The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) advised the White House on July 8 that it is not investing railroad workers’ money in questionable companies headquartered in the People’s Republic of China.

On July 7, the Chairman of the RRB received a letter from White House officials expressing concerns over the RRB’s alleged investment in Chinese companies. The National Railroad Retirement Investment Trust (NRRIT) manages railroad retirement funds and makes investment decisions on behalf of the RRB. The letter further alleged that NRRIT was investing in two Chinese companies that specifically pose an economic risk to the trust funds of railroad employees.

With the concurrence of RRB Labor Member John Bragg and RRB Industry Member Thomas Jayne, RRB Chairman Erhard R. Chorlé responded to the White House on July 8.

“Regarding the specific companies you cite in your letter, Hikvision and ZTE, NRRIT assured us in mid-June that the Trust held no interest in either of those companies,” Chorlé wrote.

In a follow up letter dated July 30, 2020, the NRRIT itself responded to the White House and confirmed that Railroad Retirement Investment funds are not being invested in companies that pose national security threats or raise humanitarian concerns.

RRB Labor Member Bragg defended the NRRIT and RRB in a July 9 letter to all Rail Labor unions. He said the Board takes the White House inquiry very seriously and assured Rail Labor members that their retirement funds are being invested wisely.

“Regarding the specific companies you cite in your letter, Hikvision and ZTE, NRRIT assured us in mid-June that the Trust held no interest in either of those companies,” Chorlé wrote.

“Our retirement trust fund is one of the healthiest in the country,” Bragg wrote. “The NRRIT manages and makes the investment decisions of the railroad retirement funds and to date has helped produce returns that secure our trust fund well into the future. NRRIT is an independent non-federal entity governed by a seven-member Board, with three selected by rail management, three selected by rail labor, and one independent trustee selected by the six rail trustees. The best interest of the trust fund and the security that it provides to the rail community is always at the forefront of their duties.”

In an August 4 follow-up letter to Rail Labor, Brother Bragg wrote: “I want to reiterate that our trust fund is stable and NRRIT’s investments are producing the returns needed to ensure the stability of the fund well into the future. Every railroader has the right to retire with financial security and a sense of dignity. The RRB, with the help of NRRIT and its investments, helps ensure that right.”

A copy of NRRIT’s July 30 letter to the White House is available here (PDF): www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/NRRIT_Investment_China.pdf

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“REGARDING THE SPECIFIC COMPANIES YOU CITE IN YOUR LETTER, HIKVISION AND ZTE, NRRIT ASSURED US IN MID-JUNE THAT THE TRUST HELD NO INTEREST IN EITHER OF THOSE COMPANIES.”

Chorlé responding to the White House:

before the last Presidential Election in 2016. While there have been many common themes in my Messages over those years, one has been primary and consistent throughout: our Unity is our Strength.

I bring it up again in this Message for a very simple reason. This year has been very difficult for many BLET members. Many have been furloughed and many have had to travel to stay employed, all so that the carriers could protect their bottom line instead of their employees. Worst of all, many members and their families have had to battle COVID-19, and there is no end of the pandemic in sight.

Much of this hardship is due to the carriers’ failure, in many cases, to properly manage the pandemic. Inconsistent policies, rarely applied as written from distant headquarters locations, only compound the frustrations experienced in the field. That coupled with insufficient sanitation in ready rooms, crew vans, locomotives and hotels only adds to the stress of being an essential employee. In my conversations with members since the pandemic started, many have been made to feel more like an expendable employee than an essential employee.

In response, all levels of the BLET have labored since the pandemic started to improve the working conditions related to COVID. Be it with Federal, State and Local governments, or directly with carriers, BLET’s Officers have been on the front lines fighting to improve on a bad situation. Unfortunately, and in spite of our best efforts, the results of those efforts have been mixed.

Even more mixed is the way that BLET members, and Americans in general, view the pandemic and the nation’s reaction to it. For a significant number of people, partisan politics has displaced medical science as a factor in how seriously the pandemic and our nation’s reaction to it are taken. Although most Americans call their Physician, not their Congressman, when they have a medical issue, politics now play a greater and greater role in how Americans are dealing with the pandemic. And that political divide is not only affecting our collective view of the pandemic, it has insinuated itself into how Union members view and support their Union’s efforts on broader, unrelated issues.

