



— SINCE 1937 —

National Association of Retired & Veteran Railway Employees, Inc.

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NARVRE NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE NATIONAL PAST PRESIDENT —

As I place pen to paper in my last official act as President of NARVRE, many memories have surfaced going back to the 1980's. I first joined NARVRE at the age of 48 in Unit 109 at Minneapolis-St. Paul. I became Unit Legislative Representative as well as a term as president. Those days I was so proud of Unit 109 members because they decided to challenge the State of Minnesota in a taxation law suit whereby our annuities were being taxed against federal law U.S. Code 45, Sec 231m. The late Bob Jaeb was the plaintiff in the case and his records were flawless. The attorney for NARVRE Unit 109, Keith Queensen was superb as well. State Attorney General Hubert Humphrey, III sent documents to the court defending federal law and our position on taxation and would not defend the State in Court. Tax Court Judge Arthur Roemer ruled that specific federal legislation exempts benefits received under that act from any taxation other than federal taxes. These NARVRE members Bob Jaeb, Joe Mike, Roger Carlson, Floyd Nelson now all deceased saved 32,000 railroad retirees and were refunded \$2.9 million dollars. This case was from 1988-1989. I was happy for them and to be a part of their win in the lobbying effort.

The 1980's were turbulent with passage of the Staggers Act deregulating the railroads causing the carriers to buying off employees which affected the railroad retirement system. The 1974 amendments granted railroad employees 30-60 retirement or the rule of 90. In 1983, those retiring after 1984 between age 60 and 62 had their Tier 1 reduced

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National Vice President Ron Hylla, National Secretary Treasurer Philip Steward, National President George Boatwright, National Legislative Director Gary Faley.

FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT —

Greetings to the members of NARVRE from your newly elected National President, George Boatwright. Please go to www.narvre.us and click on "STAFF" to view my BIO. Beginning with the July issue I will have a regular column and express to you my goals and aspirations for OUR organization in the coming years. Congratulations to newly elected National Vice-President, Ron Hylla and to the returning National Secretary/Treasurer, Phil Steward and to National Legislative Director, Gary Faley. Please keep us all in your thoughts and prayers as along with the other members of the Governing Board we work UNITED together to advance the principles and ideals of NARVRE.

— *George Boatwright,*
Newly-Elected National President

FROM THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR —

The current budget law requires the President to submit his annual Fiscal Year (FY) budget for the federal government which begins on October 1st of each year and ends on September 30th of the following year. The White House on 3/28/22 released President Joe Biden's \$5.8 trillion proposed budget for federal spending in FY 2023. This budget requests that Congress pass a new minimum tax on billionaire households worth more than \$100 million and pay a rate of at least 20 percent on their income and assets in stocks and bonds that are currently taxed only when they are sold. The increase would apply only to the top one-hundredth of 1 percent of American households. The budget document and proposal refer to it as a prepayment of tax obligations and means the very

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From the National Vice President —

I am Ron Hylla, the duly elected National Vice President for NARVRE. I wish to thank the delegates for their support at the 42nd Biennial Convention in Oakland, California. The delegates at the convention elected a truly devoted group of National Officers who will protect NARVRE and its members well into the future.

I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to my friend Tom Dwyer for his many years of service to NARVRE members. Tom has been an inspiration to me as well as others across this nation. I wish Tom and Diane the very best in their retirement years.

I also wish to thank outgoing NARVRE National Vice President Tony Padilla for his years of service to NARVRE. While Tony has elected to step down from his position, he will continue to assist NARVRE as Area 5 Director.

One of the major responsibilities of the National Vice President is to recruit new members. While Vice President Tony Padilla, along with the Area Directors and Assistant Directors, have done a fantastic job in obtaining new members, there is still much more work to be done. As of 2020, RRB reported there were 418,000 full retirement beneficiaries receiving railroad retirement benefits. However, just a small fraction of those railroad retirees are members of NARVRE. We need to double our efforts to secure more members to insure the stability of NARVRE into the future.

Finally, I look forward to serving you and NARVRE for the next two years. While it may be a challenge for all of us in securing new members, I remain confident we can succeed.

— **Ron Hylla**
NARVRE National Vice President

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.

Glenn & Fay Lindbloom \$1000 • Victor Sundquist • Barbara Sundquist • David Corless • James Earl White

Memorials

Michael Walsh • Ivory J Jones • Mike Doherty Past President Unit 162 Centralia IL (closed) • Lynn Queatham

(National Past President from page 1)

with 20 percent at age 60 and 10 percent at age 61. It was passage of The Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001 effective February 2002 that 30-60 was fully restored with no penalty.

