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FAST PHOSPHATE FREIGHT

CSX loaded phosphate train K818 — with an all Union Pacific consist — heads westbound along the James River in downtown Richmond, Va., on January 31, 2019. Photo by Brother Michael Marra, an Amtrak Auto Train locomotive engineer and member of BLET Division 14 in Washington, D.C.



BLET initiates online Division Secretary-Treasurer and Local Chairman training

The BLET's Education and Training Department is proud to announce the availability of online video courses to provide convenient, repeatable, and cost-effective training for Division Secretary-Treasurers and Local Chairmen. The program made its debut on February 6, 2019.

During the BLET Fourth National Convention, National President Dennis R. Pierce announced to the delegates "This is an important step in providing better educational opportunities for BLET members," and that "online classes will not replace the actual classes that the BLET will still offer during the year. Rather, the online training will assist newly elected officers in the field get started on the

FOR MORE INFO ABOUT BLET
ONLINE TRAINING, GO TO:

[www.ble-t.org/
departments/et](http://www.ble-t.org/departments/et)



right foot and act as an enhancement to the regularly scheduled classes."

E&T Director Jason Wright said, "This project is in its beginning stages and as we move forward we hope to make even

more essential training more readily available to the field, which will make us stronger as a Union as we move into the future. These online enhancements will allow us to take a much deeper dive into these sub-

jects in class, with more time for discussion, strategy, and address questions that may arise during your time in office."

The training will be available in secure online forums using Adobe Connect virtual collabo-

ration tools, and will eventually be accessible across different platforms and devices. Training can be done at the user's own pace during their free time. Once a member enrolls they will receive an email information package from the BLET Education and Training Department on how to access the material. Currently, users must access these modules using a desktop or laptop computer, but in the future the training will be available using tablets.

For additional information pertaining to Online Training, please visit: www.ble-t.org/departments/et.

Any questions regarding online training can be addressed by contacting Director of Education and Training Jason Wright at TrainingSupport@ble-t.org. @@



BLET President's Message

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St. Louis Regional Meeting

Online registration
now open **pg. 3**



Runion Re-Elected

Cory Runion gets 5th term
as Wyoming SLBC **pg. 4**

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BLET PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY DENNIS R. PIERCE

PRECISION SCHEDULED RAILROADING: SHORT TERM GAINS AT WHAT COST?

Much is being made in the railroad industry and other transportation media about the Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) wildfire sweeping from coast to coast. Proponents of PSR will tell you that it will prove to be the industry's savior. But it also begs the following question; just what does the industry need to be saved from?

According to transportation industry news provider *Transport Topics*, the combined operating income of the Class I railroads topped \$16 billion for the first half of last year, based on company reports. The carriers are now well into their second decade of ever increasing profits, setting new records virtually every year.

So, why the stampede toward PSR? And what does PSR really mean for railroad workers, shippers and the nation as a whole? While everyone seems to have a slightly different definition of PSR, there are a couple of common threads in all the definitions.

What the PSR crowd is in unanimous agreement on is that the process will be driven by maximization of every single asset. That includes even the fixed-point shippers, as Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific eliminated more than 425 domestic and nearly 100 international origin-and-destination interline pairs in just the first six weeks of the year.

As a result, hundreds of locomotives and cars already have been mothballed, and that number will increase into the thousands in the next few years. Dozens of shops and yards have already been closed or are slated to be shuttered.

And where a line doesn't pass muster under the profit maximization test it will be sold off

or leased to some short line. NS did just that last year with an entire operating division, and CSX has been trying to do with its main line along the Florida Panhandle since last fall.

While all this is unfolding, thousands of railroad workers already have been furloughed.

For BLET members, there are signs beyond yard closures, demotions and furloughs. Increasing numbers of Distributed Power locomotives are used to run trains of dangerous lengths in order to eliminate road jobs, vastly exceeding the train lengths that current communication technology can manage.

Of even more concern is that many railroads refuse to consider the introduction of actual scheduling for our work shifts in road freight service. There is no consistent "precision scheduled railroading" insofar as BLET members are concerned. Predictability for road freight crews on many railroads is all but nonexistent, creating avoidable fatigue risks every day. And the carriers continue to complain about crew size even when a single crew of two is moving hundreds of truckloads hundreds of miles every day across America. All of this combined creates the potential for a much less safe workplace, all in the name of short term profits.

What is the purpose of all this asset maximization? At a conference held in Atlanta in February NS identified three key targets for investors.

One was that it plans to reduce its operating ratio, which measures operational costs as a percentage of revenue. The carrier's operating ratio was 65.4 percent in 2018. NS vows to slash that ratio by over 8 percent in just three years' time.

The second is that NS plans a



dividend payout ratio of 33 percent. What this means is that one out of every three dollars in profits will be paid to shareholders as a dividend.

On top of that, the third key is that NS plans to continue share repurchases using free cash flow and borrowing capacity. In other words, much of the two dollars in profit that are not paid out in dividends will be used to buy back stock and, if there isn't enough money to do that, then the railroad will borrow money for buybacks.

These financial goals reveal PSR for what it really is ... a scheme to suck up as much of the railroad's revenues as possible and distribute it to investors, particularly to the hedge funds that own an ever-increasing stake in the industry.

