

# The retirement of R.R. RETIREMENT

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Legis. Rep.- BLET Div. 839

September 3, 2012  
Article 26

Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan, D.O.B. 1-29-70, is not the conceptual father of R.R. Retirement's retirement. He is more like the grand son as he was only 13 years old when this was first proposed during the Reagan Administration in 1983. At that time, I was 29 years of age and eight years associated with my "old head" co-workers of that era as my R.R. service goes back to 1975 with membership in the BLE(T) since 1976. Right or wrong, the reactionary difference of the men, then, to this issue was as different as the 29 year difference in time-span itself. Even without the Internet, they instantly grasped how their "tier 2" contributions, which represent the extra amount over and above Social Security, was theirs to keep as a refund should R.R. Retirement be retired. Why? Because the R.R. contributed share of our "tier 2" benefit is the result of R.R. contractual consideration, negotiation and sacrifice. Think of it as a 401 K on steroids. Even back then, the "tier 2" refund for a 40 year veteran would have been in the low hundreds of thousands (dollars) and they knew it! They also knew the average life expectancy after the then 65 year retirement age was only four years. Therefore, their motto was, give us our money now so we can better enjoy our short retirement, as well as pay the smaller Social Security contributions until the day we do retire.

Today, R.R. retirement age is nearer to 60, while male life expectancy is 72, making for an average 12 year instead of four year male retirement, and we know it. What most of us don't know, Internet notwithstanding, is that our "tier 2" contributions would be kept by us should R.R. Retirement be retired, but only if and while R.R. Retirement Board finances remain healthy. This misunderstanding caused a common abhorrent reaction, which was 180 degrees opposite from our recent T Y and E ancestors. Why? Because it was wrongly assumed our "tier 2" would be confiscated by Uncle Sam, thus making the so-called savings for the general tax paying public.

Armed with this past and present knowledge, and for the fun of it, I called Congressman Ryan's main office at 202-225-3031 for three weeks in a row, asking the same two questions. Question one: Since R.R. Retirement is totally self-supporting, how would its

abolition save money for the general tax paying public? Question two: By what formula would "tier 2" contributions be refunded to current R.R. employees as well as retirees should Social Security take over? Calling the first week, one of Ryan's staffers answered by saying, "Congressman Ryan was not available for comment." My response: "Would you please network these two questions amongst your staffers so that when I call back in a week we can further discuss, thank you." Calling the second week, another Ryan staffer asked, "Are you a constituent of Congressman Ryan, and what is your Ohio address?" My response: "I am a United States citizen, who is a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, a nation wide R.R. Union. If I need to, I could easily network my two questions through another BLET brother or sister living in your Congressman's District. If this is a delay tactic and your staffers need more time to answer the two questions, I'll call back in another week." The third week was the charm as a more open and cynically honest staffer actually answered by saying, "We don't know the answers to your questions because we never thought that far ahead. In short, we knew it had no "legs." My response: "How could Mr. Ryan be a Republican Vice Presidential hopeful, and submit legislation which isn't even half baked?" Their response: "It's kind of like Amtrak in that its funding is voted down time after time because we know that has no 'legs' either." My response: "Your political 'window dressing' has caused needless worry amongst hundreds of thousands of R.R. related people. At any rate, our Union(s) will continue to be vigilant in this matter." We parted by saying, "Thank you."

In hated conclusion, and in the hated long run — Congressman Ryan may be right about R.R. Retirement's retirement, but for entirely different and unwitting reasons, which are economic rather than political. Chief among them is the so-far immutable trend of R.R. companies spinning off more and more of their operations of all types to various vendors, public agencies and third party contractors, who instead, pay their new employees in Social Security wages. Various Amtrak operations may be soon to join. This trending shrinkage in R.R. Retirement contributors will have obvious consequences. The old adage, "When our outgo exceeds our ingo, our upkeep will be our downfall," fits perfectly here. If our topmost Union Officers continue to do little in the reversal of this trend, R.R. Retirement will suffer a slow and suffocating death. This will ultimately force a merger with Social Security. At that future point in time our "tier 2" funds will be long gone and obviously not available for reconveyance (refund). Therefore, as you come to your own conclusion in this matter, please discount forecasts that our R.R. Retirement will be healthy until 2035. Ninety-nine percent of all published financial forecasts are wrong because they are mainly calculated with present day factors and unable to factor future day variables.

As always, thanks again.