

# The Capital Times

## Baldwin Wins Duel with Railroads

By Dave Zweifel  
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Our congresswoman, Tammy Baldwin, is obviously tougher than some people give her credit for.

Dave Benforado, the executive director of the state's association of municipally owned utilities, sent along an interesting e-mail last week detailing some late-night congressional intrigue in which Baldwin played an important role.

In light of what is expected to be a boon in the manufacture of biofuels, Baldwin wants the Energy Department to conduct a one-year study to determine whether the nation's freight railroads will be able to transport those biofuels and, if so, whether they will be able to do so in a competitive environment and at reasonable rates.

The answers to those questions could be crucial to the future of alternative fuels. If railroads won't have the capacity to deliver the fuel to the market or won't be in a position to offer competitive rates, the cost of transportation could deliver a body blow to the use of biofuels. That would be bad news for energy independence initiatives, including Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle's plan to boost the production of alternative fuels here.

But, like most of corporate America, the freight railroads don't want government snooping around their business practices. So they sent their high-powered lobbyists to the meetings of the House Energy and Commerce Committee to defeat Baldwin's proposal. And, by the sounds of it, pulled out all stops. The freight railroads seldom lose congressional fights.

Benforado's Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin belongs to a national organization called Consumers United for Rail Equity (CURE), a group whose members rely on fuel delivered by train.

CURE's lawyer, Bob Szabo, reported that the maneuvering lasted well into two straight nights.

The freights were banking on Congressman Joe Barton, the Texas Republican and ranking minority member on the committee, to gut the Baldwin plan, Szabo wrote. But Baldwin held fast, marshalled support from CURE and a host of other organizations - from ethanol manufacturers to the Farm Bureau - and prevailed, he reported.

"So, please congratulate and thank Congresswoman Baldwin," Szabo told Benforado. "Our campaign is strengthened by the skirmish we won over the last couple of days in this major committee."