

DC Wrap: Baldwin pledges “impartial justice” if articles of impeachment reach Senate; Johnson criticizes expected vape flavor limits

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Welcome to our weekly DC Wrap, where we write about Wisconsin’s congressional delegation. Sign up [here](#) to receive the newsletter directly.

Quotes of the week

“What I want to share with you today is that many witnesses have already corroborated the basic fundamental allegations that the whistleblower brought to our attention, that the president abused his power, that the president behaved in a corrupt manner, and that the president attempted to bribe a foreign country with military aid and a visit to the White House in order to extract personal favors that would benefit him in the 2020 election.”

– U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, in a Twitter video address regarding the commencement of the impeachment hearings against President Donald Trump.

“I think that what you’re seeing here is that you give people accused of serial murder or serial rape more rights than the president of the United States.”

– U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, R-Menomonee Falls, slamming the process by which House Intelligence Committee Chair U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., has conducted impeachment hearings in an appearance on Fox News ahead of the first day of public testimony.



This week's news

— U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin committed to maintaining “impartial justice” if the House hearings that kicked off this week on President Trump’s alleged dealings with Ukraine lead to articles of impeachment.

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Impeachment hearings kicked off yesterday with testimony from George Kent, a senior State Department official, and Bill Taylor, an ambassador to Ukraine.

Dem lawmakers allege Trump withheld congressionally approved military assistance to Ukraine contingent upon President Volodymyr Zelensky announcing an investigation into political rival Joe Biden’s family and further contend the call between Trump and Zelensky is evidence the president authorized and was fully aware of the scheme.

Baldwin said she’ll “wait to see the evidence that comes over” if the investigation moves to the Senate. Speaking with reporters in Madison on Monday, Baldwin said the transcript of a call between Trump and Zelensky showed the president “soliciting foreign interference with our elections.”

Still, the Madison Dem noted Trump had not yet presented his case or his evidence.

But when asked if she feared backlash from voters in response to the impeachment process, Baldwin dismissed the notion that her vote would be guided by political ramifications. Instead, she pledged to uphold her oath to do “impartial justice” if the House impeached the president and she found herself serving as a juror in the Senate trial.

“This is a matter of real seriousness and significance,” she said. “I do not know what the House will do, but if we do get articles of impeachment sent over to the Senate, I will take that oath and follow that oath.”

Baldwin was also noncommittal when asked if fellow Wisconsin lawmaker U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, should recuse himself from a potential Senate trial.

Several witnesses testified to congressional investigators that Johnson was involved in diplomatic outreach in the leadup to the call between Trump and Zelinsky.

Baldwin today noted that while testimony had shown Johnson had “been involved in a number of meetings” with key Trump administration officials on Ukraine policy, “he has to decide for himself whether that interferes with his service.”

“All senators, if there is an article of impeachment or more that gets sent over to the Senate, will take an oath rather like a juror’s oath to do impartial justice,” she said. “ He has to decide that for himself.”

— U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson criticized expected limits on e-cigarette flavors, saying the move would cause “significant economic harm in the form of businesses closing and subsequent job losses.”

In a letter to President Trump, the Oshkosh Republican knocked the move and urged the administration to consider the potential long-term economic effects.

“I am supportive of regulations that ensure the safety of consumer products, and common-sense efforts that prevent youth access to e-cigarettes,” Johnson said. “But I am strongly opposed to far-reaching, unchecked government action that stifles innovation and restricts adults’ freedom to choose safer alternatives to smoking,” in a release.

This came after the Trump administration rolled out a series of restrictions aimed at combating the youth e-cigarette epidemic. The FDA in September released the National Youth Tobacco Survey numbers that indicated heightened popularity of non-tobacco flavored vaping products among high school students.

In response, the Trump administration is expected to introduce regulations to limit the sale of fruit- and menthol-flavored products.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin has championed efforts to combat vaping-related illnesses. Over the past few months, the Madison Dem has pushed the FDA and CDC to crack down on e-cigarette products marketed to young people.

“The outbreak of lung injury connected to using e-cigarettes, or vaping, products continues to grow,” Baldwin said in a release. “We need to know more about what is

making people sick and do more to prevent young people from using vaping products.”

