

Disabled Members Attacked by AAR, CEOs

CLEVELAND, October 26 -- The railroad industry has again shown its contempt for its workers, including those who are retired.

Edward Hamberger, president of the Association of American Railroads, recently wrote to Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY) in opposition to H.R. 5483, the Railroad Retirement Disability Earnings Act. Senator Enzi serves as the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. The bill, scheduled for Senate consideration after the November 7 elections, would increase the amount of money a disabled individual can earn without affecting his or her Railroad Retirement Disability benefits.

The House passed the bill on September 28 and the Senate needs to pass it in order for it to become law. However, AAR is lobbying against it.

1. “The House of Representatives saw fit to increase the amount of money these men and women can receive from outside employment,” BLET National President Don Hahs said. “However, the railroads can’t concede an inch in their battle against their workers – both present and former. The total cost of this legislation would be about \$400,000 annually – a pittance compared to the millions raked in by these CEOs in salary and bonuses.”

Current law limits the outside earnings of a railroad worker drawing disability benefits from the Railroad Retirement Board to a maximum of \$400 per month. These limits have remained unchanged for more than a decade. The bill raises the monthly limit to \$700. If passed, the measure would become effective January 1, 2007, and would also create an indexing formula to provide for automatic increases in the future.

“This is an attack against the most vulnerable,” said BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman, who is lobbying for passage of the bill on Capitol Hill. “Many of the individuals that would be affected by the passage of this legislation were hurt on the job. Others are considered disabled or disqualified from working by the railroads themselves for various reasons. These individuals rely on their Railroad Retirement disability benefits in combination with outside work. The attempt to destroy this legislation would jeopardize their benefits – and their ability to provide for their families.”