



**An excuse for everything....** Power industry veterans warn that August's Big Blackout could provide an excuse for countless interests to load their baggage on the **federal energy legislation** train.

A conference committee was expected to produce a final version for an up-or-down vote by October, as some lawmakers called for vast new federal spending on the **transmission grid**, others counseled dropping efforts to develop competitive regional **wholesale electricity markets** in favor of emphasizing **reliability measures**, and some interests (e.g., **Midwest Independent System Operator**) looked for angles to boost **transmission rates**. At the state level, legislative committees heard the **Public Service Commission** report on Wisconsin reliability efforts in view of the blackout, along with the PSC's and **Department of Natural Resources'** progress in streamlining separate agency reviews of transmission projects. As if to underline the issue, in the first days of October the PSC will hold six hearings in three northern communities on the **Duluth–Wausau** transmission line that was proposed in 1999, initially approved in 2001, but not yet under construction pending re-approval.