Rail Unions making up the Coordinated Bargaining Group (CBG) announced on October 6th that they had reached a Tentative National Agreement with the Nation’s Freight Rail Carriers. The CBG is comprised of six unions: the American Train Dispatchers Association; the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (a Division of the Rail Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters); the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen; the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers, and Helpers; the National Conference of Firemen and Oilers / SEIU; and the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART TD).

On Wednesday, October 4, the CBG’s full Negotiating Team met in Independence, Ohio, for a review of the terms of the proposed voluntary agreement. Following that review, each of the CBG Unions’ Negotiating Teams unanimously endorsed the Tentative Agreement. On Thursday, October 5, the involved General Chairpersons of SMART TD, BRS and BLET met as well and those groups also unanimously endorsed the Tentative Agreement for consideration by the respective membership of each Union. The Tentative Agreement, which will be submitted to the memberships of each involved Union in the coming weeks, includes an immediate wage increase of 4.04%, with an additional 2.5% six months later on July 1, 2018 and an additional 3% one year later on July 1, 2019. In addition, wage increases of 2% effective July 1, 2016 and another 2% effective July 1, 2017 will be fully retroactive through implementation, for a compounded increase of 9.84% over an 18-month period and 13.14% over the 5-year contract term (this includes the First General Wage Increase of 3% implemented on January 1, 2015). All benefits under the existing Health and Welfare Plan will remain in effect unchanged and there are no disruptions to the existing healthcare networks. While some employee participation costs are increased, the tentative agreement maintains reasonable maximum out-of-pocket protections for our members. The TA also adds several new benefits to the

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BLET President's Message

BY DENNIS R. PIERCE

This edition of the Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen News focuses on the Tentative Agreement between the nation’s freight carriers, the BLET, and five other Unions making up the Coordinated Bargaining Group. By now, those members eligible to vote on the Tentative Agreement should have received a letter from me explaining how the bargaining round has transpired, and where we now find ourselves when it comes to our options.

As I said in my letter, BLET is at a crossroads in these negotiations. On the one hand, the members will be given the democratic right to vote on a proposed voluntary settlement of our contract. On the other hand, if the membership rejects the Tentative Agreement, we will in all likelihood be saddled with a contract crafted, and potentially imposed, by the Federal Government under the remaining steps of the Railway Labor Act, and Congressional authority under the Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution.

In an effort to ensure that all BLET members have the information that they need to make an informed decision, we have added comparisons of the potential outcomes of both paths now before the BLET at www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/CBJ-NCCC_TA_BLET_Slides.pdf. I would again suggest that you review those comparisons to better understand the choice now before us. This edition of the newspaper includes a full consideration of the official and officer comments and perspectives about the proposed settlements, and I would encourage you to read them as well.

When I became National President of our proud Union, I promised all members that I would only hear the truth from me. As with any contract ratification, you will hear comments from those in favor of the agreement and those opposed. Some, with their own agenda, will even misrepresent what is in the contract and what will happen if the agreement is not ratified.

In this piece, I intend to stick to the facts; the time has come for straight talk on our proposed contract:

1. BLET served Section 6 Notices on the Rail Carriers in December of 2014. Those notices included a long list of improvements to our Collective Bargaining Agreements, many submitted directly by members and officers of BLET Local Divisions and General Committees of Adjustment.

2. All of the items in those Section 6 Notices were also put on the bargaining table and proposals were submitted to be carried out in an effort to obtain the requested improvements. No stones were left unturned in our efforts to obtain every possible item important to the BLET membership.

3. As with any contract negotiations, both sides bring a long list of demands, and this round was no exception as our demands brought by your employers.

4. After two years and ten months at the bargaining table, your negotiating team reached a proposed voluntary settlement based upon a full consideration of all of the events that have, and could, impact the final settlement of this contract round. No “crumbs” were left on the bargaining table.

5. Rejecting the proposed agreement will not return your negotiating team to the table because the Carriers have made it clear they will not be there. Instead, rejecting the proposed agreement will in all likelihood place the final disposition of our contract in the hands of the Federal Government under the terms and conditions of the Railway Labor Act.

