase 36 percent (from

\$72 to \$98) from 2015 to 2026, experience-based contribution rates maintain solvency. No new loans are anticipated even under the pessimistic assumption. Unemployment levels are the single most significant factor affecting the financial status of the railroad unemployment insurance system. However, the system's experience-rating provisions, which adjust contribution rates for changing benefit levels, and its surcharge trigger for maintaining a minimum balance help to ensure financial stability in the advent of adverse economic conditions.

Under experience-rating provisions, each employer's contribution rate is determined by the RRB on the basis of benefit payments made to the railroad's employees. Even under the pessimistic assumption, the report predicted that the average employer contribution rate remains well below the maximum throughout the projection period.

A 1.5 percent surcharge is in effect in calendar year 2016. Under all three employment assumptions, the report proj-

ects a surcharge of 1.5 percent in 2017 and 2018, with a surcharge of 1.5 percent predicted for 2019 under the pessimistic assumption and likely under the intermediate and optimistic assumptions.

## 7. What methods were used to evaluate the financial condition of the railroad unemployment insurance system?

The economic and employment assumptions used in the unemployment insurance report corresponded to those used in the 2016 report of the retirement system. Projections were made for various components of income and outgo under each of the three employment assumptions, but for the period 2016-2026, rather than a 25-year period.

## 8. Did the 2016 report on the railroad unemployment insurance system recommend any financing changes to the system?

No financing changes were recommended at this time by the report. @

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### Photo of the Month: October 2016

**MRL'S JIMBO LOCAL:** The Jimbo Local, a work train on Montana Rail Link, rolls slowly as the Jimbo crane operator picks up old tie plates and other used track materials along the right of way after the tie and steel gangs worked through the area. Photo taken at Findley Flats near Trout Creek, Mont., in September of 2016. **Photo:** BLET Member J.D. Santucci, Division 262 (Missoula, Mont.).



**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 August 2016 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; General Committee Secretary-Treasurer training class, Independence, Ohio; BLET Regional Meeting, Long Beach, Calif.; Arizona State Legislative Board mtg., Long Beach, Calif.

**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.; BLET regional meeting, Long Beach, Calif.; Union Pacific-Eastern District GCA mtg., 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; Pension, STD, 457 plan Trustee; Division, General Committee and SLB monthly Trustee reports; Mtgs. with vendors and financial institutions; Publications Committee; Passenger Dept.; National Bargaining Committee; IBT Human Rights Commission; ND office work, Independence, Ohio; Union Track implementation and training; BLET regional meeting, Long Beach, Calif.

**VICE PRESIDENT & NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN P. TOLMAN:** Assigned to BLET Washington, DC office; General office duties, telephone and correspondence communications; Coordinate content of NLO website; Weekly PAC committee and legislative mtgs.; Rail Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC) meeting for Hazmat Working Group, Washington, D.C.; Arizona State Legislative Board mtg., Long Beach, Calif.; BLET regional mtg., Long Beach, Calif. Various functions for Representatives and Senators, 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, Indiana Harbor Belt, Belt Railway of Chicago, Metra, GRR and Illinois RR; Study dockets for referee hearing, NRAB, Chicago; Division 682 monthly mtg., IHB, Chicago; NRAB hearings, referees Miller and Benn DL's; Assist GC Reynolds w/ discipline cases, WC, Chicago; Admin assistance for NRAB 3rd Division; NRAB hearings, referee Vaughn DL, Chicago; PLB 7154, referee Zimmerman, IC, Chicago; BLET regional meeting, Long Beach; Assist VGC Lough w/ disc. Submissions, Metra, Chicago; Assist GC Reynolds w/ LMRC mtg., Homewood.

**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-Eastern District GCA mtg., Las Vegas; UP-Western Region conference, Las Vegas; BLET regional meeting, Long Beach, Calif.

**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.; Holiday; Vacation; CAPS conference call; Inward-facing camera conference call, all CSX GCs; Meal allows and WLC roster, safety, conference call; CSX codification and wrap-up mtgs.; Jacksonville; Operation Red Block mtg., Detroit.

**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.; BNSF General Chairmen's retreat, San Diego; M&NA contract conference call, assisting GC Thurman; BLET regional mtg., Long Beach, Calif.; BNSF Safety Summit discussions w/ BNSF and BLET General Chairmen, Fort Worth, Texas.

