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BLET and SMART-TD, four other Rail Unions to bargain together

Top leaders of the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) announced on December 17 that their organizations will be participating with four other rail unions in coordinated bargaining in the upcoming round of

national negotiations.

On December 8, 2014, BLET General Chairmen and SMART-TD General Chairpersons each served bargaining notices on their respective railroads, including identical notices related to health and welfare and related benefits.

"Today we build on the successes of joint bargaining during the past two national rounds," said BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce.

"Now more than ever before it is imperative that the unions representing railroad operating crafts sit side-by-side at the national table, and I am pleased that we have been able to accomplish that."

"This is a landmark occasion for BLET members and SMART-TD members alike," said SMART-TD President John Previsich. "Today's announcement builds on several years of cooperation between our organizations on a va-

riety of common issues, and is the logical next step for our great unions. Working together will allow rail labor to make the strongest possible effort to obtain for our members the wages and working conditions that they deserve."

Also participating in the coordinated bargaining effort are the American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA), the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS), the International

Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers, and Helpers (IBB), and the National Conference of Firemen and Oilers / SEIU (NCFO).

Jointly, the participating unions represent more than 85,000 railroad workers covered by the various organizations' national agreements, and comprise over 58% of the workforce who will be impacted by the negotiations. @@



*Happy
New Year!*

CANADIAN PACIFIC LOCOMOTIVE 6241 rolls past the Amtrak station in Port Henry, N.Y., on December 27, 2013. The lead unit is hauling two BNSF locomotives, one in the famous warbonnet paint scheme. This type of consist is rare for the Port Henry area. The station, originally built in 1888 by the Delaware & Hudson Railroad, has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1995. Photo: Gary Knapp

Announcement of verified results of BLET National Division Officers election

As prescribed by the Rules for the 2014 BLET National Division Officers Election, on December 1 National Secretary-Treasurer William C. Walpert yesterday released the verified results of the 2014 BLET National Division Officers election. A total of 26 National Division Officers and Alternates were cho-

sen in the election and all were elected by acclamation. Four-year terms of office will begin on January 1, 2015.

Delegates at the BLET's Third National Convention, which concluded on October 2, 2014, nominated just one candidate for each National Division office. While the convention was in session, the

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BLET PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY DENNIS R. PIERCE

2014 STATE OF THE UNION

Looking back at 2014, I am proud of our accomplishments as a Brotherhood and guardedly optimistic as I look ahead to the New Year. While we continued to face significant challenges in 2014, our union remains strong and our course is steady.

Much of the year 2014 was dedicated to planning and conducting our Third National Convention. We published our Convention Call in the February/March 2014 issue of this Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen News, but planning of the event actually began nearly two years prior to that announcement.

Our Third National Convention marked the 64th time in our 151-year history that the Brotherhood gathered together for a national or international convention. I share this fact so all members can be aware of the proud tradition that was continued by all in attendance at this year's National Convention. This year's delegation was asked to consider many resolutions, all crafted to make our union stronger and more stable, and our Bylaws more understandable. Work on Bylaws resolutions is not always exciting, but it is work that must be done for the betterment of the Brotherhood. This year's delegates should be proud of the determination and work ethic that they showed, and they have my personal thanks for seeing that the work of the Brotherhood was completed in a timely fashion.

I am also proud of our new Education and Training Center, which opened at our National Headquarters in Cleveland in 2014. Our first class was held on July 21, 2014 — a workshop for Local Chairmen. It is so much more than a brick and mortar training facility. We have established perhaps the most modern classroom environment in all of organized labor, affording our membership access to the best classroom technology that exists today. We concluded this year's final workshop during the week of December 15, and will host a full slate of workshops throughout 2015.

Looking ahead, we plan to expand the availability of the Edu-



President Pierce presiding over the BLET's Third National Convention in Las Vegas as delegates deliberate over changes to the BLET's Bylaws.

cation and Training Department in the not too distant future. I have challenged our staff to extend the reach of our Education and Training Department to as many members as possible. The realities of in-person training imposes a limit on the number of officers and members we can reach through our traditional training methods. My goal is to implement a curriculum of on-line and electronic training that will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. I would also like to expand training to more than just our elected officers. My ultimate goal is to establish a training module for rank and file members to help us have the best-educated membership in the House of Labor.

While on the subject of Education and Training, I would be remiss if I did not mention the retirement of National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert. Brother Bill served as Director of our Education and Training Department since its founding. His visionary leadership helped mold the Department from its infancy to the high-tech training we offer today. I would personally like to thank Brother Walpert for all his efforts during his long and illustrious career and wish him

nothing but the best during his well-deserved retirement.

Another milestone in 2014 occurred on June 30, when we announced the sale of our historic Standard Building in downtown Cleveland. The Standard Building was built by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers in 1924 and is a significant part of our heritage. However, the building had reached a point where considerable assets would have been necessary to repurpose the building. These are union resources that your Advisory Board determined would have been better spent performing the true function of a labor union, which is representation of the membership. A search has begun to find a new headquarters for our hard-working National Division officers and staff in the Cleveland area. The new building will also be the home of our Education and Training Center.