Here is more straight talk about what is actually in the Tentative Agreement:

1. The January 1, 2015 GWI is part of this deal. The 2011/2012 National Agreements for all Unions accepting that GWI include a Side Letter that makes clear that (1) the January 1, 2015 GWI would be paid during the period covered by the current Tentative Agreement, and (2) that it would become the GWI for the calendar year 2015 if the dispute were to be presented to a PEB or arbitration board.

2. On an increaseable base salary of $80,000 per year, the total value of the five (5) GWIs covered during this contract term is over $33,000 per employee. The value of the already paid January 1, 2015 GWIs is approximately $15,000 of that value, but the four additional GWIs included in the TA generate an additional $18,000 per employee in just over 2 years’ time.

3. The Tentative Agreement includes back pay going back to July 1, 2016, and will put thousands of dollars of overdue wages into the hands of all BLET members within sixty (60) days of the Agreement date. The industry position should we reject the proposal is that there will be no retroactive application of any wage increase, and no back pay.

4. The employee’s monthly cost-sharing contribution is frozen at its current rate of $228.29. All references to the employees paying 15% of the Carrier’s monthly premium payment are eliminated, and in application, employees will be paying closer to 10% of that payment by the end of the term of the TA due to increased premium costs. Under the TA, all of those increases are the responsibility of the Railroads.

5. While there are no changes to the coverage provided by the insurance benefits, there are adjustments to who pays those costs at the “point of service.” Even with these adjustments, the TA requires that the railroads continue to pay 90% of those costs on average, which is considered “Platinum Plan” coverage under the ACA.

6. All Carrier demands for work rules are off of the table in the Tentative Agreement. Those demands are detailed in theSynopsis, and the Carriers have been clear that they will be back in play should our dispute go to the Federal Government.

7. Additional examples showing the impact of the TA are included in this edition of the News.

BLET has spent well over two years at the bargaining table with five other Unions fighting to provide our members with an agreement.

It is also worth noting that for the first time in my 40 years of railroading, all operating employees will vote on the same contract at the same time. BLET and UTU/SMART TD have been criticized for years by some for not working together. This time we have and that is why so many things are NOT in the Tentative Agreement — including harmful work rule changes. Despite the Carriers’ best efforts to change rules to make you do more work for less money, your negotiating team achieved an agreement that rejects all of their proposed changes. In contrast, rules remain as-is, and unlike what happened after PEB 219, there is nothing forcing either Union to negotiate on a new contract.

The Agreement before you provides real wage increases, limits any increase to your health care costs, and protects you from an overreaching contract crafted by the government. Our bargaining group has shown solidarity from the beginning, and I am proud to be a part of such a diverse group of railroad employees. Compared to what certain Rail Carriers would still like to gain via a Government Settlement, we’ve achieved a lot at the bargaining table, and I will not apologize to anyone for giving BLET’s membership the democratic right to decide its own future.

You will soon have an agreement in your hands worthy of your consideration, and I, along with your Advisory Board, recommend that you vote YES on the proposal before you. Please participate in the vote when your ballot arrives.

DENNIS R. PIERCE
BLET NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Official communications between BLET members and the National Division require a hard copy of this communication. This is to provide that the actual question(s) are addressed, and ensures that when official interpretations are made they have reference to a specific request and can be used in future correspondence.

The volume of e-mails received makes it impossible for the National President to answer all unofficial communications. Therefore, it is the policy of the BLET that e-mails addressed to the National President will be reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate officer or staff for a timely response; however, an e-mail message is not considered an official communication.

Moreover, anonymous e-mails and e-mails that do not provide sufficient information concerning the sender to enable National Division staff to confirm the sender’s membership status will not receive any reply or acknowledgement. This policy is intended to allow the National President to be aware of the opinions and suggestions of the membership, while at the same time providing a timely response to the member’s unofficial communication, if a response is necessary, without needlessly expending limited BLET resources.

