Bill Kaplan: End the Trump emergency

Posted on Monday, Feb 25, 2019

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Candidate Trump made many promises in 2016, mostly unmet. His tax cuts largely helped big business and the wealthy, not regular folks. And, the Trump alternative to the Affordable Care Act was to repeal, with no replacement. Trump also pledged massive infrastructure spending. Empty words, despite much of the nation and Wisconsin in disrepair. The American Society of Civil Engineers' infrastructure report gave a D+ to the U.S. And, it rated Wisconsin: 8.7 percent of bridges are "structurally deficient", 27 percent of roads in "poor condition", and over $7 billion needed for drinking and wastewater infrastructure.

However, Trump's most far-fetched promise was to make Mexico pay for a border wall. Mexico refused. And, a GOP-led Congress, busily running up the deficit, did not pony up the funding. Moreover, there is no emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border. Illegal crossings have been declining for years, most outlawed drugs enter the U.S. through border stations and terrorists are not coming across the border.

But Trump's empty record and failed promises enraged conservative talking heads and extremists. So Trump shut down the government for over a month. His disapproval polling numbers soared, while congressional Republicans began to defect. Trump caved. The government reopened, but to save face Trump proclaimed a "national emergency" at the border. A manufactured crisis. Worse, Trump said he would divert funds appropriated by Congress for military construction to build his vanity wall. A clear violation of Article I of the Constitution and separation of powers.

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On Tuesday, the House will vote on a resolution terminating the “national emergency”. About 225 representatives have signed on as sponsors, including Wisconsin Democratic Representatives Ron Kind, Gwen Moore and Mark Pocan. Will Wisconsin GOP representatives stand up for the Constitution? Green Bay Representative Mike Gallagher has been critical: “This is bad policy and bad process”. And, Waukesha Representative Jim Sensenbrenner has been scathing: “Article I of the Constitution gives Congress the exclusive power of the purse… . It is imperative that no administration, Republican or Democratic, circumvent the will of Congress”. Well-spoken words from both, but on Tuesday it will be time to stand up and vote to end the Trump emergency.

The same resolution will be introduced in the Senate. Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin tweeted: “Both Democrats and Republicans oppose the President declaring a national emergency, and taking money from our military, or anywhere else, to pay for a wall that he promised Mexico would pay for. This is a bad idea. Doesn’t the President have enough legal problems already?” But as usual Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson is talking out of both sides of his mouth. Will he stand up for the Constitution?

The only real way to end the Trump emergency is to vote this tin-pot dictator out in 2020. Democrats must choose a candidate who can beat Trump and govern. We must lead to overcome the rural-urban divide. Instead of emphasizing our own identity group let’s unite Americans. Senator Baldwin has been outstanding in doing this, leading with pocketbook economic issues.

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