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BLET members proud to work President George H.W. Bush funeral train

See pg 2 for more information

HISTORIC BUSH FUNERAL TRAIN

Train crew of the George H.W. Bush funeral train, from left: Locomotive engineer **June Nobles** (BLET Division 139); Conductor Billy Blanton; Locomotive engineer **Aaron Braud** (BLET Division 139); and Conductor Randy Kuhaneck. Sister Nobles operated UP locomotive 4141, which powered the Bush funeral train. Brother Braud operated UP locomotive 9069, which pulled a security train in advance of the funeral train.

»»»» SAVE THE DATE «««« 2019 BLET regional meetings

The BLET National Division is pleased to announce the dates and locations of its 2019 regional meetings: June 24-28 in St. Louis, Missouri; and July 22-26 in Clearwater, Florida.

The St. Louis regional meeting will be held at the Hilton Hotel at the Ballpark and the Clearwater regional will be held at the Hilton Clearwater Beach.

As with previous regional meetings, the 2019 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 24 for St. Louis and July 22 for Clearwater). Meetings, training classes and other events will be scheduled throughout the remainder of the week and will include a closing dinner/dance on Thursday night. Travel home is on Friday for each meeting (June 28 for St. Louis and July 26 for Clearwater).

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 (<http://www.bletregionals.org>). All members are encouraged to attend one or both of these regional meetings in 2019. ©©

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI • June 24-28, 2019



CLEARWATER BEACH, FLORIDA • July 22-26, 2019



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Hoffa Scholarship Fund accepting applications through March 2019, **pg. 3**

RRB News

Retiree earnings limits to rise in 2019 **pg. 4**



2018 Santa Train

BLET member Joe Barr helps Santa Claus on 76th annual run **pg. 7**

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BLET members proud to work Bush funeral train

Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen proudly worked as crew members aboard the special Union Pacific funeral train for President George H.W. Bush on December 6.

The two funeral trains were operated by BLET locomotive engineers. The first train — UP locomotive 4141 — was operated by June Nobles of BLET Division 139 (Houston, Texas). Her conductor was Randy Kuhaneck, a member of SMART TD Local 577 (Palestine, Texas). Like President Bush, Nobles and Kuhaneck are both Navy veterans. The train carried the casket and members of the Bush



From left: Conductor Randy Kuhaneck, Engineer June Nobles, Conductor Billy Blanton, and Engineer Aaron Braud. **Photo:** by Adolphus E. Sharp

family from the funeral in Houston to President Bush's final resting place in College Station, Texas.

The second train was operated by BLET locomotive engineer Aaron Braud, also of Division 139 (Houston, Texas). His conductor was Billy Blanton, also of SMART TD Local

577 (Palestine, Texas). Their train was a security train that traveled in advance of the Bush funeral train, making sure the infrastructure was sound and all security measures were in place.

BLET Division 139 Local Chairman Kevin DeArment said that Sister Nobles and Brother Braud are both highly regarded engineers on the territory. "It was a great honor for both," Brother DeArment said. "I've had the pleasure of working with them over the years and they are a credit to our craft." ©©



The Bush funeral train (UP locomotive 4141, EMD SD70ACE) at Navosta, Texas, on December 6, 2018. **Photo:** by Brother Leo W. Persick Jr., former BNSF locomotive engineer and a retired member of BLET Division 636 (Lafayette, La.).



Sister June Nobles, BLET Division 139 operated the train carrying the casket and members of the Bush family from the funeral in Houston to President Bush's final resting place in College Station, Texas.



Brother Aaron Braud, BLET Division 139 operated the second train.



2005 dedication ceremony of the "Bush 4141" locomotive. **Photos:** Union Pacific

BLET EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS MONTH, PRESIDENT PIERCE WANTED TO DEDICATE THIS PAGE TO THE TRAIN CREW WHO OPERATED THE GEORGE H.W. BUSH FUNERAL TRAIN ON DECEMBER 6, 2018. HIS REGULAR COLUMN WILL RESUME IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER.

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

IN OHIO, ANOTHER EFFORT TO INSTITUTE RTW

Some lawmakers in Ohio were up to their old tricks again just after Election Day when a hearing was held to discuss a so-called right-to-work (RTW) bill. But the Teamsters and other unions showed up and made it clear that the Buckeye State doesn't need any more laws that infringe on the rights of workers.

