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Subject: Update from the Labor Member



FROM THE DESK OF

JOHN BRAGG
LABOR MEMBER

U.S. Railroad Retirement Board



April 24, 2020

I wanted to send out another update on what is going on at the agency. We have received inquiries regarding Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) that was established under the CARES Act and whether railroaders may be eligible for benefits under that program if they are not eligible for Railroad Unemployment Insurance Benefits (RUIA) benefits. The Department of Labor (DoL) is responsible for giving guidance to the states regarding the PUA benefits, so we asked the Railroad Retirement Board's (RRB) General Counsel to reach out to the DoL. The RRB's General Counsel has been advised by the DoL that nothing in the PUA provisions prohibit railroaders from being eligible for these benefits if they otherwise qualify. Similarly, the RRB's General Counsel has found that there is nothing in the RUIA that prohibits railroaders from receiving PUA benefits if they are not receiving RUIA benefits. So as a result, I would recommend that if your members have been denied RUIA benefits, they check with their state unemployment services to see if they are eligible for PUA benefits. To find out the application process in each state, you can refer workers to the Unemployment Benefit Finder at the following website:

<https://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/UnemploymentBenefits/Find-Unemployment-Benefits.aspx>.

We have also received questions about the \$1,200 one-time economic relief payment. The Department of Treasury is responsible for making those payments, so unfortunately, we do not have information about the timing of those payments. Information about the economic relief payments can be found at the following link: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/economic-impact-payments-what-you-need-to-know>

Though not related to COVID-19, I wanted to inform you of a new hire at the RRB. As you may remember from previous updates, the Board has been trying to hire a Chief Medical Officer. A new CMO, Dr. Elizabeth Bonson, has been hired and will be starting April 27. We hope that the CMO's presence at the agency will help make the disability process more efficient.

Finally, as you know, the RRB is located in Chicago and this week, the Governor of Illinois extended the stay-at-home order through May 30. I anticipate that the agency headquarters will

continue to primarily work remotely. Regarding the field offices, although not all states have the same limitations as the state of Illinois, at present it is my recommendation that it is in the best interests of agency personnel and the railroad population we serve to maintain the current work environment for all offices. Consequently, for the time being, field offices will remain closed to the public and staff will work remotely with periodic visits to the office for administrative tasks.

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