Our union continued to grow during 2014 thanks in large part to increased rail traffic and the growing need for railroads to employ professional, certified locomotive engineers and trainmen. But we also received a boost from our Organizing Department. On August 7, the BLET scored an organizing victory at

Illinois Railway near Chicago. We are proud to welcome nearly two dozen new members who will become a part of the BLET's Indiana Harbor Belt General Committee of Adjustment.

Also in terms of Brotherhood business, our members ratified a new collective bargaining agreement with Metra on May 19, with over 96 percent of eligible members voting in the process. And by a better than 2-to-1 ratio, our membership ratified a new wage and work rule agreement with CSX Transportation, Inc., which represents a continuation of our Single System Agreement (SSA) with that carrier. Additionally, by a 93 percent majority, BNSF engineers ratified an agreement that gives them a 3 percent general wage increase while transitioning them into National Handling for the bargaining round beginning in 2015. As the year closes, a ratification vote on an agreement governing wages and work rules on Norfolk Southern is also underway.

Our members also ratified a new contract with SEPTA in Philadelphia this year, but that agreement came only after we shut down the passenger railroad with a one-day strike on June 14. We brought all passenger trains

to a halt not because we wanted to, but because we needed to. Our issues with SEPTA still persist, however, as we continue to object to the carrier's continued abuse of a waiver of federally mandated safety rules. SEPTA's practice of stretching workdays at the expense of rest time for our members is not acceptable, and the issue is coming to a head at a public hearing hosted by the Federal Railroad Administration in February 2015.

As I mentioned earlier, we faced many significant challenges during 2014, with more on the horizon next year. We will continue our fight for passage of the Safe Freight Act, H.R. 3040, which would mandate an operating crew size of at least two. We are also lobbying for the safe and timely installation of Positive Train Control on our nation's railroads, which will represent a significant safety upgrade and overlay on existing signal and train control technology. It will save lives and reduce accidents and property damage.

Another major challenge in 2015 is the beginning of national contract negotiations. However, as you read on Page 1 of this issue, the Brotherhood is working in concert with five other rail unions, including the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail, and Transportation Workers, to achieve our goals at the bargaining table. Our group is the largest in the current round of national handling, representing approximately 58 percent of all active railroad workers in the United States. There is strength in numbers, and the strength and size of our group gives me optimism as we begin negotiating on your next national contract.

These are some of the many issues that will be on our plate as we approach our proud organization's 152nd birthday on May 8, 2015. I wish to thank all officers, members and staff of our great Brotherhood for a job well done in 2014. We will not rest until we secure a better tomorrow for our members.

DENNIS R. PIERCE
BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

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 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

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES BEYOND WAGES

Americans spend more hours at work than anyone else in the industrialized world. But increasingly they have less and less to show for it and are beginning to lose hope.

A New York Times survey found that only 64 percent of respondents believe the American Dream concept anymore, less than even during the Great Recession and lower than any poll taken by the newspaper that asked the question going back to 1996. And given the pro-corporate system in place, many don't expect it to change.

Low-income workers face significant challenges in making a better life for themselves, but minuscule wages are only a part of it. Their problems are exacerbated by not having enough time in

their day, not having sick leave and not having the ability to plan for the future. It leads to unhealthy choices and unfortunate events that keep them in poverty.

With elected officials increasingly choosing not to be the answer for American workers, the people need to find their own solutions. And that's where the Teamsters and other unions can play a role in lifting up regular workers. After all, union jobs pay better. That's not bull — it's fact.

The legal system seems to recognize what the other two branches of government don't. Recently, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas hinted that Amazon workers would benefit from joining a union so they could have their arguments heard by the online shopping giant. Meanwhile, a NLRB administrative law judge sided

with Walmart workers at two northern California stores who said the company was trying to inhibit their organizing efforts.

More and more low-income workers are also taking control of their own destiny. They are out in the streets, letting the public know that they aren't being paid enough and they aren't being treated fairly.

Workers need to stick together and help each other whenever possible. Joining a union is the best way to restore faith that American lives can get better if they work hard. It is in everybody's interest to make sure the American Dream is alive and well.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
TEAMSTERS GENERAL PRESIDENT



66 With elected officials increasingly choosing not to be the answer for American workers, the people need to find their own solutions. And that's where the Teamsters and other unions can play a role in lifting up regular workers. 99

BLET says FRA should reject SEPTA's request for safety waiver

Citing SEPTA's failure to follow its own scheduling procedures, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) has asked the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to reject the transit agency's request for an extended waiver of safety rules. The waiver would decrease the amount of rest time available for SEPTA's locomotive engineers.