While state Rep. John Becker (R) tried to peddle to the public that the legislation, known as HB 53, would only enshrine into state law the recent Janus v. AFSCME decision handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court in June, labor and pro-worker allies weren't having any of it. Ohio, they noted, rejected RTW in a 2011 referendum vote, and there was no reason to consider the issue again.

Democrats on the House Finance Committee also pushed back on the bill, saying Becker was not being forthcoming on the true

ramifications of the legislation.

Among other things, the legislation would have made "an appropriation to be used by the State Employment Relations Board to pay the costs of developing, producing, and distributing written information explaining a public employee's rights and options under the Public Employees Collective Bargaining Law."

What that means is taxpayers would be doling out scarce public dollars to enforce union busting. That's not a good use of precious funds and certainly goes beyond anything spelled out under Janus.

Efforts to impose RTW in Ohio have popped up several times in recent years, but thankfully haven't gone anywhere. And it appears this latest attempt won't either. Current Gov. John Kasich and incoming Gov. Mike DeWine said they don't support

such efforts, given voters' rejection of the ballot measure seven years ago.

That said, unions must remain vigilant in fighting against such anti-union measures. Workers in RTW states have lower wages, higher poverty, less access to health care and poorer education for their children.

When will corporate crony lawmakers learn? You'd think the stinging rebuke issued by Missouri voters in August, when they defeated a no-rights-at-work ballot measure by a more than two-to-one vote, would have sent a message.

RTW is a ruse. Workers mustn't let elected officials forget it.

Faternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
TEAMSTERS GENERAL
PRESIDENT



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When will corporate crony lawmakers learn? You'd think the stinging rebuke issued by Missouri voters in August, when they defeated a no-rights-at-work ballot measure by a more than two-to-one vote, would have sent a message.

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The James R. Hoffa Memorial Scholarship Fund

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Railroad retiree earnings limits to increase in 2019

Railroad retirement annuitants subject to earnings restrictions can earn more in 2019 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 2019, the exempt earnings amount rises to \$17,640 from \$17,040 in 2018. For beneficiaries attaining full retirement age in 2019, the exempt earnings

amount, for the months before the month full retirement age is attained, increases to \$46,920 in 2019 from \$45,360 in 2018.

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 2019, 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 2019. The monthly disability earnings limit increases to \$950 in 2019 from \$920 in 2018.

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. @@

SEQUESTRATION RATE ADJUSTED, AFFECTED BENEFITS TO RISE

Starting October 1, 2018, the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) will reduce railroad unemployment and sickness insurance benefits by 6.2 percent, down from the current 6.6 percent reduction, as required by law.

The adjusted reduction amount is based on revised projections of benefit claims and payments under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act. It will remain in effect through September 30, 2019, the end of the fiscal year. Reductions in future fiscal years, should they occur, will be calculated based on applicable law.

The daily benefit rate is \$77, so the 6.2 percent reduction in railroad unemployment and sickness benefits will reduce the maximum amount payable in a 2-week period with 10 days of unemployment from \$770.00 to \$722.26.

Certain railroad sickness benefits are also subject to regular tier I railroad retirement taxes, resulting in a further reduction of 7.65 percent. Applying the 6.2 percent

reduction to these sickness benefits will result in a maximum 2-week total of \$667.01.

These reductions are required under the Budget Control Act of 2011 and a subsequent sequestration order to implement the mandated cuts. The law exempted social security benefits, as well as railroad retirement, survivor, and disability benefits paid by the RRB, from sequestration.

When sequestration first took effect in March 2013, railroad unemployment and sickness benefits were subject to a 9.2 percent reduction. This amount was then adjusted to 7.2 percent in October 2013, 7.3 percent in October 2014, 6.8 percent in October 2015, 6.9 percent in October 2016, and 6.6 percent in October 2017, as required by law.

In fiscal year 2017, the RRB paid almost \$12.6 billion in retirement and survivor benefits to about 548,000 beneficiaries, and net unemployment-sickness benefits of almost \$105.4 million to approximately 28,000 claimants. @@

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President Pierce addresses TCRC delegates in Vancouver

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce was the opening speaker as the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference's (TCRC) Fourth Quadrennial Convention got underway in Vancouver, B.C., on September 18. Also representing the BLET National Division at the convention was Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman.