Adopted at Cleveland, Ohio on July 23, 2009, 9:58.
recently, the media reported fresh numbers from the Census Bureau — the U.S. median income rose to record levels last year while poverty decreased. Good news for workers, right? But hidden beneath those top-line numbers was the real truth. Income inequality, an issue that gained traction with the public in the wake of the Great Recession, is still a big problem. The sunniest of the census data also sheltered reality. Income inequality, an issue that gained traction with the public in the wake of the Great Recession, is still a big problem.

The sum of the census data also shielded what’s happening to many people of color in this country. While white families take in just north of $65,000 a year on average, Latino families only earn $47,675. And African-American families trail even further behind, at $39,490. That doesn’t seem like progress.

Workers are getting a raw deal, plain and simple, and a new survey backs that up. Americans, when informed about the state of economic inequality in this country, are less likely to believe they and others can get a fair shake, the poll finds. They also want government to do something about it.

“Among people who read about inequality, 53 percent indicated some degree of support for government efforts to reduce the income gap, compared to 43 percent who did not read in-equality. Similarly, the people became more likely to support efforts by major companies to reduce pay gaps,” academics Leslie McCall and Jennifer Richeson wrote in The Washington Post. Of course, there is something workers and policymakers could do that would improve incomes nationwide — expand unions. If more workers organized with the support of states that encourage union membership, workers would have higher salaries, better benefits and a retirement nest egg. But that’s not happening right now.

Instead, corporations, CEOs and the top one percent are rigging the rules. As a result, corporate profits skyrocket and it’s harder for working people to make ends meet. While they might be working harder than ever, the American dream continues to slip away.

The American economy benefits when unions are strong. The more money workers have to spend, the more products they buy, creating more jobs and better wages of all workers. It’s time for elected officials to wake up to this reality.

Fraternally,
JAMES P. HOFFA
Teamsters General President

Three rail hazmat training classes available

The Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program is hosting three rail worker training sessions in 2018. The dates are as follows: January 7-12, 2018; February 11-16, 2018; and March 18-23, 2018.

These 40-hour chemical emergency response training courses will run on a Sunday through Friday basis, with an orientation session at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday and departure on Friday. All training will be conducted at the Houston Fire Department’s Val Jahnke Training Facility, 8030 Braen St., Houston, Texas, 77061.

The Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program is funded by a federal grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to provide hazmat training to rail workers. These five-day hazmat training courses will provide rail workers the essential knowledge, skills, and response actions in the case of an unintentional release. These tools will allow rail workers to protect themselves, their co-workers and their communities.

This training addresses OSHA and DOT required training in addition to procedures, different levels of response and worker protection in a hazardous materials emergency or release, weapons of mass destruction awareness, and the incident command system. The training also provides completion of the OSHA 10-Hour General Industry Outreach requirements. The programs are delivered using interactive classroom instruction, small group activities, hands-on drills and a simulated hazmat response in full safety gear.

The funding provides the following student expenses: travel, lodging and meals. In addition, an incentive of $175.00 per day is available to all trainees to cover student expenses: travel, lodging and meals. In addition, an incentive of $175.00 per day is available to all trainees.

It is recommended that rail workers complete the 40-hour chemical emergency response training courses once every three years. Please use the following website to register: http://railworkerrtrainingprogram.org

For more information, please call the Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program at (202) 624-6963, or visit the Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program website to register: http://railworkerrtrainingprogram.org.

Workers will participate in a simulated hazmat response while wearing full safety gear as part of the Rail Workers Hazardous Materials Training Program.

New Data Doesn’t Dispel Income Inequality

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An open letter to BLET members regarding the tentative national contract

SPECIAL REPORT: NATIONAL CONTRACT UPDATE

GUEST COMMENTARY
BY JOHN P. TOLMAN
BLET Vice President &
National Legislative Representative

Dear BLET Brothers and Sisters:

As the BLET’s Vice President and National Legislative Representative, I don’t often speak about collective bargaining issues, but I would be remiss if I didn’t discuss the current agreement proposal. This is truly a historical time for the rail labor movement. The Coordinated Bargaining Group (CBG) is a group consisting of six great union leaders and their members. Together, the CBG has managed to negotiate a voluntary agreement with the railroads. This involved a long, concerted and sustained effort. These six unions all have to be applauded for negotiating a tentative contract in these crazy times in Washington, D.C.; the American Train Dispatchers Association; the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen; the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers; the National Conference of Firemen and Oilers–SEIU; the Transportation Division of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART TD); and, of course, the BLET.

