Willard Knight new BLET National Vice President
Radek retires from Advisory Board

Willard E. Knight has been elevated to the position of National Vice President of the 59,000-member Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen.

He was elected by acclamation to the position of third-alternate vice president at the BLET’s First Quadrennial Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2006. He was promoted to the BLET’s Advisory Board on April 24 following the retirement of National Vice-President and Director of Arbitration Richard K. Radek.

“I look forward to serving the membership in the position I was elected unanimously to hold,” Vice President Knight said.

Immediately prior to his elevation to the Advisory Board, Knight served as General Chairman of the BLET’s Norfolk Southern-Eastern Region General Committee of Adjustment, a position he held for 18 years.

As Vice President, Knight will be assigned to assist the BLET’s Norfolk Southern General Committees of Adjustment.

Knight’s railroad career began in 1969 as a fireman on the Norfolk & Western Railroad in Portsmouth, Ohio. He earned promotion to locomotive engineer in 1972 and first joined the Brotherhood on

President Obama plans high-speed rail for U.S.

On April 16, the Obama administration released an in-depth plan regarding the establishment and implementation of a new world-class, high-speed rail system in the United States. For members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, this is outstanding news. According to National President Ed Rodzwicz, it is the BLET’s position that all high-speed trains — regardless of the technology used — should be run by BLET-represented engineers.

The plan will help create permanent railroad jobs in these difficult economic times.

“A major new high-speed rail line will generate many thousands of construction jobs over several years, as well as permanent jobs for rail employees and increased economic activity in the destinations these trains serve,” President Barack Obama said.

As stated in President Obama’s Strategic Plan, the government will undertake and complete two different types of projects. It will first work to expedite train services on corridors that already exist; those both ready to begin construction and/or those that need additional time before breaking ground. The second type of project will focus on developing new high-speed rail corridors modeled after prototypes found throughout Europe and Japan.

Under the plan, President Obama would use the $8 billion allocated to him by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to jumpstart the program. The plan also requests an additional $5 billion, which would be given out in five, $1 billion annual increments to states by using a merit system. The President, Vice President, and Secretary of Transportation are planning to use this competitive process to encourage states to develop their own high-speed rail systems. These separate corridors, which will range in distance from 100 to 600 miles, will earn the highest-achieving states federal aid in the form of grants.

Furthermore, the funding of these projects will be broken down into three specific tracks:

1. The first track is concentrated on projects that are “ready-to-go” and have undergone all preliminary environmental and engineering works. These individual projects, focused on near term job creation, will be provided with grants for construction. Such projects include acquisition and improvement to already-existing infrastructure.

2. The second track is for corridor programs, which are programs focused on the development of geographic sections for high-speed corridors. These projects will earn the highest-achieving states federal aid in the form of grants.

3. The third track is for corridor projects, which are focused on the development of geographic sections for high-speed corridors. These projects will earn the highest-achieving states federal aid in the form of grants.
Train crew safety bill becomes law in Arkansas

Railroad workers in Arkansas will now ride in off-duty vehicles with a greater peace of mind, thanks to the combined efforts of the BLET’s Arkansas State Legislative Board, their counterparts in the United Transportation Union and the Union Pacific Railroad. The three parties recently collaborated to secure passage of a law to improve the safety of off-duty transportation vehicles.

In early March, Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe signed House Bill 1318 into law. The “Safe Transportation of Railroad Employees by Contract Carriers Act” establishes safety standards for drivers employed by contract carriers as well as the motor vehicles they use to transport train crews to and from off-duty locations.

The new law mandates hours of service for van drivers, drug testing for drivers, inspections of the vehicles and maintenance on the vehicles. It also mandates liability insurance of $5 million dollars for each motor vehicle that transports railroad employees.

“There aren’t many times you find two unions and the railroad working together,” said Terry Todd, Chairman of the BLET’s Arkansas State Legislative Board. “But our issues and the UTU’s issues were almost the same — bad drivers, unsafe vans and a poorly-managed limo company.”

Todd said the solidarity of the two unions helped to get lobbyists from the Union Pacific Railroad involved.

“We brought our issues to the attention of the Union Pacific Railroad and showed them how unreliable their limo company was and how they were wasting money paying for services they were not getting,” Todd said.

With the three parties united, it was just a matter of time before the legislation was passed.

