Along with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) strongly opposes so-called ‘right-to-work’ legislation introduced in the U.S. Congress on January 31, and the National Division is urging all union members and their families to contact Congress to express their opposition to this destructive anti-union/anti-worker bill.

Intended to hurt workers and their unions, H.R. 785 is sponsored by Reps. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) and Steve King (R-Iowa). It would amend the National Labor Relations Act and the Railway Labor Act to forbid union security provisions in all contracts in all industries everywhere in the country. Right-to-work laws forbid requiring all workers in the craft to share the costs of negotiating and administering agreements that apply to everyone in the craft; without the financial support of everyone in the craft, the union is faced with having to cutback the services it provides, which obviously hurts everyone.

And that is exactly what the sponsors of this legislation want. If they are able to undermine the union’s finances and thus the union’s ability to represent workers in ensuring fair treatment in the workplace, this will sow dissatisfaction and, they hope, render the union powerless. We will no longer be able to negotiate contracts to protect and improve your wages and conditions of employment, while at the same time spreading the cost of that representation among all of the workers who reap the benefits.

Members can call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121, and ask to speak with the House of Representative member from your Congressional District. Contact information can also be found online here: http://www.house.gov/htbin/findrep.

“The fact of the matter is that the so-called ‘right-to-work’ law would severely undermine the rights, compensation and benefits that workers have on the job by destroying their union representation.”

— DENNIS R. PIERCE, BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Continued on page 2
BLET PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE  

BY DENNIS R. PIERCE

The Benefits of Belonging

Make no mistake, you are the Union, and an attack on your wages and benefits is also an attack on our Union. There is no better example of that attack than the current round of bargaining for our national contract.

To address the question, “What do I have to show for belonging to the BLET?”, I have asked our National Division staff to do some research so that we can all be aware of just what is at stake in these anti-union, anti-union contract, times. Current under development is a series of articles titled “The Benefits of Belonging.” This series of reports will explain some of the benefits the BLET has negotiated on behalf of our members, and show when and how they were obtained and improved. Our effort is not to ignore the fact that there is much to improve upon, but is instead an effort to show what could be taken away if our Union does not survive the current anti-union attacks.

Make no mistake, you are the Union, and an attack on your wages and benefits is also an attack on our Union. There is no better example of that attack than the current round of bargaining for our national contract. The Carriers have delayed making any meaningful offers, in fact, recent proposals provided to one of the other bargaining coalitions make it clear that they intend to pursue dramatic changes to our Health and Welfare benefits, while offering pitiful wage increases. BLET’s bargaining coalition will have more than enough in its first mediated bargaining session by the time you read this article, and I have every expectation that the Carriers will have pushed a similar “bad faith” proposal to our coalition as well.

You have my commitment, and that of our National Negotiating Team, that we will do everything in our power to prevent such a proposal from becoming your next National Contract. But that is where the political world truly collides with our efforts. Winning, keeping and improving national contract benefits is a process that frequently exhausts all avenues of resolution, beginning with the collective bargaining process under the Railway Labor Act. Absent a dramatic showing of support, we will all likely move through mediation without reaching a proposed agreement that you would find acceptable. In that event, we must all be mindful that it is President Trump who will appoint a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB). There obviously are opinions on both sides of whether or not the President will take action to support working class Americans by appointing a fair PEB, but one thing is certain: we will find if and when he does make that appointment exactly where he stands with our membership.

Regardless of the answer to that question, the PEB will make its recommendations, good or bad. Either way, it will be incumbent upon the Rail Unions to make an effort to use those recommendations to negotiate a proposed contract. If that effort does not result in an agreement that you would ratify, the ultimate conclusion of our contract dispute will be decided by Congress. That is also when we will find out exactly where the current Congress stands with our unemployment. I share this not to paint a gloomy picture of the future, but to ensure that all members understand just how affected by politics we all are as we labor under the terms and conditions of the Railway Labor Act. Some members have suggested that rail Unions “hide” behind the Railway Labor Act (RLA), but nothing could be further from the truth. The RLA is the law of the land when it comes to the processes that all Rail Unions must follow. There is no choice available to ignore the law; in fact, those who suggest we should break the law are not only putting your Union representation at risk, they are putting the benefits of your existing Collective Bargaining Agreement at risk. Benefits such as paid holidays, vacations, health care, and the seniority system are all benefits that we enjoy today due to the longevity and success of our Brotherhood. I cannot say if enough, none of those benefits survive in a non-union rail workplace.