When the SMART TD and the BLET decided to negotiate together for the first time since 1964, it was history in the making. After all the years when both unions were at odds over the issues of the day, or just plain old disagreements between the two great unions, we finally got it right. It takes intelligent people to work together to put the past behind and move forward for the good of the membership. The negotiating teams — led by BLET President Dennis Pierce and the SMART TD President John Previsich — should be commended for their vision and thoughtfulness. The negative battles of the past have been left in the past to provide for our members’ futures.

This is not to take anything away from the other great unions of the CBG, but one cannot ignore the significance of our two Unions working together as they have in these negotiations.

Eugene Debs said it best when he said: “What can Labor do for itself? The answer is not difficult. Labor can organize, it can unify; it can consolidate its forces. This done, it can demand and command.”

The six labor unions making up the CBG embodied Debs’ comment through their actions and solidarity at the bargaining table.

Solidarity has always defined success in the labor movement. Without solidarity of purpose, early organizing drives would have failed. Without solidarity at the bargaining table it would be impossible to negotiate equitable contracts. And without solidarity when it became necessary to strike or engage in other types of job actions, employers would have succeeded in destroying the labor movement.

As a result of the CBG’s hard work, and in large part because we remained unified throughout the bargaining process, none of the union leaders in the CBG let their ego get in the way of the unified goal. Because of this, you and 85,000 other railroad workers will have the opportunity to ratify a contract. Is the contract perfect? Of course not. But in an era in which workers’ wages are stagnant, health care costs are skyrocketing, and companies are shedding millions of jobs through outsourcing and automation, I believe the Tentative Agreement is a remarkable achievement — and certainly far better than anything that would be imposed on us by a Presidential Emergency Board if we don’t reach an agreement with the railroads. In fact, the carriers’ work rule changes (more work for less pay) and health care increases that were taken off the bargaining table will be resurrected if a Presidential Emergency Board is chosen to impose the carriers’ terms on the BLET should the agreement proposal fail to ratify.

The negotiations produced one more extremely positive outcome: greater unity between the unions that represent America’s railroad workers. In the end, that may be the most important victory we achieved because it will make us stronger in the years ahead as we work together to improve the lives of everyone who works to keep America on the move.

Henry Ford once said, “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

All Rail Labor has to work together in solidarity to make the lives of all our Brothers and Sisters better for tomorrow. I deeply appreciate all the support you have given throughout the talks, and sincerely hope that you will vote “Yes” for an agreement that puts the members on track for a better, brighter future.

“An era in which workers’ wages are stagnant, health care costs are skyrocketing, and companies are shedding millions of jobs through outsourcing and automation, I believe the Tentative Agreement is a remarkable achievement — and certainly far better than anything that would be imposed on us by a Presidential Emergency Board if we don’t reach an agreement with the railroads.”

— John Tolman

TENTATIVE CONTRACT AGREEMENT

Continued from page 1

Health and Welfare Plan for the members of the involved unions and, importantly, it requires that the Rail Carriers will, on average, continue to pay 90% of all of our members’ point of service costs. On a matter of critical importance, the employees’ monthly premium contribution is frozen at the current rate of $228.89. The frozen rate can only be increased by mutual agreement at the conclusion of negotiations in the next round of bargaining that begins in 2020.

In addition, the CBG steadfastly refused to accept the carriers’ demands for changes to work rules that would have imposed significant negative impacts on every one of our members. As a result of that rejection, the Tentative Agreement provides for absolutely no changes in work rules for any of the involved unions.

