

National Association of Retired & Veteran Railway Employees, Inc. — SINCE 1937 —

NARVRE National Office
102 S Williams, Suite B
Moberly, MO 65270-3430
Phone: 660/269-8895 • Fax: 660/269-8896
Toll Free: 1-800-551-2588
Email: NARVRE@gmail.com
WEBSITE: www.narvre.org



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NARVRE NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT —

Every December the Railroad Retirement Board issues notices as to whether or not annuitants are entitled to

“Widow(er)’s annuities computed on the basis of the initial minimum amount **will not increase** until the amount payable under **previous law plus cost-of-living increases** is higher than the initial minimum amount.”

a Cost-of-Living increase based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. When January rolls around some widowed annuitants receive a letter that they will not receive an increase based on the Widows’ Initial Minimum Amount (WIMA). The Railroad Retirement and Survivors Improvement Act of

2001 addressed Widow(er)s’ Benefits as such.

The legislation established an “initial minimum amount” based on the two-tier annuity amount that would have been payable to the railroad employee

at the time **the widow(er)’s annuity is awarded, minus any applicable reductions.** Widow(er)’s annuities computed on the basis of the initial minimum amount **will not increase** until the amount payable under **previous law plus cost-of-living increases** is higher than the initial minimum amount. This provision was effective February 1, 2002.

An hypothetical example could be the following. Let’s say Ms. Helen Smith, who’s husband passed away on September 17, 2002, so she was directly affected by the new WIMA law at that time. Her net monthly annuity in 2005 was \$1488.92 per month. Her net monthly annuity in 2006 changed to \$1478.62 per month. This \$10.30 reduction in her net monthly annuity is due to the \$10.30 increase in her Medicare premium, which went up from \$78.20 in 2005 to \$88.50 in 2006.

Every widow(er) annuity is different. The WIMA provision was effective February 1, 2002, and was not retroactive. It applied to widow(er)’s on the rolls before the effective date **only if the annuity the widow(er)’s was receiving on the effective date was less than he or she would have received had the legislation been in effect on the date the widow(er)’s annuity began.**

If you are currently affected by WIMA it is best to talk to the RRB to see when you will than become eligible to receive a cost-of-living again. They can be reached at 1-877-772-5772.

— Tom Dwyer,
National President

From the National Legislative Director —

The First Session of the 112th Congress closed out with the usual and confounding politicization that marked the entire year on Capitol Hill. The House is scheduled to convene the Second Session on Tuesday, January 17, 2012, and the Senate is scheduled to convene the following Monday, January 23, 2012.

“Will they help protect railroad retirement by voting for the proper levels of federal funding for Amtrak, or will they only vote to subsidize the highways and airline industries?”

The last order of business in the 2011 Congress was to extend certain deadlines that prevented Medicare providers from absorbing a big cut in Medicare payments (doc-fix issue), continued specific therapy

treatments, and also extended the payroll tax cut holiday, but for only a two-month period. Therefore, as soon as they return to Capitol Hill, they must try to reach agreement on how to modify the formula for paying Medicare providers, and over a longer-period of time. The main problem is finding ways to pay for it, because it is expensive. The CBO estimates that the cost for a one-year extension will reach \$21 billion, and while

the two parties are looking at very different ways of finding that money, they at least agree the next doc-fix legislation must identify where that money will come from. We shall keep watch on that process.

Final appropriations for Amtrak came in at \$1.4 billion for FY 2012, or \$64 million less than 2011 levels. The \$1.4b includes \$466 million for operations and the remainder of \$952 million is for capital improvements and debt service. Amtrak did win a big victory by convincing Congress to turn back an earlier House proposal that would have eliminated all federal funds for 26 state partner-

From the National Vice President —

“Attack! Attack! Attack!”

Does this phrase represent December, 1941? NO! it is a reminder of action by Congress in 2011, when, our very livelihood was under attack; Social Security, Medicare, (Vouchers), and the Balancing of the budget all on the back of the fixed income, senior citizens.

Our National Legislative Director, Gary Faley, asked in September for calls and emails to your member of the House of Representatives in Washington to demand a stop to the elimination of all funding for Amtrak, as proposed by the house appropriations subcommittee on Transportation & Housing. Elimination of funds was to affect all Amtrak Trains operating between St. Louis and Kansas

City. Amtrak does not issue predictions, but reported “...from Oct. 1, 2010, to Sept. 30 2011, it set an annual ridership record of 30.2 million passengers. During Thanksgiving week, the rail service’s busiest travel period of the year, ridership was up 2.8% over 2010”. Due to the documented information, why do we have to constantly appeal to congress for full funding for Amtrak? What if we didn’t? Think!

