

# Bill Kaplan: Johnson a two-faced politician

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Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson is a two-faced politician. Case In point. Johnson has met with the Wisconsin Committee to Protect Pensions (whose members include many veterans). He has expressed sympathy and a willingness to tackle the explosive problem of underfunded multiemployer pension plans such as the Central States Pension Fund (CSPF). However, years of talk has not prodded Johnson into action with a legislative solution.

Unlike Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin, he refused to support a bipartisan budget deal which the Senate passed 71 to 28 in February. The legislation established a bipartisan, bicameral committee to develop a solution for multiemployer pension plans facing insolvency. This “financial time bomb” will affect about 1.5 million retirees (New York Times), including 25,000 in Wisconsin (CSPF). Baldwin said: “If nothing is done, these 200 multiemployer plans are projected to fail, many within the next 10 years. The result of significant cuts to these pensions would be economically devastating....”

The Joint Select Committee on Solvency of Multiemployer Plans held its first meeting last week. It is tasked with coming up with recommendations and legislation by November 30, 2018. One possible solution is the Butch Lewis Act sponsored by Baldwin and 19 other senators. Baldwin said: “Democrats (introduced) legislation that would allow the Treasury Department to make loans, leveraged by safe investments, to pension plans to ensure that retirees and their families are guaranteed their promised benefits.” Johnson is not a sponsor. Why not? Posturing will no longer do.

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This is true for trade too. Johnson is critical of Trump's tariffs on aluminum and steel imports. He has a point that a trade war would be disastrous. So why not support a narrowly tailored approach to the main culprit of unfair trade - China. "Chinese imports from 1999 to 2011 cost up to 2.4 million American jobs" (New York Times). Many lost factory jobs were in Wisconsin. Johnson's sympathy for Wisconsin consumers and manufacturers is woefully inadequate. Baldwin has a better answer. She wants government infrastructure projects to be built with American-made iron and steel. Moreover, why hasn't Johnson signed on to Baldwin's bill "to crack down specifically on countries that are unfairly subsidizing their products through rock-bottom wages and substandard environmental practices"?

Being a two-faced politician is not limited to economics. Johnson has preened his hawkishness on foreign policy, but downplayed the seriousness of Russian intervention in the 2016 presidential election. However, Special Counsel Robert Mueller has indicted 19 individuals. Former Trump National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, Trump campaign Deputy Chairman Rick Gates and Trump campaign foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos have pleaded guilty and are cooperating. Mueller has also issued subpoenas to the Trump Organization "to turn over documents, including some related to Russia ..." (New York Times). And, the Federal Election Commission is investigating "whether NRA (National Rifle Association) got illegal Russian donations" (Politico).

Nevertheless, Johnson and top Trump lawyer John Dowd want the Mueller investigation to end before the inquiry gets to the bottom. Time to put country before party. A constitutional crisis looms.

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