This Tentative Agreement provides real wage increases over and above inflation, health care cost increases far below what the carriers were demanding, freezes our monthly health plan cost contribution at the current level, provides significant retroactive pay and imposes no changes to any of our work rules,” said the CBG Union Presidents. “This is a very positive outcome for a very difficult round of negotiations. We look forward to presenting the Tentative Agreement to our respective member-ship for their consideration.”

A copy of the Tentative Agreement is at:
www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/CBG_BLET_InitialsCNC_2017.pdf

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NATIONAL CONTRACT UPDATE

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Synopsis of Tentative Agreement

n October 5th, the BLET — along with the five (5) other Unions that com- prise the Coordinat ed Bargaining Group — reached a Tentative Agreement with the National Carrier’s Conference Commit- tee (NCCC). The Tentative Agreement is for five (5) years, from 2015—2019. The relevant provisions of the Ten- tative Agreement fall into two categories: Wages and Health & Welfare.

Regarding the proposed Wage settle- ment, a general wage increase (GWI) of 3% was implemented effective January 1, 2015. This GWI came as a result of the January 5, 2012 National Agreement; however, Side Letter 3 of that agreement expressly stated that this GWI was to be paid during term covered by the Tentative Agreement, and further that it would be considered the GWI for the calendar year 2015. The proposal also provides for additional GWIs, providing in total: • 3% effective January 1, 2015 • 2% effective July 1, 2017; • 2.5% effective July 1, 2018; and • 3% effective July 1, 2019.

The total of the GWIs payable during the term of the Tentative Agreement is 12.5%, resulting in a total compounded increase to the rates in effect at the close of the last contract period (December 31, 2014) of 13.14%. The GWIs for 2016 and 2017 will be implemented on January 1, 2018 or as soon thereafter as practicable, with back pay due based upon those GWIs’ retroactive application within six- ty (60) days of the Agreement date. Six months later the July 1, 2018 2.5% GWI will be implemented, and the July 1, 2019 3% GWI will be implemented one year after that. In other words, between January 1, 2018 and July 1, 2019 GWIs totaling 9.5% — and 9.84% compound- ed — will be made to insurmountable working rates of pay, with back pay due going back to July 1, 2016.

A locomotive engineer who earned $75,000 of non-frozen pay elements in 2014 will gain nearly $25,000 in addi- tional compensation from the GWIs imple- mented during the 2015–2019 term of the Tentative Agreement ($11,250 from the January 1, 2015 GWI already paid and nearly $13,600 from the additional GWIs in the Tentative Agreement). A locomotive engineer who earned $100,000 of non-frozen pay elements in 2014 will gain over $33,000 in additional compensation from the GWIs implemented during the term ($18,750 from the January 1, 2015 GWI already paid and over $22,600 from the additional GWIs in the Tentative Agreement). The values are approximately $5000, $6300 and, $7700, respectively, more than the NCCC’s June proposal, which will serve as the industry’s position should this dis- pute be placed before a Presidential Emer- gency Board (PEB).

These GWIs provide real wage in- creases. Consider that they are measurably high- er than past and projected rates of inflation. The accepted inflation index historically used to calculate cost of liv- ing adjustments to railroad contracts is the CPI. Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Work- ers (1967=100) series published by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics. The annual rate of in- flation for the past five years has been as follows: 2012: 2.1%; 2013: 1.4%; 2014: 1.5%; 2015: 1.1%; 2016: 1.6%. For 2015 and 2016, inflation was sixth of one percent (0.6%). For 2017-2020, the Federal Open Market Committee fore- cast 1.6% for 2020, and an average of less than 2% each for 2018 and 2019. In total, that is inflation of 6.2% over the five-year term of the Tentative Agreement. With general wage increases that add up to 13.1% when compounded, the Tentative Agreement provides increases that are more than double the rate of inflation. The Health & Welfare settlement con- tained in the Tentative Agreement ex- pands some coverages, but does not re- move any existing coverages. The monthly employee premium cost-shar- ing payment would be frozen at $228.89 for the life of the Agreement and would not be subject to change until one is ne- gotiated in a future bargaining round; this provision would add over $800 in value to the above wage increases as com- pared to the industry’s position should our dispute go before the Federal Gov- ernment. Also, the previous requirement that employees pay 15% of the carriers’ monthly payment rate has been elimi- nated; employees should only be paying approximately 10% of that monthly pay- ment rate by the end of the term of the Tentative Agreement.

