



National Association of Retired & Veteran Railway Employees, Inc.

NARVRE National Office
Phone Toll Free: 1-800-551-2588
6819 Crumpler Blvd, Suite 200 • Olive Branch, MS 38654-1940
Email: NARVRE@gmail.com • WEBSITE: www.narvre.us
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Cost – Membership in a Unit or Membership-at-Large



NARVRE NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT —

Several decades ago I came to Minneapolis to seek employment and found a job on the railroad. I landed in south Minneapolis along Lake Street. This is the area where recently you saw protesters, arson, and looting in addition to the death of George Floyd. Looking back over sixty years times have really changed for that neighborhood. Now as Covid-19 reaches out over the country, us seniors stay sheltered to avoid being a victim.

I guess Minneapolis is no different than any other city in the country. Systemic racial tensions entrenched at society's core. Going back to the 1960's with protests over the Vietnam War, assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, and Robert F. Kennedy and the ensuing turmoil that grasped us all. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. This legislation has helped in our politics, but has not put out the flames of racism nor attacks on our citizens by the very groups sworn to protect us.

God Bless George Floyd and the many others. For the first time we have seen black and white come together to protest racial inequality in our daily lives.

— Tom Dwyer, National President

FROM THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR —

Members of Congress and staff have a major issue hanging over their collective heads, related to the November 3rd General Election. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought this year's elections to the forefront of issues affecting all secretaries of states, election officials, and state and federal lawmakers working to safeguard the health of American voters, and properly protect our Democracy at the ballot box. The current pandemic will absolutely change the way our 2020 elections will be run, and how voters will cast their votes. Earlier 2020 elections in certain states were delayed and voters have experienced fewer precincts open with limited help from in-experienced volunteers to assist the voters. However, specific election funding of \$425 million has been allocated, and training is ongoing in the states. The lines to vote are now longer due to personal distancing in place, and voters in most states will be required to wear masks at polling sites. States are updating their election emergency powers to give governors and election officials more latitude to reschedule primaries, move polling places, expand options to all-mail elections, while ensuring in-person voting is accessible and safe. The federal general election is set by federal statute as the Tuesday following the first Monday in November (since 1845). This date cannot be changed by a state nor by the President. It would take a change in federal law to move that date. Legislation would have to be enacted by Congress, signed by the President and would be subject

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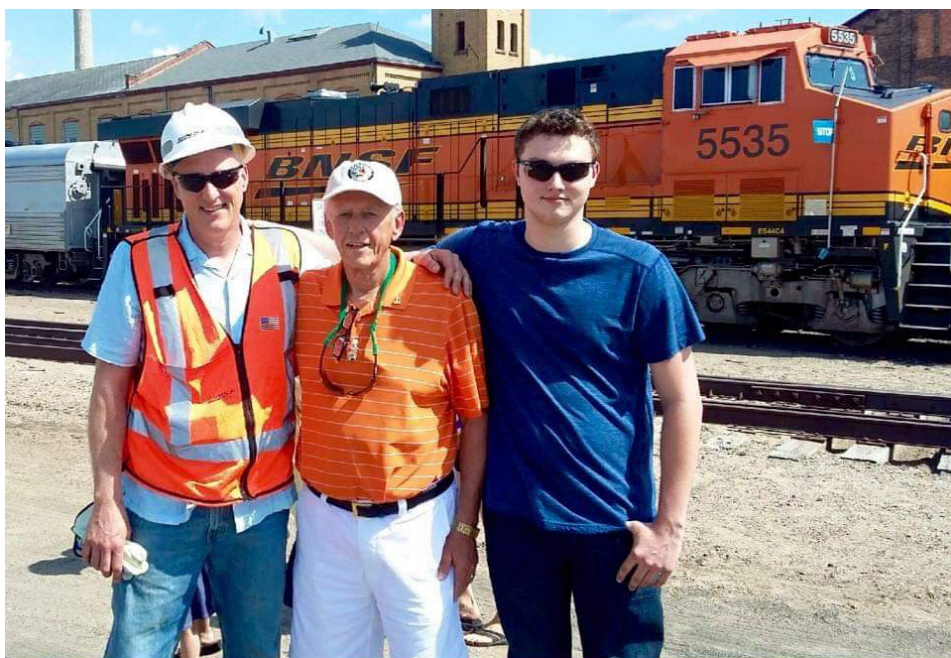


Photo at Brainerd, Mn. Left to right: Chadd Nelson, Road Foreman of Engines; Gary R Nelson, Area 4 Director; Christopher Nelson. Three generations of the Nelson family. The photo was taken on site of the Northern Pacific Railway Shops. BNSF still has a Work Equipment Shop there which employs over 100 people.

From the National Vice President —

July is the beginning of the Third Quarter of the Fiscal Year and usually, it is the time of the year to evaluate our membership roster and dues.

