Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) achieved a significant milestone with the ratification of their first-ever union contract with the Illinois Railway (IR) on March 21, 2016. More than 80 percent of members who cast a valid ballot voted in favor of the agreement.

Train and engine service employees at the formerly non-union railroad voted to join the BLET in August of 2014, and negotiations began shortly thereafter. The new four-year deal governs about 32 members and establishes hourly wage rates, overtime, and the concept of a basic day, which guarantees members a minimum of eight hours pay for each tour of duty. The contract runs through January 1, 2020.

The newly ratified agreement establishes a seniority system for job bidding and placement, making job assignment a purely objective function. This is significant as it addresses the concerns of many IR members who were upset with how they were assigned to positions, especially when they saw an employee who was hired after them assigned to a position they themselves deemed more desirable.

Continued on page 7 •••

Registration for the BLET’s 2016 Regional Meetings will be available soon! Please watch the BLET National Division website and Facebook page for the latest information. The Chicago Regional Meeting will be held July 11-14, 2016, at the Drake Hotel. The Long Beach Regional Meeting will be held August 22-25, 2016, at the Hyatt Regency. The Drake in Chicago is a beautifully restored grand hotel, and the Hyatt Regency in Long Beach is in the heart of the Long Beach Harbor entertainment area.

Join us in Long Beach!

AUGUST 22-25, 2016

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FRA advances rulemaking for two-person train crews

On Tuesday, March 15, The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) published a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) establishing minimum requirements for the size of train crew staffing depending on the type of operation. The FRA’s proposed rule provides compelling reasons trains should be crewed by at least two persons. BLET applauds the FRA’s willingness to take a hard look at many scientific concepts that need to be considered when determining crew sizes.

BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce and officers at all levels of the Organization have warned the FRA and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) at every opportunity regarding the dangers that task overload presents to train crews. To be clear, however, task overload does not lead to the nebulous term “loss of situational awareness.” The words “loss of...”
A t this edition of the News goes to press we are all being inundated with information about the primary processes for both the Democratic and the Republican Party. Many of the BLET’s 36,000 active members have listened to the platforms and candidates but have been pushed on them for the last few months, and also have developed their own opinions about who, from either party, would actually work to improve their lot in life. Other members continue to gather information, holding out hope that some candidate will step forward who is in line with the principles that they hold near and dear.

As part of that process, this column in the coming months will offer BLET members additional information on what the two parties and their eventual nominees, may bring to our lives. Before that happens, however, it is important for all BLET members to realize that there is no politician from either party who will agree with our union, or with us as individuals, on all of the issues of the day. If anyone promises that they can be everything that you want, they are in my experience promising you something that they cannot, and will not deliver. Indeed, our efforts as working class Americans should be to support candidates who actually will work to improve the living standards and work-place safety of the working class. Against that backdrop, we look at each candidate’s voting record and past actions on the issues that impact working class Americans, and more importantly, working class railroad employees. I am well aware that my analysis will be well received by some members, and rejected by others. That does not mean that the BLET National Division’s view on the issues that confront us should divide us. Instead, it should be a part of a deeper discussion about the actual chances for any given candidate to truly improve the lives of working class Americans. As we all know, there generally are two sides to every story, and in most cases the issues are much more complicated than the 30-second sound bites that politicians share on any given issue. For example, the downturn in coal traffic — and the related furloughs that operating employees are experiencing — have generated a steady stream of correspondence to the National Division, mostly blaming the Democratic Party for this turn of events. In answer to the questions that the National Division receives on this issue, I can honestly tell you that I am not satisfied or pleased with the current administration’s policies that support natural gas over coal at our nation’s power plants. It is no secret that I have written President Obama on more than one occasion urging that the nation’s energy plan must include a place for coal.

While all BLET members understand that the railroads they work for are profit-driven corporations, many have overlooked that deregulated utilities are no different. In reality, much of the conversion from coal to natural gas in existing power plants has been driven not by profit-driven concerns, but by the fuel whether the EPA mandates it or not. That profit-driven conversion is at the expense of our jobs that are tied to the coal industry, but many members have never considered how we get to this point.

Ironically, the cheap natural gas that we hear about comes largely from the efforts of the Bush administration to relax EPA rules governing hydraulic fracturing drilling operations — more commonly known as fracking — in its 2005 Energetic Bill. That Bill, which included provisions of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill, was driven by the expansion of that coal corridor, which included upgrading the tracks east and west of Lincoln, Nebraska, and adding sidings and double track to accommodate the increase in coal traffic. My transfer to engine service was equally tied to coal, as BN struggled to satisfy the demand for coal transportation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which grew faster than anyone could have projected.

