

Bill Kaplan: Paul Ryan has failed as speaker

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Politico reports: "The (GOP-led) House could vote as early as Tuesday on a stopgap bill to fund the government through March 22" That will be the sixth short-term funding bill since Trump became president. Conservative Washington Post blogger Jennifer Rubin opined: "I can't remember a weaker, more dysfunctional GOP House majority. Forget about what it has done (e.g., pass a debt-producing tax bill that disproportionately benefits the rich and corporations); consider what it has not done."

Under House Speaker Paul Ryan's leadership the budget process has collapsed. Little progress on appropriations and a budget for fiscal year 2018, which began on October 1, 2017 and goes through September 30, 2018. Funding the government for a full year is governance. It allows federal agencies to make hiring and spending decisions. Instead there is "dysfunction, disorder and chaos" (Pennsylvania GOP Representative Charlie Dent). Ryan has failed as Speaker, with dire consequences.

Funding for Community Health Centers (CHCs) – 17 in Wisconsin, with 115 delivery sites – expired September 30, 2017, but since extended until March 31, 2018. Mary Wakefield, former Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration, 2009 – 2015 (oversaw CHCs) said: "Community Health Centers provide health care for about 26 million people (303,266 Wisconsin patients), keeping people healthy and managing chronic illnesses like diabetes and asthma. They open their doors to everyone and connect patients to care ranging from oral health to maternity care ... (and) people with substance use disorder. ... Uncertainty over funding (CHCs) ... limits their ability to hire needed nurses and doctors and strengthen services to meet the needs of their communities." Wakefield calls for Congress to fully fund CHCs. As does the Wisconsin Hospital Association and the Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association.

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Ryan has also failed Wisconsin on funding an infrastructure program. The need is great. The Milwaukee Business Journal reported that “Wisconsin ranks among the worst for structurally deficient bridges” (1,232 or 8.7 percent of bridges in Wisconsin). A total of 2,809 state bridges need repair. And, Wisconsin roads, once the envy of the nation, are in disrepair, with many in “poor condition” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel). Where is Ryan? Why not join the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in supporting a raise in the federal gas tax to fund an infrastructure program (last done in 1993)? Ryan knows Trump’s proposal for a paltry \$200 billion in federal funding for the entire country is a bad joke (raising private sector financing is illusionary). The American Society of Civil Engineers said \$4.6 trillion is needed for repairs in the U.S.!

Finally, Ryan’s greatest failure has been to hobble the House oversight process. He has enabled House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes to blowup the House Russia inquiry, with false (distracting) allegations, designed to undermine Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s Russia investigation and probe into obstruction of justice. Trump may now believe he has cover to fire Mueller and others. So much for checks and balances or upholding the Constitution. Ryan acts as a toady for Trump. A failed Speaker.

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