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U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Baldwin introduces legislation to improve freight rail service for American businesses

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) introduced the *Reliable Rail Service Act* to help address the unreliable service and high costs of rail shipping for American businesses. The legislation, which is supported by members of the agriculture industry, labor organizations, energy producers, and manufacturers, ensures the largest freight railroads provide American businesses reliable services at reasonable rates, delivers Made in American products to market more efficiently, and helps bring down costs for consumers.

"American farmers, producers, and manufacturers are paying sky-high prices for subpar rail service to get their goods to market, and consumers seeing the impact on their pocketbooks," **said Senator Baldwin.** "In order to build a strong Made in America economy and also lower costs for consumers, we need to ensure our agriculture, energy, and manufacturing businesses have reliable rail service. My Reliable Rail Service Act will keep our Made in America economy moving forward."

The *Reliable Rail Service Act* will help American-made products get to market more dependably by defining the "common carrier obligation." The "common carrier obligation" is a requirement that rail carriers serve the wider shipping public "on reasonable request," a provision of the 1980 Staggers Act that passed in response to the railroad industry's financial woes that threatened the long-term viability of freight rail transportation in the country. But, as a report from Transportation Research Board found, "the common carrier service obligation remains poorly defined" despite it being more than four decades old. Failure to define this principle

has contributed to insufficient rail services and exorbitant costs for American products to get to market. Clearly defining this ambiguous principle has taken on greater importance as the railroad industry faces consolidation and has undertaken Wall Street practices that reduce capacity on the rail network.

“The Wisconsin Farm Bureau appreciates the work of Sen. Baldwin to address the definition of common carrier service obligation and increase the authority of the Surface Transportation Board to address agricultural rail needs. The pandemic made it clear that Wisconsin farmers are dependent on the movement of agricultural goods by rail and we hope this increased authority will lead to greater efficiency within the rail industry,” **said Kevin Krentz, President, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation.**

“For years, America’s freight railroads have shaped a freight rail network that cannot reasonably respond to the country’s supply chain challenges. In some cases, they even created new challenges in the supply chain, such as when they cut 29% of the industry’s workforce in the last six years. Now, unreasonable service is a nationwide crisis for freight rail customers, including farmers, ranchers, manufacturers, and energy producers. We applaud Senator Baldwin for introducing the Reliable Rail Service Act to help remedy the freight rail service crisis by clearly defining the reasonable service obligation and providing the Surface Transportation Board with more effective mechanisms to enforce this obligation,” **said Greg Regan, President, Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO.**

“Our growers cannot make a living without consistent rail service. With this bill, Senator Baldwin is taking a step towards ensuring that we are delivered more reliable service while maintaining our strong partnership with the railroads,” **said Mark Hoffmann, President, Wisconsin Corn Growers Association.**

“The Wisconsin Soybean Association appreciates Senator Baldwin’s work on these critical transportation issues,” **said Joe Smentek, Executive Director, Wisconsin Soybean Association.** “When farmers are harvesting they need to be sure that common carriers are held accountable in their crucial role in the transportation system and ensuring timely delivery. The Wisconsin Soybean Association fully supports Senator Baldwin’s efforts on this issue”

“Manufacturers and consumers can’t keep being subjected to one rail crisis after another – we need Congress to act,” **said Chris Jahn, President and Chief**

Executive Officer, American Chemistry Council. “Senator Baldwin has put together a sensible solution aimed at addressing ongoing freight rail service failures. This is a problem everyone should be interested in solving. We urge Democrats and Republicans to come together to pass legislation that will ensure railroads live up to their obligation to provide reliable service.”

The legislation is supported by the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, National Grain and Feed Association, American Farm Bureau Federation, American Soybean Association, National Milk, National Corn Growers Association, National Association of Wheat Growers, Growth Energy, Corn Refiners Association, International Dairy Foods Association, USA Rice, Freight Rail Customer Alliance, Western Coal Traffic League, National Stone, Sand & Gravel Association, The Fertilizer Institute, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, American Chemistry Council, Consumer Brands Association, North American Millers’ Association, National Industrial Transportation League, American Pulse Association, USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council, U.S. Pea and Lentil Trade Association, National Grange, Private Rail Car Food and Beverage Association American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA), Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division (BMWED)-IBT, Brotherhood of Railway Carmen (BRC), Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS), International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers (IBB), International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), National Conference of Firemen and Oilers, SEIU (NCFO), Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers-Mechanical Division (SMART-MD), Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers-Transportation Division (SMART-TD), Transportation Communications Union (TCU), Transport Workers Union of America (TWU), Transportation Trades Department (TTD), AFL-CIO.

A one pager on the legislation is available here.

Full text of the legislation is available here.

An online version of this release is available here.