Please take the time to read the upcoming series outlining the “Benefits of Belonging.” It is my hope that you will agree, that rail Unions “hide” behind the law; in fact, those who suggest we should break the law are not only putting your Union representation at risk, they are putting the benefits of your existing Collective Bargaining Agreement at risk. Benefits such as paid holidays, vacations, health care, and the seniority system are all benefits that we enjoy today due to the longevity and success of our Brotherhood. I cannot say if enough, none of those benefits survive in a non-union rail workplace.

Again, please call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask your member of Congress to oppose H.R. 785, the national “right-to-work” bill.®

® Dennis R. Pierce  
BLET National President
Evans reelected to third term as Mississippi State Legislative Board Chairman

To that end, there is a need to end incentives for non-U.S. production that eliminate jobs and push down wages. The offshoring of jobs can be curbed through stronger enforcement of trade deal rules. New provisions are also needed to address currency management, labor and the environment, while rules undermining this country’s “Buy American” federal procurement program should be discarded.

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.
He U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has announced a schedule of dates for the agency’s spring 2017 informational conferences. Informal conferences will be held in various locations across the country concluding on June 23 in Portland, Oregon. Additional conference for fall 2017 will be announced at a later date.

Started approximately 60 years ago by the RRB’s Office of the Labor Member, the conferences provide rail union officers with a comprehensive overview of the provisions and financing of the railroad retirement and unemployment insurance systems. These officials, in turn, pass on to their fellow rail labor membership the information acquired at the conferences.

New this year is the ability to register online for conferences. To go paperless and avoid having to mail or fax your registration form, please visit the RRB’s Informational Conference Program website: www.rrb.gov/imo/info_conf.asp. Registration links will be made active about 60 days prior to the start of each conference. Informal conferences are open to union officials and their spouses by invitation only. Labor representatives who do not receive an invitation to a conference in their area should contact the RRB toll-free at (877) 772-5772 and request that they be added to the agency’s invitation database. Registration for each informational conference begins at 8:00 a.m., with the programs beginning promptly at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 12:15 p.m. (CT).

Registering is now open for the BLET regional meeting at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio Riverwalk, June 5-9, 2017. The BLET National Division is planning a meeting filled with educational opportunities and entertaining leisure time activities. Guests will stay at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio Riverwalk, (123 Leoness St., San Antonio, TX 78205, (210) 222-1234). BLET convention registration as well as hotel registration can be made through the BLET’s regional meeting website, www.bletregionals.org. If making reservations by telephone, you must mention the group code “BLET.” Room reservations must be made by April 28, 2017.

Located just steps away from the San Antonio Riverwalk, the Hyatt Regency is a three-minute walk from the Majestic Theatre and a six-minute walk from the historic Alamo. The San Antonio regional meeting kicks off with registration and a welcome reception on Monday, June 5. Opening ceremonies will take place the morning of Tuesday, June 6, with a closed meeting for BLET members that afternoon. A golf tournament will be held on Wednesday, June 7, at the Silverhorn Golf Club. The cost to register for the golf tournament is $160.00 per person. Non-golfers will be on their own to explore the many entertainment options that San Antonio has to offer.

Workshops will be held for Local Chairmen, Secretary-Treasurers and Legislative Representatives throughout the day on Thursday, June 8. The BLET’s San Antonio regional meeting will conclude with a banquet the evening of June 8. Attendees will travel home on June 9. There is no cost for BLET members who wish to attend the June 6 meetings and June 8 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 banquet and all BLET sponsored meals) is $200.00 per person.


R R R

Registration open for BLET’s San Antonio regional meeting

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The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) determined on February 7, 2017, that a broken axle set off a series of actions that resulted in an accident in which about 476,000 gallons of crude oil spilled and ignited near Casselton, North Dakota. The derailment occurred on December 30, 2013, and contributed to a national debate concerning a widely used rail tank car.

