



Locomotive

ENGINEERS & TRAINMEN NEWS

JULY/AUGUST
2020
VOLUME 34, ISSUE 5
DAILY NEWS UPDATES
WWW.BLE-T.ORG

PUBLISHED BY THE BLET, A DIVISION OF THE RAIL CONFERENCE, INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

Crossing the Continental Divide

BNSF SSEALPC1-11 is eastbound after cresting Marias Pass just east of Summit, Montana, on July 13, 2013. The rail line across Marias Pass was completed on January 6, 1893, and it is the lowest crossing of the Continental Divide in the United States at 5,213 feet. Photo by Brother Cory Rusch, a member of BLET Division 659 in Buffalo, N.Y. Brother Rusch is a conductor with Norfolk Southern.



RRB not investing in questionable Chinese companies

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.

RRB CHAIRMAN ERHARD R. CHORLÉ
RESPONDING TO THE WHITE HOUSE:

"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."

"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 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.

"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 rail-roader 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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BLET PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE BY DENNIS R. PIERCE

IT'S TIME TO STRENGTHEN OUR UNITY

As we prepare this edition of the *Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen News*, we also quickly approach the fall elections. Before writing this Message, I took the time to review the past President's Messages that I have written for the *News*, going back to 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 in a concerted effort 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 cau-

tioned 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' indifference to your workplace safety in a time of pandemic should show 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 railroads' actions, in an effort to foster division amongst us.

If we are to succeed as a Union, and as locomotive engineers 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 workplace 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 out-sized share of the profits created by their workers. We must support candidates who will fight for Main Street instead of for 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 they must pass to garner your Union's support. Again, our Unity is our Strength. We are much stronger when we are standing together on our common issues than we are when we allow outside forces to divide us.

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

AMID COVID-19 CRISIS, ELECTION CAN'T BE FORGOTTEN

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 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 damndest to ensure that hardworking Americans come out on top when all is said and done.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
TEAMSTERS 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 on 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.



Retiring Chairman Robert Scardelletti served for 19 years



New CRLO Chairman Dennis Pierce



New CRLO Vice-Chairman Arthur Maratea



Leo McCann will continue to serve as Secretary-Treasurer

"I am humbled 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 preserve and protect the health care benefits enjoyed 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 El-

len Conboy for her many years of service as CRLO Administrator. "Bob and Ellen both worked very hard for all railroad workers. They both leave 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). @@



Dan Cook will serve as the new CRLO Administrator

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gin receiving the most current news from the BLET National Division.

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Evans reelected CN-IC General Chairman

William 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 GCA's 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 (Clin-



From left: BLET Vice President & National Legislative Representative John Tolman; Brother Evans; and BLET National President Dennis Pierce

ton, Ill); 3rd Alternate Vice GC Shawn Early, Division 8 (Slater, 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. Ruef; 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



Brother Evans with former State of Ohio Legislator Dennis Kucinich

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. ©©

Spradlin reelected KCS General Chairman



Brother Spradlin (left) with Keith Silmon, Division 244



Brother Spradlin with his wife Angela



From left: Steven Cutrer, Division 426; Gregory Jones, Division 632; and Brother Spradlin

David A. Spradlin was reelected 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 at Shreveport, 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); 2nd Vice General

Chairman David M. Grubbs Jr., Division 569 (Heavener, Okla.); Secretary-Treasurer Gregory E. Jones, Division 632 (Minden, La.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Jeffery A. 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 (Heavener, 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 I 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 Bowen, 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 (New-



Brother Simon (seated, center with red tie) at the BLET New Jersey State Legislative Board's 2016 quadrennial meeting

ark, 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 Divi-

sion 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. Verna; Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Robert F. Hagan; 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. @@

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Leyshon 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). He hired out in Las Vegas as a brakeman for the Union Pacific on October 5, 1990, earning promotion to locomotive engineer in September of 1995. He has held continuous membership in Division 766 since August 1, 1995. General Chairman Leyshon was elected 1st Vice General Chairman of the GCA at quadrennial meetings in 2008 and 2012. He was elected General Chairman at the GCA's 2016 meeting to succeed outgoing General Chairman Jim L. Dayton, who retired.

