FRA JUST REDUCED THE PROSPECTS FOR A SAFER RAILROAD INDUSTRY

On Thursday, May 24, 2019, we were informed that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) had released a notice, withdrawing a 2016 notice of proposed rulemaking establishing a minimum train crew size for most rail freight operations in the United States. This news was not surprising.

What is shocking, however, is the degree to which FRA has chosen to subordinate the safety of BLET and SMART TD members, other railroad workers, and the American public to the interests of the nation’s major railroads.

FRA’s reference to current crew sizes, which have existed for decades, as mere “crew redundancy” displays an astonishing ignorance of the findings of the agency’s own research studies, which establish—in detail and beyond dispute—the unique and specific duties of each crewmember.

FRA also disappointingly engages in self-serving fact selection in its attempts to negate the importance of the 2013 Lac-Mégantic tragedy and the Casselton, North Dakota oil train derailment—and subsequent explosion and fire—to the crew size debate. And it simply ignores several subsequent accidents where a two-person crew saved the public from an even more horrific outcome.

In its rush to diminish the safety impact of common-sense crew size regulations, FRA also points to various regulations requiring risk analyses and the adoption of risk reduction plans by railroads. While our Organizations fully support such plans, we note that Congress mandated regulations governing these subjects more than a decade ago, but they have yet to be promulgated because of industry recalcitrance and obstructionism.

Also, the argument that two-person crews have not been proven safer—because of FRA’s failure to collect crew size data—while the data support a conclusion that single-person crews are not demonstrably less safe is mystifying in its logic, to be charitable.

Moreover, the federal rail safety regulator hints that there is no “specific requirement that would prohibit autonomous technology from operating a locomotive or train” in the absence of any human crewmember whatsoever as a means of “reducing accidents caused by human error.” If the ongoing grounding of the Boeing MAX aircraft has taught nothing else, FRA and the Department of Transportation should be mindful of the danger of transferring the risk of a human factors accident from operator to programmer when autonomous technology comes into play.

Continued on page 4

BIG SKY COUNTRY

An eastbound BNSF freight train crosses the trestle over the Two Medicine River near East Glacier, Montana, on August 5, 2014.

Photo: Brother Richard C. Bartela Jr., a member of BLET Division 382 in Buffalo, N.Y.

FRA’s reference to current crew sizes, which have existed for decades, as mere “crew redundancy” displays an astonishing ignorance of the findings of the agency’s own research studies, which establish—in detail and beyond dispute—the unique and specific duties of each crewmember.
I
ing my recent President’s Message I wrote
about the Precision Sched-
uled Railroading (PSR)
phenomenon in the railroad in-
dustry, and how PSR focuses on “asset maximization” in an ef-
fort to sharply drive down oper-
ating ratio, which is the percent-
age of railroad revenue spent on
operating costs.

This focus on operating ratio
suggests that railroads are not very
efficient. Data published by the
Association of American Rail-
oroads (AAR) show otherwise.

Between 1980 and 2016, traf-
fic density tripled, from 5.58 mil-
lion tons-per-mile to 16.99.

And, today, railroads can
move one ton of freight 479 miles
on one gallon of fuel, which is
double the fuel efficiency in 1980.

AAR also acknowledges that productivity gains by locomo-
tive engineers and trainmen over the
past four decades are simi-
larly dramatic. From 1980 through 2017, rail
employee productivity (measured
by ton-miles per employee) rose
467 percent; locomotive produc-
tivity (measured by ton-miles per
locomotive) rose 93 percent; and
average freight carried per train
rose 63 percent. The most com-
monly used broad measure of
rail-industry productivity — ton-
miles per constant-dollar oper-
ating revenue — was 159 percent
higher in 2017 than in 1980.

We all know that efficiency and productivity are contin-
uing to soar in more recent years.

Two of the most obvious chang-
es in productivity are the ever-
increasing weight of the Ameri-
can standard gauge locomotive (DFP locomotive consists
as well as the operation of lon-
ger and longer trains.

When I testified before Pres-
idential Emergency Board No.
243 in October of 2011, I dem-
strated the productivity of BLET members by showing the
Board’s members a video of a train operated from Dallas, Tex.

...
The Midwest finds itself at the forefront of the 2020 presidential election conversation. Thanks to the slim victory voters gave to President Trump in states such as Michigan and Wisconsin in 2016, those running for president this time know they need to win all across the Midwest if they want to reach the White House. So even though it’s still more than a year-and-a-half until the next general election, contenders are coming to America’s heartland to talk about the issues.