In May 2020 we had about 14,000 members on our roster. We must start to increase our membership and begin to prepare for the next Biennial Convention of May 2022. Our main setback is the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which caused our Biennial Convention of May 2020 to be cancelled and continues to keep our local units from conducting meetings due to the dangers of risking contagion of the deadly COVID-19 virus.

Slowly we are recovering our late membership dues, but we must make every effort to recover the loss. Although I encourage our Area Directors to continue to check with their jurisdictional and respective units to ask officers to set up membership drives, it is going to be a difficult challenge without being able to conduct meetings.

As an example, I would like to feature our Area 1 Director, George Boatwright, for the excellent work he is doing to continue to recruit and expand his membership. George is our newest of the Area Directors and he also is the President of Florida State Association he reorganized.

George Boatwright writes *“Activity Report for Area 1 May-June 6-6-2020. Hi Tony, I have mailed 151 letters of introduction and information forms to NARVRE Area families OUTSIDE of Florida on May 10, 2020. As of this date*

I have received replies from 14 families and two returned undeliverable. I also emailed the same to 80 families and have received about 8 replies. Today, I mailed 166 letters and forms along with the 3rd Quarter Florida State Association Newsletter to families in Florida. Additionally, there were 94 emails to families containing these items as attachments. This is the only time that the newsletter will be received by those without email. I will be on vacation the next two weeks and hope to find my mailbox full upon my return. All updates to rosters are sent to Phil and he has quickly updated info received. Also, a ‘cc’ is sent to Unit Officers with new information.”

This is commendable and admirable. This is a technique that others could adopt to reach out to the membership. NARVRE members must continue to Promote, Protect and Preserve our Railroad Retirement Pension Annuity.

Brothers and Sisters, I want to

thank all those that continue to make financial contributions to NARVRE in the form of honoring, recognizing and memorializing family members and friends in the rail industry by making a voluntary contribution above your membership dues. You have made a big difference to augment our NARVRE finances and it is appreciated, no matter how small your contribution may be.

On another note, be aware that we are still in the first wave of the COVID-19 virus and a rebound may take us to the end of the year and perhaps to the end of 2021. Avoid gatherings and stay home as much as possible. Wear a mask and wash your hands often. There are over 2 million confirmed cases and over 117,000 deaths. With the opening of the economy it is expected to double, so stay safe. God Bless us all.

— **Anthony (Tony) Padilla**
NARVRE National Vice President



The engineer of the westbound *California Zephyr* enters the cab at Fraser-Winter Park, Colo., in June 2016. Amtrak plans to cut the *Zephyr*, and the vast majority of its other long-distance trains, to triweekly service on Oct. 1.



The New Orleans-bound *Crescent* pulls into Meridian, Miss., in May 2014. Amtrak says it has not yet finalized plans for cuts to its long-distance service and so did not say whether some portions, such as the New York-Atlanta segment of the *Crescent*, might still run daily.

Thank you!

We would like to thank all who made donations, both large and small. Your contributions are important to advancing the organizational goals of NARVRE.

Billy Parker • Victor Sunquist • David Corles

Memorials

Steve Lee, Secretary Treasurer Unit 027 Los Angeles CA • William Powell • Wally Davis • Bennie R Daiprai • David Brooks • Tom George • Jim Tush • Rodney McDowell • Robert “Bob” Shanklin • Thomas Bushner

From the National Secretary-Treasurer —

There have been multiple inquiries from unit officers asking about procedures for resuming monthly meetings. Although I do not consider myself an expert on the topic of COVID-19, I have done much research from the CDC as well as other available resources and put together a general overview. There is currently no vaccine to prevent the coronavirus, but there are ways to help with prevention. In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we must understand how it is spread.

- The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus.
- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- Some recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

Some common prevention tips include:

- Listen for instructions from your local government about staying home.

- Stay at least 6 feet or 2 arms lengths from others.
 - Wash hands often and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
 - Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth with hands that are not sanitized.
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or tissue.
 - Cover your mouth and nose in public with a face covering, including surgical and cloth masks
- For additional ideas for consideration review my article in the May/June newsletter which can be accessed on our website at www.narvre.us or check the CDC website www.cdc.gov for the latest COVID-19 updated information.

— **James (Phil) Steward,**
National Secretary/Treasurer

(National Legislative Director from page 1)

to challenges in the courts. And time would have to be factored in with choosing an alternate date, as the Constitution mandates that the new Congress must be sworn in on Jan. 3, and the new presidential term must begin on Jan 20. Those dates cannot be changed simply by the passage of normal legislation. Therefore, the next general election will be held on Nov. 3, 2020.

Any hopes of implementing “online computer voting systems” have been scrapped because of the many security issues, so most election officials are focusing on mail-in ballots as the obvious preference for the next general election. There's little experience with online-voting but there are track records showing success with both mail-in requests for ballots and mail-in absentee voting.