Members of Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Division 71, representing 200 locomotive engineers at SEPTA, reached an economic agreement with the agency in October. At the time, the union insisted it would "aggressively pursue" a resolution of critical safety issues with federal authorities. SEPTA refused to bargain over safety matters during the most recent round of contract talks.

"This is no way to run a railroad," said BLET Vice President Steve Bruno. "Safety has to come first — but SEPTA is more interested in cutting payroll costs. They haven't lived up to the promises they made when they got the first waiver; there's no reason to give them a second one." Added Bruno, "We've seen



Sleep deprivation is becoming an issue for locomotive engineers at SEPTA as the railroad seeks to renew a safety waiver that would limit rest time for operating crews.

some terrible accidents due to sleep deprivation on other railroads. We don't need that to happen here."

Since originally receiving a waiver in October of 2012, wrote BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce in a letter to the FRA, SEPTA has systematically reduced "the number of locomotive engineer assignments while simultaneously increasing

the number of trains and route miles in the public schedule."

Without enough hands on deck, says Pierce, SEPTA has resorted to overworking its locomotive engineers, who are the most critical safety employees on every SEPTA train in operation.

Six-day workweeks are routine at SEPTA, Pierce reports, and engineers are frequently called into

work in a way that interrupts their sleep patterns. Forcing engineers to operate trains with insufficient rest creates a known — and preventable — risk to passengers and crews members.

In his letter to FRA, Pierce documented that SEPTA's recent performance does not justify granting the agency an extended and expanded waiver from compliance with federal

regulations on operator safety and fatigue:

"SEPTA has increased its daily revenue miles, increased the occasions of interrupted sleep for its extra board engineers, decreased its manpower, decreased the number of five day assignments, eliminated the number of extra board employees with two consecutive days off, and had an 'alarming' series of decertification events recently," President Pierce wrote.

BLET is calling on FRA to deny the agency's request for a new waiver, which would allow the agency to bypass existing safety regulations by reducing rest times for locomotive engineers. Instead, the union asked the agency to conduct a full public hearing, to ensure that SEPTA is operating in a manner that is as safe as possible for the public and for the agency's employees, and the hearing has been scheduled for February 10, 2015.

"Let's examine all the facts and evidence," BLET Vice President Bruno said. "We believe that when the FRA examines the record, they'll agree with us that SEPTA needs more compliance — not less — with federal safety rules." @

Alan Holdcraft reelected BNSF (former ATSF) General Chairman

Brother J. Alan Holdcraft was reelected by acclamation to his second term as General Chairman of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (former ATSF) General Committee of Adjustment at the GCA's triennial meeting at Bally's in Las Vegas, which concluded on October 24.

A member of BLET Division 776 (Galveston, Texas), Brother Holdcraft is a BNSF locomotive engineer. He has held continuous membership in the Brotherhood for more than 34 years, having joined Division 776 on February 1, 1980. Brother Holdcraft was first elected General Chairman at the GCA's triennial convention in 2011.

Also elected by acclamation were 1st Vice-Chairman Robby Cunningham, Division 134 (Winslow, Ariz.), and Secretary-Treasurer Chris Mosser, Division 871 (Slaton, Texas). The following Brothers also were elected during the triennial session: 2nd Vice-Chairman Joe Maloy, Division 299 (Amarillo, Texas); 3rd Vice-Chairman Jorge Gomez, Division 264 (El Paso, Texas); 4th Vice-Chairman Oscar Burrola, Division 839



Delegates, officers and guests at the BNSF (former ATSF) General Committee of Adjustment meeting in Las Vegas, which concluded on October 24, 2014.

(Richmond, Calif.); and 5th Vice-Chairman Ken Mueller, Division 64 (Newton, Kan.).

The assembled delegates heard reports from BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce; First Vice President E. Lee Pruitt; National Secretary-Treasurer William C. Walpert; Vice President and Na-

tional Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; Vice President Michael D. Priester; Vice President Stephen J. Bruno; and Vice President Richard C. Gibbons. Brother Priester is the GCA's assigned Vice President. Brother Holdcraft thanked these National Division officers for their participation.

"I offer my congratulations and thanks to Brother Holdcraft and all officers of the BNSF (former ATSF) General Committee of Adjustment," President Pierce said. "Union membership is not a spectator sport, and I thank these Brothers for their dedication and active participation in our Brotherhood."

Also attending the meeting were Special Representative Matthew C. Kronyak and General Chairmen Matt O. Wilson (BNSF/MRL-Austin Western) and Jeffrey L. Thurman (BNSF (former STL-SF)/MNA). Susie Burrola, 1st Vice President of the BLET Auxiliary, was also in attendance.

In addition to his General Chairman duties, Brother Holdcraft also serves the BLET as Secretary-Treasurer of the Western General Chairmen's Association (WGCA).

