



# BLET Auxiliary News

Working to bring about safer working conditions for Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen, educate spouses, and enhance the lifestyles of railroad employees and their families.

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Anita J. Caruso, President • Sereena Hogan, Vice President/National Legislative Representative • Linda D. Maher, Secretary  
Helen Brand, Treasurer • Gina Forman, 1st Vice President /National Outreach Coordinator • [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net)

## EXECUTIVE COUNCIL TO CONVENE IN OMAHA

by Anita J. Caruso, National President

Last year, the BLET Auxiliary Executive Council tried something a little different from our usual tradition of meeting soon after the Easter holiday. We held our 2011 Executive Council Meeting during the Southeastern Meeting Association (SMA) in Asheville, North Carolina. This resulted in a tremendous savings in travel expenses for the National Auxiliary and we are grateful to last year's SMA Conference hosts Dewey and Christie Brown for arranging a meeting space for us at their convention. For the 2012 Executive Council Meeting, we will go back to the format we had used for the four years preceding 2011, and I will be hosting the meeting in my hometown of Omaha, Nebraska. We will convene June 4 - 7, 2012, with two full

days of business meetings. In an effort to conserve Auxiliary funds we started the tradition of holding our meetings at the home of one of our national officers in 2007, thereby saving the expense of paying for a meeting space at a hotel, as well as saving on travel expenses for one member of the Executive Council.

The current members of the Executive Council are as follows: National President Anita J. Caruso; National Vice President/National Legislative Representative Sereena Hogan; National Secretary Linda D. Maher; National Treasurer Helen Brand; and National 1st Vice President/National Outreach Coordinator Gina Forman. We meet once a year to do the National Auxiliary

business, which includes a report of the yearly activities of each national officer; an extensive review of our financial portfolio; review of our Care & Assistance Program recipients; awarding of the scholarships for the upcoming school year, including administering the scholarship program for International Western Convention; and any additional items of importance that are set forth in our agenda.

We look forward to addressing the many issues that have been going on the past year and making some decisions regarding our continued efforts to recruit new members to our organization. This has and will continue to be our main focus for this year and many years to come.

Any member who wishes to suggest an item or topic for our agenda is strongly urged to contact me or any member of the Executive Council. We welcome your input and will gladly put your ideas on our agenda for discussion at our meeting.

## STOP THE WAR ON WORKERS! Phoenix Day of Action - March 1, 2012



Members of Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28, Tucson, Arizona, participated with BLET members and approximately 1000 other union supporters from all over the state of Arizona in a Day of Action at the Phoenix Capitol Building on March 1, 2012. The event included instructional presentations on grassroots lobbying, visits to state legislators' offices, sign-ups for the Permanent Early Voting List, signing of the "Standing up for Arizona

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## Auxiliary President's Message - BY ANITA J. CARUSO

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I am constantly amazed at how time flies by. It reminds of a poster on the wall of our 8th grade classroom that read: "Time flies; what are you doing with it?" It must have made an impression on me because I can still clearly remember reading it and wondering what it meant. Now I can say with certainty that I do understand the statement.

It's already time to start preparing for my "busy season" and all that this entails. My calendar is quickly filling up with travel plans on behalf of the National Auxiliary; composing articles, either for our newsletter, the BLET publications, or for the regional convention programs; making plans for our annual Executive Council meeting (see front cover), and anything else that comes my way.

Once again, our Legislative Department and Mobilization Program have been hard at work. 1st Vice President/National Outreach Coordinator and Mobilization Director Gina Forman and Vice President/National Legislative Representative Sereena Hogan have been continually keeping our members informed of important matters involving contract negotiations as well as legislative issues of importance to our members, as requested by BLET Mobilization Coordinators Kent Confer and Larry James. We are happy to help with these endeavors as this is a vital part of our mission and purpose.

I would like to ask all Auxiliary Legislative Representatives to please check our website for the monthly legislative reports composed by Sereena Hogan and posted to the site by Past President Becky Schneider (thank you Becky!). In doing so, you will have the most updated legislative information to share at your monthly meetings. Anyone who wishes to be added to the list to receive legislative alerts when there is an important issue on which we need to quickly take action, please send your e-mail address to Sister Sereena at [vp3sereena@aol.com](mailto:vp3sereena@aol.com) and you will be kept apprised of the many changes that are taking place in Congress along with occasional messages from BLET National President Pierce.

As the regional convention season is coming upon us, we are always in a perpetual state of recruiting. We need to reach out to all BLET members (approximately 55,000) to encourage them to "invite" their spouses to join the Auxiliary. I have never been able to understand why the spouse of a railroader doesn't choose to be a part of the Auxiliary. Who wouldn't want to find out pertinent information that pertains to their spouse's job, from working conditions to important legislative issues that directly affect their livelihood? If anyone has a good answer to those questions, please share it with me!

We are in desperate need of reaching those spouses who are new to the railroad industry. If you or someone you know would like to belong by joining an existing auxiliary in your area, joining as a Member-at-Large or Associate Member-at-Large, or organizing an Auxiliary in your area, this would be a step in the right direction. Please encourage any spouses that you know or meet in the future to consider being a part of this over 125-year-old organization.

I am asking all of our current members to please start branching out and helping us with this monumental task. Refer any and all inquiries pertaining to joining the BLET Auxiliary to our website, [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net) and that will get the ball rolling. The website contains contact information for all of our national officers and any one of us can be of assistance in responding to inquires about membership.

Let's all do our best in the recruiting department and make 2012 our best year in getting the word out about our existence and the kinds of help we can provide to our members and all BLET families.