In my Message prior to the 2016 Presidential Election, I cautioned that electing a CEO to run the country could have negative political consequences in the workplace. As I pointed out then, this is even more dangerous in an industry like ours where there is so much impact by the Federal Government. Whether it has affected you personally or not, my concerns have been our reality for the past four years. For example, the current Administration’s appointments to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the National Mediation Board have made our struggle, which is your struggle, an even more uphill battle on the issues that affect you in your workplace. Whether it be issues of crew size, cross-border traffic, or organizing the unorganized, the current Administration has fought your Union… at your expense … at every turn. This Administration’s actions, and more often its inactions, have emboldened carriers more and more every day. I don’t have to tell you that, you see it every day as carriers implement even more draconian attendance policies along with their outright refusal to comply with our contracts. In the absence of any reasonable response by FRA, the carriers’ in-difference to your workplace safety in a time of pandemic should tell you how emboldened they have become. Sadly, along the way, some carriers have even managed to convince some members that they should blame their Union for the railroad’s actions, in an effort to foster division amongst us.

If we are to succeed as a Union, and as a locomotive employees, and trainmen, we must not only resist all employer efforts to divide us, we must also join together to elect candidates who truly support the Union movement and the American working class. We must reject candidates who threaten our Medicare and our Railroad Retirement system. We must reject candidates who refuse to protect American jobs along our nation’s borders. We must reject those candidates who refuse to protect two-person crews. But we must go further than that. We must support those candidates who support our work-place issues. We must support candidates who will give precedence to the men and women whose labor powers our economy and whose consumption sustains that economy, over the Executives of Corporate America who grab for themselves an outsized share of the profits created by their workers. We must support candidates who will fight for Main Street instead of Wall Street.

Issues of fair wages and benefits, a secure retirement and a safe workplace are not partisan issues, they are American issues. Even though most BLET members identify with one political party or another, we must not allow that division to separate us on the issues so important to our workplace. Unity on Election Day is what is necessary in order to reverse the trends that favor the carriers and work against locomotive engineers and trainmen.

Join me this fall in taking a hard look at all candidates running for office. Put them through the “workplace test” that they must be able to pass to gain your support. That is the test that you must pass to garner your Union’s support. Again, our Unity is our Strength. We are much stronger when we are standing together on the issues than we are when we allow outside forces to divide us.

DENNIS R. PIERCE
BLET National President
These continue to be trying times for our nation. The coronavirus still holds America in its grip, and it is unclear when that will improve. The health and economic security of workers, including more than 1 million essential Teamsters working on the front lines, remain at risk.

This union and others have stood strong and made their voices heard in Congress advocating for the wellbeing of hardworking people during the past four months. But we must also again begin to look ahead towards November, when a consequential election will decide the future path of this country.

Leaning on the lessons the union learned during primary elections held in the last two months — including empowering shop stewards on the job to post fliers and talk to fellow workers; increasing phone banking and texting efforts; and using social media to reach out to the membership — the Teamsters are confident they can educate and get workers to vote.

But in the age of the coronavirus, voting doesn’t look the same. That’s why we’re encouraging members to take advantage of more flexible absentee voting and vote-by-mail provisions to make sure they get their ballots in and counted. That allows them to vote from the safety of their homes when they are able to do so.

The coronavirus has put a focus on workplace safety issues like we haven’t seen before. Undoubtedly, that will remain a priority as we near Election Day. But many topics of concern remain the same.

One that continues to be of primary focus to this union is pensions. Some 1.5 million workers and retirees belong to multiemployer pension plans that are currently endangered. Another is collective bargaining. There is an understanding by a sizable majority in this country that hardworking Americans deserve the ability to organize and collectively bargain for better pay, working conditions and benefits.

This nation is a little more than three months away from the deciding the fate of workers for at least a generation. The Teamsters are going to do their damnedest to ensure that hardworking Americans come out on top when all is said and done.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
Teammers General President

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Pierce elected Chairman of CRLO

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce has been elected Chairman of the Cooperating Railway Labor Organizations (CRLO) following the retirement of long-serving Chairman Robert A. Scardelletti. His election became effective August 1, 2020. The CRLO is a group of 12 Rail Labor unions that sit together to oversee the collectively bargained health and welfare benefits contained within the National Agreements, on behalf of railroad members.

President Scardelletti, who served as Chairman of the CRLO for 19 years, retired effective July 31, 2020. He also served for 29 years as President of the Transportation Communications Union/International Association of Machinists (TCU/IAM).