**VICE PRESIDENT COLE W. DAVIS:** Assigned to: Kansas City Southern (MidSouth Rail, South Rail, 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), Cedar River, Louisville & Indiana, Huron & Eastern; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; Assist GC Semenok w/ issues on DM&E, CP, Soo Line; Assist GC Craddock w/ issues Mid South; Assist GC Moore w/ issues on Springfield Terminal and D&H; Assist GC Silmon w/ TexMex issues; Assist GC Spradlin w/ KCS issues; Assist GC Ladrig w/ Huron & Eastern issues; PLB 6560, assisting GC Moore, Boston; D&H contract negotiations, assist GC Moore, Boston; Soo contract issues, assist GC Semenok; BLET regional mtg., Long Beach, Calif.; Division 602 mtgs. w/ GC Craddock, St. Joseph, Ill.; Division 527 mtg. w/ GC Spradlin, Pittsburgh, Kan.; Mtg. w/ KCS, assisting GC Spradlin, Kansas City, Mo.

**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; Vacation; NECR mediation, assist GC Martin, Rochester, N.Y.; BLET regional mtg., Long Beach, Calif.

**VICE PRESIDENT JAMES P. LOUIS:** Assigned Amtrak; Long Island Rail Road; New York & Atlantic; Metro North; New Jersey Transit; PATH; SEPTA; Metra; Union Railroad; National Division Department Head, Education & Training Dept.; National Division Department Head, Internal Organizing, Mobilizing & Strategic Planning Dept.; Union Track mtgs.; Planning for BLET regional mtgs. in 2016 and 2017; GCA Secretary-Treasurer training class, Independence, Ohio; Assist GCA Nunziato w/ PATH issues; Assist GC Nunziato w/ NMB A-13753, PATH, Washington, D.C.; BLET regional mtg., Long Beach, Calif.; Assist GC Sexton w/ LIRR issues; Assist GC Decker w/ NJ Transit issues.

## Tyler Jones elected Kansas State Legislative Board Chairman

Tyler G. Jones was elected by acclamation to his first full term as Chairman of the Kansas Legislative Board at its quadrennial meeting in Kansas City, Kan., held from September 12-13, 2016.

Brother Jones hired out on January 5, 1995 with the St. Louis Southwestern in Herington, Kan. Since 1997, he has been a locomotive engineer with Union Pacific and member of Division 740, (Pratt, Kan.). He served as Division Secretary-Treasurer for nine years, and Vice-Local Chairman and Local Chairman for five years. Currently, he is Vice Local Chairman and Legislative Representative of Division 740. He was elected 2nd Vice Chairman of the Kansas State Legislative Board in 2012.

Also elected were: 1st Vice



Officers, delegates and guests attending the Kansas State Legislative Board's quadrennial meeting on September 13, 2016.

Chairman Scott W. Newell, Div. 336 (Osawatomie, Kan.); 2nd Vice Chairman William E. Brake, Div. 237 (Fort Scott, Kan.); Secretary-Treasurer Willie E. Tilsworth, Div. 130 (Kansas City, Kan.); and Alternate S-T Brandon D. Nunnenkamp, Div. 130 (Kansas City, Kan.).

Elected to serve as Trustees were: Shad M. Bremer, Div. 90 (Council Grove, Kan.); Phil D. Taylor, Div. 130 (Kansas City,

Kan.); and Jason S. Hiles, Div. 777 (Argentine, Kan.).

National officers in attendance were: First Vice President E. Lee Pruitt and Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman.

"I congratulate Brother Jones and all officers of the Kansas State Legislative Board," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. "I thank them for their dedica-

tion and willingness to serve our Brotherhood. I have every confidence they will do an excellent job representing the interests of our members in the proud state of Kansas."

Special guest speakers included: Senator Anthony Hensley, Kansas Senate Minority Leader; Rep. Tom Burroughs, Kansas House Minority Leader; Pat S. Pfeifer, Chairman of the Nebraska State Legislative Board; and Brian P. Kelley, Chairman of the Missouri State Legislative Board.

James Tiede, retired Chairman of the Kansas State Legislative Board, was also in attendance. The delegates recognized him and thanked him for his service to the Board.

The Kansas State Legislative Board represents approximately 1,100 members. @®