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**Please help us grow our membership in 2012!**

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# NOR-CAL AUXILIARY UPDATE

By Kathleen Bisbikis

***The California auxiliary has started 2012 off motivated!!***

Due to a warm winter, we held our first meeting in the park with a picnic provided by Susie Burrola. We planned our event and meeting calendar for the year and nominated Jen Hayden for the office of Chaplain and LeAnn Chiara for the Vice President position. We also named our first \$250.00 scholarship in honor of Ed Pfister, which we plan to give away this year for the first time ... we are really excited about that!

In February, we celebrated our two-year anniversary as an auxiliary. The families all met at a nice local restaurant and enjoyed a great meal, held our business meeting, installed our new officers, and ended the night with group pictures for our scrapbook.

In March, we have our 2nd Annual Bowling Championship with its revolving trophy to the high scoring team. In June, we will hold our 2nd Annual Family Picnic with lots of old school games planned for everyone. We can't wait for the gunny sack races, pie eating contest, hotdog and hamburger barbecue, and of course our 50/50 raffle that we do at every event to help raise money for our auxiliary.

We have also signed up through the S-Mart grocery chain for a fundraising program called SHARES. Each member is given a card that they swipe during their grocery purchase at any S-Mart grocery store. At the end of each quarter, S-Mart issues us a check for 3% of the total purchases made by our members and families who swiped their cards on our behalf. This is a popular fundraising method in our area and oftentimes people have more than one card in their wallet, so to help make ours easier for them to find, we have placed a train engine on the card. This money will go towards our scholarship fund.



**Nor Cal Auxiliary President Susie Burrola conducted the February business meeting at the Valley Brew Family Restaurant in Stockton, California. The auxiliary celebrated its first year anniversary at this meeting.**



**Nor Cal Auxiliary members Candace Blue, Scott Wiseman, and Susie Burrola (photographer) attended the first meeting of the new Stockton charter of the National Association of Retired and Veteran Railway Employees (NARVRE) on March 3, 2012, in Stockton, California.**

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***What has your auxiliary been up to recently?  
Please let our publisher know so we can do a  
feature story and share it with all our readers!***

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# WISCONSIN STATE POLITICS STILL BOILING

By Jessica Cole, Wisconsin State Legislative Representative, BLET Auxiliary

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I have an ironic sense of humor. So I got quite a sick chuckle recently when I walked into my parents' house to find my dad, retired college English Professor Dave Cole, with his head buried in his hand, leaned over a sheet of paper, writing in his tiny, bold, hieroglyphic style penmanship, in a sort of silent, quietly angry ferocity.

The plain, unlined sheet of paper was virtually full from top to bottom and side to side. Not much remained for margins anywhere—the paper was full of my dad's small, but distinctively strong handwriting. He gave it to me and said, "This is just off the top of my head."

What, you might wonder, could he have been writing with such passion, almost Unibomber Manifesto style?

Sadly, the answer is that he was helping me and my husband, Wisconsin BLET State Legislative Board Chairman Tony Dimond, with a project to compile a list of all of the sins committed so far by our infamous Governor Scott Walker since he took office just over a year ago. Tony said he would use the list to put together talking points for what we anticipate will be a volatile recall election coming up.

And so there it was, another one of those situations that's so sad that I have to laugh at the irony, because if I didn't laugh, I'd cry! It was, in a sad way, FUNNY that our Governor is so bad and so corrupt that he could, in just one year's time, cause my dad to write such a long list that there was no room left on the paper anywhere, not even for margins, even in my dad's very tiny, yet

very strong handwriting.

Among the worst of Walker's sins with respect to this newsletter is the unprecedented attack on unions, particularly in removing collective bargaining for state employees, through his infamous 2011 Budget Repair Bill. Walker swore this measure was necessary to balance the budget, but later admitted publicly that removing those rights didn't have any financial effect at all. And, in fact, Wisconsin's budget still is not balanced, so the promise to end our state's deficit on the backs of its own employees also fell through the cracks.

But wait! The deficit is not going to be that big a problem, because Walker figured out that he could take some \$26 million in federal money that was earmarked to help distressed mortgage holders, and divert it to prop up the ailing state budget instead. And that's just one rather minor example of the past year's shenanigans that have gone on in what used to be the respectable and upstanding state of Wisconsin.

It's little wonder, then, that recall petition efforts have garnered more than one million signatures, which represents about 47% of all the votes cast in the 2010 election that put Walker in office. This represents about twice the number of signatures needed to force a recall election, but they all have to be verified before the recall election can happen. It seems there is no shortage of people who have reason to be angry with our governor!

So we wait in Wisconsin as the signatures are independently verified, shaking our heads or,

in the case of my dad, burying his head in his hands in frustration, anger, and shame for our state as he fills a sheet of paper from top to bottom and side to side.

Sadly, there aren't many promising viable Democratic candidates coming forth just yet, a situation that I hope will change soon. In the meantime, the Lieutenant Governor, Rebecca Kleefish, is also being recalled, as is the State Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, another of Walker's cronies.

Almost daily, certainly weekly at the very least, a new story surfaces about some sort of corruption or shenanigans close to the Governor or other Republican lawmakers. Just last week, Kleefish's husband, a State Assemblyman, was caught on tape voting on behalf of absent assemblymen in the Assembly Chamber, a direct violation of Assembly rules. The tape shows another Republican lawmaker looking on, snickering as Mr. Kleefish casts votes for two absent lawmakers. Ironically, Mr. Kleefish was one of the legislators who voted for the controversial Voter ID Law in Wisconsin! Again, I have to laugh at the irony so that I don't cry!