Speaking at the invitation of TCRC President Douglas Finnson, President Pierce described the BLET's long history with Canada, which dates back nearly 153 years. The first Canadian Division of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen was founded in Toronto on December 5, 1865.

"For the next 138 years, locomotive engineers from Canada and locomotive engineers from the United States struggled side-by-side against the railroads to improve the wages, benefits and working conditions of those who toil in our noble craft," he said.

When the former BLE merged with the Teamsters union in 2004, the administrative structure of the union required the separation of the Canadian members into the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC), with the remaining portion of the original BLE becoming the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen in the U.S.



President Pierce addresses delegates at the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) quadrennial convention in Vancouver on September 18.

"This shared history is not something that simply disappeared when the BLE merged with the Teamsters in 2004 and the U.S. and Canadian Rail Conferences were formed," he said.

President Pierce then described how BLET and TCRC recently fought together to overturn the Canadian Pacific Railway's efforts to eliminate the crew change point at Emerson and run crews through between Winnipeg and Thief River Falls. He also discussed how the BLET and TCRC are collaborating to strengthen NAFTA to explicitly protect the jobs of Canadian and American railroad workers.

"The bonds created by our shared his-

tory made that collaboration feel more like a family reunion than anything else," President Pierce said.

Teamsters Canada represents 125,000 members north of the border, including more than 16,000 TCRC members who work in the railroad industry. TCRC is the collective bargaining representative for workers at the Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, as well as the majority of short line railways in Canada. @@

A TRANSCRIPT OF PRESIDENT PIERCE'S REMARKS CAN BE FOUND AT: WWW.BLE-T.ORG/PR/PDF/DRP_TCRC_SPEECH_FINAL.PDF



BLET hosts Town Hall Meetings in Houston, San Antonio, and Arlington

Wasting no time getting back into the field following the conclusion of the Fourth National Convention, BLET National Division officers participated in a series of Town Hall Meetings throughout Texas in advance of the November 2018 national elections.

The Fourth National Convention concluded on October 4, and the Town Hall meetings were held in Arlington (October 23), Houston (October 24) and San Antonio (October 25). Representing the National Division at the meeting were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; Vice



President Pierce addresses the attendees

President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; and Vice President Michael Priester.

Also in attendance was Vice Presi-

dent-Elect Alan Holdcraft, who helped organize the meetings in his role as General Chairman of the BNSF (former AT&SF) General Committee of Adjustment. Also coordinating the series of meetings was: UP-Southern Region General Chairman Dana Marlow; BNSF (former STL-SF) General Chairman Jeff Thurman; BNSF (former C&S/CRIP/FWD) General Chairman Bobby Brown; and Kansas City Southern General Chairman David Spradlin. Dozens of members from those GCAs were in attendance at the informational sessions.

President Pierce chaired the meetings and many items were discussed, includ-

ing the Supreme Court's Janus decision, corporate greed, and the war on American workers. The general theme was that elections have consequences. Each session included an extended question-and-answer session with the officers.

"These Town Hall meetings are an important forum for the free exchange of thoughts and information with our Brothers and Sisters," President Pierce said. "The meetings in Texas were well attended and it is important to thank the members who took the time to show up, listen, and ask questions. Meetings of this type help us to build a stronger Brotherhood, and I thank you for your participation." @@

RRB: MEDICARE PART B PREMIUMS FOR 2019

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has announced that the standard monthly Part B premium will be \$135.50 in 2019, a slight increase from \$134.00 in 2018. However, some Medicare beneficiaries will pay slightly less than this amount. By law, Part B premiums for current enrollees cannot increase by more than the amount of the cost-of-living adjustment for social security (railroad retirement tier I) benefits.

Since that adjustment is 2.8 percent in 2019, about 2 million Medicare beneficiaries will see an increase in their Part B premiums but still pay less than \$135.50. The standard premium amount will also apply to new enrollees in the program, and certain beneficiaries will continue to pay higher premiums based on their modified adjusted gross income.

The monthly premiums that include income-related adjustments for 2019 will range from \$189.60 up to \$460.50, depending on the extent to which an individual beneficiary's mod-

ified adjusted gross income exceeds \$85,000 (or \$170,000 for a married couple). The highest rate applies to beneficiaries whose incomes exceed \$500,000 (or \$750,000 for a married couple). The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services estimates that about 5 percent of Medicare beneficiaries pay the larger income-adjusted premiums.