Also elected during the quadrennial session were: 1st Vice General Chairman William J. Wallace, Division 362 (La Grande, Ore.); 2nd Vice General Chairman Tim L. Smith Jr., Division 443 (Spokane, Wash.); 3rd Vice General Chairman Matt Keene, Division 416 (Portland, Ore.); Secretary-Treasurer Tom M. Preston, Division 236 (Portland, Ore.); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Chad A. Holub, Division 766 (Las Vegas, Nevada). All were elected or reelected by acclamation.



From left: William Wallace, Jodi Wallace, Pat Leyshon, and Brother Leyshon

Appointed to the Audit Committee 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 Wallace 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



A group photo of UP-Western Region GCA delegates at the BLET's 2018 National Convention

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&W membership since 2008. @@

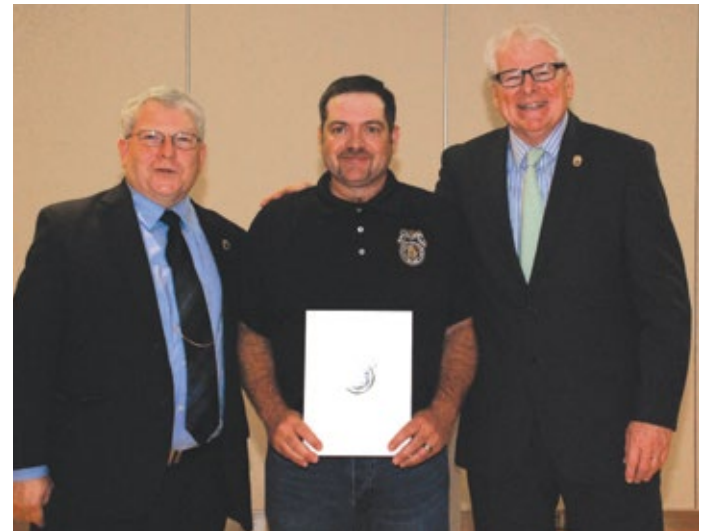
Walker elected Iowa State Legislative Board Chairman



Brother Walker with President Pierce



Brother Walker with his wife Nikki



From left: BLET National Vice President Jim Louis; Brother Walker; and BLET Vice President & National Legislative Representative John Tolman

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 (Fort Madison, Iowa); Secretary-Treasurer Tony L. Smith, Division 6 (Boone, Iowa); and Alternate Secretary-Treasurer Tulane A. McAuliffe, Division 125 (Clinton, Iowa).

Appointed to serve as Trustees were: Darren G. Krug, Division 114 (Waterloo, Iowa); Joe M. Japel, Division 687

(Sioux City, Iowa); and Nick R. Hollar, Division 117 (Mason City, Iowa). Also, Brian P. Gruntmeir of Division 391 (Fort Madison, Iowa), was appointed to serve the Board as Education Coordinator.

Brother Walker said there were no guests at the meeting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He also said that those in attendance practiced social distancing and followed CDC guidelines throughout the meeting.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce congratulated Chairman Walker and all officers of the Iowa State Legislative Board.

"I thank the Brothers and Sisters of the Iowa State Legislative Board for their dedication to our Brotherhood and for mak-

ing the effort to hold their quadrennial meeting during these difficult times," President Pierce said. "I also thank Brother 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 Christensen 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 1 of 2: Unemployment and sickness benefits for railroad employees

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS IS PART 1 OF A TWO PART SERIES OF ARTICLES. PART 2 WILL APPEAR IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS & TRAINMEN NEWS

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) administers the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act (RUIA), which provides two kinds of benefits for qualified railroaders: unemployment benefits for those who become unemployed but are ready, willing, and able to work; and sickness benefits for those who are unable to work because of sickness or injury. Sickness benefits are also payable to female rail workers for periods of time when they are unable to work because of health conditions related to pregnancy, miscarriage, or childbirth. A new benefit year begins each July 1.

The following questions and answers describe these benefits, their eligibility requirements, and how to claim them. In addition, it details how the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act, affects the RRB's administration of benefits under the RUIA.