The BNSF (former ATSF) General Committee of Adjustment represents nearly 3,150 members belonging to 34 different BLET Division. Their members work for the BNSF Railway, Great Western of Colorado, Panhandle Northern, and Texas Pacifico. ©©

Railroad Retirement and Unemployment Insurance taxes in 2015

The amounts of compensation subject to railroad retirement tier I and tier II payroll taxes will increase in 2015, with the tier I tax rates remaining the same while tier II tax rates will increase for both railroad employers and employees. Also, railroad unemployment insurance contribution rates paid by employers will include a surcharge of 1.5 percent in 2015.

TIER I AND MEDICARE TAX:

The railroad retirement tier I payroll tax rate on covered rail employers and employees for the year 2015 remains at 7.65 percent. The railroad retirement tier I tax rate is the same as the social security tax, and for withholding and reporting purposes is divided into 6.20 percent for retirement and 1.45 percent for Medicare hospital insurance. The maximum amount of an employee's earnings subject to the 6.20 percent rate increases from \$117,000

to \$118,500 in 2015, but there is no maximum on earnings subject to the 1.45 percent Medicare rate.

An additional Medicare payroll tax of 0.9 percent applies to an individual's income exceeding \$200,000 or \$250,000 for a married couple filing a joint tax return. While employers will begin withholding the additional Medicare tax as soon as an individual's wages exceed the \$200,000 threshold, the final amount owed or refunded will be calculated as part of the individual's Federal income tax return.

TIER II TAX:

The railroad retirement tier II tax rate on employees will be 4.9 percent in 2015, and the employers' rate will be 13.1 percent. The rates in 2014 for employees and employers were 4.4 percent and 12.6 percent, respectively. The maximum amount of earnings subject to railroad retirement tier II taxes will increase from \$87,000 to

\$88,200 in 2015. Since 2004, tier II tax rates are based on an average account benefits ratio reflecting railroad retirement fund levels. Depending on this ratio, the tier II tax rate for employees can be between 0 percent and 4.9 percent, while the tier II rate for employers can range between 8.2 percent and 22.1 percent.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS:

Employers, but not employees, pay railroad unemployment insurance contributions, which are experience-rated by employer. The Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act also provides for a surcharge in the event the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account balance falls below an indexed threshold amount. The accrual balance of the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account was \$140.8 million on June 30, 2014. Since the balance is less than the indexed

threshold of \$141.2 million, a 1.5 percent surcharge will be added to the basic contribution rates for 2015, but will not increase the maximum 12 percent rate. There was no surcharge in 2014 or 2013, although a surcharge of 1.5 percent applied in 2012.

As a result, the unemployment insurance contribution rates (including the 1.5 percent surcharge) on railroad employers in 2015 will range from the minimum rate of 2.15 percent to the maximum of 12 percent on monthly compensation up to \$1,455, an increase from \$1,440 in 2014.

In 2015, the minimum rate of 2.15 percent will apply to 77 percent of covered employers, with 8 percent paying the maximum rate of 12 percent.

During the year, new employers will pay an unemployment insurance contribution rate of 4.09 percent, which represents the average rate paid by all employers in the period 2011-2013. ©©

BLET MEMBERS RATIFY CONTRACT WITH CSXT

By a ratio of better than 2-to-1, members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen have ratified a new collective bargaining agreement with CSX Transportation, Inc. (CSXT).

Ballots were counted on December 15, 2014, and the agreement governs rates of pay and work rules for more than 4,800 locomotive engineers. Health and welfare benefits for CSXT locomotive engineers will be bargained nationally starting early in 2015.

BLET National President thanked all members of the negotiating team, including Vice President Gil Gore and General Chairmen Gary Best, CSXT-



Photo: Chase Gunnoe

Eastern Lines, Jim Louis, CSXT-Northern District, Bill Lyons, CSXT-Northern Lines, and Matt Thornton, CSXT-Western Lines. He also thanked Mobilization Coordinator Larry James for leading the BLET's get-out-the-vote campaign during the balloting process.

"These Brothers deserve thanks for their hard work in

securing this contract," President Pierce said. "But more importantly, I thank the members who took the time to vote. Union membership is not a spectator sport and participating in the balloting process on new contract agreements is one of the most important things any union member can do to make our Brotherhood stronger." ©©

BLET members ratify Letter of Agreement with BNSF

By a 93 percent majority, BLET members have ratified a Letter of Agreement with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway that provides for a 3 percent General Wage Increase (GWI) effective January 1, 2015.

The letter governs approximately 7,500 locomotive engineers across the BNSF system and ballots were counted on December 29, 2014. The Letter of Agreement provides the 3 percent GWI and establishes a transition from on-property bargaining with BNSF to National Handling in the upcoming round of contract negotiations starting in 2015.

The BLET settled its wage and work rule issues with BNSF in the last round of bargaining with an on-property agreement dated November 3, 2009. That agreement provided general wage increases (GWIs) for the life of the contract period with the last GWI applicable on January 1, 2014. The January

5, 2012 National Agreement likewise included GWIs for the same period, but also included a 3 percent GWI to be effective on January 1, 2015.