An ongoing John Doe investigation into the conduct of staffers close to Walker in his years as a Milwaukee County Executive continues to turn up corruption of the highest order. One aide embezzled \$60,000 that was supposed to go to a veteran's program. Several staffers have been charged with using their paid work time directly for campaign activi-

ties and fundraising for Walker rather than for activities relevant to the executive office's actual duties. And a staffer's boyfriend was found to have been sending sexually explicit messages to a 17-year-old boy, and charged.

And all of this is just the tip of the iceberg. I could probably write enough about Walker and his cronies, and their corruption, to fill 10 or 12 Auxiliary Newsletters if only I had more time!

I am mostly a liberal at heart, and not necessarily always as politically aware and active as I would like to be if the rest of my life were not so busy. But there have certainly been plenty of Republicans I could like and respect on moral character and intelligence, even if they sometimes reached a different reasoned conclusion about an issue than I did.

But the tenor of the GOP in Wisconsin these days has become so ugly that even if, by some unlikely chance, I agreed with these people on the issues, I could never stand behind them anyway due to their corrupt and lawless conduct! And THESE are the people who were calling our union members "Union Thugs" at the huge demonstrations over the Budget Repair Bill last year! Once again, I have to laugh at the irony, so that I don't cry!

Let's all hope, then, that the Democratic Party of Wisconsin can get its act together and put up some viable candidates for these recall elections PRONTO. I am not sure I could laugh at the irony of managing to get one million recall signatures to get rid of Walker, but not being able to produce the candidate who could get it done when the opportunity arose.



## TIDBITS FROM YOUR NATIONAL SECRETARY - BY LINDA D. MAHER

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ideas blooming within the auxiliary. Don't forget to ASK someone to join the Auxiliary so that we can keep growing this year!

I have been very busy since my husband Pat's official retirement on January 2, 2012. We left for Hawaii on January 3, 2012, not giving anything a chance to settle under our feet. When we got to our new home in Waianae, on the island of Oahu, my deal with Pat was for him to cook, do the laundry, and some of the cleaning, and in return I would do all the painting inside the condo. So far, the deal has been kept and it is kind of nice to sit down when dinner is done! I did have to whine a bit to get him to the furniture store as he hates shopping (so do I actually) but it needed to be done. We are in the learning phase of living on an island; it is not like back in Ohio where if one store is out of a product you go to the next one and they have it. Once it is gone here, it is gone until the next boat comes in! I have learned to buy when I see and if it doesn't fit, match, etc., you can always return it! I sort of miss the conveniences of home but certainly not the weather. Retirement is great! You'll see us at some of the regional meetings this summer, so come and say "Hi" to us! Meanwhile, I have my office set up here in Hawaii and I am available for anyone who needs information. My address here is:

Linda D. Maher, National Secretary  
BLET Auxiliary  
84-688 Ala Mahiku Street #161A  
Waianae, Hawaii 96792

Phone: 808-888-5783

If you need to reach me, just e-mail me, give me a contact phone number along with the state you are in, and I will call you. Hawaii time is anywhere from two hours (west coast) to five hours (east coast) behind those of you on the mainland.

### **NOTICE TO ALL AUXILIARY SECRETARIES AND MALs**

Secretary packets and MAL dues notices were mailed out at the end of December 2011. Please remember to send these in for renewal of membership for 2012. PLEASE fill your forms out completely so that I am able to keep all of my records

updated. I would like to ask all auxiliary secretaries to inform our newsletter editor/publisher Sereena hogan of any members who have been dropped from your files. Sereena's e-mail address is [vp3sereena@aol.com](mailto:vp3sereena@aol.com).

### **SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS**

BLET Auxiliary Scholarship applications can be obtained on our website at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net). You may also connect via a link from the BLET website at [www.ble.org](http://www.ble.org) under "Departments" BLET Auxiliary. Scholarship applications for the 2012-2013 academic school year are **due in my office April 1, 2012. Please be sure to follow the instruction sheet completely** so you know what documents need to be submitted with your application. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered. If you have any questions, you may e-mail me or call, but be sure to leave a phone number so I can get back with you and I will be happy to assist you.

You will also find our article along with others pertaining to scholarship opportunities in the BLET Newsletter that is published in February 2012.

### **SCARVES**

I have taken on a task of knitting scarves to sell to raise money for the auxiliary. Not all colors will always be available as yarn types are not always available. I have added some scarves for the men along with the ladies' styles. I will have scarves at the EUMA in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and at the SWCM in Galveston, Texas, so please stop by the auxiliary table and see what we have to offer. They cost \$15.00, \$20.00, and \$25.00 each and make great gifts as well as being a great way to help support the auxiliary. If you see one that you would like, please call (808) 888-5783 to check availability and I will be happy to assist you.

From my family to yours, I wish everyone a very Happy and blessed Easter Season! Be Safe!

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*Linda Maher can be reached October 15 - May 11 at her Hawaii address and phone number listed above, or at 29215 West Miller Road, Willoughby Hills, Ohio, 44092, 440-944-6579, from October 15 through May 10. She can be reached by e-mail any time at [biddykaili@aol.com](mailto:biddykaili@aol.com), or [sissy62756@mac.com](mailto:sissy62756@mac.com).*

## ***Deadline for Submission of Scholarship Applications Fast Approaching!***

**Scholarship applications for the 2012-2013 academic school year are due no later than April 1, 2012. Please submit your completed applications to National Secretary Linda Maher (see contact info above). Application forms, instructions, and information can be obtained at [www.bletauxiliary.net](http://www.bletauxiliary.net) or by calling Linda Maher at 808-888-5783.**



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - BY SEREENA HOGAN, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE REP

*"The most important word in the language of the working class is solidarity."*

— Harry Bridges

Harry Bridges, a controversial union leader, helped to form the International Longshore and Warehouse Union on the West Coast, Hawaii, and Alaska, and led that union for over 40 years. His words are so important for us all to remember as the insidious War on Workers spreads across our country like a plague.