The following additional benefits would be added to coverage under the Managed Medical Care Program (MMCP), all without copays or coinsur- rance unless otherwise noted: • expert second opinions; • member advocacy services; • end-of-life counseling; • Telemedicine is $30 copay would ap- ply; and • the Centers of Excellence benefit would be expanded to include Cleveland Clinic for specialized cardiac care dur- ing the first year, and for orthopedic and spine care beginning in the second year. Further, benefits under the Vision Plan would be improved by providing for a covered eye exam every calendar year (instead of the current once every 12 months), and lenses/frames once every 2 calendar years (instead of the current once every 24 months). The Flexible Spending Account would be improved as follows: • NCCC’s right to terminate for fail- ure to meet minimum enrollment levels would be suspended; by 2019 at least; • the grace period is extended from January 31 to March 15 starting 2019; and • also beginning in 2019, maximum contribution is raised to the maximum allowable under law, with a $500 cap on annual adjustments.

In addition, Mental Health Substance Abuse services would no longer be sub- ject to separate deductibles and out-of- pocket maximums. Also, the NCCC has agreed to drop its demand for mandato- ry Plan Design changes to keep Plan valu- able below the Cadillac tax threshold. There also are a number of Plan De- sign changes that would set and main- tain a threshold for the railroads to pay 90% of plan costs. This 90% level is clas- sified as “Platinum” coverage under the Affordable Care Act, and is far above the 70% level currently provided by most plans in the U.S. Prescriptions for MMCP services would be as follows: Convenient Care Clinic frozen at $10; Primary Care Physician increases from $20 to $25; Specialist care increases from $35 to $40; Urgent Care Center increases from $20 to $25; and Emergency Room increases from $75 to $100 (waived if the patient is admitted). Prescription copays at the retail level (21-day supply) would increase by $5 for generic and brand formulary drugs, and by $15 for brand non-formulary drugs.

Mail order prescription copays (90-day supply) would increase by $5 for generic drugs, by $10 for brand formulary drugs, and by $20 for brand non-formulary drugs.

For services not covered by the above copays, the following schedule would ap- ply: • MMCP In Network coinsurance would be 10% and deductibles would go from current $200 (individual) / $400 (family) to $325/$650 in 2018 and $350/$700 in 2019. • MMCP In Network out-of-pocket maximums would go from current $1000/$2000 to $1800/$3600 in 2018 and $2000/$4000 in 2019. • MMCP Out of Network co-insur- ance would be 30% and deductibles would go from current $300/900 to $650/$1300 in 2018 and $700/$1400 in 2019. • MMCP Out of Network out-of-pock- et maximums would go from current $2000/$4000 to $3600/$7200 in 2018 and $4000/$8000 in 2019. • CHCB coinsurance would be 20% and deductibles would go from current $200/$400 to $325/$650 in 2018 and $350/$700 in 2019.

NEW MEMBER BENEFITS

$50,000 in 2019.

Lump Sum “Retirement” Benefit
$500 for the first 10 years of membership and $350 for each year thereafter

Education Scholarships
20 scholarships of $1,000 awarded each year

DAILY BENEFIT
$100/$102 $150 $200/$201 $250/$252
BR&C Monthly Direct $38.00 $57.00 $76.00 $95.00

*LEGMPA #16 Monthly Premium $59.50 $78.50 $117.25 $147.00
SMART - TD (UTU) $81.00 $102.50 $162.00 Not Offered

BROTHELDER’S RELIEF AND COMPENSATION FUND
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A Not-For-Profit Organization Established in 1912
The BR&C is an insurance company
BR&C Officers and Directors are Railroaders
160 years of railroad experience

New Members Start with 150 Days of Benefit Eligibility
Maximum of 365 days after 3 years of beneficial membership