The oil spilled from 18 of 20 derailed DOT-111 tank cars. The oil then formed pools that caught fire. Other derailed tank cars eventually ruptured as the heat from the fire weakened the tank steel and increased the internal pressure until oil vapor erupted in violent fires.

Among its recommendations, the NTSB suggested studying the use of additional “buffer” cars between locomotives and cars carrying hazardous materials to protect crews. The Casselton oil train had a single buffer car between the locomotives and its hazardous cargo. Due to damage caused to the lead locomotive during the derailment, the train crew was forced to exit through the rear of the locomotive and closer to the trailing inferno.

The NTSB found that the chain of events for the accident began when a train carrying grain derailed because of a broken axle on one of its cars. A second train on an adjacent track, carrying crude oil, was unable to stop in time before colliding with the derailed cars of the grain train.

NTSB investigators found a void in the middle of the broken axle of the grain train, which was used previously on another train car. In response to the NTSB’s urgent safety recommendation on the matter, the American Association of Railroads has moved to require testing of secondhand use axles.

There were no fatalities or serious injuries resulting from the accident, but nearly 1,500 people were evacuated from nearby homes.

The NTSB has long had concerns about DOT-111 tank cars. The cars have a relatively thin 7/16-inch shell thickness, are not puncture-resistant, and lack thermal protection as well as top and bottom fittings protection. The board reiterated its recommendations for quickly phasing out DOT-111 rail tank cars and its variants.

Since the accident, Congress and the U.S. Department of Transportation have established requirements for a new, stronger DOT-117 tank car to replace the DOT-111. However, the deadline for replacing DOT-111 rail tank cars and its variants extends to 2029. Relatively few DOT-111s currently remain in crude-oil service, yet a vast fleet of these less-safe tank cars continues in service for ethanol and other flammable liquids.

As part of the accident investigation, the NTSB studied advanced brake systems. While their use would not have prevented the Casselton accident, it may have mitigated the damage. In other scenarios, advanced brake systems have the potential to prevent train accidents altogether.

An abstract and its findings, the formal report, will be available at www.ntsb.gov. The final report will be available on the NTSB website in several weeks.
Hunter Harrison new CEO at CSX

Executive Officer (CEO) of Illinois Central, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways, has been named the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CSX. CSX also announced that it has reached an agreement with Mantle Ridge LP, an investment firm formed by Paul Hilal, to reconstitute the Company’s Board of Directors. Under the terms of the agreement, CSX has appointed five new directors to its Board of Directors, mutually agreed upon by CSX and Mantle Ridge. According to an earlier CSX press release, “On January 18, 2017, Mantle Ridge had recently become a CSX shareholder owning less than 5 percent of the Company’s stock. Mantle Ridge also advised CSX that Mr. Harrison had terminated his employment with Canadian Pacific that day, while working with Mantle Ridge on an exclusive basis and would be eager to become CEO of CSX. CSX has been engaged in CEO succession discussions and was planning to make an announcement. In light of Mr. Harrison’s notable experience and accomplishments, however, the CSX Board quickly engaged in extensive discussions with Mr. Harrison and Mantle Ridge, including by inviting Mr. Harrison and Mantle Ridge to present to and engage in dialogue with the full CSX Board during a meeting, which lasted more than five hours.”

According to media reports, Harrison was seeking a four-year deal with CSX worth approximately $300 million. Harrison arrived at Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) in 2012. Doug Parker, then chairman, president and CEO of Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, the union that represents CP’s 3,000 engineers, conductors and traffic controllers, had one message for CSX work force: “Thank God that you’re unionized—she

TCU/IAM ELEVATES HOLLIS AND GUNN TO VICE-PRESIDENT POSITIONS

In November 2016, the Transportation Communications Union/International Association of Machinists (TCU/IAM) Executive Council elected National Representatives Matt Hollis and Mary Gunn to be as its National Vice President. It is believed that Sister Gunn is one of the first women to hold a national level office in a rail labor union.