### Payroll Tax Cut Extended

The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 was enacted on February 22, continuing the social security tax withholding rate at 4.2 percent through the end of 2012 rather than returning it to the 6.2 percent rate which was in effect prior to 2011. The two percent rate reduction was originally in effect for all of 2011, and then was extended through the end of February 2012. The payroll tax cut benefits nearly 160 million workers, requires no action by workers to continue receiving the cut, and has no effect on workers' future Social Security benefits. The law also affects current railroad workers in the same way with regard to Railroad Retirement Tier I tax rates, which are equivalent to social security benefits.

### BLET National Contract Ratified

On January 5, 2012, BLET members approved a new collective bargaining agreement by a 2-to-1 margin. The new five-year agreement with the National Carriers' Conference Committee is retroactive to January 1, 2010. The following is from a BLET Newsflash posted on January 5, 2011:

"The agreement largely reflects the recommendations of Presidential Emergency Board 243, which was appointed on the eve of a pending nationwide strike by BLET members. The PEB recommendations provided a better outcome for BLET members than the carrier's proposal by recommending the phasing in of the larger portions of the health and welfare changes over an 18-month period, rather than instituting all of them immediately.

"The BLET's National Wage Committee, led by National President Dennis R. Pierce, then secured a Flexible Spending Account benefit to help offset any possible increased costs

associated with the health and welfare, as well as a clarification to PEB 243's ambiguous recommendation that a 1% signing bonus only be paid on an employee's 'straight time' earnings."

In that same newsflash, President Pierce thanked all of those who took the time to cast their vote by the January 5 deadline, and stated that there was a "very solid turnout," especially given that the voting took place over the holiday season.

### Controversy Over Recess Appointments

Representative Steve LaTourette (R-OH) formally closed the first session of the 112th Congress just before noon on Tuesday, January 3, and began the second session at noon. The 20th Amendment to the Constitution requires that Congress must meet at least once each year, at noon, on the third day of January. The Second Session of the 112th Congress formally convened on January 17, 2012. This election year begins with a display of more partisan politics and endless bickering while serious problems go unresolved.

In January, a huge dispute arose over some recess appointments made by President Obama, and the debate over the question as to what actually constitutes a congressional recess rages on. Starting before last Memorial Day weekend, the House of Representatives would not agree to recess and began holding "pro forma" sessions after a group of Republican legislators said they wanted to block the President from making any recess appointments, specifically the appointment to the position of Director of the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau. Under the Constitution, neither the House nor the Senate can recess for more than three days unless both agree. The House of Representatives did not give that consent and instead held pro forma sessions every three days, forcing the Senate to do the same. Both chambers have gaveled themselves in and out for a few seconds at least every fourth day in order to technically maintain a "session."

On January 4, under the Recess Appointment Clause of the U.S. Constitution, President Obama claimed authority to appoint Richard Cordray as Director of the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau (CFPB), and also appointed three new members to the vacant positions on the National Labor Relations

Board (NLRB). Senate Republicans disputed the appointments stating that Obama had "arrogantly circumvented the American people" with these appointments and it was expected that a legal challenge would ensue. On January 6, the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel ruled that the President did in fact have the discretion to conclude that the Senate was unavailable to perform its advise-and-consent function, allowing him to exercise his power to make recess appointments. Both the White House and the Justice Department have argued that the recent pro-forma sessions of the U.S. Senate did not constitute a legitimate session that could block the appointments.

All of this has given rise to the question of what exactly constitutes a congressional recess. A tug-of-war has ensued, with the executive branch arguing that the President had the authority to make the appointments because the Senate was not in perpetual meeting, and congressional Republicans arguing that the President has overstepped his bounds because the chamber was not technically on recess. The Recess Appointment Clause in the U.S. Constitution expressly gives the President the "Power to fill up all vacancies that may happen during the Recess of the Senate, by granting commission which shall expire at the end of their next session." But nowhere in the Constitution is there a definition of what actually constitutes a recess.

Lawyers for this White House and for past administrations have argued that the use of "pro forma" sessions is merely a legislative sham designed to rob the executive branch of its powers. Over the last 100+ years, there have been other differing legal arguments regarding the interpretation of the Recess Appointment Clause and what actually constitutes a recess. Although the courts do not like to get in the middle of disputes between the other two branches, it may actually be the Judicial Branch that will have the final word on whether or not the Senate was in recess when the appointments were made by President Obama; however this could take some time. In the meantime, the debate over whether or not the appointments are valid continues and leaves the door open for future court challenges regarding the decisions rendered by both the CFPB and the NLRB. The seating of the three new members on the NLRB is an important move for the rights



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of American workers as this action will allow the board, which has five seats, to continue to function. The board had shrunk to only two members when the term of a previous Democratic recess appointee expired on January 3, 2012. The board is not allowed to make decisions with less than three members. The new members are Department of Labor Attorney Sharon Block, labor lawyer Richard Griffin, and NLRB counsel Terence Flynn.