PSR is nothing more than what has been called by many industry observers, and with good reason, vulture capitalism. Hedge fund investors swoop into

a company and drive down operating costs in order to wring out every possible dime in profits, but don't share those profits with the workers who created them. They buy back stock to pump up the price, and when they run out of cash they borrow against the company's assets to buy back more stock and pump up the prices some more. At the same time, operational downsizing cuts are removing much more than "fat"; they cut into the muscle and bone of the operation and are much harder to repair when the hedge fund investors move on to greener pastures.

And what happens when this merry-go-round stops? Just ask the folks who used to work for Sears, or Kmart, or Toys 'R' Us, to name just a few of the more recent victims of vulture capitalism. Their companies were cannibalized in the name of making wealthy investors even wealthier.

To be sure, it is very unlikely that CSX or KCS or NS or UP

will disappear from the economic map the way those companies did. But history instructs what happens when vulture capitalist schemes like PSR have squeezed all of a railroad's assets dry.

In 1968 the Pennsylvania and the New York Central railroads merged to become the Penn Central. When it became apparent that the two operations were not a good match, a system-wide cannibalization and liquidation of assets began so that stock prices could be maintained and dividend payments continued. Penn Central's shippers and workers were mere afterthoughts. Less than two and a half years after the merger, the Penn Central became the largest corporation in U.S. history — to that point — to declare bankruptcy ... and the carcass of the railroad was dumped on the nation's taxpayers to rebuild.

Significantly, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, which is the only privately-owned Class I railroad in the country, has said "Thanks, but no thanks" to PSR. Perhaps BNSF understands this history, or maybe it knows that short-term gain for a few ultra-wealthy investors at the cost of long-term pain for everyone else is not a plan for long term success.

Former Republican President Theodore Roosevelt said in 1913, four years after he left the White House, that "Of all forms of tyranny, the least attractive and the most vulgar is the tyranny of mere wealth, the tyranny of a plutocracy." Time will tell if PSR is what the railroad industry needed. Unfortunately, much harm could come to the nation's railroad infrastructure by the time that question is answered.

DENNIS R. PIERCE
BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

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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

THE STRUGGLE FOR WORKERS IS REAL

Sometimes statistics don't tell the whole story. That's certainly the case with today's economy.

So-called experts point to increased jobs and decreased unemployment as if it means that hardworking Americans should be instantly OK. But they shouldn't be fooled by those numbers, and neither should the working public.

Increasingly workers aren't making enough to get by. While the rich have gotten immensely richer over the past few decades, pay at most middle-class jobs has remained stagnant. In some cases, such workers are finding themselves on the chopping block, like what happened at General Motors in November when the mega-profitable company decided to "restructure" and ended up cutting some 14,000 jobs.



Additionally, federal workers and contractors were devastated by a partial government shutdown that left them without paychecks for 35 days. That's more than 800,000 people who had to struggle to feed their families, pay their bills

and keep a roof over their heads. While federal workers will get that money back, tens of thousands of low-wage service contract workers will be left to pick up the pieces of their tattered wallets on their own. Most likely, they will never get

that money back.

Here are the facts: 22.5 percent of workers are in a low-wage job that doesn't pay above the poverty threshold for a family of four; and 40 percent of American households lack a basic level of savings that would allow them to subsist at a poverty level for three months if they lost their income. That means there are tens of millions of workers who are struggling to make ends meet. That is a bright, flashing sign that the nation's current path isn't working.

It's time for elected leaders to stop telling lies that things are going in the right direction for families. Because when push comes to shove, it is clear they're not. The wealthy continue to glean their monetary gains off the backs of the working class, padding their pockets while the people who play by the rules continue to fall behind.

That's where unions come in. The median union worker makes almost \$10,000 more a year than the median nonunion worker. Plus, they are more likely to receive benefits and have a retirement plan. Unions like the Teamsters bargain hard to provide fair pay for everyone, no matter their gender, race or ethnic background. That cannot be understated at a time when equality is not happening in most workplaces.

Workers must join together and demand a better deal from their employers and from lawmakers. Don't be fooled by the top-line numbers — hardworking Americans deserve more.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
TEAMSTERS GENERAL
PRESIDENT

66 It's time for elected leaders to stop telling lies that things are going in the right direction for families. Because when push comes to shove, it is clear they're not. The wealthy continue to glean their monetary gains off the backs of the working class, padding their pockets while the people who play by the rules continue to fall behind. 99

Registration open for BLET's St. Louis regional meeting, June 24-28, 2019

Registration is now open for the BLET regional meeting at the Hilton at the Ballpark in St. Louis, Mo., June 24-28, 2019.

The BLET National Division is planning a meeting filled with educational opportunities and entertaining leisure time activities. Guests will stay at the Hilton at the Ballpark (1 South Broadway, St. Louis, Mo., (314) 421-1776). BLET convention registration as well as hotel registration can be made through the BLET's regional meeting website, <http://bletregionals.org>. If making reservations by telephone, you must mention the group code "BLE." Room reservations must be made by May 22, 2019.

The St. Louis regional meeting kicks off with registration and a welcome reception on Monday, June 24 (ticket required). Opening ceremonies will take place the morning of Tuesday, June 25, with a closed meeting for BLET members that afternoon. A golf tournament will be held on Wednesday, June 26, at the Far Oaks Golf Club.



The world famous Gateway Arch is one of the many St. Louis attractions available to BLET members during this summer's regional meeting.