1 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 rail 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) who received normal benefits in the benefit year ending June 30, 2020, may be eligible for **extended** benefits, and employees with at least 10 years of service (120 or more months of service) might qualify for **accelerated** benefits if they have rail earnings of at least \$4,137.50 in 2020, not counting earnings of more than \$1,655 a month. (Please see Question 4 for information on provisions for extended unemployment benefits under the CARES Act.)

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.

To be eligible for **accelerated** benefits, a claimant must have 14 or more consecutive days of unemployment or sickness; not have voluntarily retired or, if claiming unemployment benefits, quit work without good cause; and, when claiming sickness benefits, be under age 65.

2 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 39 weeks of unemployment benefits to individuals **not** eligible for regular unemployment compensation or extended benefits, including those who have exhausted all rights to such benefits. The PUA program is administered by individual states, **not** the RRB. For eligibility information, and to find the application process in each state, please visit careeronestop.org, and under the Find Local Help tab, select Unemployment Benefits Finder.

3 What is the daily benefit rate payable in the new benefit year beginning July 1, 2020?

Almost all employees will qualify for the maximum daily benefit rate of \$80. Benefits are generally payable for the number of days of unemployment or sickness over four in 14-day claim periods, which yields \$800 for each two full weeks of unemployment or sickness. Sickness benefits payable for the first 6 months after the month the employee last worked are subject to tier I railroad retirement payroll taxes, unless benefits are being paid for an on-the-job injury.

Claimants should be aware that as a result of a sequestration order under the Budget Control Act of 2011, the RRB will reduce unemployment and sickness benefits by 5.9 percent through September 30, 2020. As a result, the total maximum amount payable in a 2-week period covering 10 days of unemployment or sickness will be \$752.80. The maximum amount payable for sickness benefits subject to tier I payroll taxes of 7.65 percent will be \$695.21 over two weeks. It is expected that sequestration will force a 5.7 percent reduction in unemployment and sickness benefits beginning October 1, 2020. Future reductions, should they occur, will be calculated based on applicable law.

In addition, under the CARES Act, the amount of an unemployment benefit is increased by \$1,200 per 2-week period. This increased amount, which is not subject to sequestration, is applied to any 2-week registration periods that began on or after April 1, 2020, through July 31, 2020. (Sequestration is not applied to benefit payments issued under the CARES Act.) The CARES Act includes a separate appropriation of \$425 million to pay for this added "recovery benefit." If this fund is exhausted, the new provision will no longer apply.

4 How long are these benefits payable?

Normal unemployment or sickness benefits are each payable for up to 130 days (26 weeks) in a benefit year. The total amount of each kind of benefit which may be paid in the new benefit year cannot exceed the employee's railroad earnings in calendar year 2019, counting earnings up to \$2,073 per month.

If normal benefits are exhausted, extended benefits are payable for up to 65 days (during 7 consecutive 14-day claim

periods) to employees with at least 10 years of service (120 or more cumulative service months).

The CARES Act also authorizes payment of extended unemployment benefits to rail workers who received unemployment benefits from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020. Under the legislation, railroad workers with less than 10 years of service may be eligible for up to 65 days of extended benefits within 7 consecutive 2-week registration periods. Workers with 10 or more years of railroad service, who were previously eligible for up to 65 days in extended benefits, may now receive benefits for up to 130 days within 13 consecutive 2-week registration periods. No extended benefit period under this provision will begin after December 31, 2020.

5 What is the waiting period requirement for unemployment and sickness benefits?

There is a 7-day waiting period requirement, prior to any benefits becoming payable under the RUIA. During the first 14-day claim period, benefits are payable for every day claimed in excess of seven days. Subsequent claims are paid for the number of days of unemployment or sickness over four in each 14-day registration period. Initial sickness claims must also begin with four consecutive days of sickness. If an employee has at least five days of unemployment or five days of sickness in a 14-day period, he or she should still file for benefits in order to satisfy the waiting period for the current benefit year. Separate waiting periods are required for unemployment and sickness benefits. However, only one seven-day waiting period is generally required during any period of continuing unemployment or sickness, even if that period continues into a subsequent benefit year.