See Johnson’s letter:

<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/majority-media/johnson-raises-concerns-about-anticipated-e-cig-restrictions-in-letter-to-trump>

See Baldwin’s release:

<https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/press-releases/help-hearing-on-lung-injury-outbreak-connected-to-vaping>

— U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman this week introduced a bill that would ban “immoral” triple-digit interest rates on a number of consumer loans, including so-called payday loans.

The bipartisan bill, which the Glenbeulah Republican is sponsoring alongside Illinois Dem Rep. Jesus “Chuy” Garcia and Oregon Dem Sen. Jeff Merkley, would address high-cost loans that can carry interest rates above 400 percent by setting a cap on interest rates at 36 percent.

“Even for a conservative person politically, this is one of the few things that has been barred by government going back literally thousands of years,” Grothman said, referencing biblical bans on usury during a call with reporters this afternoon.

The bill expands on protections from predatory lending practices put in place for military service members by the 2006 Military Lending Act, which capped interest rates for loans to active-duty service members at 36 percent.

Col. Paul Kantwill, who previously served as assistant director of Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and as a legal and policy advisor to top Department of Defense officials, touted the success of the 2006 legislation, noting that “harmful access to ruinous debts” among service members “has nearly been stamped out.”

“We have proven that we can protect those who protect us,” he said. “We must now expand those protections to those whose service is at an end, but who remains vulnerable to these debt traps, and to all consumers.”

Grothman added “the vast majority” Congress supported the Military Lending Act

when it first passed and predicted that backing would make this bill hard to oppose.

“Not to pass this bill puts people in an unusual position of saying it’s immoral to give one of these loans to a 20-year-old service member, but it’s perfectly ethical to give these loans to say a 20-year-old single mom,” he said.

Grothman played up the bill’s chances in the House, noting it currently sits in the Financial Services Committee where he hopes it will get a vote “in the relatively near future.” He was slightly less optimistic about its chances in the Senate, “where it’s more difficult to get things done.”

Still, the Glenbeulah Republican said he was happy the proposal would “put the light of day” on the high-cost loan industry.

“We’re obviously on the side of the angels here,” he said. “If they want to defend themselves, if they wanted to defend a 300 percent interest rates, go for it baby. But I think it will be helpful to the American public just to have this open discussion.”

— U.S. Rep. Ron Kind introduced legislation to protect accountability within designated opportunity zones, saying the program is designed to ensure “capital and opportunity for economic growth are spread throughout the country.”

Opportunity zones, which are designated areas that receive tax benefits to boost their struggling economies, were introduced in 2017 as part of the Trump admin’s Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. According to Kind, the program will require increased transparency to be effective.

“Opportunity Zones were created to bring capital to communities in rural and underserved areas, but in order to ensure that this program is used as it was intended, we need strong transparency and accountability measures in place,” Kind, D-La Crosse, said in a release.

U.S. Reps. Mike Kelly, R-Pa., and Terri Sewell, D-Ala., joined Kind in cosponsoring the bill.

“I’m proud to be working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to introduce this

important legislation that will help provide Congress with information that will further improve the program in the future,” Kind said.

See the release:

<https://kind.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rebs-kind-mike-kelly-and-sewell-introduce-bill-increase-transparency-and>

— A pair of conservative groups have launched ads targeting Kind on impeachment.

The conservative American Action Network announced Kind’s western Wisconsin district was among the 37 it has targeted with a \$2 million digital ad campaign urging members of Congress to vote no on impeaching the president.

An example of the digital ads the group included in the release tells viewers to urge the lawmakers to “work on the issues we care about. Stop this partisan charade.”

The ad allows viewers to click on a button to send an email opposing impeachment.

Meanwhile, the RNC says it ran full-page newspaper ads yesterday targeting Kind on impeachment.

A version the RNC posted on its website reads “Wanted: Member of Congress who actually works for Wisconsin.”

National Republicans have been targeting Kind since President Trump won the 3rd CD in 2016. But he cruised to reelection last year and so far hasn’t attracted a high-profile GOP opponent for 2020.

See the AAN release:

<https://americanactionnetwork.org/press/aan-launches-2-million-campaign-opposing-impeachment/>

See the RNC release:

<https://gop.com/rnc-holding-ron-kinds-feet-to-the-fire>

— Kind shaved his head to show support for one of his sons as he begins chemotherapy.

Kind tweeted a picture of him and his sons with their heads shaved.

“As some of you may have already seen on the news, last week one of our sons began chemotherapy,” Kind wrote. “One for all and all for one in this family—we all shaved our heads in solidarity. He is doing well, and his prognosis is excellent.”