There is an additional cost to register for the golf tournament. Non-golfers will be on their own to explore the many entertainment options that St. Louis has to offer.

Those attending the St. Louis regional meeting will have the opportunity to attend a Major League Baseball game as the St. Louis Cardinals host the Oak-

land A's on the evening of Tuesday, June 25. Tickets for this event are \$21 each and are available for purchase from the BLET website. Tickets sales are by credit card only and the deadline for purchase is Wednesday, May 22.

Other St. Louis attractions include: the famous Gateway Arch; Six Flags St. Louis; the Saint Louis Zoo; the historic An-

heuser-Busch Brewery and the Budweiser Clydesdales; the City Museum; casinos; various art and history museums; and the sprawling restaurant and entertainment district surrounding the Hilton at the Ballpark.

Workshops will be held for Local Chairmen, Secretary-Treasurers and Legislative Representatives throughout the day

on Thursday, June 27. The BLET's St. Louis regional meeting will conclude with a dinner dance the evening of June 27. Attendees will travel home on June 28.

There is no cost for BLET members who wish to attend the June 25 meetings and June 27 workshops only; however, there will be fees for those members who choose to attend the meals. The cost of full registration (including all meetings, workshops, the dinner dance and all BLET sponsored meals) is \$225.00 per person. The cost is \$175.00 to register for all of the above EXCEPT the dinner dance. Reduced children's registration and a la carte meal registration options are also available. Please visit <http://bletregionals.org> for more information about the registration process.

Registration will be open soon for the BLET's second regional meeting in 2019 — at the Hilton hotel in Clearwater Beach, Fla., which will be held July 22-26, 2019. Please visit the BLET website, Facebook page, and <http://bletregionals.org> for the latest information. ©

Runion reelected to fifth term as Chairman of Wyoming State Legislative Board

Cory L. Runion was reelected by acclamation to his fifth term as Chairman of the Wyoming State Legislative Board during its triennial meeting held in Cheyenne, Wyo., February 5-6, 2019.

A member of BLET Division 115 (Cheyenne), Brother Runion is a Union Pacific locomotive engineer who joined the Brotherhood on December 1, 2000. He was elected Vice Chairman of the State Legislative Board in 2007 and assumed the Chairman's office on September 28, 2008, following the retirement of former State Chairman Terry R. Jones. Brother Runion was reelected by acclamation in 2010, 2013 and 2016.

Also elected by acclamation to three-year terms were: 1st Vice Chairman Mark E. Stokes, Division 103 (Cheyenne, Wyo.); 2nd Vice Chairman George W. Johnson, Division 207 (Casper, Wyo.); Secretary-Treasurer Anthony P. Lecholat, Division 624 (Sheridan, Wyo.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Russell E. Sapp, Division 142 (Rawlins, Wyo.). Brother Lecholat was reelected to his third term of office and Brother Johnson was reelected to his second term. Brother Stokes and Brother Sapp were elected to their first terms of office.

Reelected to serve as Trustees were: Larry L. Nelson, Division 94 (Gillette, Wyo.); Steven S. Dyer, Division 31 (Bill, Wyo.); and Michael L. Fielder, Division 869 (Greybull, Wyo.). Elected to serve as Alternate Trustees were: Brett A. Taylor, Division 44 (Cheyenne, Wyo.); and George W. Johnson, Division 207 (Casper, Wyo.).

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; National Vice President Michael D. Twombly; National Division Trustee/UP-Northern Region GCA General Chairman R.E. (Dick) Crow; Director of Regulatory Affairs Vincent G. Verna; Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Robert F. Hagan; and Special Representative and Director of Mobilization-Western Region Paul T. Aird. Additional BLET guests included: BNSF/MRL GCA 3rd Vice General Chairman Steve Halbrook; and UP-Eastern District General Chairman Dave Geisler.

"I congratulate Brother Runion and thank all officers of the Wyoming State Legislative Board for their willingness to serve our Brotherhood," President Pierce



Officers, members and guests of the Wyoming State Legislative Board during its triennial meeting in Cheyenne, Wyo., on February 5, 2019.



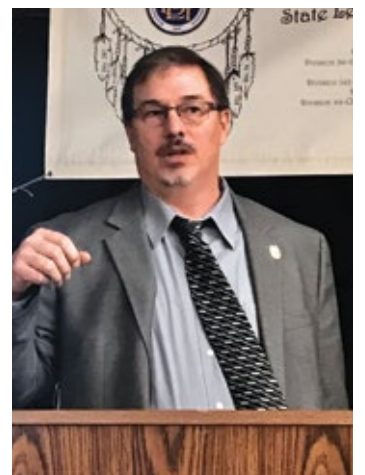
Dennis Pierce



Bob Hagan



Vince Verna



Cory Runion

said. "I am also proud to thank them for the great job they've done in lobbying for the state's two-person crew bill, which would protect jobs and preserve safety."

Chairman Runion welcomed the three newest members — Brother Taylor, Brother Stokes and Brother Sapp — to the Board and expressed optimism for the years to come. "Our new and existing Board members have an energy and willingness to advance the Board's mission in advocating for Rail Labor in Wyoming," Chairman Runion said. He also noted that Brothers Taylor and Stokes have hit the ground

running and have attended a grassroots lobbying training conference hosted by Wyoming's Equality State Policy Center (ESPC).