Beneficiaries in Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage plans pay premiums that vary from plan to plan. Part D beneficiaries whose modified adjusted gross income exceeds the same income thresholds that apply to Part B premiums also pay a monthly adjustment amount. In 2019, the adjustment amount ranges from \$12.40 to \$77.40.

The Railroad Retirement Board withholds Part B premiums from benefit payments it processes. The agency can also withhold Part C and D premiums from benefit payments if an individual submits a request to his or her Part C or D insurance plan.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is responsible for all income-related monthly adjustment amount determinations. To make the determinations, SSA uses the most recent tax return information available from the Internal Revenue Service. For 2019, that will usually be the beneficiary's 2017 tax return information. If that information is not available, SSA will use information from the 2016 tax return.

Those railroad retirement and social security Medicare beneficiaries affected by the 2019 Part B and D income-related premiums will receive a notice from SSA by the end of the year. The notice will include an explanation of the circumstances where a beneficiary may request a new determination. Persons who have questions or would like to request a new determination should contact SSA after receiving their notice.

Additional information about Medicare coverage, including specific benefits and deductibles, can be found at Medicare.gov. @@

GA-46000 LIFETIME MAXIMUM ADJUSTED FOR 2019

The lifetime maximum benefit for the Railroad Employees National Early Retirement Major Medical Benefit Plan (also known as ERMA or GA-46000) will increase from \$162,500 to \$166,400 on January 1, 2019.

At the end of 2001, Labor and Management agreed on various procedures to administer the annual changes in the amount of the lifetime maximum benefit under the ERMA plan. In conjunction with the formula established in 2001, a new lifetime maximum was calculated for 2019 by utilizing the October 2018 consumer price index (CPI) data for Hospital and Related Services and Physician Services.

Additionally, for individuals who have reached the lifetime maximum, the incremental maximum available is applied to eligible expenses submitted for dates of service on or after the effective date of the new maximum. For 2019, this amount will be \$3,900.

This change will apply to all railroads and crafts participating in ERMA. @@

Q&A:

Buyouts and Railroad Retirement benefits

Railroad employees frequently ask the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) how the acceptance of a buyout from a railroad employer affects their future eligibility for benefits under the Railroad Retirement and Railroad Unemployment Insurance Acts. The following questions and answers provide information on this subject.

1 Would leaving railroad work and accepting a buyout mean that an employee forfeits any future entitlement to an annuity under the Railroad Retirement Act?

As long as an employee has acquired at least 10 years (120 months) of creditable rail service, or 5 years (60 months) of creditable service if such service was performed after 1995, he or she would still be eligible for a regular railroad retirement annuity upon reaching retirement age, or, if totally disabled, for an annuity before retirement age, regardless of whether or not a buyout was ever accepted.

However, if a person permanently leaves railroad employment before attaining retirement age, the employee may not be able to meet the requirements for certain other benefits, particularly the current connection requirement for annuities based on occupational, rather than total, disability and for supplemental annuities paid by the RRB to career employees.

In addition, if an employee does not have a current connection, the Social Security Administration, rather than the RRB, would have jurisdiction of any survivor benefits that become payable on the basis of the employee's combined railroad retirement and social security covered earnings. The survivor benefits payable by the RRB are generally greater than those paid by the Social Security Administration.

2 How are buyout payments treated under the Railroad Retirement and Railroad Unemployment Insurance Acts?

Buyout payments that result from the abolishment of an employee's job are creditable as compensation under the Railroad Retirement and Railroad Unemployment Insurance Acts. While the actual names of these employer payments may vary, the treatment given them by the RRB will depend upon whether the employee relinquished or retained his or her job rights. If the employee relinquishes job rights to obtain the compensation, the RRB considers the payment a separation allowance. This compensation is credited to either the month last worked or, if later, the month in which the employee relinquishes his or her employment relationship. While all compensation subject to tier I payroll taxes is considered in the computation of a railroad retirement annuity, no additional service months can be credited after the month in which rights are relinquished.