“Amtrak does not issue predictions, but reported “..from Oct. 1, 2010, to Sept. 30 2011, it set an annual ridership record of 30.2 million passengers.”

There is no room for error or apathy now. Life offers many choices, and N.A.R.V.R.E. members have made the choice to do all they can to protect our retirement, and keep our membership informed of important issues.

I want to thank all units for their efforts last year in contacting delinquent unit members, when notified and asked to contact again those who had not renewed. You went to work early last fall when alerted by Sec/Tr. Duley to start sending out renewal notices, stating they would be delinquent on January 1. Now is the time to check again to see who needs a second reminder.

The N.A.R.V.R.E. Convention will be in May, 2012. Please, all Units plan to send a delegate. I thank you for the 14 years you have honored me as your NVP, and I appreciate all you have done to help preserve our annuity.

You are important to N.A.R.V.R.E.; please continue to make N.A.R.V.R.E. important to you.

— **George A. Wisdom**

N.A.R.V.R.E. National Vice President

From the National Secretary-Treasurer —

2012

Member’s Dues

Your National Office is working hard getting the 2012 member’s dues posted. It is very important that all of our members continue to receive their monthly NARVRE newsletter. Please take action now if you have not paid your 2012 dues. Call your unit Treasurer and double check to see if they have sent your dues money to the National Office for posting. Our members at large (801)

please get your dues in the mail or call the National Office for information about your membership.

Attention: Local Unit S & T’s, your annual audit report and Local Unit election forms are due. Please try to get them sent to the National Office ASAP. The 990N report can be filed with the IRS. Please send a copy of your 990N filing to the National Office so we can post your unit records. If you are having a problem with any of these reports call the National Office for assistance.

NARVEPAC Ready For Action

About two and half years ago we initiated a political action committee called NARVREPAC. We have hesitated to make any contributions to political candidates to this point until the fund built up to a reasonable sum. With 2012 elections in the near future we would like to start making some contributions to candidates who will support railroad retirees in Congress from both political parties. We also would like to support challengers seeking office as well.

NARVREPAC is registered with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) in Washington, D.C. All donations must be voluntary from NARVRE members and contributions must be made by personal check addressed to NARVRE at the National Secretary-Treasurer’s office, 102 S. Williams, Ste B, Moberly, MO 65270. Note NARVREPAC on the check in the memo.

No monies from Unit treasuries can be used nor pooling from individual members such (as passing the hat) at Unit meetings. All contributions must be done by an individual writing his own personal check.

The 2012 NARVRE National Convention will be held in Bloomington, MN on May 20, 21, & 22, 2012. At each convention all the National Offices are open for election, National President, National Vice President & National Secretary/Treasurer. Also, the Area Directors for Area’s 1, 3, 5 and 7. At this time the National Vice President and National Secretary/Treasurer will not be seeking re-election. This will be our convention to celebrate NARVRE’S 75TH BIRTHDAY.

— **Richard L. Duley**
National Secretary/Treasurer

**(National Legislative
Director from page 1)**

ships involving some 150 regional Amtrak trains running through 26 states. Those trains help maintain and preserve jobs on a daily basis while providing service for nine million passengers annually. This turn around came about by the efforts of many rail passenger train advocates, to include NARVRE and rail labor, along with the testimony and advice from the National Association of Rail Passengers (NARP) and the Transportation Trades Dept. of the AFL-CIO. It always takes a collective effort. We want to thank our Units and every member that took the time to contact your members of Congress in this never ending fight for adequate funding for Amtrak and the thousands of employees that pay into our railroad retirement system. Your efforts are the lifeline that serves NARVRE and our mission to protect and preserve our railroad annuities.

Beyond the need to address the temporary two-month extension package passed last December, there will not be much legislative movement in either chamber of Congress because it's full-steam ahead towards the November elections. The primary season will eventually come to an end, and all of us must then turn our focus to issues relative to railroad retirees and our railroad retirement system. Some candidates are upfront about their positions on certain issues, and some are not so open. We must be careful to support candidates that will serve to protect our needs and rights as seniors and retirees. These elections can be tiresome, especially with the overload of confusing attack

ads used to influence our votes. We should know where the candidate stands on issues like Amtrak as well as Medicare. Will they help protect railroad retirement by voting for the proper levels of federal funding for Amtrak, or will they only vote to subsidize the highways and airline industries? Where do they stand on Medicare issues that affect our health and well-being. We must demand answers to important questions. You have the right as a constituent to expect proper representation on immediate issues without interference from lobbyists outside your District soliciting their support. These candidates asking for our support should know that you belong to an association of retired railroad employees and that we are active. Politics is NARVRE's business. We must make them earn our vote by asking the necessary questions. Much more on these election issues in the months ahead.