Members of the Board have been active in lobbying the Wyoming legislature regarding H.B. 104, which is a rail safety bill that would require a minimum of two crew members on trains operating in the state of Wyoming. Chairman Runion reports that the bill has passed the House and that Board members are prepared to begin lobbying again when debate begins on the Senate side. He also expressed pride in the efforts of the newest Board mem-

bers to lobby for the H.B. 104, and extended his gratitude to the BLET's counterparts in SMART TD's Wyoming Legislative Board for their efforts in advocating on behalf of the bill.

Following the conclusion of the Board meeting, a Town Hall was held the next day for all rail union members in the area. Speakers representing the BLET at the Town Hall were President Pierce, Brother Verna and Brother Hagan.

The BLET's Wyoming State Legislative Board represents approximately 1,000 active and retired members from 9 different Local Divisions. @@

RELIEF FUND TO ASSIST FAMILIES OF FALLEN CP RAIL BROTHERS

A relief fund has been established to assist the families of three members of the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) who died as a result of a major Canadian Pacific Railway (CP Rail) derailment on February 4, 2019.

According to media reports, locomotive engineer Andrew (Doc) Dockrell, conductor Dylan Paradis and trainee Daniel Waldenberger-Bulmer suffered fatal injuries when their westbound freight train left the tracks about 1 a.m. just east of Field, B.C., some 124 miles west of Calgary. The train, which had three locomotives and 112 cars, left the tracks while crossing a bridge over the Kicking Horse River, plunging some 197 feet to the icy waters below.

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to the friends

and families of our Canadian Brothers who are going through the most difficult of times," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said.

Eight railway workers have now died in Canada since November 2017. Investigations into these accidents are still ongoing.

A group of railway workers out of Calgary, who all worked with these Brothers on a daily basis, have established a Go Fund Me account to help take care of the men's families. The funds raised are 100% going to go to their families to help them with whatever they need. The funds will be distributed with the TCRC's involvement. @@

TO MAKE A DONATION, PLEASE VISIT:

www.gofundme.com/laggan-relief-fund



RRB announces spring 2019 Pre-Retirement Seminars

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has announced its schedule of Pre-Retirement Seminars for the spring of 2019.

Designed for railroad employees and spouses planning to retire within five years, Pre-Retirement Seminars will familiarize attendees with the retirement benefits available to them, and also guide them through the application process. Sponsored by the Office of the Labor Member, the program began in 2014 on a pilot basis. Pre-Retirement Seminars are held at a number of locations annually. However, persons wishing to attend must register in advance through the RRB website.

RRB field service representatives conduct each Pre-Retirement Seminar using a PowerPoint slide presentation covering the various benefits provided to retired rail workers and their families. Attendees receive a program booklet of this presentation with detailed side notes and fact sheets. In addition to the program booklet, seminar attendees receive a retirement kit full of informational handouts and other helpful materials. Online and downloadable versions of items included with seminar kits are available the RRB's Educational Materials webpage.

Registration is required to ensure accommodations and materials for all attendees.

- Unless otherwise noted, Pre-Retirement Seminars begin at 8:30 a.m. and are held over the course of 4 hours. (Doors open for attendees 30 minutes before the seminar start time.)

- Security screening required for seminars hosted inside any Federal buildings. Bring a current, valid photo ID (issued by State/Federal Government); no weapons permitted.

- Parking fee for seminars marked with

- Attendees are encouraged to bring original records (or certified copies) of documents required in order to file a Railroad Retirement application (such as proof of age, marriage, or military service), along with an additional copy of each item to leave with field service staff.

- Please let the RRB know if you sign up for a seminar and become unable to attend.

Those who are unable to attend a seminar but may still be interested in learning about the railroad retirement program and application process should contact the RRB field office where they live. Search here via the RRB's Field Office Locator or call toll-free (1-877-772-5772) for pre-retirement information or to schedule an appointment for individual retirement counseling at your local RRB field office.

DATES AND LOCATIONS OF THE RRB'S SPRING 2019 PRE-RETIREMENT SEMINARS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

» APRIL 12, 2019:

Ronald V. Dellums Federal Building,
1301 Clay Street – North Tower,
5th Floor (Room H),
Oakland, California*

» APRIL 12, 2019:

Drury Inn & Suites, St Louis Forest Park,
2111 Sulphur Avenue,
St Louis, Missouri

» APRIL 26, 2019:

Holiday Inn Plainview – Long Island,
215 Sunnyside Boulevard,
Plainview, New York

» APRIL 26, 2019:

Patrick V. McNamara Federal Building,
477 Michigan Avenue, Suite 1180,
Detroit, Michigan*

» APRIL 26, 2019:

Holiday Inn Plainview – Long Island,
215 Sunnyside Boulevard,
Plainview, New York

» MAY 3, 2019:

Hilton Garden Inn,
2465 Grant Avenue, Billings, Montana

» MAY 3, 2019:

Richard Bolling Federal Building,
601 East 12th Street,
Room G-41 (Dogwood
Conference Room),
Kansas City, Missouri

» MAY 10, 2019:

Holiday Inn Denver Lakewood,
7390 West Hampden Avenue,
Lakewood, Colorado

» MAY 17, 2019:

Sheet Metal Workers Local 33,
12515 Corporate Drive, Parma, Ohio

» MAY 17, 2019:

