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All Local Chairmen  
All Secretary / Treasurers  
BNSF (SLSF) – MNA GCA

November 1, 2005  
**Re: Initiative – Rank/File Elections**  
Sent via USPS and Email

Dear Sirs and Brothers,

This is in reference to the petition that was recently circulated by Division 316 to all BLET Local Divisions dated October 18, 2005 in accordance with Section 4(a) – National Division Rules. The “Initiative” that was put forth to the divisions is a proposal to change BLET’s current process governing the election of National Division Officers. Our current process allows the rank and file membership of each division to elect a delegate to attend the National Convention and that delegate carries the division’s vote to the Convention. This form of “representative governance” includes the right of the rank and file membership of each division to instruct their delegate on all matters before the body at the Convention, including the election of officers.

The proposal presented by BLET Division 316 would modify this process by creating a nationwide “rank and file” election process for the purpose of electing National Division Officers. As written, this new process would not take the place of the National Convention. It would still take place and would include nominations for national officers, a rank and file election would then take place in addition to *and* subsequent to the Convention.

Several of you have asked that the General Committee of Adjustment share its view on this matter , thus this letter and correspondence. Attached is a list of bullet points that were compiled by the Western General Chairmen’s Association for distribution to our respective divisions. Our goal in preparing these points is not to instruct any member as to how to view this issue, rather to do everything we can to ensure those studying this issue are given both sides of the debate that has long surrounded this issue and on several convention floors. We would ask that you make every effort to see the attached bullet points are made available at your division meeting so as to allow for discussions on this very important topic. Only through education and open debate can the membership move forward to make a decision which is truly in their best interest.

As always, please feel free to contact this office in the event you have additional questions.

Fraternally and with solidarity,

R. C. Gibbons  
BLET General Chairman

Cc: BNSF BLET General Chairmen  
Steve Speagle, BLET Vice President Assigned  
Don Hahs, BLET National President

## Initiative presented by BLET Division 316 – Rank and File Elections vs. Delegate Elections

Whether the current election of National Division Officers by “Delegates” at the Quadrennial Convention is retained, or a “Rank and File” process is adopted, both systems represent a democratic majority rule system. Regardless of process, there will be those who cast their votes in what becomes the majority and there will be those who cast their votes in the minority, changing the current process will not change that outcome. The following bullet points are to insure that BLET Divisions give full consideration to the details of either process, so that they consider the current initiative with as much information as possible.

1. Our current system governing the election of National Division Officers is a democratic process based on representative government. Representative government is not unique to this process, it is in place all across the country in all political forums. Currently, each Division elects a Delegate by rank and file election to attend the National Convention and represent the Division’s wishes on all matters before the assembled body, including the election of National Division Officers. While in session, Delegates are the governing body of the National Division of the BLET. In addition, the rank and file membership of each BLET Division is authorized to instruct their Delegate on how to vote on any resolution before the body as well as who to vote for in the election of National Division Officers.
2. The current convention process includes question and answer sessions where each Delegate can question candidates for National Division positions before casting their vote. Candidates cannot avoid direct questions, relying on printed brochures, rather, they must address direct and pointed questions concerning their views and ideas. Candidates are also available throughout the Convention for one on one discussions so that Delegates can address any concerns that they might have prior to casting their Division’s vote.
3. Under the current system, all business of the National Division is completed within the week set aside for the National Convention, including the election of National Division Officers. No additional costs are generated following the Convention for the additional Rank and File Elections, costs that are always passed onto the membership in the form of increased dues.
4. If a “Rank and File” election process is adopted for the election of National Division Officers, several things will change, the most apparent being the cost to the membership. The National Division is not the “BLET”, the membership is the BLET and all activities of the National Division are the financial responsibility of the membership through their dues assessments. The National Division advises that the minimum predicted costs to adopt Rank and File elections for National Division Officers would be \$50,000.00, the actual costs associated with the Rank and File vote to merge with IBT were closer to \$100,000.00. In the past few weeks, the National Division successfully negotiated with IBT to address the \$11.00 increase to the IBT per capita with no increase passed on to membership dues. The costs of a Rank and File election are not included in that budget plan, and any new costs generated by Rank and File elections will most likely be passed onto the membership in the form of a dues increase.
5. The Rank and File of the BLET recently voted to retain the twelve (12) man minimum for those Divisions existing prior to the BLE-IBT merger. This decision preserved the right of each Division to continue to have a full part in the election process based on “representative government”. Rank and File elections will diminish if not eliminate the votes of smaller BLET Divisions, all but wiping out the voice that the recent Rank and File vote preserved. For example, the Rank and File membership of a Division having 200 members could counteract the votes of the Rank and File membership of ten (10) Divisions of twenty (20) members. The votes of one BLET Region’s Rank and File could counteract the votes of another BLET Region’s Rank and File, eliminating any form

of regional based representative government. As information, this very issue has been before the Delegates at several past conventions and has always been defeated because all Divisions, large or small, are equally represented at the Convention. It is no surprise that the issue is now before the Rank and File prior to the upcoming convention, it is to avoid the voting strength of the smaller divisions at the convention.

6. Equally important to the membership is how Rank and File elections of National Division Officers will change who can run for a National Division position. When the costs of one single direct mailing to the Rank and File exceeds \$10,000.00, average members will not be able to afford to run for positions at the National Division. Only those who are independently wealthy, or dependent on the “contributions” of others will be able to afford to seek the positions. Our membership often complains about how the cost of getting elected has eliminated the voice of the average citizen in local and national elections for public office. Changing to a Rank and File election of our National Division officers would do the same, creating a world where only those members who can arrange financial backing can afford to run for office.
7. Finally, one of the most important impacts of Rank and File elections to the membership is how this new process would affect the campaign process. The BLET membership elects National Division Officers to carry out the business and work of the membership, and there is plenty of work still to be done. Expecting Officers to spend the time reaching out directly to each and every member to be elected or re elected can only take from the time that should be dedicated to the real work of the BLET. Rank and File elections would all but create full time candidates and require that politicking become a full time occupation, rather than a required event once every four years. Even with direct campaigning, the jury is out on how much the Rank and File will truly be able to learn about any candidate, absent direct access currently available at the Convention.

While BLET's Bylaws place the initial decision on “Initiatives” in the hands of BLET Local Divisions, it is important that those who cast their votes at upcoming Division meetings fully consider all impacts of this decision. Change for the sake of change rarely improves things unless there is a showing that the current system is broken, and, that the proposed system repairs what is broken. Some supporters of Rank and File elections maintain that the new process will make it easier to remove all incumbent officers from office and that may be true. However, the current Delegate election process accomplishes the same thing, without passing on new costs and/or concerns to the membership. Remember that the Delegate election process removed all three National Division Executive Board members from Office at the Convention in 2001 and has not re elected a sitting President since 1981. Changing to a Rank and File election process where only those who are financially beholden to others can afford to run for office, diminishing the vote strength of the small divisions while increasing costs and dues to all members may not be the improvement that some make it out to be. In any event, the issue is in the hands of the Divisions now and all are encouraged to participate in the discussions, debate, and Division voting process regardless of viewpoint. BLET is a democratically run Organization with or without the changes proposed in this “Initiative” and there is room for all opinions and viewpoints with the majority of those voting ultimately ruling.