### **War on Workers Wages on with Passage of FAA Reauthorization Bill**

Anti-worker legislators and some of the nation's most powerful airlines had it their way on February 5 with the passage of the long-awaited Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill by 75 to 20. The bill, entitled H.R. 658, the FAA Air Transportation Modernization and Safety Improvement Act, sponsored by Rep. John Mica (R-FL), which modernizes air traffic control systems and funds the FAA through 2014 has been fought over for the past four years and led to a partial shutdown of the FAA last summer due to the anti-union language that would have changed the way union elections are handled for airline and railroad workers. That provision would have repealed the 2010 ruling of the National Mediation Board that made union representation elections among airline and railroad workers covered by the Railway Labor Act the same as all other elections in America... where the majority of those who vote make the decision as to whether or not there will be union representation. Prior to that rule change, the NMB rules governing representation elections in the railroad and aviation industries counted workers who did not vote in the elections as having voted against representation.

While it was still in committee, two amendments were offered, one by Steve LaTourette (R-OH) and one by Jerry Costello (D-IL), to strip the anti-union language from the bill. However, both amendments were defeated and the bill passed out of the House on April 1, 2011, and was referred to a conference committee. Although the measure outlined above, was stripped in the conference committee, it was unfortunately replaced by other anti-union language that is designed to weaken the Railway Labor Act and to end the discretion of the National Mediation Board (NMB) to decide when a representation election will be held. The newly added provision will increase the number of signatures necessary to compel an election for an unrepresented bargaining unit from 35 percent to 50 percent. These

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## **With this being an election year, BLET and BLET Auxiliary members are urged to take note of which legislators in Congress support our issues and which do not.**

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changes will, in fact, result in a higher threshold to hold a representation election than for a union to prevail in the elections. The changes also promote legal challenges by railroads and make it extremely difficult for unions to continue to exist on smaller carriers that are merged with a large, non-union carrier.

In addition, this bill changes the way a "run-off" is handled in a representation election. Currently, if two unions are on an election ballot and between them they garner more than a majority of votes, a runoff election between those two unions is held. Provisions of this bill state that a runoff between the top two vote-getters will include the category of "no union," even though a majority of the voters voted in favor of union representation. *Example:* One union gets 40% of the votes, one union gets 29%, and 31% of the votes are for "no union." The runoff will be between the union that got 40% of the votes and the category of "no union" because the percentage who voted "no union" was higher than the percentage who voted for the other union. This gives management two opportunities to defeat unionization of their workforce.

Ten rail labor unions, including the BLET and Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division joined forces with the Teamsters and other transportation unions to defend rail workers from these provisions designed to weaken their rights to be represented by a union. In a joint statement issued on January 30, the unions urged the Senate to delete the provisions of the bill that would amend the Railway Labor Act and to pass a clean FAA Reauthorization bill. The letter states that "Rewarding the House Republican Leadership's desire to rewrite decades of long standing labor law in a flash by inserting an unrelated and controversial labor provision in a much needed aviation and security bill, without notice, hearing, or debate, sets an extremely dangerous precedent." *To see the entire letter, go to <http://files.cwa-union.org/national/News/Misc/20120130-FAA-Reauthorization.pdf>.*

Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) was amongst the Democrats who voted in favor of the bill and praised it as a good compromise and a vital step forward for the country's air traffic control system. Many of his Democratic

colleagues, however, sided with the unions, agreeing that Congress was caving in to a few powerful airlines. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) was one of the 157 House Democrats and 15 Democratic Senators who stood up for collective bargaining. Senator Harkin stated that he was taking a stand against "a few of these powerful companies who don't want their workers to have representation" because someday "they might have to put a few additional dollars in their workers' pockets." The bill now goes to President Obama for his signature. On February 7, BLET National President Dennis Pierce sent a letter, delivered electronically, to the White House urging President Obama to veto the bill. *A copy of the letter is available at [http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Pierce\\_Obama\\_FAA.pdf](http://www.ble-t.org/pr/pdf/Pierce_Obama_FAA.pdf).*

With this being an election year, BLET and BLET Auxiliary members are urged to take note of which legislators in Congress support our issues and which do not. *To see how your Representative voted on this bill on April 1, 2011, go to <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/vote.xpd?vote=h2011-220>. To see how your Senators voted on February 6, go to <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/vote.xpd?vote=s2012-15>.*

### **House Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill**

The House Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill, HR 7, also known as "The American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act of 2012," was introduced by Rep. John Mica (R-FL) on January 31 and referred to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. This bill contained language that pushed for allowing heavier trucks on our nation's highways. The proposed bill would allow freight trucks with six axles to weigh up to 97,000 pounds, an increase from the current limit of 80,000 pounds. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle argued that the increase would make roads less safe, not to mention the damage these heavier trucks would create on our already crumbling infrastructure. When the bill was marked up on February 2, a bipartisan amendment was submitted by Reps. Lou Barletta (R-PA) and Jerry Costello (D-IL) to require a study before considering an increase in the limit on truck weight. The amendment was approved 33-20. Thanks to everyone who contacted their representatives asking them

to vote no on any attempts to pass legislation that would allow bigger trucks.

There are, however, other provisions still remaining in this bill that are detrimental for rail employees. One is a provision that will cause nearly 15% of Amtrak employees to lose their jobs by privatizing several areas of Amtrak operations, handing over the food and beverage service and state-supported services that receive federal subsidies to private contractors. The bill also calls for significant cuts to Amtrak's operating funding in FY 2012 and 2013. In 2012, Amtrak funding would be decreased from \$616 million to \$466 million, and in 2013, it would be reduced from \$631 million to \$463 million (nearly one-third). This is yet another effort by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and its chairman, John Mica, to privatize and dismantle Amtrak.