All the while, we were told that the then called the “Hall/La Loophole,” stripped the EPA of its authority to regulate fracking. The end result has been an astronomical increase in fracking, which led to cheaper natural gas prices that continue to threaten coal production. The collective energy policies of the Bush administration, along with the famous “drill baby, drill” agenda heard loud and clear in the last Presidential election, are what created the world of cheap natural gas that now pushes coal out of many of the nation’s power plants. I share this so that you understand that the version of this story that you hear on the news every evening from your employer, may not include all of the factors that have impacted the ability of our membership to earn a living. The bottom line is that neither political party has entirely cleaned the slate that it has come to coal and the downturn in the coal industry. It also is important to recognize the role that the utilities have played in coal’s downturn, and I share my personal experience as a railroad employee to spotlight that role.

Ironically, the cheap natural gas that now pushes coal out of the power plants has all but been reduced to zero, due to the speculation that for coal to return, the Utilities will need to install scrubbers to control power plant emissions. The effect of any pain on America’s northern border due to power plant emissions was discussed at least in the 1970s, yet the utilities that we delivered coal to put short-term profits over long-term implications in many cases.

Therefore, it is the policy of the BLET that e-mails addressed to the National President will be reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate officer or staff for a time-ly response; however, an e-mail message is not considered an official communication. Moreover, anonymous e-mails and e-mails that do not contain sufficient information concerning the sender to enable National Division staff to confirm the sender’s membership status will not receive any reply or acknowledgement. This policy is intended to allow the National President to be aware of the opinions and suggestions of the membership, while at the same time providing a timely response to the membership. If a member has a question, if a response is necessary, without need-ess expending limited BLET resources.
The Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway continued its pursuit of a merger/acquisition of the Norfolk Southern during the first several months of 2016. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) remains opposed to the merger.

On March 9, CP filed a preliminary proxy statement with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which outlines a shareholder resolution to be considered at NS’s annual meeting of shareholders in May. The resolution requests that the NS board of directors engage in a business combination.

The Brotherhood said that the NS board of directors has rejected CP’s March 2 request at a future date. The STB’s review was completed.

The STB’s decision represents more than 70,000 active railroad workers whose constituent unions that strongly oppose a hostile takeover of NS by CP. The Rail Conference represents more than 70,000 active railroad workers whose constituent unions are the BLET and the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWD).

The Rail Conference added its voice to the dozens of elected officials, shippers and labor unions that strongly oppose a hostile takeover of NS by CP. The Rail Conference endorsed much of CP’s budget proposal, saying it would quicken the pace of U.S. economic and employment growth.

It estimated gross domestic product would grow by three percent and employment by 3.6 million jobs in the short term if the budget was enacted.

“The big boost to public investment that the People’s Budget provides will help address two of the most glaring problems in the American economy today: a still incomplete economic recovery and decelerating productivity growth,” said Hunter Blair, EPI’s budget analyst. “Further, the budget’s target of genuine full employment is essential if low- and middle-wage workers are going to see significant gains in hourly pay in coming years.”

Candidates and elected officials interested in getting the U.S. back on track economically must endorse a platform that invests in this country. That is the only way to make the Teamsters strong and America stronger.

Fraternally,

JAMES P. HOFFA
Teamsters General President

Candidates and elected officials interested in getting the U.S. back on track economically must endorse a platform that invests in this country. That is the only way to make the Teamsters strong and America stronger.
Runion reelected to fourth term as Chairman of Wyoming State Legislative Board

S ean P. Simon was elected by acclamation to his second term as Chairman of the New Jersey State Legislative Board at the Board’s triennial meeting in Newark, N.J., on March 15, 2016.

A Norfolk Southern locomotive engineer, Brother Simon hired out on Conrail in March of 1994. He earned promotion to locomotive engineer in August of 1995 and joined the Brotherhood effective October 1, 1997. He is Local Chairman of Division 226 in Newark, N.J.

Also elected by acclamation were: 1st Vice Chairman David Ziegler, Division 53 (Jersey City); 2nd Vice Chairman Andrew A. Arias, Division 157 (Jersey City); and Secretary-Treasurer Bob Fallon, Division 497 (Jersey City). These Brothers and Secretary-Treasurer Bob Fallon, Division 497 (Jersey City). These Brothers also elected to serve as delegates to the Audit Committee are Mike Fielder, Division 869 (Greybull) and Terry L. Cooke, Division 103 (Cheyenne).

Representing the National Division at the meeting were First Vice President E. Lee Pruitt and Vice President & National Legislative Representative John P. Tolman.