“We were unopposed on all votes,” Todd said. “This was for public safety.” Chairman Todd thanked James Hoskins, Legislative Representative of BLET Division 182 (Little Rock) and Robert Lindsay, retired Division 858 (Pine Bluff) Legislative Representative, for their work on the legislation. He acknowledged the assistance of the Arkansas State AFL-CIO and also thanked the BLET members and their spouses who made phone calls and sent e-mails to lobby their legislators regarding this issue.

BLET congratulates Szabo on FRA confirmation

On May 1, BLET National President Ed Rodzwicz sent congratulations to Joe Szabo on his confirmation as Federal Railroad Administrator by the U.S. Senate.

“The BLET members, officers and staff who have worked with you over the years highly regard your integrity and dedication,” President Rodzwicz wrote. “And your past public service as Mayor of Riverdale, Illinois, displayed the leadership qualities that will be an essential element of your tenure as Administrator.”

A fifth-generation railroader, Szabo, 51, is the first FRA administrator to come from the ranks of rail labor. He recently served the United Transportation Union (UTU) as Illinois state legislative director, and has worked closely with President Obama in the past.

In a letter congratulating Szabo, President Rodzwicz wrote that industry-wide risk reduction programs are the cornerstone for taking safety improvements to the next level.

Replacing the industry’s 175-year-old command and control culture with one that treats safety as a value “is one area of vital concern to BLET members, Rodzwicz wrote.

The BLET President also said this is a time of great challenge and opportunity for the rail industry, particularly concerning the opportunity provided to the industry through President Obama’s funding of high speed rail.

“Significantly changed work schedules will soon be upon us, the importance of the rail alternative finally has been acknowledged by appropriation of substantial public funds — particularly for high speed passenger rail — and a new generation of signal and train control technology will be implemented in much of the industry over the next several years,” President Rodzwicz wrote. “We are confident that, under your leadership, the FRA will play a pivotal role in the renaissance of the industry.”

Locomotive Engineers & Conductors Mutual Protective Association

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Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe, seated, signs the Safe Transportation of Railroad Employees by Contract Carriers Act.

From left: BLET Div. 182 Jr. James Hoskins, retired BLET Div. 858 Br. Robert Lindsay; BLET Arkansas State Legislative Board Chairman Terry Todd; Arkansas AFL-CIO Jim Brewer, Representative Barbara Nix; Matt Fair, Arkansas AFL-CIO; UTU Br. Talmon Freyer; UTU Arkansas State Legislative Director Steve Evans; Alan Hughes, Arkansas AFL-CIO; Rickey Bell, Arkansas AFL-CIO, and retired UTU Arkansas State Legislative Director Don Brehaver.
January 1, 1974. He is a member of BLE Division 511 in Portsmouth, Ohio. After joining the Brotherhood, he was elected Local Chairman of Division 511 in 1979, a position he held until he was elected General Chairman on January 1, 1992.

He also served the Brotherhood as a delegate to the 1996 quinquennial convention in Detroit, the 2001 quinquennial convention in Miami, and the 2006 quadrennial convention in Las Vegas.

As General Chairman, Knight was involved in Conrail merger negotiations in the mid- to late-1990s and has participated in all on-property agreements at the Northeastern Region which have provided wage increases, quality of life improvements and important job protections for the members he represented. The on-property agreement with NS was among the first in the country to tie membership wage increases to company performance.

Most recently, he helped negotiate an agreement that contains an important scope of work language that protects locomotive engineer jobs in the face of changing technology without sacrificing jobs in other crafts.

Vice President Retiske remains as the senior member of the BLE’s Advisory Board, having first won election to the office of Vice President in 1996. His railroad career began on the Chicago & North Western in 1965. He joined the BLE in 1974 and earned promotion to Locomotive Engineer in 1976. Soon after joining

Federal Employers’ Liability Act (FELA)

Your Checklist:

1. What type of will do you need? A simple will is a straightforward way of directing the distribution of assets. If, however, you wish to direct the transfer of property or establish guardianship for children a more complex will may be needed.

2. How will you go about preparing your will? A basic will can sometimes be found on state bar sites, or even sourced on the Internet. A local attorney should be able to easily draft a simple will for a small fee. Be sure to ask what the fee would be in advance.

3. Who are your beneficiaries? Your executor or representative may also be the final claim and, if so, for how much.

4. Have you signed the will? If you elect to create the will through a source such as the state bar, make sure you sign it in front of at least two adult witnesses. In some states, it is a good idea to have the will notarized.