It may seem ridiculously early. But Midwesterners would be wise to engage in the process now. It’s these first months of the campaign when candidates will be fleshing out their platforms and crafting the policy ideas that they will be prioritizing. And workers must make sure that kitchen table issues that support families are the main topic of discussion. Securing good-paying jobs that will remain in this country is important. Ensuring quality health care benefits are available for everyone is important. And guaranteeing that those who worked hard all their lives will be able to retire with dignity is important.

The Teamsters have been leading the fight on these issues for years. And the union plans to take all the time it needs to consider these important factors and speak with a united voice for its members. To that end, the Teamsters have unveiled protocols for the 2020 presidential election that explain the process and dictate how candidates interested in obtaining Teamster support will work to do so. Highlighted among top concerns of the union is preventing the looming pension and retirement crisis; ensuring U.S. workers are represented in international trade deals; and protecting wages and labor standards. Candidates seeking the endorsement of the Teamsters must understand the importance unions play in the working lives of the American worker.

As the union’s endorsement process moves forward, the Teamsters will seek input from BLET and other union leaders to ensure that the candidate that earns the union’s support best represents its political priorities. While the Teamsters recognize that members may not agree on everything, working together, this union can help select and support a candidate who will grow and strengthen this union for workers and unity this country.

Fraternally,

James P. Hoffa
Teamsters General President

Middlewest Will Play Critical Role in 2020 Election

Registration open for BLET’s Clearwater regional meeting, July 22-26, 2019

Registration is now open for the BLET regional meeting at the Hilton Clearwater Beach hotel in Clearwater, Fla., July 22-26, 2019. The BLET National Division is planning a meeting filled with educational opportunities and entertaining leisure time activities. Guests will stay at the Hilton Clearwater Beach (400 Manda lay Ave, Clearwater, Fla., telephone: (800) HILTONS). BLET convention registration as well as hotel registration can be made through the BLET’s regional meeting website, http://bletregionals.org. If making reservations by telephone, you must mention the group code “BLEM19.” The Clearwater regional meeting kicks off with registration and a welcome reception on Monday, July 22 (ticket required). Opening ceremonies will take place the morning of Tuesday, July 23, with a closed meeting for BLET members that afternoon. A golf tournament will be held on Wednesday, July 24, at the Innsbrook Golf Resort. There is an additional cost to register for the golf tournament. Non-golfers will be on their own to explore the many entertainment options that Clearwater has to offer.

Workshops will be held for Local Chairmen, Secretary-Treasurers and Legislative Representatives throughout the day on Thursday, July 25. The BLET’s Clearwater regional meeting will conclude with a dinner dance the evening of July 25. Attendees will travel home on July 26.

There is no cost for BLET members who wish to attend the July 23 meetings and July 25 workshops only; however, there will be fees for those members who choose to attend the meals. The cost of full registration (including all meetings, workshops, the dinner dance and all BLET sponsored meals) is $225.00 per person. The cost is $175.00 to register for all of the above EXCEPT the dinner dance. Reduced children’s registration and a la carte meal registration options are also available. Please visit http://bletregionals.org for more information about the registration process.

The BLET will host two regional meetings in 2019. In addition to the Clearwater meeting, another regional meeting will be held in St. Louis, Mo., from June 24-28. Please visit the BLET website, Facebook page, and http://bletregionals.org for the latest information.

Securing good-paying jobs that will remain in this country is important. Ensuring quality health care benefits are available for everyone is important. And guaranteeing that those who worked hard all their lives will be able to retire with dignity is important.

SIGN UP FOR BLET NEWS FLASHES!

Register at www.ble-t.org to get Brotherhood news emailed to you

Stay up-to-date with the latest Brotherhood news by going to the BLET website and signing up to receive BLET News Flash alerts via email. The News Flash alerts are news articles from the BLET National Division website that are automatically emailed to you.

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.
THE two large railroad unions in the United States have pledged their joint support for the Safe Freight Act legislation, which was introduced by U.S. Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) during late March.

The Safe Freight Act (H.R.1748) requires that two certified crew members operate freight trains on U.S. rails and has the backing of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) and the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers — Transportation Division (SMART TD).

“This is necessary safety legislation to protect railroad workers and the American public,” BLET National President Denis R. Pierce said. “While the railroad industry talks of one-person train crews and even autonomous trains, the 2013 tragedy of Lac-Megantic is justification enough that we need two sets of eyes and ears in the locomotive cab.”