Jacob K. Javits Federal Building,
26 Federal Plaza,
6th Floor Conference Room,
New York, New York*

**Important links regarding this article can be found in the
Labor Member's area of the RRB website: www.rrb.gov/prs**

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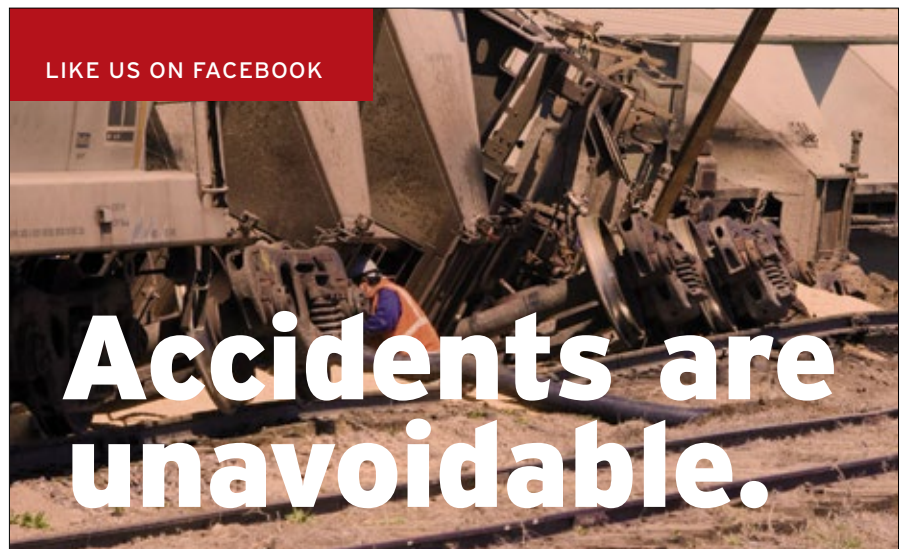
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Q&A: RRB appeals procedure

Persons claiming retirement, disability, survivor, unemployment, or sickness benefits from the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) have the right to appeal unfavorable determinations on their claims. The following questions and answers describe the appeals process for persons whose claims under the Railroad Retirement Act or Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act are denied, or who are dissatisfied with decisions on their claims.

1 How does a person initiate a review of an unfavorable decision on a claim and what are the time limits?

For all claims under the Railroad Retirement and Railroad Unemployment Insurance Acts there is a three-stage review and appeals process within the RRB.

An individual dissatisfied with the initial decision on his or her claim may first request reconsideration from the RRB unit which issued that decision. An individual has 60 days from the date on which notice of the initial decision is mailed to the claimant to file a written request for reconsideration. This step is mandatory before an appeal may be filed with the RRB's Bureau of Hearings and Appeals.

In cases involving overpayments under the Railroad Retirement Act, an individual has the right to request waiver of recovery and also a personal conference. For cases involving overpayments under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act, if the case involves a benefit overpayment of more than 10 times the maximum daily benefit rate, the claimant may request a waiver of recovery. In order for recovery of the overpayment to be deferred while a waiver request is pending, the waiver request must be in writing and filed within 60 days from the date on which notice of the overpayment was mailed to the beneficiary. A request for waiver received after 60 days will be considered but will not defer collection of the overpayment, and any amount of the overpayment recovered prior to the date on which the waiver request is filed will not be subject to waiver.

2 What are the second and third stages of the appeals process and their time limits?

If dissatisfied with the reconsideration or waiver decision on a retirement, disability, survivor, unemployment, or sickness claim, a person may appeal to the RRB's Bureau of Hearings and Appeals, which is independent of those units responsible for initial and reconsideration decisions. An appellant has 60 days from the date on which notice of the reconsideration or waiver decision notice is mailed to the claimant to file an appeal. This appeal must be filed using RRB Form HA-1 (https://rrb.gov/sites/default/files/2017-06/HA1%5B1%5D_0.pdf), which may be ob-



tained online or the agency's field offices. The Bureau of Hearings and Appeals may, if necessary, further investigate the case and obtain reports through the RRB's field representatives, designated medical examiners, and others who may be in a position to furnish information pertinent to the appellant's claim. When the appeal involves a question of fact, the appellant has the right to an oral hearing before a hearings officer. In most cases, video conferencing or phone hearings are held. In cases where an in-person hearing is held, it may be conducted in the RRB office closest to the appellant's home.

If not satisfied with the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals' decision, an appellant may further appeal to the three-member Board, which heads the agency, within 60 days from the date on which notice of the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals' decision is mailed to the appellant. This appeal must be filed using RRB Form HA-1 (https://rrb.gov/sites/default/files/2017-06/HA1%5B1%5D_0.pdf), which, as stated previously, may be obtained online or from the agency's field offices. The three-member Board ordinarily will not accept additional evidence or conduct a hearing.

3 What are the criteria applied to requests for waivers of retirement, disability, or survivor benefit overpayments, and unemployment or sickness benefit overpayments?

A person's obligation to repay any erroneous benefit payments may be waived only if the following conditions are met:

1. The person was not at fault in causing the overpayment; and
2. Recovery of the overpayment would cause financial hardship to the extent that he or she would not be able to meet ordinary and necessary living expenses, or recovery would be against equity or good conscience. "Against equity or good con-

science" is defined in the regulations of the RRB as meaning that the claimant has, by reliance on the payments made to him or her, or on notice that payment would be made, relinquished a significant and valuable right or changed his or her position to his or her substantial detriment.