5. Have you named the personal representative? Your executor or representative is charged with seeing that the will is administered.

6. Have you chosen the guardian of your minor children? A will can appoint guardians for your children in the rare, but occa- sional, tragedy of the loss of both parents.

A will is always best to consult an attorney who is familiar with your specific situation. They may be able to consult a financial advisor or accountant to help create a plan. Without this direction, you may have endured enough without com- pli- cating their lives further.

If you have any more specific ques- tions, please do not hesitate to contact the State Bar of the state of your residence or us at www.harpcallier.com. Submitted by:

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Phoenix City, Alabama 36686
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Website: www.harpcallier.com

2009 Calendar & Events

June 7-12, 2009
82nd Annual Southeastern Convention
Association, Gatlinburg, Tenn.

Brother John Mason, Local Chairman of BLE Division 239 (Knoxville, Tenn.), is a Chairman of the 2009 SACA in Gatlinburg, Tenn. It will be held at the Park Vista Hotel & Conference Center (705 Cherokee Orchard Road, Gatlinburg, TN 37738. Phone: (865) 436-9211. The room rate will be $103 per night. To contact Brother Mason, call (865) 533-2684 email: scoolefico@comcast.net or sn6560@comcast.net.

June 30-July 3, 2009
National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen
The NASLBC will hold its annual meeting at the Hyatt Regency Penn’s Landing (just prior to the Eastern Union Meeting Association (EUAMA). More information can be secured by contacting Tim Smith, NASLBC Chairman at tsommily@bigblueb .com, or Ken Kartesz, NASLBC Secretary-Treasurer at kkertesz@comcast.net.

July 5-9, 2009

Brother Sean Sloan, Vice President of BLE Division 220 (Newark, N.J.), is Arrangements Chairman of the 2009 EUAM in Philadelphia. It will be held at the Hyatt Regency Philadelphia at Penn’s Landing (201 S. Columbus Blvd., Philadelphia, PA 19106. Phone: (215) 928-1234. The room rate will be $169 per night. To contact Brother Sloan, call (609) 558-5405 or email euama2009@bom.com.

July 29-August 1, 2009
Military Railway Service Reunion
Organizers are planning a large reunion of WRS veterans who served during WWII and Ko- rean War. Interested will be held at Ft. Eustis, Va., as part of the Armys Transportation Corps Week. More details forthcoming. Contact www.collnet.com.

August 9-14, 2009
69th Annual International Western Convention, Green Bay, Wis.

Brother John Reynolds, Wisconsin Central Gen- eral Chairman and member of BLE Division 209 (Green Bay, Wis.), is the Chairman of the 2009 IVC in Green Bay, Wis. It will be held at Radisson Hotel & Conference Center Green Bay (2040 Air- port Drive, Green Bay, WI 54313. Phone: (920) 494-2700. The room rate will be $94 per night. To contact Brother Reynolds, call (920) 462-4509 or email JRaymondElliott@bundle.com. Visit the IWC website at: www.ifwilg.org.

September 13-16, 2009
75th Annual Southwestern Convention Meeting, Kansas City, Mo.

Brother Mike Zener, Secretary-Treasurer of BLE Division 130 (Kansas City, Kan.), is Hosting Chairman of the 2009 SWCM in Kansas City, Mo. It will be held at the Hyatt Regency Crown Center (2345 McGee St., Kansas City, MO 64110. Phone: (816) 421-1234. The room rate will be $139 per night. To contact Brother Zener, call (816) 804-9107 or email zenermike@Verizon.net. Visit the SWCM website at: www.bletwcm.org.
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Our union has designated attorneys who are qualified to serve as counsel for BLET members in accordance with the Federal Employer’s Liability Act (FELA) governing workplace accidents. In the event of an injury or death and before reaching any settlement with a railroad, members or surviving families should contact an attorney listed to get competent advice concerning their legal rights under the FELA. In addition, if you or any members of your family have questions concerning medical malpractice, product liability or other types of injury cases, please don’t hesitate to contact one of these law firms for a consultation concerning your rights and remedies. **
You never know if tomorrow may come