A Kind spokeswoman told WisPolitics.com the La Crosse Dem’s office was not comfortable sharing any further information and reiterated that the prognosis is “very good.”

See the tweet:

<https://twitter.com/RepRonKind/status/1194697186136788992>

— U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher this week unveiled a bipartisan bill to honor veterans of the war on terror with a monument on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

“Hopefully it will be a unifying effort at a time when we really are struggling to find things that unify us,” the Green Bay Republican said in an interview with WisPolitics.com.

Still, he acknowledged the bill didn’t tackle some of the larger issues facing the country — singling out health care and infrastructure — and noted “some might say, ‘Well, this is a smaller effort, so it’s easier to be bipartisan.’” But he added he was hopeful “over time, those small things become bigger things.”

“Hopefully, over time we restore the institution to one that has more than an 11 percent approval rating among the American people,” he said.

Gallagher is a Marine Corps veteran who served as a counterintelligence and regional affairs officer and was twice deployed to Iraq. The proposal marks his second effort to honor his generation of combat veterans. He pushed a bipartisan bill last Congress along with fellow Marine Corps vet Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass.; that bill established the war on terror veterans memorial.

“The idea was to honor the service and sacrifice of the 9/11 generation of veterans,” he said of the new legislation. “Given the timeline it takes to get these things actually authorized and funded and completed, we need to start now so that the guys and girls who are serving in uniform now in places like Iraq and Afghanistan — when they’re old enough to take an honor flight, there’s a memorial there honoring their service.”

This bill would further his previous legislation by giving the memorial prominent placement on the National Mall.

“We want to make sure that this memorial doesn’t get relegated into a place and our nation’s capital that people won’t see it,” he said. “I can think of no more fitting place than the National Mall to memorialize the heroes of the 9/11 wars.”

Gallagher said while “real estate around the mall is in very high demand,” he’s “very optimistic” the bill will pass by summer 2020. The whip effort will start, Gallagher said, by reaching out to the bipartisan group of 159 lawmakers who were on his initial memorial bill.

“I see no reason why everyone that was on that bill wouldn’t be on this bill, so I think we’re going to start off from a position of strength,” he said. “From there it’s just a matter of bugging (House Speaker Nancy) Pelosi to put it up on the House floor for a vote and then getting action in the Senate.”

See the release:

<https://gallagher.house.gov/media/press-releases/gallagher-crow-introduce-bill-authorize-gwot-memorial-national-mall>

Posts of the week

Stopped by the Racine Senior Center for lunch yesterday. Great time chatting with folks about my commitment to protect Social Security and Medicare! pic.twitter.com/kAB06Oluj4

— Bryan Steil (@RepBryanSteil) [November 8, 2019](#)

I stopped in [@FisherHouseWI](#). Thanks to Fisher House MKE, veterans' families can have a home away from home while loved ones recover at the VA medical center. There are so many incredible WI organizations who do right by our veterans every day and I was honored to meet them. pic.twitter.com/H3Qzmv3jH

— Sen. Tammy Baldwin (@SenatorBaldwin) [November 12, 2019](#)

Honored to present veterans at Good Shepherd Lutheran Nursing Home with certificates of appreciation for their service and sacrifice. These men and women represent the best of America, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. pic.twitter.com/JwPDPpSRP4

— Rep. Gallagher Press Office (@RepGallagher) [November 11, 2019](#)

This Veterans Day, I had the honor of touring the Oshkosh Military Veterans Museum. Thank you to everyone featured in the museum, and all of our veterans and active duty service members who fight to keep America safe. pic.twitter.com/PbDAeYj2cV

— Rep. Glenn Grothman (@RepGrothman) [November 11, 2019](#)

ICYMI

[Sen. Ron Johnson says he's 'sympathetic' to Trump rationale for freezing Ukraine aid](#)

[Rep. Ron Kind introduces new mental health proposal on Veteran's Day](#)

[How the Trump impeachment inquiry compares to Bill Clinton's Wisconsin Democrat's claim about reliance on Planned Parenthood for health care is in the ballpark](#)

[Federal lawmakers aim to reduce payday loan rates from 400% interest to 36%](#)

[Rep. Gallagher thanks fellow veterans for their service](#)

[Sen. Baldwin asks DOD to investigate Wisconsin discharge decision](#)