All states now have some form of voting by mail, such as absentee ballots that are mailed to eligible voters that request one. Some states automatically mail ballots to every eligible voter where no request or application is necessary. Also, some states now allow eligible voters to sign up for a permanent absentee ballot list and if qualified, will receive an absentee ballot for all future elections. The majority of states now permit voters

to cast ballots before election day, either in person at designated early voting sites, or via a ballot that has been mailed to the voter's home. In all states, to varying degrees, voting now takes place not just on one day during a certain time period, but over a series of days and weeks before the election, as well. Absentee voting ballots arrive early which gives the voter additional time to look over the entire ballot before voting. Two-thirds of the states allow any qualified voter to vote absentee ballot without offering an excuse, and one-third of the states demand an excuse to obtain an absentee ballot. Information specific to each state can be found on their websites (such as MI.Gov/elections), and that will include local polling site information, as well.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and countless other experts have said that replacing paperless voting machines is critical. As a security benefit, mail-in ballots are human readable paper ballots, providing a reliable method for critical post-election audits. Further, national intelligence agencies, like DHS continue to warn us of intensifying cyber-threats to a vulnerable lack of security within our election systems. Studies indicate and agree that the use of paperless voting machines are extremely susceptible to hacking without detection because they pro-

duce only a digital record of votes. Without a paper record, officials have no way of verifying a vote count when a machine is hacked. While funding to protect our elections against foreign interference and cyberattacks is a part of the aforementioned \$425 million, the experts state that this is simply a starting point, and much more must be invested in this critical matter. We all must protect our voting rights, so we don't see them disappear. Seniors should collectively vote to elect candidates that will protect the rights of older citizens for the same reason.

—**Gary Faley,**
National Legislative Director



Area 1 Director; Florida State Association President, George Boatwright. Be sure to read George's BIO on our website at www.narvre.us under the STAFF menu button.

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National President
Thomas Dwyer
11304 Norway St. NW
Coon Rapids MN 55448-3269
763-757-1501 FAX 763-767-5794
tdwyertcu@aol.com

National Vice President
Anthony "Tony" Padilla
303 Black Cap Run
Buda, TX 78610-4978
Home: 512-523-8465
Cell: 512-552-8703
tonypadillatcuam@austin.rr.com

National Secretary-Treasurer
James (Phil) Steward
6819 Crumpler Blvd, Ste 200
Olive Branch, MS 38654-1940
1-800-551-2588
narvre@gmail.com

National Legislative Director
Gary M Faley
6324 Calkins Road
Flint, MI 48532-3207
810-733-7256
faleyg@comcast.net

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED
AND VETERAN RAILWAY EMPLOYEES, INC.
6819 Crumpler Blvd, Ste 200
Olive Branch, MS 38654-1940
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Railroad Medicare Updates Financial System

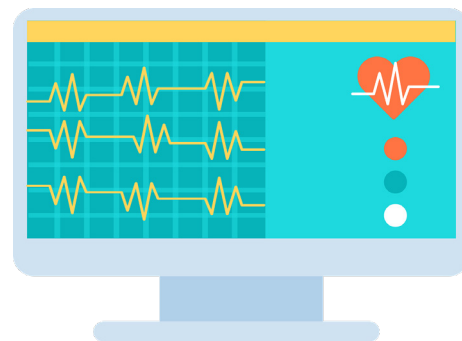
Railroad Medicare has transitioned to a new financial system. It is the same financial system used by the local Medicare contractors in your area. The system, named the Healthcare Integrated General Ledger Accounting System, or HIGLAS, was implemented on June 15, 2020. HIGLAS is a robust accounting system that replaces the legacy accounting system in place for the past decade.

Overall, HIGLAS lets the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to track Medicare payments and to accurately pay claims for over 58 million Medicare beneficiaries. The change here gives the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) and CMS enhanced oversight of contractors' accounting systems, as well as access to more accurate, timely, and consistent data for decision-making and for evaluations.

As part of this transition, we sent out a letter to more than 100,000 providers letting them know about this change. (We sent letters to these providers because they had

sent us claims in the past year.) In order to perform the transition from one system to the next, Railroad Medicare had to pay some claims faster than usual, which means your doctors offices, labs, etc. may have received payment sooner than they were expecting. This may have given the appearance that their cash revenues had increased, when in fact payments for some claims may have simply been made earlier than normal. We strongly encouraged providers to monitor their payments and make adjustments as necessary to prevent cash flow problems during the transition period (June 17 through July 1, 2020).

If your provider is unsure about their claims payments due to the HIGLAS transition, please have them give us a call at 888-355-9165, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in all time zones, with the exception of Pacific Time, which is available from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. PT. They can also visit our website at www.PalmettoGBA.com/RR for more information about the



HIGLAS transition.

Other than questions providers could have about when payments may have been made, this change to HIGLAS should not have any impact to you. Your claims will continue to process as normal.

If your provider has an issue and will not call us, we encourage you to call our Beneficiary Contact Center by calling 800-833-4455, or for TTY, call 877-566-3572. Representatives are available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET. You can also visit our website at www.PalmettoGBA.com/RR/Me.

— *Jennifer Johnson,*
Palmetto, GBA