BLET Auxiliary

By Kathie Bailey-Todd

(With the on-duty rail fatality rates up in 2008 and in the first quarter of 2009, now is the time to make sure that you and your spouse have all of your important paperwork in order, up to date. One can never have enough information on hand in case something happens to our spouses that work on the railroad. I was unfortunate enough to have to put information to use almost four years ago when my late husband, G.Y. Bailey, was killed while at work in a head-on collision in dark territory in Shepherd, Texas, on Sept. 15, 2005. Several years before his death, we had sat down with BLET DLC Robert Tramuto of Jones, Georgia, Tramuto, Christy and Halstead and compiled a list of information spouse’s could use in the event their railroad worker was injured at work or God forbid, a worse. Please make sure you always have this information easily accessible to your spouse at all times. We always think those types of tragedies happened to “someone else,” yet in the blink of an eye, I became that someone else. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact any of your BLET DLC’s – that’s why they are here.

What to do if railroad officials or claim agents contact you to inform you of an injury or death of your spouse:

• Make ANY railroad officials or claim agents contacting you in person identify themselves. Find out exactly where your spouse is located and what his/her condition is. Allow NO railroad representatives into your home. Do NOT volunteer any information. Make NO statements – verbal, written or recorded.

• If in public, get all needed information and walk away. Again, make NO statements.

• If a railroad official calls you on the phone, get the needed information and hang up. Again, make NO statements. Monitor all calls if you have Caller ID and an answering machine. Do NOT sign anything. Do NOT accept anything from them. After you have the needed information, have no further contact with ANY railroad officials or claim agents until after you have contacted a BLET Designated Legal Counsel. Make certain that the railroad official is informed that they are not to contact you or any member of your family from this time forward until you want to make contact with them.

At the hospital, DO NOT allow railroad officials or claim agents into the hospital room or treatment area. Contact railroad officials and claim agents to have NO contact with the patient, family or any medical personnel treating your spouse. Inform them that BLET Designated Legal Counsel has been notified. This will back them off very quickly.

Do NOT allow any railroad officials or claim agents to make ANY decisions concerning medical treatment or arrange for your spouse.

Sign ONLY necessary medical forms from the hospital that are for the treatment of your spouse. Make NO statements to any medical personnel except in regard to the medical treatment for your spouse.

Make certain ALL medical personnel know of these instructions and abide by them. Insist that the Doctor/Patient confidentiality be observed.

When and where you can, especially if your spouse has been medicated, make certain that your spouse gives a consistent identification to the each medical provider that may inquire. Consistency of the event is very important, as medical providers will be questioned by their respective agencies.

REMEMBER… Anything you say to railroad official and/or claims agent will be used against you and your spouse in order to protect the railroad’s interest.

Paperwork you should always have on hand in the case of any injury or death:

• Names and phone numbers to your local division’s union officers: Local Chairman, President, Secretary/Treasurer, Vice President, Chaplain.

• Names and phone numbers of the BLET Designated Legal Counsel members in your area can be found at www.blet.org

• All insurance policies: Health, Disability, Job Insurance, Life Insurance (make sure you have beneficiaries up-to-date from divorce, etc.)

• Your current will. Everyone should have one, no matter what your age.

• Important paperwork, such as a living will, DNR, power of attorney or organ donor information.

• Names and phone numbers of the BLET National Auxiliary Officers at www.bletauxiliary.net

Education & Training Dept. holds NJ Transit workshop

Jim Gee, System General Road Foreman, NJT; Tom Haza, BLET; Fred Mattison, BLET; Bill Craven, BLET; Larry Brain, BLET; Rich Darcy, BLET GC; Ed Bako, Superintendent, NJT; Tim Leiner, Asst. Manager Mechanical, NJT; Marcus Ruef, BLET VP; Dave CLOSEY, BLET; John Smolczynski, Sr. Training Coordinator, NJT; Dan Loeb, BLET; Al Zahn, Sr. Road Foreman, NJT; Ken Kroeger, BLET Training Coordinator; Stanley Buzzieszewicz, BLET; Sean Dolan, Sr. Road foreman, NJT.

Walpert to make it happen. NST Walpert is Director of the BLET Education & Training Department. Kent Kroeger, BLET Education & Training Coordinator, designed and presented the program as and presented it, and was assisted by General Chairman Darcy and Vice President Marcus Ruef. NJT fully supported the workshop and made sure that all 14 class participants were available for the training. The NJ Transit made sure the participants had the day off from their regular assignments (with pay).