Another provision has to do with Positive Train Control (PTC). As you may recall, the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 mandated that PTC be installed on the nation's railroads by 2015 and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) followed with a regulation ordering that the technology be implemented by December 31, 2015, on a vast expanse of track used to transport passengers and certain hazardous materials. A provision of H.R.7 calls for delaying the implementation of PTC systems by five years, pushing back the date of implementation to December 31, 2020, for commuter systems and on or after December 31, 2020, for freight railroads. It also gives the freight railroads the ability to avoid implementing PTC altogether on lines carrying poisonous-by-inhalation or toxic-by-inhalation materials by allowing for undefined "alternative" strategies instead. However, the legislation offers no criteria as to how this safeguarding would occur.

The legislation also contains language designed to weaken the Federal Railroad Administration by making it more difficult for important safety issues to be addressed in the regulatory process. It would make all regulations issued by the Department of Transportation, including the FRA, subject to much stricter scrutiny than what is currently in effect. New regulations would have to be based on an undefined standard of evidence, thereby tying the hands of the FRA, making it difficult, if not impossible, to create regulations that are good policy.

As the bill continues to be debated on the House floor, opposition has been pouring

in from a diverse group of transportation stakeholders, elected officials, health professionals, business and labor groups, and public interest organizations, as well as a veto threat from the Obama Administration. Although the country is in desperate need of a transportation bill that provides robust funding and updates national priorities and policies, this bill, which would end three decades of dedicated federal funding for public transportation, has been dubbed, "Bad on transit, bad on safety, bad on the environment." Please urge your elected officials to vote against this damaging legislation.

### **Amtrak & High-Speed Rail**

On February 14, the Obama Administration released a FY-2013 budget request that includes a \$6 billion investment in Amtrak and high-speed rail in 2012. This proposal is in sharp contrast to the \$1.42 billion set aside for Amtrak in the 2012 round of appropriations, which is an unacceptable figure given the record-breaking 30.2 million passengers carried by Amtrak last year. Amtrak ridership has steadily risen for the last eight years. The funding for 2012 would be broken down into two pots, with \$4 billion going to network development and \$2 billion toward system preservation.

The proposal also includes a six-year surface transportation reauthorization that includes a total of \$47.09 billion for passenger trains through the end of 2018, with \$2.546 for high speed and intercity passenger rail, including Amtrak, in the coming year.

Please encourage our friends on both sides of the aisle to support this legislation that will not only protect the employment of our brothers and sisters who work for Amtrak and ensure that our Railroad Retirement Fund continues to be sustained by their employment, but will also create good-paying manufacturing and construction jobs in our country.

### **Railroad Retirement and the IRS**

Each January the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) publishes a series of questions and answers to help beneficiaries with the tax statements that are issued by the RRB and the tax withholding from their benefits. For more information, go to: [http://www.rrb.gov/opa/qa/pub\\_1202.asp](http://www.rrb.gov/opa/qa/pub_1202.asp) or contact an office of the RRB.

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## **MEDICARE "DOC FIX"**

On February 17, the Medicare "Doc Fix" passed in both the House and the Senate. This is part of the same legislation that extends the temporary Social Security payroll tax cut and through 2012 and continues unemployment compensation benefits for the long-term jobless. The "Doc Fix" delays a 27.4% reduction in Medicare pay to physicians from March 1, 2012, to January 1, 2013.

Congress has been passing legislation since 2003 to delay the reduction in pay for physicians treating senior and disabled citizens. The pay cut would make it much harder for those on Medicare to access physician care. Medicare payments for doctors is determined by a complex fee system in which payment is tied to a social-science measurement of doctors' estimated time, energy, and resources in providing a medical service. Since 1989, doctors cannot legally charge Medicare patients more than government officials say.

Physician payment is annually updated on the basis of the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR), a special economic formula which would result in deep annual payment cuts. What really needs to happen is for Congress to devise a permanent fix that would be fair to doctors and make a serious effort to slow the rise of Medicare spending.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the cost of delaying the scheduled Medicare pay cut for 10 months is \$18 billion. To help offset this and other expenditures in the bill, lawmakers reduced federal payments to hospitals. Under the bill, over the course of 11 years they would receive \$7 billion less in Medicare funds that make up for unpaid deductibles and copayments owed by patients. Hospitals that serve a disproportionate number of low-income patients also would receive \$4.1 billion less in Medicaid payments.



# Phoenix Day of Action

continued from front cover

Workers' banner, and a rally on the House lawn. BLET National Vice President/National Legislative Representative John Tolman attended the event and spoke at the rally on behalf of the BLET Members of Arizona and across the nation.

He and the other speakers warned that these gathering attacks on unions are just a precursor to broader efforts to cripple all unions and take advantage of the workers they represent.

Arizona is the latest front in the War on Workers. In early February of this year, four collective bargaining bills were introduced in the Arizona State Senate. In short, these bills would ban collective bargaining for state and local government workers and school districts, bar cities and counties from paying release time to workers doing union business, and ban payroll deduction for union dues. One bill, which already passed in the Senate on February 16, requires unions to obtain annual authorization for automatic payroll deduction for union dues.

These bills were crafted last fall with the help of Wisconsin's Governor Scott Walker and two right-wing organizations that write bills for conservative state legislators to attack organized labor. Arizona, already a right-to-work state, has a very dominating Republican majority in both the House and the Senate, and its Governor, Jan Brewer, has become somewhat well known nationwide, first through her push for controversial immigration laws in the state, then with her cutting of organ transplant recipients from the state's Medicaid program, and more recently when she wagged her finger in the face of President Obama on an airport tarmac near Phoenix. Now she is pushing a bill to remove civil service protections from many state employees. Rumor has it that she will veto any or all of the pending anti-union bills recently introduced if her proposed changes to the state's personnel system do not pass.