Lowest Membership Dues in the Industry

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2017

Lump-sum retirement benefits apply today – www.brcf.org

For more information, call the BR&C at (800) 333-7800

Call the BR&C at (800) 333-7800 if you have any questions!

apply today – www.brcf.org (Initial 2 months of membership provided at no cost)
SPECIAL REPORT: NATIONAL CONTRACT UPDATE

An open letter to UP-Central Region BLET members

GUEST COMMENTARY
BY RONNIE E. RHODES

General Chairman, Union Pacific-Central Region

To the Union Pacific Engineers:

I have decided to write this open letter now because of the Union Pacific’s continued failure to negotiate in good faith. The facts are clear:

- Union Pacific’s current proposal was negotiated in 2014.
- The proposal has not been updated since 2014.
- The proposal includes significant changes to current seniority rules, which would hurt our members.

Unfortunately, Union Pacific has refused to negotiate on these issues. Instead, they are waiting for a new round of negotiations to come up with a better proposal. This is not good enough.

Our General Committee has agreed to support any actions that our membership takes to address these issues. We are standing with the membership and will do everything in our power to ensure that the interests of our members are protected.

Please join us in standing up for our rights.

- Ronnie Rhodes
The BLET National Division is continuing to accept donations and applications for its Perrien Fund to help members victimized by Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Louisiana. As previously reported, the BLET National Division Advisory Board approved a recommendation from BLET National President Dennis R. Pierce on August 30 to reactivate and expand its Gary Perrien Fund to provide financial assistance to members living in Texas and Louisiana who have been the hardest hit by Hurricane Harvey.

The Gary Perrien Fund was originally established by action of the delegates at BLET’s Second National Convention in 2010. Brother Gary Perrien, then an active member of the Convention’s Arrangements Committee, fell ill and the delegates passed the hat to assist in his recovery. In a televised report back to the convention from his hospital bed, Brother Perrien asked that the fund be used to help those more needy than him, leading the delegates and the Advisory Board to later create the Gary Perrien Fund. Brother Perrien recovered and retired in the years following the 2010 Convention.

As part of the expansion of the Fund, the BLET Advisory Board also authorized President Pierce’s request that $20,000.00 be transferred from the Union’s General Fund to the Perrien Fund as part of the associated fund raising effort on behalf of the Union’s members harmed by the storm. In addition, the Advisory Board also approved President Pierce’s recommendation that BLET make a matching $20,000.00 donation to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Disaster Relief Fund.

To date, more than 75 BLET General Committees of Adjustment, State Legislative Boards, Local Divisions, and individual members have made donations to supplement the National Division’s initial $20,000 gift. However, more donations would be appreciated and would go to assist fellow BLET members and their families in need.

“We know that there are members who want to assist their Brothers and Sisters who have been harmed by the storm,” President Pierce said. “One hundred percent of the money raised through this effort will go directly to as many members as possible.”

To make an online donation, please visit: http://www.blet.org/perrien. Also, checks can be made payable to the “Gary Perrien Medical Relief Fund” and mailed to: Perrien Fund–Harvey Relief BLET National Division 7064 East Pleasant Valley Road Independence, OH 44131 Donations are not tax deductible.

BLET still accepting donations to help victims of Hurricane Harvey

FOLLOWING IRMA, TEAMSTERS OFFER DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE IN FLORIDA

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters is offering Disaster Relief assistance to members living in Florida after Hurricane Irma damaged homes and property beginning on September 10, 2017.

Available for the BLET website are Teamster “Disaster Relief Alert Notices” and “Request for Help” forms. If you live in the affected area and experience damage, the immediately following a major disaster, please download and submit the forms. For questions, contact the Teamsters Disaster Relief Fund office at (202) 624-8971.

Members living in the following Florida counties are eligible to apply:


Download the DR-4337 Request for Help form here: www.blet.org/pdf/PR_D_R_4337.pdf. Please be sure to include all requested documentation. The deadline to apply is December 15, 2017.