The class helped the students understand how to make the most productive use of meeting time by organizing focused agendas, understanding rules of order, keeping things on track, and encouraging two-way communication. The class participated in effective listening and brainstorming exercises that facilitated improved communication. Most of the participants offered positive feedback about the class and felt it would help them to improve the functioning of their various committees.

VP Marcus Ruef commended both GC Darcy, who initially requested the training, and NJ Transit Superintendent of Operations Kevin O’Connor, who sponsored the attendance of the participants, for working together to improve labor management relations.

“Such a positive exercise is an example of labor and management working together at NJT to create a more functional workplace,” Ruef said. “Hopefully, others in the industry will follow their lead.”

Darcy expressed enthusiasm about the program’s successful outcome.

“It created a pool of confident, proactive local rank and file committee men and women who will grow someday to lead the BLET on property and beyond,” Darcy said.

BLET plans high-speed rail for U.S.

Continued from page 1

OMBA PLANS HIGH-SPEED RAIL FOR U.S.

Continued from page 1

Obama plans high-speed rail for U.S.

Continued from page 1

would have already completed gathering background information and will have structured plans for reaching their corridor projections.

The third and final track, referred to as planning, will emphasize the development of cooperative plans and agreements for state railways. Although the funds that will be used are not those appropriated under the ARRA, this track is imperative in establishing future corridor development.

Today, the only existing high-speed rail system in the United States is the Northeast Corridor, located between Boston and Washington D.C. In the plan, President Obama identifies 10 specific corridors, which could potentially receive federal funding. One such corridor is a Chicago hub network was included in the plan. Features include Chicago as the hub, it would hit eight major cities, including Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, and St. Louis. According to Vice President Joe Biden, the potential benefits of high-speed railways are endless. “Investing in a high-speed rail system will lower our dependence on foreign oil and the bill for a tank of gas; lessen the congestion suffocating our highways and skyscrapers; and significantly reduce the damage we do to our planet” (by reduc-
**Extended unemployment benefits coming to rail workers**

President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act) into law on February 17, 2009. It contains two important provisions to assist BLET members during these troubled economic times.

1. **Extended unemployment benefits**
   
   The Act provides an appropriation of $20 million to be used for payment of additional extended unemployment benefits under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act. The new law provides the temporary extended benefits to employees receiving normal unemployment benefits for days between July 1, 2008, and June 30, 2009.

   - Railroad workers who previously were not eligible for extended unemployment benefits because they did not have 10 years of service may be eligible for benefits of up to 65 days within an extended period consisting of 7 consecutive 2-week registration periods.

   - Railroad workers who previously were eligible for extended unemployment benefits of up to 65 days may now be eligible for benefits of up to 130 days within an extended period consisting of 13 consecutive 2-week registration periods.

   - The latest date that an extended benefit period under these special provisions may begin is December 31, 2009, with payments stopping when the $20 million has been expended. The RRB will notify eligible individuals of their new rights to extended benefits and provide additional information about those benefits as soon as possible.

   - All railroad retirement beneficiaries residing in the United States and U.S. territories, except children and Medicare-only beneficiaries, will receive this one-time payment. Payees receiving RRB payments based on a legal partition and/or garnishment are not eligible to receive this payment.

   - You will only receive one $250 payment even if you are also receiving social security and/or veterans benefits.

   - The one-time payment will be issued separately and will not be included in your regular monthly benefit payment. It will be delivered in the same way you currently receive your benefit payment (check or direct deposit).

   - Payments are expected to be issued in May 2009.

2. **One-time payment to railroad retirement beneficiaries**
   
   Under the new legislation, a one-time economic recovery payment of $250 will also be paid to most adults (including disabled adult children) who receive railroad retirement benefits.

   - No action is required on your part to receive this payment.

   - Only individuals who were eligible for railroad retirement benefits in November 2008, December 2008, or January 2009 will receive the special payment.

   - Railroad workers who previously were eligible for extended unemployment benefits of up to 65 days may now be eligible for benefits of up to 130 days within an extended period consisting of 13 consecutive 2-week registration periods.

   - The latest date that an extended benefit period under these special provisions may begin is December 31, 2009, with payments stopping when the $20 million has been expended. The RRB will notify eligible individuals of their new rights to extended benefits and provide additional information about those benefits as soon as possible.