“SMART Transportation Division has been working tirelessly to promote safety in the railroad industry, and there is no doubt that the only safe rail operation is one that includes at a minimum a certified conductor and a certified locomotive engineer,” SMART TD President John Previsich said. “A clear message must be sent to our lawmakers and to the general public that multi-person crews are essential to ensuring the safest rail operations possible in their communities. I would like to thank Congressman Young for his leadership on this critical issue as we continue to improve safety on our nation’s railroads for both our members and for the general public.”

Recent well-publicized rail accidents in other nations involving trains with one or no crew members show how smaller crews increase the risk of catastrophe in rail accidents. In September 2018, an autonomous runaway TasRail train reached speeds of 31 mph before it derailed in the Tasmanian city of Devonport, injuring two people. The train had become unresponsive to remote control commands, including the train’s emergency stop feature.

On Nov. 5, 2018, a runaway BHP ore train of 268 cars with no one aboard reached speeds of 62 mph before it was forcibly derailed in Western Australia. The approximately 1.9-mile-long train loaded with iron ore was operated by a lone crew member who had left the locomotive to inspect an issue with the brakes when the train began moving.

And finally, an oil train with a single-person crew in Lac Megantic, Quebec, Canada, rolled into the center of the town.

The resulting derailment touched off an inferno that killed 47 people and destroyed the town center.

In the United States, labor unions and others concerned with safety on the United States’ 140,000 miles of rail are seeking to prevent such events from happening. Legislation setting crew size at two people aboard has passed in five states. Just this month a two-person crew bill backed by Congresswoman Young for his ongoing support and for introducing H.R. 1748.”

— John Tolman, BLET VP & SMART TD National Legislative Director John Risch said. “Congressman Young’s bill is a first step, and we thank him for his leadership on this. The safety of the public and our members depend on this.”

This national legislation introduced by Young, a longtime advocate of railroad safety, is a common-sense step toward making our nation’s rails safer for workers and the public alike. It has the full endorsement of both unions.

H.R. 1748 has been referred to the House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen represents nearly 58,000 professional locomotive engineers and trainmen throughout the United States. The BLET is the founding member of the Rail Conference, International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The SMART Transportation Division is comprised of approximately 125,000 active and retired members of the former United Transportation Union, who work in a variety of crafts in the transportation industry.

BLET and SMART TD announce national two-person crew legislation

Given the scope of this withdrawal, the Administrator has clearly failed the test, because he has placed corporate profits above public safety. Railroad safety has taken a giant step backward today, but our Organizations do not intend to let this development go unchallenged.

We frankly did not expect this Administration to complete this rulemaking, but we did afford the new Federal Railroad Administrator a fair opportunity to demonstrate that safety was his primary objective. Given the scope of this withdrawal, the Administrator has clearly failed the test, because he has placed corporate profits above public safety. Railroad safety has taken a giant step backward today, but our Organizations do not intend to let this development go unchallenged.

July 6, 2013, after its brakes disengaged. Both the BLET and SMART TD unions (H.B.1034) was signed into law March 21 by Colorado Gov. Jared Polis.

“Safety is non-negotiable, and this legislation is about railroad safety. Railroad safety has taken a giant step backward today, but our Organizations do not intend to let this development go unchallenged.

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Members of the BLET’s National Association of State Legislative Board Chairmen (NASLBC) concluded their 44th annual meeting on March 27, 2019, in San Diego, Calif.

The NASLBC has met annually since 1975 to hear from each State Chairman about railroad related safety and health issues, as well as their state’s political climate.

Members elected the following officers to lead the NASLBC for the next three years: Chairman Paul Piekarski (Illinois State Legislative Board Chairman); Vice Chairman Nick Johnson (Arizona SLBC); Secretary-Treasurer Dave Dinges (Maryland SLBC). The following Regional Chairmen were also elected: Region 1 Herbert Harris (District of Columbia SLBC); Region 2 M.D. Frank (Alabama SLBC); Region 3 David Brown (Minnesota SLBC); and Region 4 Cory Runion (Wyoming SLBC).

Several new State Legislative Board Chairmen were seated for their first NASLBC meeting, including: Brendan Sullivan (Florida SLBC); Shane Hubbard (Indiana SLBC); Calvin Groose (Missouri SLBC); Lanie Keith (Mississippi SLBC); Tim Laverne (Pennsylvania SLBC); and Jeff Rich (Tennessee SLBC).