Also effective August 1, new TCU/IAM National President Arthur P. Maratea was elected to serve the CRLO as Vice-Chairman. Brother Maratea was elected President of the TCU/IAM following the announcement of Brother Scardelletti’s retirement. The American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA) President F. Leo McCann will continue to serve the CRLO as Secretary-Treasurer.

“I am humbly and grateful to serve as Chairman of the CRLO, and am particularly proud to work alongside Brothers Maratea and McCann. I will do my utmost to protect and preserve the health care benefits provided by railroad workers.” President Pierce said. “I would also like to thank President Scardelletti for his 19 years of leadership as CRLO Chairman and I extend my best wishes for a long, happy and healthy retirement.”

President Pierce appointed Brother A. Dan Cook, III, the BLET’s Director of Benefits, to serve as the CRLO Administrator. President Pierce also thanked Len Conboy for her many years of service as CRLO Administrator. “Bob and Ellen both worked very hard for all railroad workers. They both left big shoes to fill.”

The 12 unions that make up the CRLO are: American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA); Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET); Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED); Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS); International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM); International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers (IBB); International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW); National Conference of Firemen & Oilers/SEIU (NCFO/SEIU); SMART Mechanical Department (SMART MD); SMART Transportation Division (SMART TD); Transport Workers Union (TWU); and Transportation Communications Union/IAM (TCU/IAM).

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To register online, just go to www.ble-t.org/newsflash. On this page, you will find an area to enter your email address and click subscribe to begin receiving the most current news from the BLET National Division. It is a great way to keep informed on the most recent issues impacting your job, your contract and your Brotherhood.
Evans reelected CN-IC General Chairman

Spradlin reelected KCS General Chairman

W illiam D. (Billy) Evans was reelected by acclamation to his second term of office as General Chairman of the BLET’s Canadian National-Illinois Central (CN-IC) General Committee of Adjustment (GCA) at the GCAs quadrennial meeting on June 9, 2020.

A CN-IC locomotive engineer, Brother Evans hired out as a brakeman in 1995 in Memphis, Tenn. In 1997, he earned promotion to locomotive engineer and joined BLET Division 203 in Jackson, Miss. Brother Evans was elected First Vice General Chairman of the CN-IC GCA in 2012 and was reelected again in 2016. He became General Chairman in June of 2018 following the retirement of then-General Chairman Clay E. Craddock.

Also elected were: Vice General Chairman Jeremy Wilborn, Division 203 (Jackson, Miss.); 2nd Vice General Chairman Monty Murphy, Division 24 (Centralia, Ill.); 3rd Vice General Chairman Jonathan Walters, Division 10 (Chicago, Ill.); 4th Vice General Chairman Lanie Keith, Division 593 (Meridian, Miss.); and Secretary-Treasurer Chuck Grigsby, Division 602 (Champaign, Ill.).

Elected to serve as alternate officers were: Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Chris McDonald, Division 577 (Mattoon, Ill.); 1st Alternate Vice GC Charlie Lough, Division 131 (Chicago, Ill.); 2nd Alternate Vice GC Judd Schust, Division 315 (Clinton, Ill.); 3rd Alternate Vice GC Shawn Early, Division 8 (Scher, Mo.); and 4th Alternate Vice GC Kelvin Nelson, Division 827 (Laurel, Miss.). Elected to serve as Trustees were: Tom Bloom, Division 114 (Waterloo, Iowa); Monty Murphy, Division 24 (Centralia, Ill.); and Alan Douglas, Division 762 (Memphis, Tenn.).

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: National President Dennis R. Pierce; National Vice President Marcus R. Ruetz; and National Vice President J. Alan Holdcraft.

“I offer my sincere congratulations to Brother Evans and all officers of the CN-IC General Committee of Adjustment, and I thank them for their dedication to our Brotherhood,” President Pierce said.

“Brother Evans is one of our veteran leaders and I know he and his GCA will continue doing an excellent job of representing our Brothers and Sisters.”

Brother Evans has been actively involved in the Brotherhood over the past 20 years. He has served Division 203 as Alternate Secretary-Treasurer (2000-2003), Vice Local Chairman (2003-2004), and Local Chairman (2004-2018). He also served Division 203 as Legislative Representative for several terms between 2000 and 2018, when he became General Chairman. From 2008-2018, Brother Evans also served the BLET as Chairman of the Mississippi State Legislative Board.

The BLET’s CN-IC GCA is comprised of 19 Local Divisions and represents nearly 1,400 active and retired members. The GCA represents multiple railroads, including CN properties (Illinois Central, Chicago Central & Pacific, Cedar River Railway), Kansas City Southern properties (MidSouth Rail Corp., SouthRail Corp., Gateway & Western), Illinois & Midland Railroad and the IC Electric Division of Metra in Chicago.

