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## Fuel bill backers face questioning

### Two officials defended for ties

By **RAQUEL RUTLEDGE**  
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Members of a legislative committee on alternative fuels defended their chairman and another committee member Tuesday after questions surfaced over whether the two face conflicts of interest in sponsoring an ethanol bill.

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Meanwhile, one lawmaker, a longtime advocate of ethics reform, said the involvement of one of the sponsors raised a red flag.

The bill sponsors are Rep. Mike Sheridan (D-Janesville), president of United Autoworkers Local 95, a position paid for by General Motors, and Rep. Eugene Hahn (R-Cambria), who owns \$20,000 worth of shares in an ethanol production company.

The measure they introduced in

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February would provide a \$1,000 tax credit to Wisconsinites who purchase a flex fuel car, one that can run on petroleum or up to 85% ethanol. Flex fuel vehicles account for more than half of GM's total production at its Janesville plant.

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"If I was in that position, personally I would abstain from participation in that legislation," Rep. Spencer Black (D-Madison) said of Hahn's involvement.

Black said he didn't consider Sheridan's position at GM to be a problem.

"GM is the biggest employer in Janesville. His job as a legislator is to fight for GM," he said. "That's representing your constituents."

Sen. Fred Risser, (D-Madison) a lead sponsor of the ethics reform billed passed in January, said: "If you're a major stock holder or a director in a company, I think you should refrain from participating in anything that directly affects that company."

Risser said he didn't know if Hahn's \$20,000 in shares in Friesland-based United Wisconsin Grain Producers constituted a substantial chunk of the company.

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Members of the Committee on Biofuels and Sustainable Energy said they saw no conflict with either of their colleagues' sponsorship of the bill.

Rep. Jeffrey Wood (R-Chippewa Falls), a committee member, called it "logical" for Hahn to invest in an ethanol company.

"Why is he chairman of this committee? Because he's passionate about the issue, and he's a farmer," Wood said. "It shows he really is passionate with his own dollars, not just rhetoric. I know Eugene Hahn. I would say he would put his money in those companies even if he knew he would lose money."

Rep. Barbara Gronemus (D-Whitehall), another committee member, said Sheridan's links with GM were "a good thing."

"I can't imagine why anyone would think that Rep. Sheridan was doing something that wouldn't benefit the plant and the state," Gronemus said.

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Ditto for Hahn, she said.

"That to me is no good reason to admonish . . . Hahn because he was smart enough to invest in something he believes in," she said.

Two non-partisan government accountability groups, Common Cause and the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, criticized the lawmakers' involvement in the bill.

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Officials with the Ethics Board, which is undergoing a major overhaul in coming months, said neither legislator appeared to have a conflict of interest but that the agency hadn't investigated the situation. Executive Director Roth Judd refused to comment further Tuesday.

The bill is in the biofuels committee. No votes have been taken and a hearing has not yet been scheduled.

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