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce, First Vice National President E. Lee Prutt, National Secretary-Treasurer Stephen J. Bruno, and Vice President & National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman were in attendance and addressed the NASLBC members and guests. President Pierce thanked the Chairmen for their service to the Brotherhood and discussed a number of issues, including efforts on the state and national levels to secure two-person crew laws.

Also, BLET Director of Regulatory Affairs Vince Verna and BLET Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Bob Hagan both made presentations on behalf of the National Division. Kat Bubekis, BLET Auxiliary National President, and Jessica Cole, BLET Auxiliary National Second Vice President and National Legislative Representative, also addressed the group.

Guest speakers included: Rich Connor of the Federal Railroad Administration, who discussed Hours of Service regulations; and Bob Apriceno of the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE), who discussed the group’s advocacy in assisting all active and retired railroad employees in support of Railroad Retirement.

The various committees of the Association also met and conducted their business for the year. The group will reconvene in 2020 for their 45th annual convention, which will be held in Austin, Texas.
BLET lobbies Capitol Hill, regulatory agencies for crew member safety

BLET officers and staff invested a lot of legwork lobbying for rail worker safety during the early part of March 2019. The BLET lobbying effort was led by National President Dennis R. Pierce and Vice President and National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman, with invaluable support for BLET Director of Regulatory Affairs Vince Verna and BLET Legislative and Political Director Bob Hagan.

On March 5, 6 and 7, the BLET team met with a dozen members of the U.S. House and Senate from both political parties, and held meetings with the heads of regulatory agencies, including Federal Railroad Administrator Ron Batory, Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, and National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Robert Sumwalt and Member Jennifer Homendy. President Pierce also met with the heads of the National Carriers’ Conference Committee and the Association of American Railroads.

Key meetings were held with Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and Congressman Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), the Assistant Speaker of the House; the staff of Congressman Rick Crawford (D-AR), ranking member on the Railroad Subcommittee; Congressman Dan Lipinski (D-IL); Congressman Don Young (R-AK); the staff of Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS); Congressman Stephen Lynch (D-MA); Congressman Sam Graves (R-MO); Congressman Joe Kennedy (D-MA); and Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA).

Among the topics discussed were NAFTA and protecting union jobs in the cross-border dispute involving Mexican train crews entering the United States; the need for two-person train crews to ensure higher levels of rail safety; the need to implement Positive Train Control as a layer of safety protection and not as a job reduction or replacement tool; precision scheduled railroading and its detrimental impact on safety and jobs; the need for accurate crew line up to combat train crew fatigue; and railroad safety in general.

“Our meetings with the members of Congress and their staff were encouraging and supportive of our point of view,” President Pierce said. “We will continue working with our friends in Congress across both political parties in order to best protect the rights and interests of our membership.”

Members of the BLET delegation meet with NTSB members and staff.

Jennifer Homendy, NTSB Board Member; Dennis Pierce, BLET President; Robert Sumwalt, NTSB Chairman; and John Tolman, BLET VP and NLR representative, meet with the heads of regulatory agencies.

SUPREME COURT FINDS INJURY AWARD FOR LOST WAGES IS TAXABLE COMPENSATION UNDER RAILROAD RETIREMENT TAX ACT

A recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court found that the portion of a damages award attributable to lost wages for a workplace injury is considered to be taxable compensation under the Railroad Retirement Tax Act (RRTA). The decision in BNSF Railway Co. v. Loos (No. 17-1042) was released by the Court on March 4, 2019. Loos was awarded damages of $142,900 for a workplace injury under the Federal Employers’ Liability Act (FELA), a law allowing railroad workers to file suit against their employers for on-the-job injuries. Mr. Loos was awarded damages of $126,212, of which $30,000 was attributable to lost wages from BNSF. BNSF indicated that it would withhold Railroad Retirement taxes from the lost wages portion of the award. Mr. Loos disagreed with this theory of withholding, arguing that, consistent with the RRTA’s definition of compensation, the payment must be “for services rendered” in order to be taxable and instead of compensation for services rendered the payment at issue compensated for an injury.

The issue worked its way from the lower courts to the Supreme Court. Oral arguments took place on November 6, 2018, and the Court rendered its decision on a 7-2 vote. In reversing the decision of the Circuit Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, the Supreme Court held that the RRTA’s definition of compensation includes not simply pay for active service, but also “pay for periods of absence from active service provided there is an employer-employee relationship.” Whether the employer chooses to make the payment through a voluntary settlement or is involuntary made to do so through an award of damages is immaterial so long as the payment for lost wages is provided based on the recipient’s status as a service-rendering employee.