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**Correction**

Due to a typographical error, the following members of BLET Division 57 were mistakenly identified as members of BLET Division 28 in the BLET PAC list that was published in the May 2009 issue: Cory Davis, Joey Joseph, John Keating, William A. Landor, Daniel Murphy, Daniel Proull, Gary Richards and William Voil. Also, the following member of Division 57 donated $10 per month to the BLET PAC throughout 2008, but was mistakenly left off the list: James Ripley.

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**Vancouver S-T Workshop, February 2009**

The BLET Education & Training Department conducted a workshop for Secretary-Treasurers in Vancouver, Wash., from February 23-26, 2009. Those in attendance are as follows:

**Front row, from left:** William Wolpert, NST & Director of Education & Training; Bob Broka, Records Department, Director; and Ken Kroeger, Coordinator of Education & Training and Special Representative.

**Second row, from left:** Steve Myers, ST Div. 443; Brian Kelley, ST Div. 64; Karten Hastings, Alt. ST Div. 144; and Dave Estess, GCA ST Amtrak. Third row, from left: John A. Murray, Alt. ST Div. 446; Cory Gaab, ST Div. 392; Robert Pratt, ST Div. 758; and Christopher Dickey, ST Div. 255. Fourth row, from left: Michael Hamilton, ST Div. 238; Arturo E. “Eddie” Perez, KCS/Tex Mex GCA ST and ST Div. 244; Gary Hayes, ST Div. 58; and Tyrone Miller, II, SLB Alt. ST. Fifth row, from left: John Wallace, ST Div. 595; Jeffrey Valentine, ST Div. 158; Bruce Roe, ST Div. 362; Walt Schmidt, Webmaster; and Tom Preston, ST Div. 236 / GCA ST UP Western Region. Last row: Darrell Schandorf, ST Div. 462; Michael Briscoe, ST Div. 262; Luke Myers, ST Div. 727; Joseph Debuttolommas, MA SLB ST; Patrick McDaniels, ST Div. 794; Todd Pollard, Member Div. 456; and Aaron Rinehart, ST Div. 842.
**Elections**

**Steve Brumbaugh was elected Chairman of the Idaho State Legislative Board at Triennial Meetings on April 4.**

Brother Brumbaugh is a member of BLET Division 676 in Nampa, Idaho. He is a Union Pacific locomotive engineer who first joined the Brotherhood on January 1, 1996. He had previously served as Chairman from 1996-2002.

“My first priority as Chairman will be getting the legislators in the state to be concerned about railroad issues and labor issues,” Brother Brumbaugh said.

This is a very ‘red’ state and we need to get these legislators to the point that they are concerned enough to work with us. My other priority will be to increase the PAC funds in the state.”

Brumbaugh replaces outgoing Chairman Mike Hystell, who did not seek reelection. Brother Hystell announced his intention to retire in July at age 60 with 41 years of service to the Union Pacific Railroad.

**Mark Kenny reelected Amtrak General Chairman**

Mark Kenny was reelected by acclamation to the office of Amtrak General Chairman at the General Committee’s quadrennial meeting in San Francisco last week.

Brother Kenny is a member of Division 11 in New York. He joined the Brotherhood on March 1, 1981, and has served as General Chairman since 1998. Earlier this year, Brother Kenny also served as General Chairman since 1998.

The General Chairman and other officers gave their regular reports to the delegates. In addition, BLET National President Ed Rodzwicz presented the delegates with an update on National Division business.

President Rodzwicz discussed the $8 billion in stimulus money the Obama Administration approved for funding Amtrak and increasing high-speed passenger trains. He also brought the delegates up to speed on the legal challenge to the Department of Transportation’s direct observation of arine testing, the Railroad Retirement trust fund, and the Federal Railroad Administration’s Emergency Order Number 26.

Tom Pontolillo, the BLET’s Director of Research and Assistant to the President, gave a presentation on close call reporting systems, such as one currently being discussed for some Amtrak operations, and one that was recently agreed upon at New Jersey Transit.

Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman also addressed the delegates, providing an update on a variety of legislative and regulatory issues. Bobby Bonds of the Amtrak employee assistance program gave a presentation on Operation RedBlock, the union-initiated, management supported program that uses the concept of peer involvement to prevent employee use of alcohol and/or drugs while on duty or subject to call.