D avid A. Spradlin was re-elected by acclamation as General Chairman during the Kansas City Southern / Louisiana & Arkansas Railway General Committee of Adjustment’s quadrennial meeting on June 2, 2020.

A member of BLET Division 573 (Greenville, Texas), Brother Spradlin has held continuous membership since he first joined the BLET on April 1, 1998. He hired out in 1994 as a conductor with KCS/Schreavort, La., earning promotion to locomotive engineer in July 1995 out of Greenville, Texas. Brother Spradlin served Division 573 as Secretary-Treasurer from 2000-2007 and as Local Chairman from 2005-2016. He served the GCA as Secretary-Treasurer for eight years, winning elections at quadrennial meetings in 2008 and 2012. Brother Spradlin was elected General Chairman by acclamation at the GCA’s 2016 quadrennial meeting, taking the reins from Sam W. Parker, who retired. In addition to his work on the GCA and Division levels, Brother Spradlin served the National Division as a member of the Arrangements Committee during the BLET’s Fourth National Convention in 2018. Also elected by acclamation during the 2016 meeting were: 1st Vice General Chairman James O. Fisher Jr., Division 612 (Nederland, Texas); and 2nd Vice General Chairman David M. Grubbs Jr., Division 569 (Heaven, Okla.). Secretary-Treasurer Gregory E. Jones, Division 612 (Minden, La.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Jeffery J. Bullington, Division 527 (Pittsburg, Kan.).

Three Trustees were also elected by acclamation: James O. Fisher Jr., Division 612 (Nederland, Texas); David M. Grubbs Jr., Division 569 (Heaven, Okla.); and Justin W. Curl, Division 527 (Pittsburg, Kan.).

Additional delegates in attendance were: Johnny L. Lacking, Division 426 (New Orleans, La.); Richard G. Guy Jr., Division 612 (Nederland, Texas); W. Bryce Dondero, Division 573 (Greenville, Texas); and Michael J. Rogers, Division 599 (Shreveport, La.).

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce and National Vice President J. Alan Holdcraft represented the National Division at the meeting.

“I congratulate Brother Spradlin and all officers of the Kansas City Southern GCA, and 1 thank them for their continued dedication to our union,” President Pierce said. “I am proud to salute these Brothers for continuing the spirit of Brotherhood during these challenging times.”

The BLET’s Kansas City Southern / Louisiana & Arkansas Railway General Committee of Adjustment represents seven BLET Divisions and approximately 600 active and retired members.
Simon reelected Chairman of New Jersey State Legislative Board

Sean P. Simon was reelected by acclamation to his third term as Chairman at the New Jersey State Legislative Board’s quadrennial meeting on May 28, 2020. A Norfolk Southern locomotive engineer, Brother Simon hired out with Conrail in March of 1994. He earned promotion to locomotive engineer in August of 1995 and joined the Brotherhood effective October 1, 1997. In 2018, Brother Simon was elected to his fourth term as Local Chairman of Division 226 in Newark, N.J. He also serves Division 226 as Alternate Legislative Representative.

Also elected by acclamation were: 1st Vice Chairman David Ziegler, Division 53 (Jersey City, N.J.); 2nd Vice Chairman Ray Vigil, Division 226 (Newark, N.J.); Secretary-Treasurer Andrew D. Arias, Division 157 (Jersey City, N.J.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Ricardo Bowman, Division 497 (Jersey City, N.J.). Elected by acclamation to serve as Trustees were: Leroy M. Hurley, Division 387 (Camden, N.J.); Mel Caban, Division 272 (Dover, N.J.); and Kevin R. Gabriel, Division 601 (Newark, N.J.). Elected by acclamation to serve as Alternate Trustees were: Chris J. Zappile, Division 373 (Trenton, N.J.); Ray Vigil, Division 226 (Newark, N.J.); and Dordy Joseph, Division 157 (Jersey City, N.J.).

Elected by acclamation to serve as Delegates to Teamsters Joint Council 73 were: Sean Simon, Division 226; Andy Arias, Division 157; Matthew C. Kronyak, Division 235 (Union City, N.J.); David Ziegler, Division 53; Kevin Gabriel, Division 601; Ray Vigil, Division 226; and Ricardo Bowen, Division 497.