Petitions to recall Governor Jan Brewer were being circulated at the Day of Action event.



Aux. 28 President Kathy Hurst signed the "Standing up for Arizona Workers" banner at the March 1 Day of Action in Phoenix, Arizona.



BLET National VP/National LR John Tolman told the crowd at the Rally it is their obligation to preserve for future generations that for which their ancestors fought so hard to attain.



## Spring

**I love the spring.  
For every day  
There's something new  
That's come to stay.  
Another bud  
Another bird  
Another blade  
The sun has stirred.**

# Retirement Rocks!

By Maddy Salisbury (madandjohn@aol.com), Auxiliary 235

Retirement has been, and hopefully will continue to be, a lot of fun. My husband John retired in October 2004, and we both have active lives.

John stays really active in the Masons and the Shriners. At least once a month he volunteers to make a trip from Oklahoma City to the Shriner Orthopedic Center in Shreveport or the Shriner Burn Center in Galveston. He drives a van that transports children in need of care, along with a family member, to receive the treatment that they desperately need. The Shriners fund the entire trip, including overnight stays. Their medical attention is provided at no cost to them. John has gotten to know some of the families and keeps me updated on their progress. Another one of their worthwhile causes is volunteering to screen children for potential eye problems. This is overseen by the Organization for the Prevention of Blindness. He has had so much fun going to different schools and interacting with these fun-loving kids that I have decided to join him. I am planning to go to the training in March.

We continue to stay in touch with the many good friends we have made through the BLET and the BLET Auxiliary. Because we live in Oklahoma City, John had been associated with the Santa Fe Committee of Adjustment through his many years as Local Chairman of Division 141. I regret now that I did not take more of an interest in attending all the great Southwest conventions that were held each year. I was busy selling real estate and it was so hard to clear my schedule. But once I began attending, I was hooked; it was all so enlighten-

ing! The conventions opened my eyes to what it means to be a locomotive engineer. I don't think I had a real appreciation for what was really at stake each time my husband left the house to go to work. I made numerous good friends through these meetings, many of whom I remain in touch with today. I continue to be involved in the BLET Auxiliary and I was lucky enough to participate as a delegate at the last National Convention in Reno, Nevada, in October 2010.

Another high point of John's retirement was getting to plan the Southwest Convention for 2005 in Oklahoma City. It was hard work for him but boy was it worthwhile! We received so much positive feedback from all the attendees. I found myself getting more involved in the planning as the opening day of the convention grew closer. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the logistics and negotiations of putting together this giant event.

During the summers, we spend part of our time at a vacation home in the Smokey Mountains of North Carolina in a town called Maggie Valley. It is close enough to Asheville, North Carolina, that we were able to attend the Southeastern Convention that was held there in the summer of 2011. The event was at a hotel close to the Biltmore Mansion and it added a wonderful new dimension to be able to share that spectacular attraction with old and new friends. During the remainder of our summers, we go to the Four Seasons RV Resort in Salida, Colorado. We finally got smart and found storage out there for our RV.

Our timing was perfect as it is scary to think about what gas prices are predicted to do this summer.

My dream for our retirement was to be where it was cool in the summer and warm during the winter. We have been lucky enough to exchange our timeshare in Arkansas for several weeks on Florida's southeast coast. We've been there two times already this year. I have learned you can make some great timeshare trades at the last minute; however, last-minute airfare can be so exorbitant that it doesn't pay to take advantage of these great offers. When I am at home, I spend time searching the internet for travel deals. I have found that by pulling up the airports within your driving distance to see who flies out of there and then checking with some of the less known airlines, you can find some great deals. In April, we are planning a trip to Kentucky to see a long lost cousin of mine; our timing will coincide with the event known as "Thunder of Louisville," renowned for being the largest fireworks spectacular in North America.

I don't spend a lot of time away from the house when we are at home in Oklahoma City; there's a lot around here to keep me busy. I get out to visit friends, exercise, shop, and participate in religious functions and charitable fundraisers. I also love to attend an occasional Thunder game. We love the Thunder (formerly the Seattle Supersonics) whether we get to see them on TV or in person. Even though this fabulous basketball team has only been ours since 2008, we have all been stricken by "Thundermania." We are looking forward to seeing them in the finals!



**Maddy and John Salisbury**

When I am home, I find myself on the computer, doing a little cooking, and picking up after myself and John. It seems like I spend a lot of time walking from room to room trying to remember why I walked in there in the first place. The older I get, the longer it seems to take for me to get ready to leave the house. Give me a couple more years and I may not be able to get out until after dark! That will work as long as there are dim lights and I don't run into anyone I know.

We are blessed to have our family nearby in Tulsa. We can get there in 90 minutes to attend recitals and competitions and show our love and support. Our grandkids range in age from 10 to 21. We enjoy sharing holidays with our son, daughter, daughter-in-law, and their three girls and two boys between them - what a crazy fun mix when we all get together! We are hoping that we can coerce them away from their many extra-curricular activities to visit us in North Carolina this year.

We are very grateful for everything we have - each other, our health, our shared beliefs and values, and our loving family and friends. My parting words—save your money, shop the sales, watch your investments, be grateful for what you have, give back to those less fortunate, and, most of all, put a lot of love in your life. It all can vanish in the blink of an eye.