In cases involving unemployment or sickness benefits, there is an additional requirement that the overpayment must be more than 10 times the current maximum daily benefit rate.

Persons requesting waiver may be asked to complete a financial statement on a form provided by the RRB.

4 What happens if a person's appeal is not filed within the prescribed time limit?

Failure to request reconsideration or to file an appeal within the allocated time period will result in forfeiture of further appeal rights, unless there is good cause for the delay. Some examples of good cause include: serious illness; a death or serious illness in the appellant's immediate family; destruction of important or relevant records; failure to be notified of a decision; an unusual or unavoidable circumstance which demonstrated that the appellant could not have known of the need for timely filing or which prevented the appellant from filing in a timely manner; or the claimant thought that his or her representative had requested reconsideration or appeal. If good cause is not established, further appeal is forfeited, except that the appellant may contest the determination that the request for reconsideration or appeal was not filed timely.

5 Are there avenues of appeal beyond the RRB?

Appellants dissatisfied with the three-member Board's final decision may then file a petition with the appro-

priate U.S. Court of Appeals to review the Board's decision. In cases involving retirement, disability, or survivor claims, the petition for review must be filed within one year after notice of the three-member Board's decision has been mailed to the appellant. In cases involving claims for unemployment or sickness benefits, the petition for review must be filed within 90 days of the Board's decision notice.

6 Can employers contest the claims of their employees for unemployment and sickness benefits?

When an employer is a party to the claim for benefits, that employer may protest the payment of benefits, but such protests do not prevent the timely payment of benefits. However, an employee may be required to repay benefits if his or her employer's protest is ultimately successful. The employer also has the right to appeal an unfavorable decision to the RRB's Bureau of Hearings and Appeals.

7 Where can a person obtain retirement, disability, survivor, unemployment, or sickness benefit appeals forms and assistance in completing the forms?

Requests for reconsideration of an initial decision must be in writing, but do not have to be on any specific form. The appropriate form for waiver of recovery of a benefit overpayment is ordinarily enclosed with the overpayment notice. As stated earlier, RRB Form HA-1 (https://rrb.gov/sites/default/files/2017-06/HA1%5B1%5D_0.pdf), which must be used to appeal to the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals and the three-member Board, is available online or from the RRB's Bureau of Hearings and Appeals, 844 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611-1275. This form can also be obtained from any RRB field office, as can assistance in filing a request for review at each of the administrative levels.

Field Office Locator (<https://rrb.gov/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. ©

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Q&A: Longevity of Railroad Retirement beneficiaries

Every three years, the Railroad Retirement Board's Chief Actuary conducts a study of the longevity of its annuitants, as part of a valuation of future revenues and benefit payments. The following questions and answers summarize the results of the most recent longevity study.

1 What were the study's findings on the life expectancy of retired male railroaders?

The most recent data reflected a continued improvement in longevity. Using data through 2016, the study indicated that, on the average, a male railroader retiring at age 60 can be expected to live another 22.5 years, or 270 months. Studies done three, six, and nine years ago indicated life expectancies of 22.4, 21.9, and 21.3 years, respectively, for this category of beneficiary. The study also indicated that a male

railroader retiring at age 62 can be expected to live another 20.8 years (approximately 250 months), while the previous three studies indicated life expectancies of 20.7, 20.1, and 19.6 years, respectively. A male railroader retiring at age 65 can be expected to live another 18.3 years (approximately 220 months). The previous studies indicated life expectancies of 18.2, 17.7, and 17.1 years, respectively, for this category of beneficiary.

2 How did these life expectancy figures compare to those of disabled annuitants?

As would be expected, disabled annuitants have a shorter average life expectancy than those who retire based on age. At age 60, a disabled railroader has an average life expectancy of 18 years, or 4.5 years less than a nondisabled male annuitant of the same age. Studies done three, six, and nine years ago indicated life ex-

pectancies of 17.7, 17.2, and 16.4 years, respectively, for this category of beneficiary. Nonetheless, the difference in life expectancy at age 60 between disabled annuitants and annuitants who retire based on age has remained relatively stable, ranging between 4.5 and 4.9 years.

3 Are women still living longer than men?

In general, women still live longer than men. This is shown both in the Railroad Retirement Board's life expectancy studies of male and female annuitants and by other studies of the general United States population.

For example, at age 60 a retired female railroader is expected on the average to live 25.6 years, 3.1 years longer than a retired male railroader of the same age; and at age 65, a retired female railroader is expected on the average to live 21.1 years, 2.8 years longer than her male counterpart. Spouses and widows age 65 have av-

erage life expectancies of 21 years and 19 years, respectively.

4 Can individuals use life expectancy figures to predict how long they will live?

Life expectancy figures are averages for large groups of people. Any particular individual's lifetime may be much longer or shorter than the life expectancy of his or her age and group.

According to the study, from a group of 1,000 retired male employees at age 65, 933 will live at least 5 years, 822 at least 10 years, 658 at least 15 years, and 448 at least 20 years. Of female age annuitants at age 65, 578 will be alive 20 years later.

