

Bill Kaplan: Trump and GOP don't have Wisconsin's back

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Trump has foolishly proclaimed: "Trade wars are good, and easy to win". Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin cut to the chase: "Wisconsin farmers have been hit hard by Trump trade wars with China, Mexico, Canada and the European Union. More than 1,600 dairy farms have gone out of business since Trump took office". Foreign retaliatory tariffs have been imposed on Wisconsin agricultural products: dairy, corn, cranberries, ginseng, kidney beans and soybeans, as well as beef and pork. "The trade war has hit farmers already beset by years of low commodity prices U.S. farm income dropped 16% last year U.S. agricultural exports to China dropped by more than half in 2018 after the trade war began ..." (Time).

Alarm bells are clanging. Julie Bomar, Director, Wisconsin Farmers Union, said: "Farmers ... are confronted by an economic crisis that is more severe than any since the 1980s. Now the weather and continuing trade wars are causing even more concern as we look forward to another distressing year in farm country." Wisconsinite "Jim Mulhern, chief executive of the National Milk Producers Federation, said dairy exports to China have dropped 54% so far this year. 'Any step away from an agreement that further escalates tensions puts recovery of these sales further out of reach', he said" (Wall Street Journal).

Last week, Trump escalated: 10 percent U.S. tariff on \$300 billion of Chinese imports to America. "The trade war between the United States and China entered a more dangerous phase ..., as Beijing allowed its currency to weaken, Chinese enterprises stopped making new purchases of American (Wisconsin) farm goods and ... Trump's Treasury Department formally labeled China a currency manipulator." The fallout and fear was immediate: the stock market lost 767 points, the worst day of the year. The plunge was followed by days of ups and downs. The Washington Post headline was scary: "Impulsive acts (by Trump) propel trade war with China". Finally, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel was blunt: "Wisconsin farmers

are losing as China halts purchases of U.S. ag products”.

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Trump, detached from reality, prattles on: “American Farmers know that China will not be able to hurt them ...”. Despite Trump’s fanciful boast, U.S. tariffs on China don’t even cover the cost of Trump’s limited aid to farmers. It gets worse: “Richest farmers get most of bailout” (Washington Post). Meanwhile, Wisconsin farmers will again receive peanuts – and Trump’s trade wars are hurting other regular folks.

“Trump has yet to articulate a clear and coherent set of objectives. He often speaks about the revival of American manufacturing, but in talks with the Chinese, his administration has focused instead on making it easier for American companies to operate in China – something that seems unlikely to increase employment in Wisconsin” (New York Times). Moreover, economic growth is slowing around the world, but Trump is clueless about the approaching downturn. Nothing but tweets.

Trump and the faltering GOP don’t have Wisconsin’s back. Only a clean Democratic sweep in 2020 will bring change.

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