Hollis, 52, began his Railroad employment in February 2004 for CSXT Railroad as a yard clerk at Boylay Yard in Birmingham, Alabama. He joined TCU Lodge 691 where he was appointed to serve on the local Lodge Board of Directors. On October 1, 2005, he was elected to represent TCU/IAM Local Unit 92 for Unit 92 and then to the TCU/IAM Lodge 691 Executive Board. Hollis began serving as a TCU/IAM National Vice President effective December 1, 2016. Gunn hired on as an organizer for AFL-CIO Railroad in Kansas City, Kansas in June of 1977. She became active in Local Lodge 121, appointed to Protective Committee Member in 1979 and elected as Local Chairman in 1981. Sister Gunn was elected to OST for Unit 92 in 2004 and then National Representative on October 1, 2005. Gunn began serving as TCU/IAM National Vice President effective January 1, 2016.

In addition to Sister Gunn, Sister Staci Moody-Gilbert serves as General Chairwoman of the BM- WED’s Burlington System Division and is Secretary of its National Executive Board.
What are the basic railroad & retirement work restrictions and earnings limitations that apply to post-retirement work?  

Neither a regular railroad retirement annuitant (whether based on age and service or on disability) nor a supplemental annuity is payable for any month in which a retired employee engages in work for an employer covered under the Rail- 
road Retirement Act, including labor or- 
ganizations. This is true even if only one 
day’s service is performed in such a 
month, and includes local lodge compensa-
tion totaling $25 or more for any cal-
edar month. Regardless of the amount of 
salary, work by a local lodge or divi-
sion secretary collecting insurance pre-
miums is considered railroad work and, 
therefore, no annuity is payable for any 
month in which such activity occurs. 

A supplemental annuity is not payable 
for any month in which the employee’s 
annuity is not payable, or for any month in which 
the spouse, regardless of age, works for an 
employer covered under the Railroad Retire-
ment Act. A divorced spouse annuity is not 
considered to be payable for months in which 
the divorced spouse, regardless of age, works 
for an employer covered under the Rail-
road Retirement Act. A divorced spouse 
can receive an annuity even if the employ-
ee has not retired, provided they have been 
divorced for at least 2 years, the employee 
and divorced spouse are at least age 62, 
and the employee is fully insured under 
the Social Security Act using combined 
railroad and social security earnings. A 
survivor annuity is not payable for any 
month the survivor works for an employ-
er covered under the Railroad Retirement 
Act, regardless of the survivor’s age. 

Also, like social security benefits, rail-
road retirement tier I benefits and vested 
dual benefits paid to employees, spouses 
and divorced spouses, and tier II and 
vested dual benefits paid to survivors, 
are subject to deductions if an annuitant’s earn-
ings exceed certain exempt amounts. These 
educations do not apply to those who have 
attained full social security re-
tirement age. Full retirement age for em-
ployees is 65 for those born before 1938 to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later. Full retirement 
age for survivor annuitants ranges from 
age 60 for those born before 1956 to age 67 for 
those born in 1962 or later. Deductions for 
all annuitants, however, remain in ef-
force throughout 2017, the exempt amount 
months derived by dividing the amount 
by which those earnings exceed the an-
nuity amount by the number of the monthly 
limit. Any resulting fraction of a month 
rounded up, increasing the number of 
months in which the annuity is not pay-
able. For example, a disabled em-
ployee annuitant earns $15,500 in 2017, 
which is $12,500 over the 2017 annual lim-
it of $3,075. Dividing $12,500 by $3,075 yields 4.53. As .53 is more than one-half, the an-
nuitant would lose 5 months of benefits. 

These disability work restrictions cease 
upon a disabled employee annuitant’s at-
tainment of full retirement age (age 65-
67). This transition is effective no earlier 
than full retirement age even if the an-
nuitant had 30 years of service. Earnings 
deductions continue to apply to those 
working for their last pre-retirement 
railroad employer. 

If a disabled employee annuitant works 
before full retirement age, this may also 
raise a question about the possibility of 
the individual’s recovery from disability, 
regardless of the amount of earnings. Con-
sequently, any work activity must be 
reported promptly to avoid overpayments, 
which are recoverable by the RRB and 
may also include significant penalties. 

