

Bill Kaplan: Johnson-Trump, loose cannons

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Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson and Trump have much in common. Both tycoons are bombastic, imprudent, incendiary and unprepared. These devotees of laissez-faire philosopher Ayn Rand are throwbacks to another era. Most of all they are loose cannons. And, now Johnson and Trump have sunk to new lows.

Johnson, who called the Affordable Care Act (ACA) “the greatest single threat to my freedom, our freedom” (speechless), is still upset over GOP Senator John McCain’s decisive vote against ACA repeal. Johnson was on the radio program “Chicago’s Morning Answer” and said: “I’m not going to speak for John McCain, you know, he has a brain tumor right now, that vote occurred at 1:30 in the morning, some of that might have factored in.” The co-host of the show was aghast at Johnson’s implication that McCain was too sick to vote rationally. Moreover, Johnson’s thoughtless comments were factually incorrect.

The Washington Post reported: “But signals that the Arizona Republican would be the final GOP defector were there all along. After all, McCain is a mostly free spirit from a state that deeply benefited from the Affordable Care Act. And, he likes some drama now and again.” McCain is also a Senate institutionalist who wanted bipartisan debate and deliberation, using Senate committees. In other words, governing.

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McCain’s communications director responded to Johnson’s slander: “It is bizarre and deeply unfortunate that Senator Johnson would question the judgment of a

colleague and friend. Senator McCain has been very open and clear about the reasons for his vote.” But Johnson is not the only thoughtless Republican. Kelli Ward, 2016 Senate GOP primary challenger to McCain, said: McCain should “step aside” and that she hoped to be considered as McCain’s replacement. What is wrong with some Republicans? Johnson soon realized he had blundered. He slithered away from his false allegation.

However, Johnson was back on the airwaves backing Trump’s reckless and scary rhetoric toward North Korea. Trump’s saber-rattling – “fire and fury and frankly power, the likes of which this world has never seen before” – was defended by Johnson. He (Johnson) said: “You finally have a president who is saying we’re not going to put up with it. Strategic patience is over.” However, foolish tough talk is not a policy or strategy to deal with North Korea’s nuclear threat. Johnson and Trump are acting like loose cannons. Their miscalculations and stumbling might lead to a catastrophic, horrific slaughter. It would not be antiseptic.

And, if possibly going to war with North Korea was not disconcerting enough, Trump floated the idea of a two-front war. He (Trump) talked about a “possible military option” in Venezuela. Nebraska GOP Senator Ben Sasse said: “No, Congress obviously isn’t authorizing any war in Venezuela.” Will Johnson blindly endorse Trump’s latest broadside against Venezuela? In contrast, McCain has condemned Trump’s incendiary rhetoric toward North Korea. Pay attention, Johnson. NBC News reports Trump is considering a preemptive strike against North Korea. Loose cannons.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the *Wisconsin State Journal* from 1995 – 2009.