“Congratulations to Mark Kenny and all other members of the Amtrak General Committee of Adjustment who were reelected by acclamation,” President Rodzwicz said. “This will be a challenging term of office for them, especially considering the $8 billion the Obama Administration will invest in Amtrak and high speed rail.

“Also, I extend best wishes to Sister Ellen Scher on her retirement from office. On behalf of the men and women of the BLET, I thank her for many years of hard work and dedicated service to the BLET and our Amtrak Brothers and Sisters.”

**Western General Chairmen elect officers**

The Western General Chairmen’s Association (WGCA), elected officers for a new term and concluded their annual business meeting.

Attendees re-elected Michael Priester to be their Chairman for another year. Also elected were Pat Williams as Vice Chairman, and Rick Gibbons as the Secretary-Treasurer.

Brother Priester serves as General Chairman of the CP Rail System/U.S. General Committee of Adjustment. He joined the Brotherhood on Feb. 1, 1972, and is a member of BLET Division 754 (Terre Haute, Ind.).

“I am humbled, but at the same time strengthened by my Brothers’ continued trust and support in reelecting me as their Association Chairman.”

The WGCA meets annually to give General Chairmen from the Western states the opportunity to discuss current problems and solutions. The meeting allows for interactive participation by all attending general chairman and vice-chairmen.

“Our discussions focus on the issues of the day, whether it be engineer certification, the current Hours of Service improvement legislation or everyday safety issues,” Priester said. “The Association takes a proactive approach as a collective body to develop strategies to improve the railroad environment our members find themselves working in on a daily basis.”

Attendees heard remarks by various speakers, including: BLET National President E. W. Rodzwicz; First Vice-President Paul Sorrow; National Secretary-Treasurer Bill Walpert; and BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman.

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**BLET Designated Legal Counsel made several presentations on topics ranging from red track vehicle coverage to whistleblower legislation. DLC also sponsored a reception and dinner.**

Representatives from the Federal Railroad Administration were present and answered numerous questions. The chairmen were also briefed by Tom Pontolillo, BLET Director of Research and Assistant to the National President, regarding the pending implementation of changes to the Hours of Service laws.

Merrill Lynch representatives also spoke, with an update on the outlook for the economy and strategies for deal closing in a difficult current economic climate.

Job insurance companies sponsored lunches or coffee service and included the Brotherhood’s Relief and Compensation Fund, CPA Insurance, and the Locomotive Engineers and Conductors Mutual Protective Association.

Mark Kenny reelected Amtrak General Chairman
Cross Border Battle

On March 16, the Mexican government announced that they will apply tariffs to 90 U.S. agricultural and industrial products from 40 states. This was done in direct retaliation to the wise decision of Congress and the Obama administration to terminate the North American Trade Agreement’s (NAFTA) truck pilot program begun by the Bush administration. The Teamsters have remained on the forefront of the fight against cross-border trucking with Mexico because we know firsthand how unsafe they would make U.S. highways. We said all along that the program should be halted until the Mexican government meets their safety standards and no trade agreement is wise, as the news pieces are missing the point.

Congress Halts Program

National publications are reporting about the Mexican tariffs, but many of the news pieces are missing the point. Few are actually talking about why Congress moved to halt the program. Instead, the publications are slanted toward the big-business concerns of potential trade wars with our Mexican neighbors. Instead of applying tariffs to the U.S. exports, the Mexican government should consider training their drivers. They should consider that their drivers should not be driven to the point of exhaustion (there are no hours-of-service regulations for Mexican drivers). The Mexican government should consider sending their drivers in cleaner, safer trucks, not trucks with bald tires and emitter dirty diesel fumes in the air.

Serious Safety Concerns

Sent a letter to the Texas Legislative (NA) issued a statement after the Mexican truck announcement on tariffs, saying, “Congress shut down the pilot Mexican trucking program over serious safety concerns, and no trade agreement should obligate us to compromise our highway safety.”

I could not agree more. We stand with Congress for voting to ban unsafe Mexican trucks as part of the omnibus fiscal year 2009 appropriation bill. There is no doubt that while the Mexican government boldly applies their tariffs, they would be far better off raising their safety standards and meeting their obligations under NAFTA. In fact, a NAFTA panel ruled in 2001 that the U.S. can keep the border closed because Mexico does not meet safety standards.

Fraternally,

James P. Hoffa
Teamsters General President