At this particular time I was appointed by President A.W. "Whitey" Westphal, to National Legislative Director succeeding Vince Connelly of New Jersey. This was the push in 2000-2001 as we were assigned to Washington, D.C. to pass The Railroad Retirement and Survivors' Improvement Act of 2001. Those involved were all of rail labor, the Association of American Railroads (AAR), The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) and Actuaries and the Congress of the United States. NARVRE was there as well alongside Gary Faley, Tony Padilla and the LR's and Legislative Committee of NARVRE. There were a lot of NARVRE friends in this fight Dennis Boston (BRS), James Brunkenhoefer (UTU), John Tolman, (BLE) and the BMWs.

The law gave us back 30-60 and established the NRRIT the investment mechanism of the law

I became National President at the Convention in Spokane, WA in 2008. From 2008, I enjoyed meeting with Units across



Waterfront Hotel, site of 2022 Convention
Oakland CA.

the country and our members. I visited 36 Units in my tenure and helped organize units in Bakersfield, Los Angeles, Barstow and Stockton, CA. The late Bob Bloomer takes credit for all of that.

In closing, the names of Whitey Westphal, George Wisdom, Mary David, Harold Zweifel, Stan Mosvick, Joyce Burton, Rich Duley, Dick Raatz, Patty Burr, Don Cain, R.C. Smith, Ruth and Bob Teper and of course all the current officers of NARVRE leaves many great memories. I won't be far away so give me a ring I still have a telephone. Thank you all for the memories.

— **Tom Dwyer**,
National Past President



Area Directors: Walter Barrows Area 2, Adrienne Natoli Area 3, Gary R Nelson Area 4, Tony Padilla Area 5, Gary Marquart Area 6, Robert Boltz Area 7, Bob Aparicio Area 8.

(National Legislative Director from page 1)

wealthiest will pay taxes as they go, just like everyone else. While this may sound fair in most non-partisan economic circles, the proposal is indeed receiving kickback from some tax policy experts, even some

From the National Secretary-Treasurer —

Our 42nd biennial Convention was hosted by Unit 61 Oakland CA. Many thanks to the Convention Co chairs Nicie Patterson and Brian Lewis, Committee Secretary Treasurer Bob Paulson and Unit 61 President, Fred Granados. The Convention was an outstanding success. We honor the Committee members and volunteers for the hard work that made everything come to fruition. Additionally thanks Mrs. Nancy Lewis for her time and dedication to this marathon effort as well. Over the next several issues our writers will be reporting on many of the issues covered at the Convention. For all the Delegates within the next ten days I will be sending via email the Official Minutes approved by the Governing Board, which can be used as a resource to report convention information to their Unit members.

Their were a lot of firsts at the 42nd convention such as the Women's Appreciation Breakfast, RRB 3 person panel featuring, Former Labor Member Walt Barrows, Current Labor Member John Bragg, and Asst. to Labor Member Mark Thomson, Presentation by National President of SMART, Jeremy Ferguson, and the addition of the Jones Granger Law firm as sponsor with Bruce Halstead speaking on the firm's behalf.

Not to be redundant after arriving home from the excitement from the Convention and settling in, I wanted to again share our thanks to all the convention attendees. We are so grateful for the effort that Delegates, Alternates, and spouses made to attend our National Event from around the country. We also appreciate everyone's extended support, gifts, and prayers and we are truly blessed to have been given such fantastic organization.

Our next Convention in 2024 will be hosted by Unit 095 Kansas City MO.

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

employed as White House officials. An additional request aims to mitigate and change yearly borrowing habits in order to shrink the federal budget deficit, stating the deficit this year is currently on track to decline by more than \$1 trillion. While the Biden FY23 budget lays claim to economic policies that will further reduce the deficit (along with the impact of the billionaire tax change), belt-tightening measures will continue to be felt in most government agencies to include the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB).