Representing the BLET National Division at the meeting were: BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce; Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman; Director of Regulatory Affairs Vincent G. Verma; Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Robert F. Hogan; and BLET Special Representative and Director of Mobilization—Eastern Region Matthew C. Kronyak.

I am proud to congratulate and thank Brother Simon and all members of the New Jersey State Legislative Board for their dedication to our Brotherhood,” BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. “I have every confidence that they will continue to do an excellent job of representing our Brothers and Sisters in New Jersey and educating political candidates about our union’s issues in advance of the November elections.”

Brother Simon briefly served as President of Division 601 after joining the Brotherhood. After Norfolk Southern and CSX took over Conrail, he flowed over to NS. Shortly after the split date, Brother Simon joined the reactivated BLET Division 226 and was elected to serve as its Legislative Representative. He has also held the offices of Local Chairman and Alternate Legislative Representative of Division 226. He was elected 2nd Vice Chairman of the New Jersey State Legislative Board in 2010, and 1st Vice Chairman in 2013. He was elevated to the office of Chairman when former Chairman Matt Kronyak was appointed as a Special Representative for the BLET National Division in 2014.

The New Jersey Legislative Board represents 11 BLET Local Divisions and more than 1,400 active and retired members from various freight and commuter railroads.
Brother Walker with his wife Nikki

**Walked reelected UP-Western Region General Chairman**

Brother Steve A. Leyshon was reelected by acclamation as the General Chairman of the Union Pacific-Western Region General Committee of Adjustment during the Committee’s quadrennial meeting held June 15, 2020. Brother Leyshon is a Union Pacific locomotive engineer and member of Division 766. (Las Vegas, Nevada). All were elected to serve as Trustees were: Jared Worthington, Division 846 (Salt Lake City, Utah); Steve P. Wells, Division 766 (Las Vegas); and Tim L. Smith Jr., Division 443 (Spokane, Wash.).

BLET National President Dennis Pierce and National Vice President Mark Leyshon represented the National Division at the meeting.

“Congratulations to Brother Leyshon and all the officers of the Union Pacific-Western Region General Committee of Adjustment,” President Pierce said. “Brother Leyshon is one of the hardest-working General Chairmen in the Brotherhood and his unanimous reelection is a testament to the fantastic job he has done for our Union Pacific and Portland & Western membership.”

Special guests included: Retired UP-WR General Chairman Jim Dayton; and Rich Egan and Kevin Potts of Iron Road Healthcare.

Over the years, Brother Leyshon has served Division 766 as Secretary-Treasurer and Local Chairman. He also served on the Arrangements Committee at three BLET National Conventions (2010, 2014 and 2018) and was assigned by President Pierce to represent the BLET on a Railroad Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC) Working Group. Brother Leyshon currently serves as Vice Chairman and Labor Member of the Board of Trustees at Iron Road Healthcare, and also as President of the Union Pacific General Chairpersons Association (UPGCA), which is a coalition of General Chairpersons from all the various craft unions at the Union Pacific Railroad.

There were 17 delegates in attendance. The UP-Western Region GCA represents more than 1,000 active members, including approximately 85 of whom work for the Portland & Western Railroad. The GCA has represented the P&WR membership since 2008.

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**Walker elected Iowa State Legislative Board Chairman**

Michael G. Walker was elected Chairman of the Iowa State Legislative Board at its quadrennial meeting in Coralville, Iowa, on June 25, 2020.

A BNSF locomotive engineer, Brother Walker hired out on November 22, 2004. He became a conductor in May 2005 and earned promotion to locomotive engineer in January of 2007. Brother Walker is a member of BLET Division 642 (Creston, Iowa), and he has held continuous membership in the BLET since April 1, 2005. He serves as Division 642’s Legislative Representative. Brother Walker was elected to the office of 1st Vice Chairman at the Iowa State Legislative Board’s 2016 convention, and prior to that, had served the Iowa SLB in a variety of other capacities, including Alternate Secretary-Treasurer and 3rd Vice Chairman. Elected by acclamation during the 2020 quadrennial meeting were: 1st Vice Chairman Ross M. Grooters, Division 778 (Des Moines, Iowa); 2nd Vice Chairman Matt J. Delay, Division 6 (Boone, Iowa); 3rd Vice Chairman Kade T. Harl, Division 391 (Portsmouth, Iowa); Secretary-Treasurer Tony L. Smith, Division 778 (Des Moines, Iowa); 2nd Vice Chairman Kent Hanson for his service as Chairman. Brother Walker also said that long-serving Iowa SLB 2nd Vice Chairman Dan L. Christensen did not seek reelection due to his pending retirement. He said Chris- tensen served Division 114 (Waterloo, Iowa) as a Legislative Representative since 1999 and has held numerous positions with the Iowa State Legislative Board over the years, including 1st and 2nd Vice Chairman. Brother Christensen will have 42 years of service when he retires from the CN.