Under the CARES Act, the 7-day waiting period required before railroad workers can receive unemployment or sickness benefits is **temporarily** eliminated. This applies to any 14-day registration period that began on or after March 28, 2020, and ends on or before December 31, 2020. (Please note that this is the **only** provision of the CARES Act that applies to both unemployment and sickness benefits.) Employees who previously submitted claims during this time and were charged with the 7-day waiting period will receive retroactive payments of these additional monies once our systems are ready to pay them. The legislation provides \$50 million to cover the cost of eliminating the waiting period, and, as with the recovery benefit paid under the CARES Act, if this fund is exhausted, the new provision will no longer apply.

6 Are there special waiting period requirements if unemployment is due to a strike?

If a worker is unemployed because of a strike conducted in accordance with the Railway Labor Act, benefits are not payable for days of unemployment during the first 14 days of the strike, but

benefits are payable during subsequent 14-day periods.

If a strike is in violation of the Railway Labor Act, unemployment benefits are not payable to employees participating in the strike. However, employees not among those participating in such an illegal strike, but who are unemployed on account of the strike, may receive benefits after the first two weeks of the strike.

While a benefit year waiting period cannot count toward a strike waiting period, the 14-day strike waiting period may count as the benefit year waiting period if a worker subsequently becomes unemployed for reasons other than a strike later in the benefit year.

7 Can employees in train and engine service receive unemployment benefits for days when they are standing by or laying over between scheduled runs?

No, not if they are standing by or laying over between regularly assigned trips or they missed a turn in pool service.

8 Can extra-board employees receive unemployment benefits between jobs?

Yes, but only if the miles and/or hours they actually worked were less than the equivalent of normal full-time work in their class of service during the 14-day claim period. Entitlement to benefits would also depend on the employee's earnings.

9 How would an employee's earnings in a claim period affect his or her eligibility for unemployment benefits?

If a claimant's earnings for days worked, and/or days of vacation, paid leave, or other leave in a 14-day registration period are more than a certain indexed amount, no benefits are payable for **any** days of unemployment in that period. That registration period, however, can be used to satisfy the waiting period.

Earnings include pay from railroad and non-railroad work, as well as part-time work and self-employment. Earnings also include pay that an employee would have earned except for failure to mark up or report for duty on time, or because he or she missed a turn in pool service or was otherwise not ready or willing to work. For the benefit year that begins July 2020, the amount is \$1,605, which corresponds to the base year monthly compensation amount used in determining eligibility for benefits in each year. Also, even if an earnings test applies on the first claim in a benefit year, this will not prevent the first claim from satisfying the waiting period in a benefit year.

Earnings of \$15 or less per day from work which is substantially less than full-time and not inconsistent with the holding of normal full-time employment may be considered subsidiary remuneration and may not prevent payment of any days in a claim. However, a claimant must report all full and part-time work on each claim, regardless of the amount of earnings, so the RRB can determine if the work affects benefits. ©©



Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen News Brotherhood Of Locomotive Engineers And Trainmen

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Independence, Ohio 44131

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VOLUME 34 • NUMBER 5 • July/August 2020

LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS & TRAINMEN NEWS (ISSN 0898-8625)

is published monthly by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen,
7061 East Pleasant Valley Road, Independence, Ohio 44131

USPS: 0002-244 ISSN: 0898-8625

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to

Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen News — BLET Record Department,
7061 East Pleasant Valley Road, Independence, Ohio 44131.

8/20

Photo of the Month: July/August 2020

FROM THE VAULT: The Jeffersonville, Madison & Indianapolis Railroad (JM&I) was formed in 1866 as a merger between the Indianapolis and Madison Railroad and the Jeffersonville Railroad. Its locomotives were as ornate as the mustaches and beards of the men who ran them. Photo from the BLET Archives.



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 June 2020 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; KCS General Committee of Adjustment meeting; Teamsters General Executive Board mtg., CN-IC GCA mtg.; UP-WR GCA mtg.

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; and PRAC; General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.

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; Mtgs. with vendors and financial institutions; Union Track issues, development, testing, status updates; Merrill Lynch, BLET finance committee.

VICE PRESIDENT & NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE JOHN P. TOLMAN: Assigned to BLET Washington, DC office; General office duties, telephone and correspondence communications, Washington, D.C.; Various receptions and office visits with members of Congress and the leadership of both the GOP and Democratic parties, Washington, D.C.