The Internal Revenue Service administers the RRTA and, therefore, is the official source for railroad retirement tax information. However, for purposes only of illustrating the Court’s decision, the following example is provided. In 2019, railroad employees and employees subject to a railroad retirement tier I payroll tax of 7.65 percent (6.2 percent on earnings up to $132,900 for retirement, and 1.45 percent on all earnings for Medicare hospital insurance) and a tier II tax of 13.3 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively, on earnings up to $199,600. An additional 0.9 percent in hospital insurance taxes, 2.35 percent in total, applies to an individual’s income exceeding $200,000, or $250,000 for a married couple filing a joint tax return. If a railroad employee with no other earnings in 2019 is awarded $300,000, the payment at issue would exceed $98,700. An additional 0.9 percent in hospital insurance taxes, 2.35 percent in total, applies to an individual’s income exceeding $200,000, or $250,000 for a married couple filing a joint tax return. If a railroad employee with no other earnings in 2019 is awarded $300,000, the payment at issue would exceed $98,700.
Q&A: Comparison of benefits under Railroad Retirement and Social Security

1. How do the average monthly railroad retirement and social security benefits paid to retired employees and spouses compare?

The average age annuity being paid by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) at the end of fiscal year 2018 was $3,050 a month for railroad workers who retired or deceased with 30 or more years of service. Social security benefit payments over and above social security also averaged $3,050 a month for railroad workers who retired or deceased with 30 or more years of service. In addition,railroad workers earning over $132,900 a year in 2019 compare to $132,900 a year in 2019. The average age annuity being paid by the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) at the end of fiscal year 2018 was $3,050 a month for railroad workers who retired or deceased with 30 or more years of service. Social security benefit payments over and above social security also averaged $3,050 a month for railroad workers who retired or deceased with 30 or more years of service. In addition,railroad workers earning over $132,900 a year in 2019 compare to $132,900 a year in 2019.

2. Are the benefits awarded to recent retirees generally greater than the benefits payable to those who retired years ago?

Yes, because recent awards are based on higher average earnings. Age annuities awarded to career railroad employees retiring in fiscal year 2018 averaged about $4,175 a month while monthly benefits awarded to workers retiring at full retirement age under social security averaged $1,915. If spouse benefits are added, the combined benefits for the employee and spouse would total approximately $5,815 under railroad retirement coverage, compared to $2,875 under social security. Adding a supplemental annuity to the railroad retirement payment increases average total benefits for current career rail retirees to about $5,850 a month.

3. What are the disability benefits currently awarded?

Disabled railroad workers retiring directly from the railroad industry in fiscal year 2018 were awarded $3,050 a month on average while awards for disabled workers under social security averaged $1,340. While both the Railroad Retirement and Social Security Acts provide benefits to workers who are totally disabled for any job, the Railroad Retirement Act also provides disability benefits specifically for employees who are disabled because of an injury arising out of and in the course of their railroad occupation. Employees may be eligible for such an occupational disability annuity at age 60 with 10 years of service, or at any age with 20 years of service.

4. Can railroad employees receive benefits at earlier ages than workers under social security?

Railroad employees with 30 or more years of service are eligible for regular annuities based on age and service the first full month they are age 60, and railroad employees with less than 30 years of creditable service are eligible for regular annuities based on age and service the first full month they are age 62. No early retirement reduction applies if a railroad employee retires at age 60 or older with 30 years of service and his or her retirement is after 2001, or if the employee retired before 2002 at age 62 or older with 30 years of service. Early retirement reductions are otherwise applied to annuities awarded before full retirement age, the age at which an employee can receive full benefits with no reduction for early retirement. This ranges from age 65 for those born before 1930 to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later, the same as under social security. Under social security, a worker can not begin receiving retirement benefits based on age until age 62, regardless of how long he or she worked, and social security retirement benefits are reduced for retirement prior to full retirement age regardless of years of coverage.

5. Can the spouse of a railroad employee receive a benefit at an earlier age than the spouse of a worker under social security?