The BLET’s Iowa State Legislative Board represents nearly 1,000 active members from 11 different Local Divisions.
RRB Q&A Part II of 2: Unemployment and sickness benefits for railroad employees

What are the eligibility requirements for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits in July 2020?

To qualify for normal railroad unemployment or sickness benefits, an employee must have had railroad earnings of at least $4,012.50 in calendar year 2019, counting no more than $1,605 for any month. Those who were first employed in the railroad industry in 2019 must also have at least five months of creditable railroad service in 2019.

Under certain conditions, employees who do not qualify on the basis of their 2019 earnings may still be able to receive benefits in the new benefit year. Employees with at least 10 years of service (120 or more months of service) might qualify for extended benefits. Employees with at least 10 years of service in a new benefit year ending June 30, 2020, may be eligible for extended benefits, and employees with at least 10 years of service in a current benefit year ending June 30, 2020, may be eligible for extended benefits if they have railroad earnings of at least $4,137.50 in 2020, not counting earnings of more than $1,605 in a month.

In order to qualify for extended unemployment benefits, a claimant must not have voluntarily quit work without good cause and not have voluntarily retired. To qualify for extended sickness benefits, a claimant must not have voluntarily retired and must be under age 65.

What if I’m not eligible for railroad unemployment benefits under the criteria listed in Question 1?

You may be eligible for benefits under a new temporary Federal program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which was created under the CARES Act. In general, PUA provides up to 13 weeks of unemployment benefits to individuals not eligible for regular unemployment compensation or extended benefits, including those who voluntarily quit work without good cause.

How long are these benefits payable?

Normal unemployment or sickness benefits are payable for up to 130 days when they are payable under the RUA, or for 52 weeks when they are payable under the CARES Act. The CARES Act also authorizes payment of extended benefits to employers who are not covered under the RUA beginning July 2020, with payments for up to 52 additional weeks.

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The Jeffersonville, Madison & Indianapolis Railroad (JM&I) was formed in 1866 as a merger between the Indianapolis and Madison Railroads and the Jeffersonville Railroad. Its locomotives were as ornate as the masts and beards of the men who ran them. Photos from the IHB Archives.

Hoffa statement on the passing of Congressman John Lewis

The following is an official statement from Teamsters General President Jim Hoffa:

"On July 17, our country lost a lion of the civil rights movement and a national force for good. As Teamsters, we are devoted to the legacy of the passing of Congressman John Lewis. John Lewis dedicated his life to causes that were bigger than himself. For more than 60 years, his courageous leadership gave hope to entire nation, reminding us all to be better.

More than anything, John Lewis was a fighter. He never backed down when it came to the rights and equality of Black people and the disadvantaged. He was at the helm of the hot box or in the workplace. He never stopped fighting, and he never lost sight of the ultimate goal of equality for all. He was a happy warrior looking for 'good trouble' to protect the wrongs of racism and systemic oppression.

He took his fight from the streets of Selma and Atlanta to the halls of the Capitol, becoming one of the 'conscience of the U.S. Congress.'

He broadened the struggle for civil rights to include all like-minded supporters, regardless of race, ethnicity or economic status. Through his deep faith and belief in the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, he sought to lift those in need by focusing on their humanity.

His deep commitment to civil rights and equality made him a staunch supporter for workers' rights. When the Teamsters needed a friend in Congress, we could always count on John Lewis to stand with workers and deliver. He understood on a deep and fundamental level that human rights and workers' rights are one and the same.

John Lewis was a true hero of our times, a trailblazer in the fight for justice and equality. His steadfast opposition to discrimination and intimidation anywhere made him one of labor's strongest allies and closest supporters.

The loss of Congressman Lewis comes at a pivotal time for our nation and our union, as we take on present-day challenges such as voter suppression and systemic racism. As Teamsters, we will never forget John Lewis, and his legacy will live on in the fight for justice and equality. He will be greatly missed.

As the official labor voice of 1.4 million Teamsters, we join the congressional delegation from Georgia in expressing our condolences to the family, friends and constituents of Congressman John Lewis."