The RRB considers the buyout payment a dismissal allowance, even though the employer might designate the payment a separation allowance, if the employee retains job rights and receives monthly payments credited to the months for which they are allocated under the dismissal allowance agreement. This is



true even if the employee relinquishes job rights after the end of the period for which a monthly dismissal allowance was paid. However, supplemental unemployment or sickness benefits paid under an RRB-approved nongovernmental plan by a railroad or third party are not considered compensation for railroad retirement purposes.

3 Suppose an employee is given a choice between (1) accepting a separation allowance, relinquishing job rights and having the payment he or she receives credited to one month or (2) accepting a dismissal allowance, retaining job rights and having the payment credited to the months for which it is allocated. What are some of the railroad retirement considerations the employee should keep in mind?

Individual factors such as an employee's age and service should be considered.

For example, if an employee is already eligible to begin receiving a railroad retirement annuity, he or she may find it advantageous to relinquish job rights, accept a separation allowance, and have the annuity begin on the earliest date allowed by law. Any periodic payments made after that date would not preclude payment of the annuity because the employee has relinquished job rights.

On the other hand, some younger employees may find it more advantageous to retain job rights and accept monthly compensation payments under a dismissal allowance if these payments would allow them to acquire 120 months of creditable rail service (or 60 months of creditable rail service if such service was performed after 1995) and establish future eligibility for a railroad retirement annuity. Also, additional service months might allow a long-service employee to acquire 30 years of service, which is required for early retirement at age 60, or 25 years of rail service, which is required for supplemental annuities paid by the RRB. Establishing 25 years of service could also aid an employee in maintaining a current connection under the Railroad Retirement Act.

4 How would acquiring 25 years of railroad service assist an employee in maintaining a current connection?

The current connection requirement is normally met if the employee has railroad service in at least 12 of the last 30 consecutive months before retirement or death. If an employee does not qualify on this basis but has 12 months of service in an earlier 30-month period, he or she may still meet the requirement if the employee does not work outside the railroad industry in the interval following the 30-month period and the employee's retirement, or death if that occurs earlier. Nonrailroad employment in that interval will likely break the employee's current connection.

However, a current connection can be maintained for purposes of supplemental and survivor annuities, but not occupational disability annuities, if the employee completed 25 years of railroad service, was involuntarily terminated without fault from his or her last job in the railroad industry, and did not thereafter decline an offer of employment in the same class or craft in the railroad industry, regardless of the distance to the new position. If all of these requirements are met, an employee's current connection may not be broken, even if the employee works in regular nonrailroad employment after the 30-month period and before retirement or death. This exception to the normal current connection requirements became effective October 1, 1981, but only for employees still living on that date who left the rail industry on or after October 1, 1975, or who were on leave of absence, on furlough, or absent due to injury on October 1, 1975.

5 Would the acceptance of a buyout have any effect on determining whether an employee could maintain a current connection under the exception provision?

In cases where an employee has no option to remain in the service of his or her employer, the termination of the employment is considered involuntary, regardless of whether the employee does

or does not receive a separation or dismissal allowance.

However, an employee who chooses a separation allowance instead of keeping his or her seniority rights to railroad employment would, for railroad retirement purposes, generally be considered to have voluntarily terminated railroad service, and, consequently, would not maintain a current connection under the exception provision.

6 An employee with 25 years of service is offered a buyout with the option of either taking payment in a single lump sum, or receiving monthly payments until retirement age. Could the method of payment affect the employee's current connection under the exception provision?

If the employee had the choice to remain in employer service and voluntarily relinquished job rights prior to accepting the payments, his or her current connection would not be maintained under the exception provision, regardless of which payment option is chosen. Therefore, nonrailroad work after the 30-month period and before retirement, or the employee's death if earlier, could break the employee's current connection. Such an employee could only meet the current connection requirement under the normal procedures.

7 Is it always advantageous to maintain a current connection?

While a current connection is generally advantageous for railroad retirement purposes, the costs of maintaining a current connection could outweigh its value, depending on individual circumstances. There may be other financial or personal factors involved besides railroad retirement eligibility and/or the preservation of a current connection, and these will vary from individual to individual.

8 Are separation and dismissal allowances subject to railroad retirement payroll taxes?

Under the Railroad Retirement Tax Act, which is administered by the Internal Revenue Service, payments of compensation, including most buyouts, are subject to tier I, tier II, and Medicare taxes on earnings up to the annual maximum earnings bases in effect when the compensation is paid. This is true whether payment is made in a lump sum or on a periodic basis.