The newly ratified Letter of Agreement provides a 3 percent GWI to all BNSF locomotive engineer rates on January 1, 2015.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce thanked the four BNSF General Chairmen for their work on the Letter of Agreement, including: B.J. Brown, BNSF-C&S GCA; J.A. Holdcraft, BNSF-ATSF GCA; J.L. Thurman, BNSF-SLSF GCA; and M.O. Wilson, BNSF/MRL GCA. "I also want to thank all members who took the time to participate and vote in this process," President Pierce said. "The strength of our Brotherhood comes from the collective strength of our membership and participating in our democratic processes only serves to make us stronger." ©©

BLET NATIONAL OFFICERS ELECTED

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

presiding officer cast a ballot to elect each of those candidates by acclamation. As a result, there was no need to conduct a mail ballot election under the Election Rules and the BLET Bylaws.

NST Walpert offered his "sincere congratulations and warmest personal regards" to all the elected officers. ©

A COPY OF THE LETTER IS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD FROM THE BLET NATIONAL DIVISION WEBSITE:
WWW.BLE-T.ORG/PR/PDF/2014_VERIFIED_RESULTS.PDF

THE NEWLY-ELECTED NATIONAL DIVISION OFFICERS ARE:

NATIONAL PRESIDENT
D. R. Pierce

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT
E. L. Pruitt

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER
S. J. Bruno

VICE PRESIDENT AND NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE
J. P. Tolman

VICE PRESIDENT NO. 1
M. J. Ruef

VICE PRESIDENT NO. 2
M. D. Twombly

VICE PRESIDENT NO. 3
G. L. Gore

VICE PRESIDENT NO. 4
M. D. Priester

VICE PRESIDENT NO. 5
C. W. Davis

VICE PRESIDENT NO. 6
J. P. Louis

VICE PRESIDENT NO. 7
R. C. Gibbons

TRUSTEE NO. 1
D. P. Estes

TRUSTEE NO. 2
M. L. Wallace

TRUSTEE NO. 3
M. O. Wilson

ALTERNATE NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER
D. P. Estes

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 1
M. L. Wallace

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 2
M. O. Wilson

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 3
J. W. Dent, Jr.

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 4
W. P. Lyons

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 5
K. J. Moore

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 6
L. R. Fannon, Jr.

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 7
J. A. Holdcraft

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 8
A. D. Cook, III

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT NO. 9
G. D. Best

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT AND NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE NO. 1
V. G. Verna

ALTERNATE VICE PRESIDENT AND NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE NO. 2
P. S. Piekarski

OSHA levies \$279,000 in fines against BNSF for FRSA violations

Throughout September and October, the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued four separate fines totaling \$279,000 against the BNSF Railway for violations of the Federal Railroad Safety Act (FRSA).

On September 2, the railroad was fined \$12,000 for disciplining a conductor at its Murray Yard complex near Kansas City, Mo. OSHA determined that the railroad disciplined the conductor in retaliation for taking leave in line with a doctor's treatment plan. The employee was ill and notified a supervisor that he was seeing a doctor the afternoon of Nov. 18, 2013. Following his doctor's appointment, the conductor immediately notified a

supervisor that the doctor had ordered him to stay out of work for the remainder of the day. The company then accused the employee of violating its attendance policy and subsequently disciplined the employee.

On October 1, BNSF was fined \$30,000 for retaliating against a worker in Mandan, N.D. The former employee submitted a whistleblower complaint to OSHA alleging violations of the anti-retaliation provisions of the FRSA. As a result, OSHA investigated and determined the work-related injury reporting and subsequent treatment plan were contributing factors in terminating the employee, a direct violation of the FRSA. OSHA ordered BNSF to reinstate the worker at the same

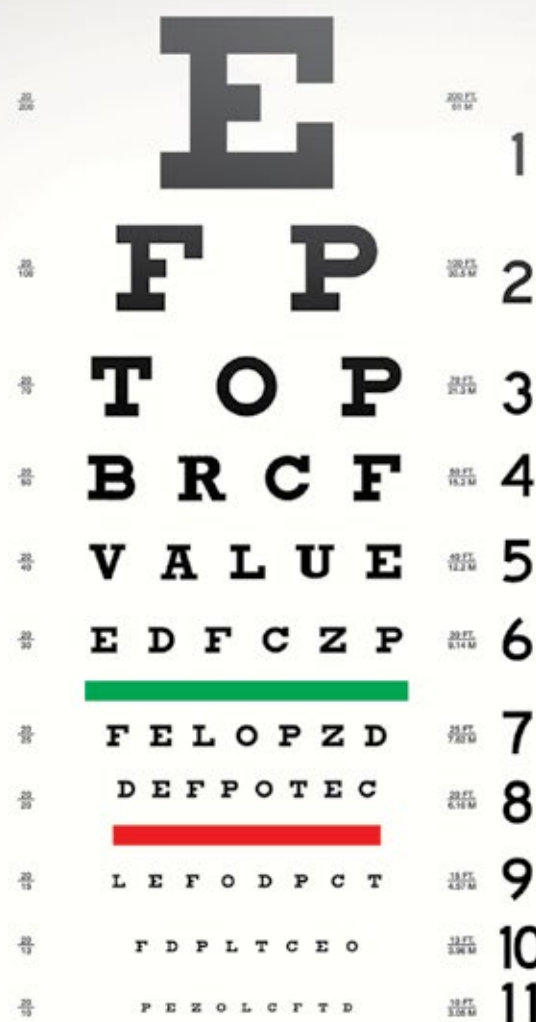
or an equivalent job while restoring seniority and benefits.