You will have by now received your yearly breakdown for your railroad retirement benefits for 2012. The RRB notes that our monthly annuity payment was adjusted due to a rise in the cost-of-living. The increase for tier 1 is 3.6 %, and the increase for tier 2 is 1.2%. Our monthly payments will also reflect an increase in Medicare Part B premiums, based on the same adjustment. If you do not understand or have questions regarding this new annuity payment, you should contact the RRB at **877-772-5772**. Only the RRB can answer personal financial questions based on your individual information.

— **Gary M. Faley**
National Legislative Director

From Palmetto, GBA

Alcohol Screenings And Limited Alcohol Behavioral Counseling Medicare Covered Health Services

During the latter half of 2011, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) mandated that annual alcohol screenings, and for those that test positive, up to four brief face-to-face counseling sessions per year, are covered services for Medicare beneficiaries.


CMS has implemented this change based on a recommendation from the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). This entity is an independent panel of primary care providers and other non-federal participants charged with reviewing clinical preventive health care services. Their research found that women who consume more than seven drinks per week/ or more than three drinks per occasion, or men who have more than 14 drinks per week/ or more than 4 drinks per session, were more likely to have elevated risks for many health problems.

Medicare will cover the annual alcohol screenings and counseling by the following types of providers:

- General Practice
- Family Practice
- Internal Medicine
- Obstetrics/Gynecology
- Pediatric Medicine
- Geriatric Medicine
- Certified Nurse Midwife
- Nurse Practitioner
- Certified Clinical Nurse
Specialist
- Physician Assistant

Deductible and coinsurance do not apply, and these changes were effective for claims with a date of service of October 14, 2011 and later.

For the behavioral counseling, Medicare beneficiaries (including pregnant women) who screen positive will be allowed up to four brief

continued on page 4 

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Railroad Retirement Board
www.rrb.gov

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
www.socialsecurity.gov

DEPT. OF VETERAN AFFAIRS
www.va.gov
877-772-5772 • 880-772-1213 • 800-827-1000

Palmetto, GBA from page 3

face-to-face counseling interventions per year. Beneficiaries must meet the following criteria:

- * Must misuse alcohol, but whose patterns of consumption do not meet the criteria for alcohol dependence
- * Are competent and alert at the time counseling is provided
- * Whose counseling is conducted qualified primary care physician or other primary care practitioner in a primary care setting. This would include a physician's office, outpatient hospital, an independent clinic or a state/local public health clinic

Each of the four sessions must follow the USPSTF's requirements relayed in their 5-A's method:

1. Assess: this is when behavioral risk factors are discussed
 2. Advise: this means providing clear, specific and personalized behavioral change advice
 3. Agree: this happens when treatment goals and methods are selected collaboratively
 4. Assist: this is when self-help and counseling assist the participant achieve agreed-upon goals
 5. Arrange: this means scheduling follow-up sessions to provide ongoing assistance. It can be in person or by telephone
- If you have questions about this covered service, please call our Beneficiary Contact Center at (800) 833-4455 or for TTY, call (800) 377-4950. Representatives are available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET. You can also visit our Web site at www.PalmettoGBA.com/tr and select the link provided under "People with Railroad Medicare."
- Please visit our Facebook page called "My RR Medicare" at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/myrrmedicare>

— Jennifer Johnson

ACTOS ALERT- The diabetes medication Actos (pioglitazone) has been associated with and increased risk of bladder cancer. Our NARVRE Legal Counsel, The Moody Law Firm is representing individuals who have taken this medication and developed bladder cancer. If you have taken Actos and developed bladder cancer or experienced symptoms of blood or red color in your urine you should contact the Moody Firm at 1-800-793-4816.

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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
George Wisdom
729 McKinsey Pl.
Moberly, MO 65270
660-263-1056
gmwisdom@sbcglobal.net

National Secretary-Treasurer
Richard L. Duley
102 S Williams, Suite B
Moberly, MO 65270-3430
660-269-8895
narvre@gmail.com

National Legislative Director
Gary M Faley
6324 Calkins Road
Flint, MI 48532-3207
810-733-7256
faley@comcast.net
News deadline 10th of each month
Mail to National Office

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED
AND VETERAN RAILWAY EMPLOYEES, INC.

102 S Williams, Suite B
Moberly, MO 65270-3430

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