"I thank Brother Runion and all members of the Wyoming State Legislative Board for their ongoing service to our Brotherhood," BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce said. "Under the leadership of Brother Runion, I have every confidence they will continue performing an excellent job representing the interests of our Brothers and Sisters in the proud state of Wyoming."

Special guests from the BLET included: Dave Geisler, General Chairman, Union Pacific-Eastern District; James Wilmesher, Colorado State Legislative Board Chairman; David B. Ditzel, Special Representative and BLET Short Term Disability Liaison; and Paul T. Aird, Special Representative, Director of Organizing and Director of Mobilization-Western Region.

First Vice President Pruitt spoke about the BLET National Division’s move into a new headquarters building and gave an update regarding national contract negotiations. Vice President Tolman discussed the upcoming national elections.

Special Representative Aird gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the BLET’s mobilization network.

Additional guests included: Kim Floyd, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Wyoming AFL-CIO; Steve Fender, Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Region 6 Director; Eldon Offutt, FRA Deputy Regional Administrator; and Mark Williams, FRA Chief Inspector. The AFL-CIO’s Floyd discussed Wyoming elections and how they impact labor, while the FRAs Fender discussed the report of rail incidents.

The Wyoming State Legislative Board represents more than 1,000 active and retired members from 9 different BLET Local Divisions.

## Sean Simon elected Chairman of New Jersey State Legislative Board

Members and officers of the Wyoming State Legislative Board at their triennial meeting in Cheyenne, Wyoming, on February 17, 2016.

Above: Members, officers and guests at the NJ SLB meeting on March 15.
Right: Sean Simon presents a plaque to thank Brother Matt Kronyak for his years of service to the NJ SLB.

has also held the office of Local Chairman of Division 226 for three terms. He was elected 2nd Vice Chairman of the New Jersey State Legislative Board in 2010, and 1st Vice Chairman in 2013. He was elevated to the office of Chairman when former Chairman Matt Kronyak was appointed as a Special Representative for the BLET National Division in 2014.

The BLET New Jersey State Legislative Board represents 850 members from PATH, New Jersey Transit, CSX, Norfolk Southern, Conrail and the New York, Susquehanna and Western (NYS&W) railroads.
**Comparing Benefits Under Railroad Retirement and Social Security**

Employers and employees covered by the Railroad Retirement Act pay higher retirement taxes than those covered by Social Security, so that railroad retirement benefits remain 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 to the employees covered by the Railroad Retirement Act also provides supplemental railroad retirement annuities of benefit to those who retired years ago? Yes, because recent awards are based on average earnings. Average annuities awarded to career railroad employees retiring at the end of fiscal year 2015 averaged about $3,805 a month, and for all railroad employees the average was $2,625. The average age retirement benefit being paid under social security was nearly $1,740 a month. Spouse benefits averaged $757 a month under railroad retirement compared to $665 under social security. To qualify for a spouse's benefit under Social Security, the employee must be at least age 62, or any age if caring for a child who is entitled to receive benefits based on the applicant's spouse's record. Those awarded at the end of fiscal year 2015 averaged $1,710 a month for widowed mothers/ fathers and $1,230 a month for children under railroad retirement, compared to $900 and $585 for widowed mothers/fathers and children, respectively, under social security. Two. 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 average earnings. Average annuities awarded to career railroad employees retiring at the end of fiscal year 2015 averaged about $3,805 a month while monthly benefits awarded to workers retiring at full retirement age under social security averaged nearly $1,840. If spouse benefits are added, the combined benefits for the employee and spouse would total $5,325 under railroad retirement, compared to $2,735 under social security. Adding a supplemental annuity to the railroad family's benefit increases average total benefits for current career railroad retirees to nearly $5,360 a month.