To the extent that a separation allowance does not yield additional tier II railroad retirement service credits, a lump sum, approximating part or all of the railroad retirement tier II payroll taxes deducted from the separation allowance, will be paid upon retirement to employees meeting minimum service requirements or their survivors. This lump sum applies to separation allowances made after 1984.

If an employee receives a dismissal allowance, he or she receives service credits for the tier II taxes deducted from the dismissal allowance payments. Consequently, such a lump sum would not be payable.

If an employee has an option about how a buyout is to be distributed, he or she should consider the impact of both

payroll taxes and income tax on the payments. Employees with questions in this regard should contact the payroll department of their railroad employer and/or the Internal Revenue Service.

9 Would an employee be able to receive unemployment or sickness benefits paid by the RRB after accepting a separation allowance?

An employee who accepts a separation allowance cannot receive unemployment or sickness benefits for roughly the period of time it would have taken to earn the amount of the allowance at his or her straight-time rate of pay. This is true regardless of whether the allowance is paid in a lump sum or installments. For example, if an employee's salary was \$3,000 a month without overtime pay and the allowance was \$12,000, he or she would be disqualified from receiving benefits for approximately four months.

10 Can an employee receive unemployment benefits after his or her separation allowance disqualification period has ended?

An employee who has not obtained new employment by the end of the disqualification period and is still actively seeking work may be eligible for unemployment benefits at that time. The employee must meet all the usual eligibility requirements, including the availability for work requirement. An employee can establish his or her availability for work by demonstrating a willingness to work and making significant efforts to obtain work. In judging the employee's willingness to work, the RRB considers, among other factors, the reason the employee accepted the separation allowance and the extent of his or her work-seeking efforts during the disqualification period.

11 How would the acceptance of a dismissal allowance affect an employee's eligibility for unemployment and sickness benefits?

Payments made under a dismissal allowance would be considered remuneration under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act and the employee would not be eligible for unemployment or sickness benefits during the period the dismissal allowance is being paid. The employee may, of course, be eligible for benefits after the end of this period if he or she is still actively seeking work or is unable to work because of illness or injury.

12 Where can employees get more specific information on how benefits payable by the RRB are affected by a buyout?

Employees can get more information online or by phone. Field Office Locator provides easy access to every field office webpage where the street address and other service information is posted, as well as the option to email an office directly 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, including being transferred to an office to speak with a representative, leave a message, or find the address of a local field office. The agency also maintains a TTY number, 312-751-4701, to accommodate those with hearing or speech impairments. Most RRB 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 12:00 p.m. RRB offices are closed on Federal holidays. @@

BLET member helps Santa Train complete 2018 run

The 76th annual CSX Santa Train ran safely and on-time again this year, thanks in large part to a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen.

Every November, Santa Claus trades in his sleigh and reindeer for a CSX train ride through Appalachia. On November 17, Santa and his elves distributed nearly 17 tons of toys, food, school supplies, and other donated gifts to children of all ages at 14 stops in rural communities in eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and eastern Tennessee. The 110-mile journey begins at Shelby Yard in Pikeville, Ky.,

and runs south to Kingsport, Tenn.

Tens of thousands gathered trackside to snap photos, catch presents, and get a glimpse of Santa Claus. While an annual tradition for many in rural Appalachia, the 76th anniversary was particularly special for BLET member and CSX engineer Joe Barr.

Brother Barr is married with two daughters. He hired out with CSX in 1994 and earned promotion to locomotive engineer in the summer of 1997, at which time he joined BLET Division 781 (Erwin, Tenn.). Brother Barr has been a member of Division 781 since June 1, 1997.

A member of BLET Division 781 tradi-

tionally operates the Santa Train each year. The train traverses difficult terrain and the BLET members are intimately familiar with the route's many challenging hills and curves. They are uniquely qualified for the job and are extremely proud of their contributions to the Santa Train heritage.

In addition to Santa, this year's special guest was country music stars Maddie and Tae, who distributed gifts along the route and performed a concert in Kingsport, Tenn., at the end of the train's route.

