

Bill Kaplan: Is GOP U.S. Rep. Gallagher a reformer?

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Democrats picked up nearly 40 House seats in the midterm elections. There will now be a Democratic-led House to provide checks and balances to Trump. Last week, prominent conservative lawyers announced why this was necessary. Calling themselves “Checks and Balances” they said: “Conservative lawyers are not doing enough to protect constitutional principles that are being undermined by the statements and actions of this president” (Trump’s attacks against the press, an independent judiciary and the Justice Department).

Leading centrist and conservative columnists are likewise sounding the alarm. Centrist Washington Post columnist Anne Applebaum opined: Trump will try to protect himself “if the institutions of the state prove that he has broken the law. ... (by attempting) to break the institutions... .” Similarly, centrist journalist Elizabeth Drew wrote: “Trump makes Nixon look like a pussycat.” She went on to say that Trump is moving toward “fascism”. Finally, conservative columnist Michael Gerson exclaimed: “Trump is a rolling disaster of mendacity, corruption and prejudice. ... (A Democratic-led) House will conduct real oversight hearings and expose both Russian influence and administration corruption.”

Given this horrifying backdrop, Wisconsin GOP Representative Mike Gallagher’s reform agenda for Congress (Atlantic) seems well-intended, but mostly inadequate for the Trump initiated constitutional crisis. Many of Gallagher’s proposals such as giving House committees more power, requiring a real workweek from representatives and suggesting they actually live in D.C. and get to know one another are reasonable, but oblivious to Trump’s assault on our institutions.

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Case in point. The day after the midterm elections Trump fired Attorney General Jeff Sessions, replacing him with an extremist toady to oversee and stymie Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation (32 indictments with 6 convicted and/or entering plea deals). Newly appointed acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker is on the record as to what he may do to curtail Mueller. In 2017, Whitaker said: "So I could see a scenario where Jeff Sessions is replaced with a recess appointment and that attorney general doesn't fire Bob Mueller, but he just reduces his budget to so low that his investigation grinds to almost a halt." Whitaker also demanded that the Justice Department "limit the scope of this (Mueller) investigation". What to do?

Gallagher, a former U.S. Marine Corps officer, has to date resisted protecting the back of Special Counsel Mueller, a retired Vietnam War U.S. Marine Corps officer. It's long past time for Gallagher to lead the charge by signing on and helping to pass bipartisan legislation to protect Mueller. The wolf is at the door. History will not be forgiving. Action not talk.

Similarly, why hasn't Gallagher agreed to cosponsor (172 representatives) the bipartisan House Butch Lewis Act? The bill would allow the Treasury Department to make loans, secured by safe investments, to the troubled Central States Pension Plan and other plans, so that retirees and their families get their promised benefits. There are 25,000 Wisconsin beneficiaries, many living in Green Bay and who are veterans. Your constituents need your help. Lead the charge and be a reformer.

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