A disability annuity is not payable for 
any month in which the disabled employee 
annuitant earns more than $4,725 (2017) 
or $4,125 (2016) in any employment or net 
self-employment, exclusive of disability-
related work expenses. If a disabled em-
ployee annuitant’s earnings exceed a 
(month 

6.5) is rounded up, increasing the number of 
months in which the annuity is not pay-
able. For example, a disabled em-
ployee annuitant earns $15,500 in 2017, 
which is $12,500 over the 2017 annual lim-
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reported promptly to avoid overpayments, 
which are recoverable by the RRB and 
may also include significant penalties. 

Do the special earnings restrictions listed in question 5 apply to disabled widow(er) and disabled child 

child annuities? 

The earnings restrictions listed in ques-
tion 5 do not apply to disabled widow(
er) 6 age 60 or disabled children. However, the annuity of an unmarried 
disabled widow(er) technically becomes an age annuity when the widow(er) at-
tains age 60. Therefore, regular annual 
educations apply beginning 
with the month the widow(er) attains age 
60 and ending with the month before the 
month the widow(er) attains full retire-
ment age (see question 2 above). 

Also, if a disabled widow(er) works be-
fore full retirement age, this may also raise 
a question about the individual’s recovery from disability, re-
gardless of the amount of earnings. There-
fore, any work activity must be reported 
quickly to avoid overpayments, which 
are recoverable by the RRB and may also 
include significant penalties. 

7. A railroad retirement employee 
annuitant is considering of becoming 
a self-employed contractor or 
consultant, and might be providing 
services for a railroad or last pre-retirement nonrailroad employer. How would this affect his or her 
annuitant's annuity? 

It depends on whether or not the RRB 

consider the annuitant to be truly en-
gaging in self-employed contracting 
or consulting, or whether the agency con-

siders him or her to be functioning as an 
employee, and if so, who the RRB con-
siders the employee for railroad 

retirement purposes. 

If a retiree is considered to be functioning 
as a self-employed contractor or con-
ultant, and might be providing 
services for a railroad or last pre-retirement 
nonrailroad employer, the retiree’s annuity 
would be subject to suspension. If the retiree is 
considered the employee of a railroad 
or railroad labor organization, rath-
er than as a self-employed contractor or 
consultant, the retiree’s annuity would be 
susceptible to penalty. 

RRB determinations on contracting or 
consulting services take into account 
multiple factors which could be evalu-
ed differently depending on the circums-
stances of the individual situation. Since 
no single rule covers every case, anyone 
requiring a determination as to whether 
contractor or consultant service is valid 
self-employment should contact the RRB 
for a determination well in advance of 
making a commitment so as to be sure of 
the effect on benefit payments. 

8. How can people get more 
information about these railroad 
retirement work restrictions and 
educations limitations? 

Claimants with questions about rail-
road retirement work restrictions and 
educations limitations should contact an 
RRB district office. District office 
numbers range from 1-800-722-7727 to 
722-7727. Claimants can also find the ad-
dress of the RRB office serving their area 
and get information about their claims 
by calling this toll-free number. Field office 
locations can also be found by visiting www.rrb.gov. 

The office is open weekdays except on 
weekends from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 
except on Wednesdays when offices are 
open from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. RRB 
ofices are closed on Federal holidays.


**UNION PACIFIC STEAM:** Union Pacific 4-8-4 No. 844 heads home for UP’s steam shops in Cheyenne, Wyoming, as letters Bailey Yard in North Platte, Nebraska, on the morning of October 31, 2016. It is the last steam locomotive built for the Union Pacific and was delivered to the company in 1944. Photo: Chasse Gunnoe

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**Are you a photographer?** The National Director's Public Relations Department, who produces the News, letter each month, has received numerous inquiries lately from BLET members volunteering to contribute their images to the "Photo of the Month" section of the News. Members are also encouraged to review the BLET’s photography guidelines located in the front of the News. Please note only high resolution images can be used. Members who wish to provide photos for consideration, you may call Editor John Bentley at (216) 241-2630, ext. 248, or you can email: Bentley@blet.org

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