VICE PRESIDENT MARCUS J. RUEF: 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, Indiana Harbor Belt, Metra (Chicago), CP Rail System/US (Soo); Assist GC Semenak w/ prep. for PLB hearings, CP; Assist GC Semenak w/ rules issue; Discuss Sec. 3 caseload management issues w/ NMB Dir. Arb. Terri Brown, NRAB, Chicago; Assist GC Semenak w/ Section 6 counter proposal, ISRR; IC/Metra GCA quadrennial mtg.; Labor Member caucus, ROAR mtg., NRAB; Assist GC Hau w/ arbitration research, discipline appeal, NRAB filing protocols, WC; Assist GC Semenak w/ discipline appeal, CP; Assist GC Burns w/ discipline appeal, IHB; Assist w/ Circular 2020-06-24 to GCs; Arbitration research, National Division; Assist GC Burns w/ discipline submissions for NRAB, IHB.

VICE PRESIDENT MIKE TWOMBLY: Department Head and designated representative of the BLET National Short Line Division (NSLD) and Organizing Department with responsibility for hearings, conferences, appeals, First Division Appeals and all other daily business involving the NSLD assigned railroads in conjunction with Carrier Officers and advancement of BLET organizing strategies and opportunities; NVP assigned to: CN-Grand Trunk Western; Springfield Terminal; Delaware & Hudson; St. Lawrence & Atlantic; New York Susquehanna & Western; Connecticut Southern; New England Central; Louisville & Indiana; Huron & Eastern; Wheeling & Lake Erie; Tacoma Municipal Belt Line Railroad; National Short Line Division (Local Division 16) railroads: Union Railroad, Belt Railway of Chicago, South Buffalo Railway, Western New York & Pennsylvania and Gary Railway; General office duties, telephone, email, cor-

respondence communications, etc.; On duty at home office, NVB and NSLB Department Head combined daily responsibilities; NSLD Division 16 monthly mtg.; Huron & Eastern Section 6 negotiations.

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.; BLET National Division officers and staff conference call; BNSF operations update conference calls w/ BLET GCs; BNSF operations conference calls w/ GC Psota and Local Chairmen.

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; BLET National Division officers and staff conference call; NS-Southern GCA mtg.; IORY negotiations, assisting GC Cole; Mtg. w/ NS GCs Dehart, Fannon and Sturdivant.

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; TransitAmerica Services, Inc.; Long Island Rail Road; New York & Atlantic; Metro-North; New Jersey Transit; PATH; SEPTA; PLB 5210, assisting PATH GC McCarthy; National Division technology mtgs; National Division regional mtg. issues; SBA 940, assisting NJ Transit GC Brown; Contract issues, assisting Amtrak GC Kenny; Education & Training Dept. issues; Contract issues, assisting LIRR GC Sexton; Contract issues, assisting SEPTA GC Hill.

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, Central Region, and Southern Region); Utah RR; Longview Portland & Northern and Longview Switching, and Portland Terminal; General office duties, telephone, emails, correspondence, communications, etc.; On duty at home office; Assist UP GC's with various on-property issues; Assist GC Leyshon with two presentations of PNWR agreement to Division 416; UP-Western Region GCA quadrennial mtg.; Conference w/ President Pierce and UP General Chairmen; Assist UP General Chairmen, re: attestation; Assist GC Geisler and GC Crow, re: Enhanced Customer Service notice; Assist GC Crow w/ RCO issue; Assist GC Leyshon with agreement language review for PNWR; Discussions w/ UP related to various policies regarding COVID-19.

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); General office duties, telephone, email, correspondence communications, etc.; KCS/L&A GCA quadrennial mtg., assisting GC Spradlin; CN-IC GCA quadrennial mtg., assisting GC Billy Evans; Prep. for Laredo cross border arbitration; Board member of PLB 7947, assisting GC Keith Kerley.

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 devastated to learn 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 the 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, be it at the ballot 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'



Congressman John Lewis, a friend of organized labor, addresses a recent meeting of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

to protest 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 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 inherent goodness of people, he sought to lift those in need by focusing on their humanity.

His deep commitment to civil rights 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.

On behalf of the 1.4 million members of the Teamsters Union, I want to send my deepest condolences to the friends, family and constituents of Congressman Lewis. @@