The President's FY23 budget, includes \$131.666 million for the Railroad Retirement Board's administration expenses which would support an estimated 756 employees. The RRB is requesting \$151.409 million for FY23 to support 880 employees and manage the rising operations costs of their hybrid information technology (IT) environment. The RRB states that there are two main reasons for the discrepancy between the agency and the President's budget requests and what the agency would do with that money. First, the RRB needs more staffing investments. Years of stagnant budgets, unfunded COLA and insurance costs, and the cumulative impact of past and anticipated attrition on staffing levels across the agency has left the RRB treading water. In order to provide good customer service, the agency needs to hire aggressively and manage proper succession planning. The second reason is the hybrid state the agency is in relative to IT modernization. They need to maintain staff that is executing the current benefit administration while also dedicating staff to the changes

that are in progress. The agency is getting ready to move into an IT phase that will depend heavily on user testing and support. Additional staffing will be needed and dedicated to IT modernization for the Bureau of Information Service and throughout the agency. It's no secret that the RRB has had to operate on outdated equipment due to inadequate funding for years. The history of staffing indicates that from 2017 to 2022, the RRB went from 853 employees to 756, a decrease of almost 12 percent. The RRB is vulnerable to cyber-attacks like all agencies and must be able to secure the personal information of all railroad workers and railroad retirement annuitants. The agency must be protected with the newest security and technology and that will take appropriate investments by the Congress. The RRB has made the case for their requested appropriations for FY23. The more detailed and intricate information has been thoroughly explained and delivered to Congress, as required. Our assistance as members of NARVRE will be indicated by forthcoming information to be used as talking points. As railroad retirees and beneficiaries of our railroad retirement system, we are on the receiving end of the efforts from an understaffed agency. Whenever possible, we will always need to convey the plight of the RRB to our own Representatives in Congress for FY2023 ...and the years to come. More to come as we continue to communicate with colleagues at the RRB.

—**Gary Faley,**
National Legislative Director



Tribute to Outgoing President Tom Dwyer. Plaque held by Gary Nelson. Left to right: Gary Faley, Ron Hylla, Philip Steward, Gary Nelson and Tony Padilla.

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News deadline 10th of each month

Medicare Covers Over-the-Counter COVID-19 Tests

Coming at a time when families gather together for the Easter holidays, Medicare announced that it is covering over-the-counter (OTC), Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved COVID-19 tests at no cost for 59 million Americans enrolled in Medicare Part B, along with those in a Medicare Advantage plan. Medicare will pay participating eligible pharmacies, and other health care providers, directly for providing these tests.

Medicare will cover up to 8 OTC tests per calendar month beginning April 4, 2022, through the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The tests will be provided at no cost to you, up to the 8 tests per calendar month limit, as long as you receive the tests from a participating pharmacy or provider. If you receive more than 8 tests per calendar month, Medicare will not pay for the additional tests and you will be responsible for the costs. You cannot submit a claim to Medicare for OTC tests you receive free as part of this initiative, or that you purchase yourself.

The following are some of the national pharmacies where you can get these tests:

- Albertsons Companies, Inc.
- Costco Pharmacy

- CVS
- Food Lion
- Giant Food
- The Giant Company
- Hannaford Pharmacies
- H-E-B Pharmacy
- Hy-Vee Pharmacy
- Kroger Family of Pharmacies
- Rite Aid Corp
- Shop & Stop
- Walgreens, and
- Walmart.

You can find contact information for these pharmacies and their options for ordering the tests by visiting this website: <https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus#300>. If you'd like to see if your local pharmacy or health care provider is participating in this initiative and will bill Medicare for you, please contact them directly.

This activity is the first time Medicare has covered an over-the-counter test. Dr. Meena Seshamani, Director of the Center for Medicare at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), told the public that COVID-19 testing is a critical part of our pandemic response, via a press release. She also said: "Combined with the free over-the-counter tests available through covid-

tests.gov, this initiative will significantly increase testing access for Americans most vulnerable to COVID-19 and will provide valuable information for future payment policy supporting accessible, comprehensive, person-centered health care."

If you have questions about this Part B benefit, you can call our Beneficiary Contact Center at 800-833-4455, or for the hearing impaired, call TTY/TDD at 877-566-3572. Customer Service Representatives are available Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. until 7 p.m. ET. You can also visit our website at www.PamettoGBA.com/RR/Me.

We invite you to use our free internet portal, MyRRMed, to access claim status, historical Medicare summary notices, and review any individuals you have authorized to have access to your private medical information. You can visit MyRRMed at www.PalmettoGBA.com/MyRRMed.

To read more from Dr. Seshamani, please visit this website: <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/biden-harris-administration-announces-get-free-over-counter-covid-19>

— **Jennifer Johnson,**
Palmetto, GBA