On October 15, BNSF was ordered to pay \$225,000 for wrongfully terminating an apprentice electrician who reported an injury to his left shoulder. OSHA determined that the railroad terminated the employee following an injury that required the employee to be transported to an emergency room and medically restricted from returning to work. The company's investigation into the injury, reported on Aug. 27, 2013, concluded that the employee had been dishonest on his employment record about former, minor workplace injuries unrelated to the left shoulder. These conclusions led the company to terminate the employee on Nov. 18,

2013. OSHA found this termination to be in retaliation for reporting the injury, a direct violation of the FRSA.

On October 28, BNSF was fined \$12,000 for disciplining a conductor in Ottumwa, Iowa. OSHA determined that the railroad disciplined the conductor in retaliation for taking leave in line with a treatment plan ordered by a doctor. The employee was ill and saw a doctor on Dec. 16, 2013. Following the appointment, the conductor immediately notified a supervisor that the doctor had ordered him to stay out of work for the remainder of the day. The employee was subsequently disciplined for violating the company's attendance policy. ©

FOCUS ON VALUE



Daily Benefit Level	\$100 (\$102*)	\$150	\$200 (\$201*)	\$220	\$250
BR&CF	\$38.00	\$57.00	\$76.00	\$83.60	\$95.00
LECMFA (*)	\$59.50	\$87.50	\$117.25	Not available... you will pay less per month with BR&CF for more daily benefits	
SMART - UTU	\$71.00	\$106.50	\$142.00		

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BLET helps Santa Train spread good cheer

The 72nd annual CSX Santa Train ran safely and on-time again this year, thanks in large part to the locomotive engineers and trainmen of BLET Division 781 in Erwin, Tenn.

Every November, Santa Claus trades his sleigh and reindeer for a CSX train ride through Appalachia. On November 22, 2014, Santa and his elves distributed an estimated 15 tons of donated gifts to children of all ages at the 14 stops along the 110-mile route through eastern Kentucky, western Virginia and northeast Tennessee.

The annual event, which first ran in 1943, is sponsored by CSX Transportation, Food City Grocers, Dignity U Wear and the Chamber of Commerce of Kingsport, Tenn.

In addition to Santa, this year's special guest was Grammy Award-winning country singer Amy Grant.

The members of BLET Division 781 normally run CSX freight trains along the route from Shelby, Ky., to Kingsport, Tenn. It is difficult terrain and the BLET members are intimately familiar with the route's many challenging hills and curves. They are uniquely qualified to operate trains along the territory and are extremely proud of their contributions to the Santa Train heritage.

Typically, the senior member of the



CSX engineer Robert Davis poses on the pilot of CSX rebuilt SD40-3 No. 4047 during a gift stop in downtown Dante, Virginia.

Division will bid on the Santa Train job. This year, the honor went to Brother Robert A. (Bobby) Davis, a 33-year member of the BLET who will mark his 41st year of railroading in March of 2015.

Brother Davis hired out on the former Clinchfield Railroad in 1974 and earned promotion to locomotive engineer in 1980. He joined BLET Division 781 in Erwin effective April 1, 1981. He stayed with the railroad through various mergers and acquisitions over the years, which included the Seaboard,

L&N, Family Lines, Chessie System, and eventually CSX.

Brother Davis ran the Santa Train once before in the late 1990s, and elected to bid on the job again this year. With retirement on the horizon, he said this could be the last year he would have a chance to work inside the cab of the Santa Train.

It was a family affair for Brother Davis this year. He said that Cindy Sanborn, CSX's Vice President and Chief Transportation Officer, allowed members of the operating crew to invite two family members on board for the 2014 Santa Train experience. So Brother Davis brought along his wife, Teresa, and

son Brent, 31.

While he worked in the cab, Brother Davis's family were able to ride in a special car with Santa Claus and Amy Grant, spending time with both and helping to pass out gifts with each celebrity.

"They had an extraordinary time," Brother Davis said. "I want to thank Cindy Sandborn for allowing them on board. They had a good time from start to finish."

Brother Davis said the 14 stops along the 110-mile route were better organized than the last time he ran the Santa Train. He took heart in knowing his fellow BLET Brothers and Sisters would be along the route to help with crowd control.