5 Where can I access the Railroad Retirement Board's longevity study?

The entire longevity study is available under Financial and Reporting (Financial, Actuarial and Statistical) at www.rrb.gov. ©

Snow bound in Minnesota

NATIONAL GUARD CALLED OUT TO RESCUE SEVEN CREW MEMBERS WHEN THEIR TRAINS STALLED IN DEEP SNOW

Three Union Pacific train crews were stranded overnight in their locomotives when an epic snow storm engulfed southern Minnesota in late February.

At about 9:30 p.m. on February 24, a northbound Union Pacific train on the Albert Lea Subdivision got stuck in a massive snow drift near milepost 264. It takes a lot of snow to stop a locomotive, and it is estimated that the drift was 14 feet deep. There were two crews on the stalled train, including one that was dead under the Hours of Service law, which had been picked up from another train because no cabs were available due to impassable roads.

A southbound crew was sent out of South St. Paul with three light engines to rescue the stranded train. However, the rescue crew got stuck in a 12-foot drift at about milepost 267.5.

All three crews spent the night inside their locomotives before help arrived at about 10 a.m. the next day. They were rescued by the Minnesota National Guard, with assistance from the Freeborn County Sheriff's Office. The National Guard deployed a Small Urban Support Vehicle (SUSV), which is a tracked vehicle specially designed by the U.S. Army to maneuver in deep snow. The crew members were taken to the National Guard's Armory in Albert Lea, Minn.

Interstate 35 was closed from Owatonna, Minn., to Ames, Iowa, for more than 24 hours as crews worked to remove 8-foot snow drifts from the freeway.

Sheriff Kurt Freitag of the Freeborn County Sheriff's Office provided the BLET National Division with photos of the rescue mission. Sheriff Freitag reports that SSG Trevor Nelson and SSG Joshua Barker, D company, 2/135 Infantry, took the photos and are the ones who rescued the seven train crew members. ©



This is what members of the Minnesota National Guard saw when they were called out to rescue seven Union Pacific train crew members on the morning of February 25, 2019.



Train crew members waiting for the Minnesota National Guard rescue team



A member of the Minnesota National Guard stands on the massive snow drift that stalled a UP train.



Snow drifts of 12-14 feet deep stopped this Union Pacific in its tracks.



Members of the Minnesota National Guard used this Small Urban Support Vehicle (SUSV) to help rescue train crews.



Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen News Brotherhood Of Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen

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Photo of the Month: February/March 2019

SCENIC UTAH: Utah Railway train HUTAHJ-29 passes through Springville, Utah, on April 29, 2014. The BLET members who work for the Utah Railway belong primarily to Division 221. **Photo:** by Brother Cory Rusch, a member of BLET Division 659 in Buffalo, N.Y. Brother Rusch is a conductor with Norfolk Southern.



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 January 2019 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; Cooperating Rail Labor Organization (CRLO) mtgs., Hollywood, Fla.

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT E.L. (LEE) PRUITT: National Duties include but not limited to: 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; Cooperating Rail Labor Organization (CRLO) mtgs., Hollywood, Fla.

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; Union Track status call; GCA dues handling; MetLife/Bombardier; Fees objector; CRLO mtgs., Hollywood, Fla.

VICE PRESIDENT & NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN P. TOLMAN: Assigned to BLET Washington, DC office; General office duties, telephone and correspondence communications; Attend rally to end government shutdown, Washington, D.C.; Attend several receptions of the new members on Congress, Washington, D.C.; One Rail mtg., Washington, D.C.; CRLO, NMB, ARLA, TTD, Teamsters Rail Conference mtgs., Hollywood, Fla.; Numerous receptions and office visits with members of Congress and 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) Advisory Forum—Labor Member; Department Head, BLET Arbitration Department; Assigned to CN-Wisconsin Central, CN-Illinois Central, CN-Cedar River, Belt Railway of Chicago, Gary Rwy., Illinois Rwy., Indiana Harbor Belt, Metra (Chicago), CP Rail System/US (Soo), Indiana Southern RR, Iowa, Chicago & Eastern, Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern, Union RR; Study DL 436 Referee Vonhoff; Assist GC Burns w/ discipline appeals, IHB, Chicago; DL 436 referee Vonhoff, NRAB, Chicago; Prepare submission for Case 190034M (Graves appeal), BRC, Chicago; Vacation; Prepare dissents to Meyers awards, NRAB, Chicago; Prep. for adoption session, NRAB, Chicago; 1st Division adoption session, NRAB, Chicago; Assist GC Evans w/ discipline appeal, IC, Chicago; Assist GC Reynolds w/ discipline appeals, WC, Chicago; Annotate awards for Circular 1-89, NRAB, Chicago; NMB mtgs., NMB freight rail symposium, NMB Section 3 status briefing, Hollywood, Fla.

VICE PRESIDENT MIKE TWOMBLY: Department Head, BLET Short Line/Organizing Department; Designated Representative of the BLET Short Line Department; Assigned to: CN—Grand Trunk Western; Springfield Terminal; Delaware & Hudson; St. Lawrence & Atlantic; New York

Susquehanna & Western; Connecticut Southern (G&W); New England Central (G&W); Louisville & Indiana; Huron & Eastern; Wheeling & Lake Erie; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; On duty at home office; Wheeling & Lake Erie GCR 41A ballot count, Independence, Ohio.

