

Bill Kaplan: Democrats lead on bread-and-butter issues

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“Trump launched (tweeted) another broadside Saturday ..., calling a prominent black congressman’s Baltimore district a ‘disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess ... no human being would want to live there’” (Washington Post). Why? “Republican officials say Trump is harnessing the anger of those who continue to feel left behind despite the strong economy, and steering their fury toward (minority) members of Congress he has accused of bad-mouthing the country and embracing socialist policies” (Post).

Trump and the GOP should be worried. Despite their “rhetorical appeals to white working-class (and rural) voters (this has) not been matched by legislative accomplishments aimed at their economic interests” (New York Times). Just tax cuts for corporations and the rich. And, notwithstanding low unemployment there is trouble: “Wisconsin, where 10 counties that (Trump) won in 2016 lost manufacturing jobs” (Times); Wisconsin’s “economy depends on manufacturers. They’re worried that a downturn is approaching” (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel); and “Trump in Milwaukee says farmers are ‘over the hump’ as dairy farms continue to close (over 1600) in Wisconsin” (MJS).

Wisconsin congressional Democrats have a different approach than Trump and Republicans: pass bread-and-butter legislation, while standing up for farmers and middle and working class folks. Over the last few weeks the Democratic-led House has strengthened the Affordable Care Act (ACA), increased the minimum wage and passed pension reform. And, Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin has led the way to improve and strengthen federal support for state dairy farms, while decrying the Trump trade wars and resultant pain and misery for Wisconsin farmers. Baldwin has been impressive in representing the entire state, regardless of political allegiance. Let’s look at the Democratic record.

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ACA: The Democratic-led House voted to block the sale of “junk insurance” with scanty benefits and no coverage of preexisting conditions, restored funding for ACA advertising and outreach, lowered drug prices and intervened in the federal lawsuit where Trump and the GOP are trying to have the ACA declared unconstitutional. All Wisconsin Democrats stood up for the ACA, while Wisconsin Republicans voted no. Baldwin supports upholding the ACA in the federal lawsuit, but Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson does not.

Minimum wage increase: House Democrats passed an historic \$15 minimum wage — “would lift the earnings of 27.3 million workers” (Post). This would cover 829,000 workers in Wisconsin, mostly adults and full-time workers (Economic Policy Institute). The Wisconsin House delegation voted along party lines. Baldwin supports, while Johnson does not.

Pension reform: The House passed a bipartisan bill to save failing troubled pension funds. 25,000 Wisconsin workers and retirees will benefit. All Wisconsin Democratic representatives and GOP Representative Sean Duffy voted yes (other state GOP representatives voted no). La Crosse Democratic Representative Ron Kind said: “Hardworking Wisconsinites deserve peace of mind and certainty that they’ll receive the benefits they’ve earned when they retire.” Baldwin has led on pension reform and is a chief sponsor of a Senate bill with 25 other senators. Will Johnson vote to help regular folks? It’s past time!

Bread-and-butter issues, morally right and politically smart.

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