DEADLINE IS NOV. 15 FOR HURRICANE HARVEY DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

As a reminder, BLET members have until November 15, 2017, to apply for relief assistance from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters if they have suffered a loss due to Hurricane Harvey.

On September 4, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) amended the list of counties in Texas where it has declared a major disaster due to Hurricane Harvey, which has opened the way for the Teamsters to provide Disaster Relief assistance in additional areas. The counties were added on September 4: Austin, Bastrop, DeWitt, Gonzales, Karnes, Lavaca, Lee, & Polk, Tyler, and Walker. BLET has declared a major disaster in the following Texas counties:


BLET members living in one of the counties listed here are eligible to apply for BLET Disaster Relief assistance. Updated Disaster Relief forms are now on the BLET National Division website at the link below.

The amended Disaster Relief Request for Help form is now available here: www.blet.org/pdf/PR_D_R_4337.pdf. Please be sure to include all requested documentation. The deadline to apply is November 15, 2017.

RRB advises rail workers impacted by Harvey, Irma

As previously reported, the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) is reminding rail employees out of work due to the aftermath to Hurricane Harvey or Hurricane Irma that they may qualify for unemployment benefits. To determine eligibility or file claims for benefits, affected railroad employees should call the RRB’s toll-free telephone number (1-877-772-5772) or visit its website (www.rrb.gov).

To file an application for benefits online via the website, an individual must have an Internet Services Account with the agency. For security purposes, first-time users must obtain a unique password, which they can do by clicking on the link for requesting a Password Request Code (PRC) in the Benefit Online Services login section of the www.rrb.gov home page. Individuals who have already established an Internet Services Account and password can go online to file applications and claims for biweekly unemployment benefits, as well as conduct other business with the RRB over the Internet.

For rail workers without power or Internet access, the RRB encourages them to call the agency’s toll-free number (1-877-772-5772) during regular business hours. Field office locations can also be found online at www.rrb.gov.

Railroad unemployment benefits are normally paid for the number of days of unemployment over four in 14-day registration periods. The maximum daily benefit rate is currently $72. However, as a result of sequestration under the Budget Control Act of 2011, unemployment benefits are reduced by 6.9 percent through September 30, 2017, so the maximum benefit in a 2-week period is $670.32. Also, during the first 14-day claim period in a benefit year, benefits are payable for each day of unemployment in excess of seven, rather than four, which basically creates a one-week waiting period.

To qualify for normal railroad unemployment benefits in the benefit year that began July 1, 2017, an employee must have had railroad earnings of at least $3,637.50 in calendar year 2016, counting no more than $1,455 for any month. Those who were first employed in the rail industry in 2016 must also have at least five months of creditable railroad service in that year.

Under certain conditions, employees with at least 10 years of service who do not qualify on the basis of their 2016 earnings may still be able to receive benefits. For example, employees who received normal benefits in the benefit year that ended June 30, 2017, might still be eligible for extended benefits. In addition, 10-year employees may be eligible for accelerated benefits if they had railroad earnings of at least $3,637.50 in 2017, not counting earnings of more than $1,455 in Federal holidays. Field office locations can also be found online at www.rrb.gov.
Photo of the Month: September/October 2017

Are you a photographer? The National Division’s Public Relations Department, which produces the Newsletter, is seeking photographs. If you wish to submit photographs, please mail them to Bill Joyce, Art Director & Associate Editor, at the address below. Your photo may be used in the newsletter or on our website.

GOFUNDME ACCOUNT TO HELP INJURED BLET MEMBER

On September 14, BLET member Shane T. McDonald of Division 46 (Albany, N.Y.) was severely injured in a CSX yard accident near Syracuse, N.Y., and a GoFundMe account has been established to help him and his family with medical and living expenses.

Mark Krajewski, Local Chairman of Division 46, reports that Brother McDonald, 45, lost his right leg in the accident. Brother McDonald joined the BLET on March 1, 2014, and was working as a conductor at the time of the accident. Brother McDonald and his wife Michelle have four children: Natalie, Adam, Colin and Brynn. The GoFundMe page was established by Brother McDonald’s sister Helen.