If a retired railroad employee with 30 or more years of service is age 60, the employee’s spouse is also eligible for an annuity the first full month the spouse is age 60. Certain early retirement reductions are applied if the employee first became eligible for a $600 annuity July 1, 1984, or later, and retired at ages 60 or 61 before 2002. If the employee was awarded a disability annuity, has attained age 60, and has 30 years of service, the spouse can receive an unreduced annuity the first full month she or he is age 60, regardless of whether the employee annuity began before or after 2002, as long as the spouse’s annuity beginning date is after 2001.

6. How do social security and railroad retirement benefits compare?

Social security does pay certain types of benefits that are not available under railroad retirement. For example, social security provides children’s benefits when an employee is disabled, retired or deceased. Under current law, the Railroad Retirement Act only provides children’s benefits if the employee is deceased.

However, the Railroad Retirement Act includes a special minimum guarantee provision which ensures that railroad families will not receive less in monthly benefits than they would have if railroad earnings were covered by social security rather than railroad retirement laws. This guaranty is intended to cover situations in which one or more members of a family would otherwise be eligible for a type of social security benefit that is not provided under the Railroad Retirement Act. Therefore, if a retired railroad employee has children who would otherwise be eligible for a benefit under social security, the employee’s annuity can be increased to reflect what social security would pay the family.

7. How much are monthly benefits for survivors under railroad retirement and social security?

Survivor benefits are generally higher if payable by the RRB rather than social security. At the end of fiscal year 2018, the average annuity being paid to all aged and disabled widow(er)s was $1,705 a month, compared to $1,305 under social security.

8. How do railroad retirement and social security lump sum benefits differ?

Both the railroad retirement and social security systems provide a lump sum benefit. The Railroad Retirement lump-sum benefit is generally payable only if survivor annuities are not immediately due upon an employee’s death. The social security lump-sum benefit may be payable regardless of whether monthly benefits are also due. Both railroad retirement and social security provide a lump-sum benefit of $255. However, if a railroad employee completed 10 years of creditable railroad service before 1975, the average railroad retirement lump-sum benefit payable is $1,020. Also, if an employee had less than 10 years of service, but had at least 5 years of service after 1975, he or she would have had an insured status under social security law (counting both railroad retirement and social security credits) in order for the $255 lump sum benefit to be payable.

The social security lump sum is generally only payable to the widow(er) living with the employee at the time of death. Under railroad retirement, if the employee had 10 years of service before 1975, and was not survived by a living widow(er), the lump sum may be paid to the funeral home or the payer of the funeral expenses.

9. How do railroad retirement and social security payroll taxes compare?

Railroad retirement payroll taxes, like railroad retirement benefits, are calculated on a two-tier basis. Railroad employees earning over $132,900 a year in 2019 pay the same rate as social security taxes, 7.65 percent, consisting of 6.20 percent for retirement on earnings up to $132,900 in 2019, and 1.45 percent for Medicare hospital insurance on all earnings. An additional 0.9 percent in Medicare taxes (2.35 percent in total) will be withheld from employees on earnings above $200,000.

10. How much are regular railroad retirement taxes for an employee earning $132,900 in 2019 compared to social security taxes?

The maximum amount of regular railroad retirement taxes that an employee earning $132,900 a year in 2019 is $15,003.15, compared to $10,166.85 under social security. For railroad employees, the maximum annual regular railroad retirement taxes are $132,900, compared to $10,166.85 under social security. For railroad employees earning $132,900 and individuals earning $132,900, railroad employees earning $132,900 and individuals earning $132,900 may pay in railroad retirement taxes than the above amounts because the Medicare hospital insurance tax is applied to all earnings, not

employers and employees covered by the Railroad Retirement Tax Act pay higher re-

irement taxes than those covered by the Social Secu-

rity Act, so that railroad retirement benefits re-

main higher than social security benefits, especially for career employees who have 30 or more years of service. The following questions and answers show the differences in railroad retirement and social security benefits payable at the close of the fiscal year ending September 30, 2018. They also show the differences in age requirements and pay-

roll taxes under the two systems.
BLET member killed in off-duty accident

April 7 when he was rear-ended on Interstate 37 south of San Antonio, Texas.

He is survived by his mother, Jimmie Siemens; three sisters, Selina Ramos and Emily Ramos and their daughter, Delia; and his nieces and nephews and other relatives.

Funeral services were held on April 16 at Coastal Bend Fellowship Church in Kingsville, Texas.

This is a terrible tragedy and a heartbreaking loss to all who knew and loved Brother Rene,” BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said.

BLET National Division, I ex- tend our most heartfelt condolences to the friends and family of Brother Ramos.®