CSX, Food City, the Kingsport Chamber of Commerce, Appalachian Power and Soles4Souls sponsored the annual tradition. @@



Santa tosses stuffed animals into the crowd at a Santa Train stop.



A Santa Train volunteer hands out presents at a stop along the Santa Train route.



Special guests Maddie & Tae hand out presents at the Santa Train stop in Fremont, Va.



Special guests Maddie & Tae perform at Santa's Depot at Centennial Park in Kingsport, Tenn.



CSX presents a check for \$1,000 to representatives from the U.S. Marine Corps for Toys for Tots on behalf of Maddie & Tae.



Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen News Brotherhood Of Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen

7061 East Pleasant Valley Road
Independence, Ohio 44131

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11/18

Photo of the Month: November/December 2018



SOUTHBOUND SHORT LINE: A southbound Indiana Railroad freight train passes by the distant signal to the interlocking in Sullivan, Ind., near sunset on August 3, 2018. The BLET's Indiana Rail Road members belong to Division 204 (Linton, Ind.) and are a part of the CSXT-Western Lines General Committee of Adjustment. **Photo:** Brother Richard C. Bartela Jr., a member of BLET Division 382 in Buffalo, N.Y.



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 September & October 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; BLET Illinois State Legislative Board mtg., Springfield, Ill.; BLET Indiana State Legislative Board mtg., Indianapolis, Ind.; Teamsters Canada Rail Conference convention, Vancouver, B.C.; BLET UP-Western Lines GCA mtg., San Diego, Calif.; BLET UP-Northern Region GCA mtg., Las Vegas, Nevada; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; Wisconsin State Legislative Board team building session, Wisconsin Dells, Wisc.; BLET Dallas/Ft. Worth Town Hall mtg., Arlington, TX; BLET Houston Town Hall mtg., Houston, TX; BLET San Antonio, Town Hall mtg., San Antonio, TX; National Health and Welfare plan rate session mtg., Washington, D.C.

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.; Holiday; Indiana State Legislative Board mtg., Indianapolis, Ind.; UP-Western Lines GCA mtg., San Diego, Calif.; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; UP-Northern Region 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/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 oversight duties; Illinois State Legislative Board mtg., Springfield, Ill.; Vacation; Division 71 mtg.; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT & NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN P. TOLMAN: Assigned to BLET Washington, DC office; General office duties, telephone and correspondence communications; Illinois State Legislative Board mtg., Springfield, Ill.; Indiana State Legislative Board mtg., Indianapolis, Ind.; UP-Western Lines GCA mtg., San Diego, Calif.; UP-Northern Region GCA mtg., Las Vegas; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; Multiple mtgs. w/ members of the House of Representatives to discuss Tex-Mex issues and letters from BLET President Pierce, Washington, D.C.; FRA Summit on Trespasser & Grade Crossing Fatality Prevention, Washington, D.C.; BLET Town Hall mtgs., in Texas (Arlington, Houston, San Antonio); Various mtgs. w/ U.S. Senators working on our 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, Illinois Rwy., Belt Railway of Chicago, METRA, GRR, and Union Railroad; Eastern Regional mtg., Washington, D.C.; Holiday; Dkt. 48365, further discussion, Referee Wesman, NRAB, Chicago; Assist GC Reynolds w/ discipline submissions, WC, Chicago; Iowa State Legislative Board recorder class w/ D.W. Davidson, Iowa City, Iowa; Assist GC Semenek w/ PLB hearing, Referee Darby, CP, Chicago; PLB 7154, cases 130-139, Referee Wesman, IC, Chicago; NRAB Admin matters, Chicago; Vacation; Study DL 434, Referee Moran, Chicago; 1st Division adoption session, NRAB, Chicago; ROAR and NRAB annual mtg., Chicago; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; Study dockets for DL 429, 430, 434 and 435 (A), NRAB, Chicago; Assist VGC Lough w/ discipline appeals, METRA; Referee Benn, DL 429-430, Referee Meyers, DL 435(A and B), NRAB, Chicago; Referee Baggett-Hays, DL 433; Assist GC Reynolds w/ Section 6 issues, WC, 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-Eastern Region PLB 7902, Estero, Fla.; UP-Western Lines GCA mtg., San Diego, Calif.; UP-Northern Region GCA mtg., Las Vegas; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; Utah Railway Section 6 negotiations, Salt Lake City, Utah; Vacation; Mtg. w/ UP General Chairmen's Association and UP Railroad Employees Health Services, Las Vegas; UP-Western Region and UP-Eastern District joint PLB 7228, New Orleans.