## From 1st VP/National Outreach Coordinator Gina Forman



Happy Spring greetings to you all! I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable winter, and made it through it in good health and spirits! I know it certainly has been a fast start to 2012 around here. I am pleased to report that I have made contact with a potential new Auxiliary in Elkhart, Indiana. We are moving right along and have hopes of getting it organized later this spring.

As many of you may know, I live in Indiana. Our state is one of the most recent casualties in the War on Workers. We are the 23rd state where the "Right to Work" bill has passed and is going to be made into law. Republican Governor Mitch Daniels made it his main priority to get this bill passed before he left office. The law passed along party lines, and with Republicans in control of both the House and Senate, his wish was granted. State Democrats made an effort to fight the bill for the second time by staging a walkout until the bill was removed. However, they were forced back to work when a \$1000-a-day fine was levied against them by leader Brian Bosna. Shortly after they were back to work, the bill passed. BLET National President Dennis Pierce and Teamsters President James P. Hoffa led campaigns to stop this bill. Locally, we contacted our members to get involved and tell these politicians there are more important things to accomplish. Our voices were ignored.

While this bill does not directly affect members represented by the BLET, it does affect our union brothers and sisters who stand with us in the fight for top wages and benefits. Although our efforts failed, it was good to see so many union personnel marching together day after day on the evening news. If our voices were ignored now, then they will certainly be heard in November. I encourage you all to have the courage to get involved and do your part to make a difference. I truly hope the day never comes where railroad workers' rights are targeted, but should that day arrive, I am confident we will all do our part to stand up and fight for what is right.

Looking forward, I hope you all have a great Easter Holiday. The time for picnics and cookout will be quickly upon us. We will convene the Executive Counsel in early June to award scholarships and conduct business. Locally, my auxiliary members here in Peru, Indiana, are going to host our 5th Annual Bake Sale to raise money for our scholarship program. Our membership is growing and we are all proud to belong to the Auxiliary. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions. Have a wonderful Spring!

Gina Forman can be reached at 765-432-1050, [tweety95@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tweety95@sbcglobal.net), or 63 S. Hood Street, Peru, Indiana 46970

## Greetings from the Editor, Sereena Hogan

As you may have gathered from reading some of the other pages in this issue, increasing our membership in the Auxiliary is our number one priority for this year. Here in Tucson we have been working to build up the membership of our local Guadalupe Auxiliary No. 28. At our meeting in February, we had three new members and we are hoping that is just the beginning!

We urge our current members and all of our readers to please help us in this endeavor. If we can assist you in any way, including providing printed promotional materials, please do not hesitate to give us a call.

I enjoyed attending the "Day of Action" in Phoenix on March 1 even though I had to get up very early that day to catch the bus that the Pima Area Labor Federation had chartered for us. Although unions are not a huge presence in this right-to-work state, it was enlightening and invigorating to be amongst nearly 1000 union brothers and sisters and those who support them and are concerned for the rights of working people here in Arizona and all around the country. It was a special treat to have Brother Tolman attend the event on behalf of all BLET members, and his speech at the rally was very well received.

Wishing a springtime full of bright new beginnings to all of you! I look forward to seeing many of you in the months ahead.



**We welcome your submissions for our publication. Please send your stories, articles, photos, poems, etc., to:**

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**The next issue will be published in June. Please have your submissions to Sereena by May 30.**



# Mark Your Calendar Now for the 2012 Regional Conventions

## **Southeastern Meeting Association June 24-29, 2012 - Orlando, Fla.**

Arrangements Chairman Earl Karper (Division 35) is hosting the 2012 SMA at the Disney Coronado Springs Hotel (1000 West Buena Vista Drive, Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830, phone: (407) 939-1000). For details, visit [www.SMA2012.com](http://www.SMA2012.com). Contact Brother Karper: [ekarper@sma2012.com](mailto:ekarper@sma2012.com).

## **International Western Convention July 29-August 1, 2012 - Billings, Mont.**

Hosted by Arrangements Chairman Craig Gilchrist (Montana State Legislative Board Chairman, BLET Division 298) and Co-Chair D.B. Kenner (Division 195). At the Crown Plaza Billings (27 North 27th St., Billings, Mont. 59101, phone: (406) 252-7400). Contact Brother Gilchrist: [blecag@nemontel.net](mailto:blecag@nemontel.net); or Brother Kenner: [kennerdb@yahoo.com](mailto:kennerdb@yahoo.com).

## **Eastern Union Meeting Association August 19-24, 2012 - Atlantic City, N.J.**

Hosted by Arrangements Chairman Matt Kronyak (New Jersey State Legislative Board Chairman and Division 235 Local Chairman), the 2012 EUMA will be at Bally's Atlantic City (1900 Pacific Ave., Atlantic City, NJ 08401, phone: (800) 345-7253, [www.ballysac.com](http://www.ballysac.com)). Contact Brother Kronyak: [mcmkronyak@aol.com](mailto:mcmkronyak@aol.com) or (201) 978-6436.

## **Southwestern Convention Meeting September 9-13, 2012 - Galveston, Texas**

Hosted by Arrangements Chairman Jack Sweeny, Division 776 Local Chairman, the 2012 SWCM will be at the Moody Gardens Hotel (Seven Hope Blvd., Galveston, Texas 77554, phone: (888) 388-8484, [www.moodygardenshotel.com](http://www.moodygardenshotel.com)). Contact Brother Sweeny: [jrsweeny@coastal-link.net](mailto:jrsweeny@coastal-link.net).

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