

Baldwin highlights common ground with Trump on gun safety, trade, other issues

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U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, known as a progressive, is openly commending President Trump, and that goes to an interesting election-year question:

Will there be a significant group of Baldwin-Trump voters at the polls this November?

A WisPolitics.com luncheon in Madison Feb. 22 provided some clues.

http://www.wiseye.org/mp4stream/EVT/EVT_180222_WISPOL_BADLWIN.mp4

The Madison Democrat commended Trump several times during the luncheon and concluded by saying she had met more than a few Baldwin-Trump voters in her tours across the state.

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She started off the conversation at the Madison Club yesterday by saying she was encouraged by Trump's announcement early Tuesday that he'd support comprehensive background checks, raising the minimum purchasing age for certain guns to 21, and banning bump stocks that allow semi-automatic guns to rapidly fire rounds.

She followed with other pro-Trump comments regarding the administration's handling of trade agreements, its push to "Buy American, Hire American," his support of her water infrastructure bill that would have included "Buy American, Hire American" principles, certain NAFTA negotiations and ending the so-called

carried interest tax loophole.

While Baldwin's comments provide a potential foreshadowing of her campaign's strategy to tackle re-election in a Trump state, overall she has found little common ground with the Republican president when back in Washington.

Instead, she has staked out opposing positions on the new tax law, immigration, budget, healthcare and more.

But while talking about her tours around the state, Baldwin said she had come across Trump voters who said they planned to cast a ballot for her in November.

"Why?" Baldwin asked. "Because I'm fighting for the dairy farmers. They're struggling right now, and they see the work I'm doing, especially with how they manage their risk."

Baldwin went on to talk about an iron worker she met at the Neenah Foundry.

"He just loves the 'Buy America' stuff," she said. "He's definitely a Trump voter. And he comes up and goes, 'Don't bash Trump but you've got my support.'"

While Baldwin said efforts to renegotiate NAFTA "aren't going smoothly or quickly," she said she backs them because they'll provide an opportunity to improve the arrangement in areas it hasn't provided enough benefits for American workers.

She argued that the arrangement has generally benefited the agriculture industry but has failed to provide similar benefits to Wisconsin's manufacturing industry.

"We gave away too much, is basically the bottom line there," she said.

She also said an improvement of relations between the U.S. and Mexico could go a long way toward establishing a secure and beneficial trade relationship between the two countries.

She then came out in support of Trump's effort to end the so-called carried interest tax loophole, which allows private equity and hedge fund managers to be taxed at the lower capital gains rate for the profits on their investment as opposed to the higher earned income rate.

"I'm going to boost President Trump again," she said. "It is nonsensical as a tax-

break, and President Trump ran on closing it.”

But Baldwin said the so-called tax loophole still exists even after the passage of the GOP tax bill, and that she will continue to call for eliminating it.

She also underscored her agreement with Trump on “buy American, hire American” principles that require the purchasing of American-made materials and the hiring of American workers, which she originally included in her water infrastructure bill.

When the discussion turned to infrastructure, however, Baldwin took a more critical tone. She argued that more should be done to provide funding for crumbling roads and bridges in the state. But she stopped short of endorsing Trump’s infrastructure plan, which requires that \$1.3 trillion of the planned \$1.5 trillion come from states, municipalities and private industry.

Because of that provision, Baldwin said it’s likely the infrastructure plan will prioritize states that have more infrastructure dollars from tolling and other measures.

“I do think we have to have a sustainable, predictable funding source for our infrastructure, and not borrow against our children’s future,” she said.

She added that increases in the federal gas tax should “be on the table.”

And she went on to criticize Trump’s plan for not including “buy American, hire American” principles in the plan.

On healthcare, Baldwin said due to inaction across the board and damaging moves from Republicans, healthcare is still too expensive for many Americans.

“After years of not being able to work constructively in Congress, it does need fixing,” she said.

She suggested Congress will need to take up a variety of short-term and long-term proposals to address the Affordable Care Act. To that end, she’s signed on to a number of initiatives that would: allow people to buy into Medicare and Medicaid; provide a public health care option in places where there’s insufficient competition from the private industry; and, of course, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders’ “Medicare for All” initiative.

Baldwin, who's faced attacks over her handling of problems involving opioid overprescription at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah, said the problems there existed at other VA facilities across the country. She said she's worked to make things right.

Baldwin's office received an inspection report in 2014 from a whistleblower describing high amounts of opiates prescribed at Tomah but waited months to call for an investigation. She since regarded her office's handling of the inspection report as a mistake, and disciplined several of her staff.

The issue has been the subject of several attack ads against Baldwin, including a \$1.5 million statewide TV and digital ad campaign from the Concerned Veterans for America earlier this month.

"Tomah has turned around," Baldwin said. "The dosages (of) opioids have gone down, the number of veterans who are being prescribed narcotics has gone down, and every prescriber in the VA has been retrained."