1. **How do the average monthly railroad retirement and social security benefits paid to retired employees and spouses compare?** The maximum amount of regular railroad retirement taxes that an employee earning $118,500 can pay in 2016 is $15,387.05, compared to $9,065.25 under social security. Railroad employees, the maximum annual regular railroad retirement taxes on an employees earning $118,500 are $10,977.45, compared to $6,260.15 under social security. Employees earning over $118,500, and their employers, will pay more in retirement taxes than the above amounts because the Medicare hospital insurance tax is applied to all earnings. The average annuity July 1, 1984, or later, and retired at ages 60 or 61 before 2002. If the employee was awarded a disability annuity, the attainment of the age of 60 is based on 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. To qualify for a spouse's benefit under social security, an applicant must at least be age 62, or any age if caring for a child who is entitled to receive benefits based on the applicant's spouse's record. Unlike Social Security, Social Security Act, so that railroad retirement benefits remain higher than social security benefits, especially for "career" employees who have 30 or more years of service. The Railroad Retirement Act also provides supplemental railroad retirement annuities of benefit to those who retired years ago? Yes, because recent awards are based on average earnings. Average annuities awarded to career railroad employees retiring at the end of fiscal year 2015 averaged about $3,805 a month while monthly benefits awarded to workers retiring at full retirement age under social security averaged nearly $1,840. If spouse benefits are added, the combined benefits for the employee and spouse would total $5,325 under railroad retirement, compared to $2,735 under social security. Adding a supplemental annuity to the railroad family's benefit increases average total benefits for current career railroad retirees to nearly $5,360 a month. Disqualified railroad retirees retiring directly from the railroad industry at the end of fiscal year 2015 were awarded nearly $2,870 a month on the average while awards for disabled workers under social security averaged over $2,170. While both the Railroad Retirement and Social Security Acts provide benefits to workers who are totally disabled for any regular work, the Railroad Retirement Act does not provide a lump-sum benefit to the family of a disabled worker. If a retired railroad employee with 30 or more years of creditable service is 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. Unlike Social Security, Social Security Act, so that railroad retirement benefits remain higher than social security benefits, especially for "career" employees who have 30 or more years of service. The Railroad Retirement Act also provides supplemental railroad retirement annuities of benefit to those who retired years ago? Yes, because recent awards are based on average earnings. 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1. **How do the average monthly railroad retirement and social security benefits paid to retired employees and spouses compare?** The average age retirement benefit being paid under social security was near-
CSX cuts operations, 101 jobs in Russell, Ky.

(Source: Herald-Dispatch, March 15, 2016)

CSX Transportation Inc. will cut 101 union and management jobs at its Russell operation, continuing a trend of cutbacks in the region over the past two months. Management met with workers at its Russell facilities Tuesday to inform them the company will be streamlining its operations as a result of declining volume through the region. About 430 workers are employed at the Russell site.

Some yard operations will continue, said CSX corporate spokeswoman Melena Cost. Neither the locomotive shop nor engineering employees are affected by the reductions, Cost said. “This decision was made only after a thorough review and careful consideration of all other possible options,” she said. “Operations in Russell primarily serve coal trains moving from the Central Appalachian coalfields, and the diminished traffic levels no longer support CSX’s coal movements over the past five years, with $1.4 billion in coal revenue declines during that time.”

Just as workers affected by recent cutbacks in Huntington, union employees in Russell will be provided relocation opportunities and other benefits in accordance with collective bargaining agreements, Cost said. Some farfetched union employees will be eligible for jobs in higher-demand areas on CSX’s network. Affected management employees will be offered relocation opportunities or offered severance benefits.

“We are grateful for these employees’ service to CSX and are committed to supporting them during this difficult time,” Cost said. “CSX will continue to serve its customers in and around Russell and across the state. CSX remains a committed partner in Russell and throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky.”

CSX, the nation’s third-largest railroad, has more than 2,900 miles of track in Kentucky, as well as an automotive distribution center in Louisville and a rail yard in Hopkinsville.

The cutbacks in Russell, part of the company’s Louisville division, come less than two months after CSX announced the closing of its administrative offices in Huntington and dissolution of its Huntington Division, affecting 121 management and union employees. A little more than a month ago, CSX announced a reduction in operations at 16 car shops that included its facility in Huntington. All seven positions at the car shop will be abolished and those employees will now be working at the locomotive shop, with two persons continuing to perform inspections and do minor repair work on cars in the area.

CSX Corporation, based in Jacksonville, Florida, owns companies providing rail, intermodal and rail-to-truck services as well as more than 200 rail roads. CSX Transportation operates the third-largest railroad in the United States and has the largest network east of the Mississippi River with 22,000 miles of rail linking commercial markets in 23 states, the District of Columbia and two Canadian provinces.

OPERATION LIFESAVER HAILS DROP IN 2015 CROSSING COLLISIONS, BUT NOTES INCREASE IN TRESPASS DEATHS

Vehicle-train collisions and deaths at highway-rail grade crossings fell in 2015, along with injuries to pedestrians trespassing on train tracks, Operation Lifesaver, Inc. announced on March 15. In contrast, the number of people killed while trespassing on train tracks rose compared to 2014, as did the number injured as a result of crossing collisions.

The national nonprofit rail safety education organization cited preliminary 2015 Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) statistics showing that U.S. crossing collisions fell 7.6 percent in 2015, to 2,280 from 2,096 in 2013; crossing-related fatalities dropped 7.6 percent to 244 vs. 264 in 2014; and trespass injuries fell 4.3 percent to 398 from 416 in 2014. Fatalities from rail trespassing increased by 7.6 percent in 2015 to 572 (vs. 543 in 2014), while crossing-related injuries increased 12.3 percent in 2015 to 967 (vs. 861 in 2014).