In addition to providing a pool of locomotive engineers to operate the Santa Train, the members of BLET Division 781 also coordinate safety teams at each of the 14 stops along the route. According to Division 781's David Fitzgerald, these safety teams keep crowds away from the tracks as the Santa Train prepares to stop.

"The ground crew did an excellent job of keeping people away from the tracks," Brother Davis said. "They did a great job and it was very well organized from start to finish."

In addition to Amy Grant, past Santa Train celebrity artists include Alison Krauss, the Judds, Travis Tritt, Patty Loveless and others. Also, several governors, U.S. senators and representatives, and other local, state and federal officials have ridden the train. @

Photo: Chase Gunnoe



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BLET Auxiliary: “On the Verge of a Surge!” in 2015

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR BLET AND AUXILIARY SISTERS AND BROTHERS!

The last few months of 2014, following our 2nd Quadrennial Convention, were a busy time for our newly elected national officers as we acclimate ourselves to the duties of our new positions. The enthusiasm exuded by this highly motivated and optimistic group of dynamic women, particularly those who comprise our Executive Council, has inspired a slogan for the takeoff of our new administration: “On the verge of a surge!” Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the word surge as “to move very quickly and suddenly in a particular direction,” or “to suddenly increase to an unusually high level.” With the goal of attracting new members and increasing the size and scope of our organization as we go about the business of supporting and educating BLET families and promoting issues that affect the safety and welfare of railroaders, we feel that we are truly “on the verge of a surge!”

In the last few months of 2014, our membership level rose almost 10 percent, which is very encouraging. We also have a number of new local auxiliaries in the making in various areas around the country. Many of these are coming about as the result of contacts that were made by our Past National President Anita Caruso and me during the last administration, and some have emerged just since the National Convention was held. Our new National 1st Vice President and Outreach Coordinator Susie Burrola is busy following up with these contacts and she and I plan to do some traveling together in the months ahead to get these new auxiliaries organized. Susie is very passionate about her new position and anxious to share information about the Auxiliary with everyone she meets.

I invite all of you who are reading this now to please join us on this upward surge by becoming a member yourself and then inviting the spouses in your area to step up and join us as well! If you are not a BLET spouse, you have the option to join as an associate member. Please visit our newly redesigned website at www.bletauxiliary.net to find out more about the Auxiliary and to download a membership application. On the site, you will also find information about our newly revised eligibility requirements for our Scholarship Program and our Care and Assistance Program, as well as up-to-date news from our National 2nd Vice President/National Legislative Representative Kathleen Bisbikis about legislative issues that affect railroad families. Kathleen is doing an excellent job of keeping us all informed, not only about legislative matters, but also about any changes to our health and welfare, and Railroad Retirement benefits.

From all of our Auxiliary National Officers to all of you... we wish you all the best in the coming year and look forward to reconnecting with those of you we already know and getting to know those of you we have not yet met! Happy New Year!!! @@



Sereena Hogan
NATIONAL PRESIDENT



Susie Burrola
NATIONAL 1ST
VICE PRESIDENT



Lawana W. Poss
NATIONAL SECRETARY



Terri Fleming
NATIONAL TREASURER



Kathleen Bisbikis
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Photo of the Month: October 2014

SANTA TRAIN 2014: The 72nd annual CSX Santa Train towers above the community of Clinchport, Va., as it crosses over the impressive Copper Creek Viaduct on commute to Kingsport, Tenn., on November 22, 2014. BLET member Robert A. (Bobby) Davis, a 33-year member of Division 781 (Erwin, Tenn.), sits behind the throttle in this image. See Page 6 for related article. Photo: Chase Gunnoe



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 October 2014 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, Cleveland; 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 Third National Convention, Las Vegas; Indiana State Legislative Board mtg., Indianapolis; Secretary-Treasurer class, Cleveland; BNSF-ATSF GCA mtg., Las Vegas; Division 11 mtg. / retirement party, Newark, N.J.; CRLO mtgs., Washington, D.C.

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT E.L. (LEE) PRUITT: National Duties include but not limited to: Director, Passenger Dept.; Shortline Organizing Dept.; Trainmen's Dept.; National Publications Committee; National Legislative Board; Teamsters Rail Conference Policy Committee; PRAC; and National Negotiations; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; UP-Western Lines GCA mtg., Sacramento, Calif.; BNSF (former ATSF) GCA mtg., Las Vegas; New York Dock negotiations, UP, Las Vegas; Inward Facing Cameras RSAC mtgs., Washington, D.C.

NATIONAL SECRETARY-TREASURER WILLIAM C. WALPERT: General supervision of accounting dept., records dept., online services dept., tax compliance dept.; Education & Training Dept.; Internal Organizing, Mobilizing & Strategic Planning Dept.; Meetings with vendors and financial institutions; Publications Committee; Teamsters Rail Conference Policy Committee; Trustee, National Railroad Retirement Investment Trust (NRRIT); BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; NRRIT mtg., Washington, D.C.; Secretary-Treasurer workshop, Cleveland; BNSF-ATSF GCA mtg., Las Vegas; National Reporting Officers' mtg., Chicago.