VICE PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. PRIESTER: Assigned to all BNSF (former ATSF, former C&S, CRI&P, FWD, former STL-SF, BNSF/MRL), Panhandle Northern, Great Western Railway of Colorado; Missouri & North Arkansas, Montana Rail Link, Otter Tail; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; M&NA contract mediation, assisting GC Thurman, Fort Worth, Texas; PLB 7477, assisting GC Cunningham, BNSF, Chicago; Former VP Cole Davis retirement event, St. Louis, Mo.

VICE PRESIDENT R.C. (RICK) GIBBONS — Assigned to: All Norfolk Southern General Committees (Northern, Eastern and Southern Lines); Chicago, Ft. Wayne & Eastern; Indiana & Ohio (G&W); General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications; Vice President duties; On duty at home office; Vacation; Holiday; PLB 7574, assist VP/GC Wallace, Estero, Fla.

VICE PRESIDENT JAMES P. LOUIS: National Division Department Head, BLET Education & Training Dept.; Department Head of the BLET Internal Organizing, Mobilizing & Strategic Planning Dept.; Department Head, BLET Passenger Dept.; Assigned Amtrak; Keolis Commuter Services; Keolis Rail Services of Virginia, LLC; Transit America Services, Inc.; Long Island Rail Road; New York & Atlantic; Metro-North; New Jersey Transit; PATH; SEPTA; Western New York & Pennsylvania Rwy.; South Buffalo Rwy.; Union Track mtgs. and training; Education & Training issues; BLET Regional Meeting planning; Advisory Board conference call; SEPTA arbitration, assist GC Hill; Amtrak issues, assist GC Kenny; Keolis issues, assist GC Kenny; NJ Transit issues, assist GC Brown; BLET regional meeting planning; PATH issues, assist GC McCarthy; Caltrain issues, assist GC Kenny; Convention hotel review, Las Vegas.

VICE PRESIDENT MARK L. WALLACE: Assigned to all Union Pacific GCAs (Eastern District, Northern Region (former C&NW), Western Lines (Pacific Harbor Lines), Western Region (Portland & Western RR, Portland Terminal), Central Region, and Southern Region); Tacoma Belt Railroad; Utah RR; Longview Portland & Northern and Longview Switching; General office duties, telephone, emails, correspondence, communications, etc.; On duty at home office; UP General Chairman mtg., New Orleans, La.; Mtg. w/ UP Central Region General Chairman/UP LR, New Orleans, La.

VICE PRESIDENT J. ALAN HOLDCRAFT: Assigned to all CSX Transportation GCAs (Eastern Lines, Western Lines, Northern Lines (Bombardier Transportation Services), Conrail Shared Assets/CSX Northern District); KCS—Kansas City Southern/Louisiana & Ark. RR.; KCS—Texas Mexican Railway; KCS—Mid South Rail, South Rail, Gateway Western RR, Illinois Midland (G&W); Mtg. w/ retired VP Gil Gore, re: Turnover of assignments and duties; Mtg. w/ CSX GC Keith Kerley, Indianapolis; Mediation w/ Indiana RR, Indianapolis; Mtg. w/ retired VP Cole Davis, re: Turnover of assignments and duties; Mtg. w/ KCS GC David Spradlin, Shreveport, La.; Mtgs. w/ KCS Labor Relations, Shreveport, La.

FRA grants two-year extension for PTC installation

According to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the 41 railroads required by Congress to implement positive train control (PTC) systems by December 31, 2018 have submitted documentation that they assert is sufficient to meet the statutory requirements for system activation or the statutory requirements to qualify for an alternative schedule ("extension") for up to two additional years to complete full implementation.

On October 29, 2015, the Positive Train Control Enforcement and Implementation Act of 2015 (PTCEI Act) was signed into law and extended the original statutory deadline for full implementation of PTC systems from December 31, 2015, to December 31, 2018. Under the PTCEI Act, each railroad subject to the congressional mandate must fully implement an FRA-certified and interoperable PTC system on all required main lines by December 31, 2018, unless a railroad qual-

ifies for and obtains FRA's approval of an alternative schedule and sequence pursuant to the PTCEI Act. A railroad's alternative schedule and sequence, if any, must contain a deadline for full PTC system implementation that is as soon as practicable, but not later than December 31, 2020.

As of December 31, 2018, 4 railroads have self-reported that they fully implemented an FRA-certified and interoperable PTC system on all of their required main lines: the Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH), North County Transit District, Portland & Western Railroad, and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink).

As of December 31, 2018, 33 railroads have submitted a written notification requesting FRA's review and approval of an alternative schedule, and each railroad provided documentation intended to demonstrate they met — or, in many cases, exceeded — the six statutory criteria necessary

to qualify for an alternative schedule under the PTCEI Act.

"The FRA will continue to hold railroads accountable in adhering to their own stated full implementation timetables through rigorous regulatory and programmatic enforcement," the FRA said in a press release. "FRA will continue to actively monitor railroads' compliance with their own required PTC Implementation Plans and help ensure they continue to satisfy and fulfill numerous technological, procedural and operational milestones and benchmarks."

Based upon railroad self-reporting, as of the third quarter of 2018, the percentage of track segments completed is 94% for freight railroads and 77% for passenger. This compares to 20% for freight and 13% for passenger as of the third quarter of 2016. Significant work remains to be done in order to ensure additional field testing, interoperability, and full implementation arrive as soon as possible. @@