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; PLB IRR; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., 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.; Divisions 285, 83, 237 and 567 picnic/outing, Thayer, Mo.; UP-Western Lines GCA mtg., San Diego, Calif.; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; Division 256 mtg., assist GC Holdcraft, Denver, Colo.; PLB 7333 conference call w/ Arbitr Ray, M&NA, Henderson, Nevada; BLET Town Hall mtgs. w/ President Pierce and GC Holdcraft in Arlington, Houston and San Antonio, Texas; Mtg. w/ BNSF General Chairmen and BNSF Labor Relations, Fort Worth, Texas.

VICE PRESIDENT COLE W. DAVIS: Assigned to: Kansas City Southern (MidSouth Rail, SouthRail, Gateway Western, Illinois & Midland), KCS-Louisiana Arkansas Rwy., Texas Mexican Rwy.; CP Rail System/US Soo Line (Indiana Southern, Iowa, Chicago & Eastern, Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern); Springfield Terminal (St. Lawrence & Atlantic, Delaware & Hudson), New York, Susquehanna & Western (Connecticut Southern, New England Central), Louisville & Indiana, Huron & Eastern, Wheeling & Lake Erie Rwy.; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; Tex Mex international border issues, Laredo, Texas; D&H and Springfield Terminal issues, assist GC Moore; KCS issues, assist GC Spradlin; MidSouth issues, assist GC Evans; Louisville & Indiana issues, assist GC Hogan; Huron & Eastern issues, assist GC Ladrig; Soo Line issues, assist GC Semenek; New England Central issues, assist GC Moore; Wheeling & Lake Erie issues, assist GC Fannon; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT R.C. (RICK) GIBBONS: Assigned to: All Norfolk Southern General Committees (Northern, Eastern and Southern Lines); Chicago, Fort Wayne & Eastern; Indiana & Ohio; RSAC/RSIA Fatigue Management Group; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications; Vice President duties; On duty at home office; CFER mediation, assist GC Dehart, Indianapolis, Ind.; PLB 7574, assist GC Wallace, Norfolk, Va.; UP-Western Lines GCA mtg., San Diego, Calif.; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; NS Labor/Management mtg., assist GCs Wallace, Dehart and Fannon, McDonough, Ga.

VICE PRESIDENT JAMES P. LOUIS: Assigned Amtrak; Long Island Rail Road; New York & Atlantic; Metro-North; New Jersey Transit; PATH; SEPTA; Western New York & Pennsylvania Rwy.; 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; PATH contract talks, assist GC Basile, Newark and Jersey City, N.J.; BLET Fourth National Convention, Las Vegas; BLET Advisory Board mtg., Las Vegas; LIRR issues, assist GC Sexton; MBRC contract talks, assist GC Kenny; Vacation; Video arbitration, SBA 940, NJ Transit, assist GC Brown; SEPTA contract talks and issues, assist GC Hill, Philadelphia.

History of the BLET video now available

Due to overwhelming membership interest, the commemorative video produced in 2013 in recognition of the BLET's 150th anniversary has been made available on YouTube.

Founded as the Brotherhood of the Footboard on May 8, 1863, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) is the oldest union in North America. The union celebrated its 150th anniversary on May 8, 2013.



As part of the BLET's 150th anniversary festivities, National President Dennis R. Pierce unveiled a commemorative 30-minute video highlighting the union's achievements over its first 150 years.

More recently, the video was also shown to delegates during the BLET's Fourth National Convention in Las Vegas on October 3, 2018.

"With Unions under attack like never before, now is a good

time to reflect on what has been accomplished by Rail Labor over the last 150 years," President Pierce said.

The video covers early railroading from the late 1820s and early 1830s, explains the factors that led to the formation of the Brotherhood of the Footboard in 1863, and highlights the Brotherhood's many achievements for its members from 1863 to the present.

Funding for the video was provided by the North American Railway Foundation. ©

DUE TO SIGNIFICANT INTEREST FROM DELEGATES, A LINK NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE AT: [BIT.LY/2UE7MKP](http://bit.ly/2UE7MKP)