For 2015, the rail trespass casualty rate (deaths and injuries per million train-miles) is 1.23, its highest level in the last decade, and the highway-rail incident rate (incidents per million train-miles) is 2.79, the lowest since 2012, OLI President and CEO Bonnie Murphy noted.

“We are encouraged by the drop in highway-rail grade crossing collisions and deaths, and will continue to work closely with FRA’s grade crossing task force and our railroad and community safety partners,” Murphy said. “However, the increase in trespasser deaths shows there is more work to be done educating Americans about the crucial need to stay off train tracks.”

States with the most crossing collisions in 2015 were Texas, Illinois, California, Indiana and Georgia. States with the most trespasser casualties (deaths and injuries combined) in 2015 were California, Texas, Florida, New York and Illinois.

Murphy said OLI will continue its “See Tracks? Think Train!” campaign in 2016, with a strategic focus on emphasizing that it’s illegal and extremely dangerous to use train tracks for recreational activities.

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ILEAN INRAILWAY CONTRACT
Continued from page 1

The new contract also establishes a discipline rule to ensure job security, an invaluable employment right. It protects members from arbitrary treatment and requires the Carrier to establish just cause for any disciplinary action it may attempt to initiate against BLET members. This protection extends all the way through final and binding arbitration under the Railway Labor Act.

IR workers hold membership in BLET Division 682 (Hammond, Ind.) and belong to the BLET’s Indiana Harbor Belt (IHB) General Committee of Adjustment. BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce thanked former IHB General Chairman Chris Cundari for his efforts to initially organize the IR property and for his work to negotiate the tentative agreement. President Pierce also recognized current IHB General Chairman Steve Short and National Vice President Marcus J. Ruef for their work in negotiations and throughout the ratification process.

“We are very pleased that we were able to satisfy the major concerns that led the Illinois Railway employees to designate BLET as their collective bargaining representative,” President Pierce said. “Their first-ever union contract is a significant milestone, and I thank our Illinois Railway membership for participating in the ratification vote. We look forward to negotiating more refinements and improvements during the next round of contract talks. I also recognized and thank Vice President Ruef, General Chairman Short and former General Chairman Cundari for their selfless and tireless efforts to bring these negotiations to a successful conclusion.”

IR is comprised of four track segments aggregating 113 miles of track located just west of the Chicago suburbs. IR services what is often called “the Sand Capital of the World” in northern Illinois.

TWO-PERSON CREWS
Continued from page 1

situational awareness” are merely management code words for blaming the employee who has been bogged down with too many tasks, duties and distractions. Task overload does lead to increased fatigue and attention capture that pose genuine and quantifiable safety risks in the railroad industry.

BLET will file comments to the NPRM docket that completely detail the concerns we have regarding task overload and the human factors issues raised by the NPRM. FRA has done good work by raising issues of human and system integration and cognitive task analysis. However, the proposed rule also has a cautionary side that should give us all pause, because FRA has proposed two different options for railroads to either continue or initiate operations with single person crews.

BLET will examine these proposals further and formally comment in greater detail in the appropriate forum. Meanwhile, the BLET will continue to work in every arena available to it – whether collective bargaining, regulatory affairs or legislation on Capitol Hill – when it comes to crew size. We will endeavor to persuade FRA to adopt a regulation that safeguards train crews and the public and we also will keep encouraging members of Congress to co-sponsor and support the Safe Freight Act, H.R. 1763.

“Technology will never be able to safely replace the eyes and ears of our highly-trained, experienced and professional two-person train crews,” President Pierce said.

Dave Geisler, General Chairman, Union Pacific–Eastern District GCA and John Kellogg, Division 88
In March 8, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT) Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced that the agencies are seeking public input during the next 90 days on the impacts of screening, evaluating and treating rail workers and commercial motor vehicles (CMV) drivers for obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommended that DOT take action to address OSA screening and treatment for transport workers.

The joint Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) is the first step as both agencies consider whether to propose requirements specifically on OSA. FRA and FMCSA will host three public listening sessions to gather input on OSA 2012, FRA partnered with the Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School, WGBH Education Foundation, and the John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center to sponsor the Railroaders’ Guide to Healthy Sleep website (www.railroadersleep.org). The site provides educational information to railroad workers and their families about sleep disorders and information to improve quality of life.

To read the ANPRM visit: www.fra.dot.gov/ASB/Details/L27264

FRA seeks input on screening and treatment of rail workers with obstructive sleep apnea