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.; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; Indiana State Legislative Board mtg., Indianapolis; Teamster Benefit Fund Trustees function, Boston; Function for Congressional candidate Seth Moulten, Lynn, Mass.; Function of Connecticut Gov. Mallow and mtg. w/ Senators Blumenthal & Murphy, Stamford, Conn.; Mtgs. w/ Senator Warren and Rep. Keating, Plymouth, Mass.; Mtg/ w/ Senator Shaleen, Boston Mayor Walsh, and AFL-CIO State Presidents for Massachusetts and New Hampshire, Manchester, N.H.; Coordinated and participate in both BLET-PAC and BLET Get Out The Vote efforts in Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Massachusetts; Various meetings and functions with Representatives and Senators, and several Labor Walks in New England states.

VICE PRESIDENT MARCUS J. RUEF: Vice Chairman, full NRAB; Labor Member, 1st Division; Labor Member, National Mediation Board Arbitration Advisory Forum; Director of BLET Arbitration Dept; Assigned to Illinois Central; Wisconsin Central; Indiana Harbor Belt; and Belt Railway of Chicago; Assist GC Reynolds w/ discipline case, WC, Chicago; NRAB 1st Division grievance mediation, NRAB, Chicago; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; NRAB admin issues; Assist GC Craddock w/ discipline issues, IC; Assist GC Cundari and Div. 682 LC Sipich w/ claims issues, IHB, Chicago; NRAB hearing, UP-N, Referee Benn, Chicago; PLB 7154, IC, Chicago; Assist GC Balonek, Metra; Assist GC Reynolds w/ claims issues, WC, Green Bay; Assist VGC Hau w/ claims issues, WC; Grievance mediation and admin issues, NRAB, Chicago.

VICE PRESIDENT MIKE TWOMBLY: Assigned to all Union Pacific GCAs (Eastern District, Northern Region (former C&NW), Western Lines (Pacific Harbor Lines), Western Region (Port-

land & Western), Central Region, Southern Region; On duty at home office; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; UP General Chairman's passenger extra, Roseville, Calif.; Joint conference of UP-Southern Region and UP-Western Region GCAs, Las Vegas; UP-Southern Region New York Dock Section 4 negotiations, Las Vegas; UP-Central Region grievance mediation, Chicago.

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.; Winter Haven extra board discussion, conference call; SAA discussions, Houston; PLB 7655, assisting GC Karakian, GTW, Chicago.

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; Texas Pacific; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; Vacation; Great Western contract negotiations, Denver; BNSF-ATSF GCA mtg. w/ GC Holdcraft, Las Vegas.

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.; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; CPRR & DM&E issues, assisting GC Semenak; Springfield Terminal issues and Delaware & Hudson issues, assisting GC Moore; Mid South issues, assisting GC Craddock; Huron & Eastern agreement, GC Latrig; TexMex issues, assisting GC Rodriguez; KCS issues, assisting GC Parker; KCS issues, National Division; Springfield Terminal contract negotiations, assisting GC Moore, Boston; Louisville & Indiana Division 279 issues, assisting GC Hartill; Division 527 mtg. w/ GC Parker, Pittsburg, Kan.

VICE PRESIDENT STEPHEN J. BRUNO: Assigned to various Rail Safety Advisory Committees (RSAC); Regulatory duties as assigned by the President; Amtrak; Long Island Rail Road; New York & Atlantic; Metro North; New Jersey Transit; PATH; SEPTA; Metra; Union Railroad; Birmingham Southern; Internal reports, telephone calls, correspondence, email, general office duties, etc.; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; SEPTA contract negotiations and media (newspaper, TV) duties, Philadelphia; NJ Transit contract negotiations, New York; Prep. for NST duties, membership database, Cleveland; BNSF (ATSF) GCA mtg., Las Vegas; Division 11 retirement dinner, Newark, N.J.

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; Ohio Central; RSAC/RSIA Fatigue Management Group; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications; BLET Third National Convention, Las Vegas; UP-Western Lines GCA mtg. w/ GC Bill Hannah, San Diego, Calif.; PLB 7574 / 7663, assisting GC Wallace and GC Peek, Norfolk, Va.; BNSF-ATSF GCA mtg., Las Vegas, Nevada; Norfolk Southern negotiations, with GCs Wallace, Dehart and Peek, Indianapolis, Ind.

RETIREE EARNINGS LIMITS TO RISE IN 2015

Railroad retirement annuitants subject to earnings restrictions can earn more in 2015 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 2015, the exempt earnings amount rises to \$15,720 from \$15,480 in 2014. For beneficiaries attaining full retirement age in 2015, the exempt earnings amount, for the months before the month full retirement age is attained, rises to \$41,880 in 2015 from \$41,400 in 2014.

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 2015, 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 2015. The monthly disability earnings limit increases to \$850 in 2015 from \$840 in 2014.

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. ©